

The Body or the Soul?
Religion and Culture in a Rural Quebec Parish,
St-Joseph-de-Beauce, 1736-1901

by

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Abstract

During the second half of the nineteenth century, French-speaking Québécois are said to have become increasingly submissive to the hegemony of the Catholic Church. Their transformation, as evidenced by greater numbers of people attending mass and receiving communion at Easter, has been attributed to the defeat of the Rebellions of 1837-38 and resulting assimilationist threats, the rise of ultramontane religiosity, the extension of the Church's administrative apparatus, and increased religious vocations. By exploring the social history of culture in the rural parish of St-Joseph de Beauce during the period 1736-1901, with emphasis on the post-1850 period, this dissertation reinterprets prevailing arguments about the Church's purported hegemony over the rural French-Canadian majority. In challenging the view that the Church extended its tutelage over a passive people, I argue that ordinary Catholics exercised more agency inside and outside church than is usually assumed. My examination of the long-term interrelationship between religion and popular customs in one rural parish, suggests that the degree of change has been overstressed, while continuity with the past has been downplayed. In this parish, Catholicism occupied an important place in people's lives before the 1850s, as it still did by the turn of the twentieth century. But the *habitants* also demonstrated an independent spirit of and a vigorous popular culture; the resulting tensions underlined the clergy's sense of its powerlessness to control people's behaviour.

To explore the interrelated factors in the encounter between Catholicism and Québec popular culture, this microhistorical study draws upon the *curés*' detailed annual reports to the Archbishop of Québec, St-Joseph's parish registers, contemporary accounts, government censuses, and other statistical data. It also makes use of the rich but largely unexplored (by historians at least) oral testimony about rural life and culture in Beauce County from the Archives de folklore at Université Laval. Although St-Joseph is only one parish, this close examination of local religion and society in a long-settled, religiously and culturally homogeneous community in the conservative rural Beauce region contributes to our understanding of the place of Catholicism in Quebec culture.

Keywords: Quebec (Province), Beauce region, 19th Century; Catholic Church; religion and culture; social life and customs

Dedication

TO RICHARD DENNIS

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List of Abbreviations

AAQ – Archives de l'Archevêché de Québec

ACSBE – Archives de la Commission scolaire de Beauce-Etchemin

AESC – Annales économie, société, culture

AFEUL – Archives de Folklore et ethnologie - Université Laval

APSJB – Archives de la paroisse de Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce

ASPB – Archives de la Société du patrimoine des Beaucerons

BAnQ – Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec

CIHM – Canadian Institute for Historic Microreproduction

CHR – Canadian Historical Review

FFSJ – Fonds de la Fabrique de St-Joseph

IQRC – Institut québécois de la recherche sur la culture

MNBAQ – Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec

RHAF – Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française

SCHEC – Société canadienne d'histoire de l'Église catholique

Preface

The image of French-Canadian subservience to the clerical *soutane* has been one of the most enduring features of popular discourse and historical writing on Québec. A number of factors have helped to perpetuate the view that the Québécois were once a priest-ridden people who passively surrendered control over their lives to the clergy. Historians of religion have advanced arguments largely similar to the one that artistic image makers had popularized by the beginning of the twentieth century: the turbulent *habitants* of the 1830s became the well-behaved submissive churchgoers of the 1890s. This significant turnabout is said to have begun during the ‘cultural crisis’ after the Rebellions of 1837-38 when the ultramontane revival transformed religious practice and brought more people to the Church.¹ Studies on the Church’s increased influence have pointed to greater numbers of clerical vocations and the clergy’s increased control of the education system. As might be expected with the extensive literature on the history of the Catholic Church in Québec in the nineteenth century, contrasting interpretations have developed concerning what this rising influence signified, and how it came about. One view portrays the Church’s increased influence as leading to a more “religious society” happily steeped in Catholicism. This process that received momentum in the religious “revival” 1840s, and reversed what some historians argued was the French Canadians’ general religious indifference since the British conquest. It painted the Church’s subsequent pre-eminence as the sublime expression of the best of Québec’s religious faith and culture. A contrasting interpretation portrays increased clerical influence as the result of a gradual “encadrement clerical” so that the Church was an external agent of suppression and control to whose hegemony the people sometimes grudgingly, but always inevitably, submitted. Despite the different emphases on the meaning of greater clerical power, both interpretations accept that the Church became the predominant force in most people’s lives after the Rebellions.

¹ For a summary of that position, see Michael Gauvreau and Ollivier Hubert, eds., Introduction, *The Churches and Social Order in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Canada* (Montreal and Kingston, 2006), 21-2.

Historian Jocelyn Létourneau offers a fresh alternative with his argument that the leitmotiv of clerical domination over a submissive population was a key element of the paralyzing myth of victimization stalking Québec's historical consciousness ever since the nineteenth century.² While he found that Québécois may be unfamiliar with most elements of their history, they have absorbed *one* persistent mythic narrative, that of “a people with a tragic destiny, a people that was for a long time backward, oppressed by the clergy and by the English, and that has succeeded in part in averting the terrible fate looming over it by re-founding itself through the Quiet Revolution.”³ The impression is that people lacked any sense of agency and initiative of their own until the 1960s, and, as Létourneau suggests, were “dominated by fear of the all-powerful clergy.”⁴ As an alternative response to this crippling narrative of victimization, Létourneau argues that Québec needs a new narrative that offers a more constructive vision of the past to future generations.

It may reasonably be asked how a social and cultural examination of a single rural parish in the nineteenth century might hope to answer Létourneau's challenge. How, in short, can it offer a meaningful interpretation of the role of the Church in Québec's past, and of the place of Catholicism in its culture? However, just as the study of a single tree allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the whole forest, a microhistorical examination of the internal dynamics of a single parish over an extended period of time offers valuable insights into the actual influence of the Church. It also reveals limitations upon clerical hegemony that might otherwise be missed, misinterpreted or even invisible at the diocesan level. As Paul Ricoeur points out, when the scale of investigation moves from the macrohistorical to the microhistorical level, “what becomes visible are not the same interconnections but rather connections that remained unperceived at the macrohistorical scale [...] In changing the scale one does not see the same things as larger or smaller [...] One sees different things.”⁵ Examining the experience of the people of a small rural parish such as St-Joseph de Beauce reveals that arguments about the degree of clerical hegemony in late-nineteenth-century Québec are far less tenable when put to the

² Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec* (Montreal and Kingston, 2004), 21.

³ Létourneau, *A History for the Future*, 21.

⁴ Létourneau, *A History for the Future*, 23.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (London, 2004), 210-12.

test at the parish level. One of the main assumptions of this study is that we cannot hope fully to understand the interrelationships between life and religion in Québec if we examine it solely from the institutional perspective of the Church, or limit our understanding of this question by assuming that only dominant groups exercise agency.

In that regard, the experience of the people of St-Joseph in the period 1736-1901 sheds light on larger questions. Focusing on this small rural community enables us to see that individuals, small groups, or communities can take advantage of ambiguities and contradictions within the power structure and, as Giovanni Levi argues, manage to carve out for themselves a measure of autonomy despite the limitations and constraints of the prevailing value system.⁶ Their experience helps us to find some answers to central questions of human endeavour such as the extent of the agency that ordinary people exercise over their lives.⁷ Examining the encounter between the faithful and the clergy in the rural parish of St-Joseph indicates that the persistence of its people's older independent attitudes and cultural practices was in large measure due to the affirmative power of their popular culture. There are many reasons to examine this corner of Québec, but perhaps the most compelling one is that if the *curés* of a parish in such an ostensibly pious area found a flock reluctant to submit quietly to the Church's control, it raises doubts about clerical domination in other parts of Québec.

With its reputation for irreproachable Catholic devotion and its close proximity to the seat of the oldest Catholic bishopric in Canada, Beauce County is an ideal place to examine the internal dynamics between a Catholic French-speaking community and the Church. As recently as 1993, the county had one of the highest numbers of roadside *calvaires* and shrines anywhere in Québec.⁸ The relatively large parish of St-Joseph has a further advantage in that its population was almost exclusively Catholic and of French origin, unlike nearby parishes such as Ste-Marie immediately to the north or St-François

⁶ Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1992), 94.

⁷ Levi, "On Microhistory," 94-5.

⁸ See in particular, Jean Simard and Jocelyne Milot, *Les croix de chemin du Québec: Inventaire sélectif et trésor* (Québec, 1994); and René Bouchard, "Calvaires et croix de chemin en Beauce," in Jean Simard et al., *Un patrimoine méprisé: La religion populaire des Québécois* (Cité de LaSalle, Québec, 1979), 27-76. For folk magic in New France and its links to the Beauce, see Peter N. Moogk, *La Nouvelle France: The Making of French Canada - A Cultural History* (East Lansing, Michigan, 2000), 246-8.

just to the south.⁹ St-Joseph also has a long tradition of population continuity; local lore asserts that over two-thirds of family names recorded on the census of 1762 immediately after the British conquest still exist there. For example, Léonce Cliche, a provincial court judge in St-Joseph, told the American linguistics scholar Raleigh Morgan in 1967, his family could trace its ancestry back over eight generations in the parish to the early decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ The few non-Catholics or non-French-Canadian families who did come to the parish over the years never stayed long.

Although it recognizes that the secular and religious worlds in St-Joseph were highly interdependent expressions of French-Canadian rural culture, this dissertation will proceed from examining the concrete world of the parish to studying its spiritual world as it moves from the preoccupations of the body to the expressions of the soul. *Habitant* life and culture were composed of the material aspects of work and survival, the sociable component of celebration, and the belief in the power of the metaphysical world to influence the visible material one. The Introduction examines current arguments about the rise of the Church to prominence in nineteenth-century Québec and raises questions concerning assumptions about the lack of agency and the passive acquiescence to priestly domination on the part of ordinary Catholics. In particular it points to the importance of popular culture as a powerful counterbalance to clerical hegemony. Chapter One examines the historical background of relations between the assertive *habitants* of the rural parish of St-Joseph and their clergy, as well as the role that the latter played in its economic and social development in the period 1736-1901. Since culture does not exist in isolation, but reflects its larger social and economic context, Chapter Two studies the changing conditions of agriculture that were central to the economy of the parish. It will examine the extent to which changing social and economic developments reinforced or otherwise affected the social composition of the parish, and by extension the culture of the *habitants* of St-Joseph.

In one sense, Chapters Three and Four study aspects of the parish that can be said to occupy intermediate terrain, combining the concrete preoccupations and the

⁹ In the nineteenth century, St-Joseph was one of a minority (21 per cent) of the 166 parishes in the Québec Archdiocese outside of the City of Québec with a population of between 2000 and 3000. Nearly 80 per cent of the rest were smaller. Sylvain and Voisine, *Histoire du catholicisme*, 288.

¹⁰ Raleigh Morgan, *The Regional French of County Beauce, Quebec* (The Hague, and Paris, 1975), 88-9.

metaphysical concerns of both priests and people. While their *curés* often appeared to think that their bodies were more important to the people of St-Joseph than their souls, situating the religious side of life in the parish within the context of the parishioners' material well-being allows us to examine Catholicism as an accepted part of the life of the community. In order to do so, Chapter Three will examine the concrete side of Catholicism in the parish by tracing St-Joseph's nineteenth-century religious construction projects which were concrete expressions of the belief system that the parish priest taught and the parishioners shared. It will also compare the sums spent on these projects with the support that parishioners gave to their schoolhouses. Chapter Four studies the country *curé* by looking at the sometimes conflicting expectations that the hierarchy and the parishioners placed upon him. Parishioners in the 1850s succeeded in removing a *curé* whose tenure was particularly divisive, but even when there were no overt conflicts the priest still had an ambivalent place in the life of the parish. He was an outsider who was simultaneously a respected community figure and an agent of external control. As most *curés* in this parish knew, or soon learned, they had to convince their parishioners, since they could not command them.

Chapter Five relies heavily on the *curés*' comments concerning the extent to which the parishioners fulfilled their religious duties as Catholics. It examines the influence of doctrinal Catholicism in St-Joseph as it would have been seen from the rectory by measuring how often the people of the parish attended Sunday mass and how frequently they received communion, two of their most important religious duties. In addition it will look at how assiduous parents were about the requirement that all children attend regular catechism classes in order to learn the tenets of Catholicism. Schooling, now seen to be one of the key to the Church's control over people, was supposed to have been one of the most effective means of weaning people away from their traditional forms of behaviour and from adopting new ones under the influence of modernity.¹¹ Examining popular religious beliefs that the Church fostered, such as the efficacy of pilgrimages to local shrines or religious processions to protect crops against natural disasters, this chapter argues that the relationship between the *habitants* and the Church was much more multidimensional than social control arguments recognize. On the

¹¹ Gauvreau and Hubert, Introduction, *The Churches and Social Order*, 29-30.

spiritual side, the borders between the worlds of the Church and the people were the most porous and overlapping since religion and popular culture shared the assumption that there was a level of ‘reality’ beyond the visible world. The Church provided the faithful with a theologically-sanctioned frame of reference about that metaphysical world, as well as efficacious rites, such as religious processions, that sought to enlist divine protection for their crops.

Chapter Six on “popular religion” argues that in addition to the clerically-approved aspects of Catholicism, the *habitants* of the Beauce possessed a popular folklore based on the belief that the spiritual world could either adversely or positively influence their lives. This well-documented corpus of beliefs included unsanctioned “petites superstitions” around Catholic sacramental objects, practices or ideas that the clergy distrusted, although many arose out of the Church’s own theology. Other popular beliefs that were not always reconcilable with Catholic doctrine arose from tales of people’s encounters with the dead or with the devil.

The last two chapters, Seven and Eight, examine the clergy’s unsuccessful attempts in the last half of the nineteenth century to change what they specifically identified as the major obstacles in directing people’s behaviour into more acceptable channels. Chapter Seven studies the role of alcohol in the context of the annual cycle of the *habitants’* social life. It finds that within the Church’s liturgical calendar of feasts the *habitant* customs celebrated seasonal changes in work rhythms or stages of human existence. When the Church observed its important feasts, or sanctified a birth or a marriage, the *habitants* likewise celebrated these occasions in their traditional manner at sociable gatherings. Chapter Eight examines the role of sociability as one of the most important ways to transmit the community’s sexual mores to the younger generation. It looks at how music and dancing expressed people’s sensual impulses, ones that the Church tried to deny, repress, or redirect. While the *curés* reported that they had no more success in suppressing dancing than in banning alcohol, this chapter will address the question of whether the clergy achieved a subtle yet pervasive influence over people’s sexual behaviour. Comparing their parish priests’ observations about them with data from statistical sources as well, as accounts of their assertive behaviour at key moments in the history of the parish, makes it clear that the people of St-Joseph exercised more control

over their lives than historians have usually attributed to such ordinary people. Far from being “priest-ridden,” the *habitants* of St-Joseph de Beauce exercised a considerable amount of agency. Taken together, the various features of the traditional way of life of the people of this parish were too strong and tenacious for the combined powers of the clergy, the catechism, and the schoolhouse to change or to control.

Even though the term *habitant* had become a nostalgic designation by the end of the nineteenth century, semantically the term possesses, in Christian Morissonneau’s words, “au moins une unité significative commune: un rapport dominant à la terre.”¹² For convenience and consistency, then, this study will continue to employ it rather than the census designations of farmer or *cultivateur*. It accurately reflects the combination of peasant individualism and sense of interdependence that characterized rural life in St-Joseph.

¹² Christian Morissonneau, “Genre de vie et religion populaire,” in Benoît Lacroix and Jean Simard, *Religion populaire religion des clercs?* (Québec, 1984), 220.

Introduction

Habitants and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Québec



Illustration 1. Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872) *Breaking Lent (or A Friday's Surprise)* c. 1847. Art Gallery of Ontario, Thomson Collection.

The painting *Breaking Lent* by the Dutch-born artist, Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872) may be familiar to many. In their rudely furnished cabin, half a dozen members of a nineteenth-century *habitant* family are at table consuming a forbidden Lenten meal of meat during the Catholic Church's forty-day period of obligatory fasting and abstinence before Easter. Into the room strides the formidable Father Brassard, the parish priest in Longueuil, on the South Shore of the Saint Lawrence River across from Montréal, where Krieghoff himself was living between 1845 and 1848. The *curé* has just arrived unannounced to discover the family guiltily hiding the evidence. The body language of the family, in contrast, expresses guilt and evasion: the man in the foreground surreptitiously feeds the dog something that looks like meat and the woman sitting to his

right covers her meal with a plate. Another woman hides behind a partially open door in the background; the company conveys the very image of a priest-ridden people. As Russell Harper notes, the Reverend Brassard “holds his silver-headed cane like a badge of authority. He dominates the room in his outrage.”¹ Raymond Vézina argues that the picture is a protest, “contre le pouvoir que veulent exercer les curés de la paroisse sur leurs ouailles.”²

If read one way, a version of this tableau that most recently adorned the cover of an atlas of religious practices in nineteenth-century Québec can be taken to depict clerical hegemony over the *habitants*.³ On the other hand, this humourous image could also be seen as a confirmation of the lack of clerical power; the priest could only ensure that people obeyed the Church’s strict rules of fasting during Lent if he personally inspected each household. In either case, it very aptly illustrates the persistent power of some stereotypes about rural French Canadians in the nineteenth century. Although he did not usually portray specifically Catholic themes or the place of the Church in people’s lives, the one exception is this famous picture, two versions of which Krieghoff had painted while living in Longueuil. Krieghoff’s other works usually emphasised the unruliness and drinking of the French-Canadian peasants of the mid-nineteenth century, but, taken as a whole, his work could be seen as a reinforcement of the stereotypes such as their unquenchable *joie de vivre* in the merrymaking that existed beside distant church steeples and disapproving clergymen.⁴ Until well into the twentieth century, as Jean-Pierre Wallot once observed, historians uncritically accepted the image of a “traditional, semi-feudal, ignorant, priest-ridden, and backward people, impervious to change,” or the equally stereotypical representation of a “devout, obedient, pastoral and God-fearing people.”⁵ In either case, a central theme has been that of a people living passively under clerical domination. Whatever artistic merits Krieghoff’s works might or might not

¹ Russell Harper, *Krieghoff* (Toronto, 1999), 29.

² Raymond Vézina, *Cornelius Krieghoff: Peintre de Moeurs (1815-1872)*, (Ottawa, 1972), 110.

³ Louis Rousseau and Frank W. Remiggi, dirs. *Atlas historique des pratiques religieuses: Le Sud-Ouest du Québec au XIXe siècle* (Ottawa, 1998).

⁴ A number of studies of Krieghoff’s works are available. See especially Dennis Reid, *Krieghoff/Images du Canada*, (Toronto, 1999), 156; Harper, *Krieghoff*; Vézina, *Cornelius Krieghoff*; and *Cornélius Krieghoff, 1815-1872* (Québec, 1971).

⁵ Jean-Pierre Wallot, “Religion and French-Canadian Mores in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *CHR* 52: 1 (March 1971), 5.

possess, it would be much more difficult today to visualize the insouciant side of *habitant* existence if Krieghoff had not bothered to depict it.⁶ Because of the long shadow that his representations of the *habitant* continue to cast over our impressions of the people of nineteenth-century rural Québec, Krieghoff's work is a particularly good place to begin an examination of the reliability of influential popular stereotypes about rural French Canadians and Catholicism.

A few decades after Krieghoff died, a markedly different, but arguably an equally persistent stereotypical representation of rural French Canadians emerged in the late 1890s. The popular artist Edmond-Joseph Massicotte (1875-1929) portrayed the *habitants'* more restrained enjoyment of dancing and sociability, but he also placed these activities in the context of their cyclical festivities, albeit through the lens of a sentimentalized and pious nostalgia and in the roseate hues of "le bon vieux temps." He transformed them into models of religious docility and submissiveness whose behaviour must have reflected the clergy's fondest hopes. The common themes of his paintings, drawings and engravings in several *Almanachs du Peuple* of the early twentieth century emphasized religion and family, or happy but decorous celebrations.⁷ In the 1920s, Massicotte depicted another occasion that had formerly been known for its high spirits and alcohol consumption, *le mardi gras* (Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday), as merely a slightly boisterous rural costume party.⁸ He depicted a fun-loving but docile Catholic people who had embraced the decorum of bourgeois civilization and deferred to the leadership of the clergy, and punctiliously performed their religious duties. In the race between fire water and holy water, Massicotte indicated that by the early 1900s, alcohol and free-and-easy behaviour had lost out to religion and piety.

While the most influential popular depictions of the *habitants* changed dramatically in the space of half a century, the question is whether such images mirrored the artists' own preoccupations or if they accurately reflected reality. Did people's behaviour conform to the expectations of the clergy by the start of the twentieth century? Fortunately for the historian interested in studying the encounter between culture and

⁶ As Vézina remarks, Krieghoff painted his period and is important today because, "Ses thèmes offrent un grand intérêt en eux-mêmes et pour leur valeur historique. Il fixe des coutumes et des traditions qu'il serait difficile de retrouver autrement." *Cornelius Krieghoff*, 182.

⁷ David Karel, *Edmond-Joseph Massicotte, illustrateur* (Québec, 2005).

⁸ Jean Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons dans la Vallée du Saint-Laurent* (Montréal, 1996), 477.

religion, shortly before Krieghoff began producing his popular images, the Church decided that it needed more detailed, accurate information on the behaviour and religious attitudes of the people of what is now Québec. By an interesting coincidence, on 27 December 1852, shortly before Krieghoff arrived in Québec City to begin eleven years of intense artistic production, His Grace Pierre-Flavien Turgeon, Archbishop of Québec, quietly began a new era in the administration of his diocese by sending out a circular letter to all the priests and missionaries under his ecclesiastical jurisdiction telling them to submit annual reports on “the state of religion and morals” of the parishes and missions under their care. Reminding them of the decision that he and his fellow bishops had taken at the first provincial council of the Catholic bishops of Lower Canada of 25 August 1851 to collect annual parish reports, and in order to standardize his priests’ responses, Turgeon also sent them a form with eighty-three detailed questions, and a suggestion to add any useful observations of their own.⁹ Monseigneur Turgeon, who is credited with supporting the establishment of Laval University in 1852, was less resistant to such modernizing initiatives than some of his more cautious predecessors.¹⁰ The scope of Turgeon’s questions has enabled us to learn more about the religious and social lives of the people under his jurisdiction than we could otherwise have hoped because he and his fellow bishops wanted statistics on the population of each parish, including the number of Catholics and French Canadians, details on people moving away and people arriving, the number of communicants, the number of children, the state of the parish school, the church, the presbytery, the cemetery, and the parish library, if there was one. His financial queries were concerned with whether parishioners regularly paid the tithe, and the amount of the *curé*’s annual revenue. Even though the archdiocese changed the order of the questions during the period 1852-1901, the questions themselves remained largely the same. Since Turgeon also wanted information about obstacles to people’s salvation,

⁹ For more on the development of the reports out of the earlier information gathering practices of the Church in New France and Lower Canada, as well as the decades after the 1850s, see Christine Hudon and Ollivier Hubert. “The Emergence of a Statistical Approach to Social Issues in the Administrative Practices of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec”, in Michael Gauvreau and Ollivier Hubert, eds. *The Churches and Social Order in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Canada* (Montreal and Kingston, 2006). 46-55.

¹⁰ Jacques Grisé, *Les conciles provinciaux de Québec et l’Église canadienne (1851-1886)* (Montréal, 1979). On Turgeon, see the very old but still useful work by Mgr. Henri Têtu, *Notices biographiques: Les Évêques de Québec* (Québec, 1889), 602-16. See also Armand Gagné, “Pierre-Flavien Turgeon,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography IX* (Toronto, 1976), 797-800.

there were questions on the main “disorders” in each parish, the number of “scandalous” public sinners, observance of various religious exercises, and the number of Easter communicants. The archbishop also wanted to know about the state of each parish’s temperance society, the extent of alcohol use, and its availability.¹¹ For the text of the questions, see Appendix A, page 332.

Monseigneur Turgeon was not the first bishop of Québec to enquire about the religious devotion of the *habitants*, as the archdiocesan archives are filled with correspondence on that subject dating back to the seventeenth century. But he was the first prelate to require regular annual reports that addressed specific questions. The unsystematic collection of material that existed before Turgeon’s time meant that his predecessors’ knowledge about their large and dispersed flock was fragmentary and incomplete. The archbishop’s personal contact with individual parishioners would have been quite unusual, and would normally have been by correspondance from their *curé*.¹² The archbishop relied upon his priests for the information needed in order to administer the religious affairs of his episcopal see’s vast territory. His periodic pastoral visits on his tours of inspection, as he journeyed to the individual parishes roughly every four years, were his other principal means of information. He customarily spent one or two days in each parish to administer the sacrament of Confirmation and to satisfy himself that the *curé* was suitably directing the religious lives of its people, and that the church wardens (*marguilliers*) in charge of a parish’s civil and financial affairs had capably and honestly administered them.¹³ As an interested and influential participant in the life of his community, the *curé* was very well placed to observe the many facets of his parishioners’ existence, and to have a good grasp of the strengths and limitations of the Church’s position in his parish.

Christine Hudon and Ollivier Hubert argue that the annual parish reports reports were “an active element in the construction of a Catholic individual who, far more directly than his ancestors, was subjected to religious demands that were increasingly

¹¹ H. Têtu and C.-O. Gagnon, *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires des Évêques de Québec*, Tome IV (Québec, 1888), 83-89.

¹² See Jean Roy and Daniel Robert, “Deux évêques trifluviens en visite: Thomas Cooke, Louis-François Laflèche et la gestion des paroisses (1852-1898),” SCHEC, *Études d’histoire religieuse*, 57 (1990) 96, for confidential and undocumented occasions on pastoral visits when parishioners and bishops could have had direct contact.

¹³ Roy and Robert, “Deux évêques trifluviens,” 89-110.

stifling.” They equate the Church’s acquisition of more and more knowledge about the laity gleaned from the annual reports with the degree of control that the local priests were able to impose on them and “the spread of a concept of social identity founded on the criterion of intense religious observance.”¹⁴ They also argue that the other benefit of the increased information for the hierarchy was that the bishops were able to apply their pastoral power within the institution in order to control their clergy.¹⁵ Thanks to these reports “the Catholic Church acquired tools by which to measure, categorize and classify in order to acquire knowledge and plan its action.”¹⁶ But whether the information they received from a rural parish such as St-Joseph de Beauce was always dependable and actually empowered the clergy, or made them acutely aware of the continuing tension between people’s worldly inclinations and the clergy’s concern to save their souls, needs to be investigated more fully.

Closely examining the information the *curés* supplied their superiors from the parish of St-Joseph will allow us to determine whether people really paid as little attention to their religion before the middle of the nineteenth century as Krieghoff implied, but then quietly accepted the clerical direction over their daily existence by the end of the century as Massicotte depicted. As will be seen next, these contrasting visual representations of rural French Canadians agree on a number of points with scholarly arguments about the extent to which people’s behaviour changed over the five-decade period 1850-1900 because of the growing hegemony of the Catholic Church. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the extent to which the people of nineteenth-century rural Québec submitted to clerical hegemony or exercised agency by resisting it. By examining academic studies in light of the reports that the clergy of the rural parish of St-Joseph de Beauce were sending to the archbishops of Québec in the period 1851-1901 we will raise a number of questions about clerical power in a nineteenth-century rural community.

¹⁴ Hudon and Hubert, “The Emergence of a Statistical Approach,” 55.

¹⁵ Hudon and Hubert, “The Emergence of a Statistical Approach,” 56-9. See also Ollivier Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel: La gestion des rites par l’Église catholique du Québec (fin XVIIe - mi-XIXe siècle)* (Québec, 2000), 83-88.

¹⁶ Hudon and Hubert, “The Emergence of a Statistical Approach,” 61.

Encadrement clérical or société religieuse

Between 1850 and 1900, the number of Catholic dioceses and parishes, as well as the religious personnel serving them, grew steadily across the province, the visible expressions of increased clerical power in Québec.¹⁷ Many French Canadians also contributed vast sums of money in order to build what some might call the infrastructure of clerical domination, the many churches, rectories, convents, schools, and hospitals that still mark the Québec landscape. Furthermore, the large numbers of people attending Sunday mass, receiving Easter communion, and the many children registered in Church-run schools testified to the increasingly bright picture from the perspective of the clergy.¹⁸ Wallot and Serge Gagnon found that the most daunting challenge for the Church before mid-century had been the small number of clergymen available to minister to the spiritual needs of an increasing population.¹⁹ While the lack of sufficient numbers of priests may have contributed to the perception of a steep decline in people's faith and morals, and consequently their independence from clerical control in the first half of the century, the opposite was true in the second half. The impressive growth of the Church's infrastructure in Québec since the 1850s, especially in the increased numbers of clergy, parishes and dioceses, reinforced the appearance of clerical domination over the obedient and religious faithful.

Despite the highly visible presence of the Church, its place in Québec culture has been contested in curiously contradictory ways. Whereas once the clerical nationalist school placed it at the centre of all historical activity, late-twentieth-century historians have either marginalized it or have emphasized Catholicism's baleful influence upon the

¹⁷ For the Diocese of Trois-Rivières, see René Hardy *Contrôle social et mutation de la culture religieuse au Québec, 1830-1930* (Montreal 1999); and René Hardy and Serge Gagnon, *L'Église et le village au Québec, 1850-1930* (Ottawa, 1979). For St-Hyacinthe see Christine Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles dans le diocèse de St-Hyacinthe* (Sillery, 1996). For Québec as a whole, see Philippe Sylvain and Nive Voisine, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois: Réveil et consolidation, Tome 2, 1840-1898* (Montréal, 1991).

¹⁸ Among other studies that have an impressive array of figures on these subjects, see Philippe Sylvain and Nive Voisine, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois: Les XVIIIe et XIXe siècles, Volume II, tome 2: Réveil et consolidation 1840-1898* (Montréal, 1991). Rousseau and Remiggi, *Atlas historique des pratiques religieuses*.

¹⁹ Wallot, "Religion and French-Canadian Mores"; Serge Gagnon, *Quand le Québec manquait de prêtres: La charge pastorale au Bas-Canada*, (Sainte-Foy, 2006). See also Ollivier Hubert, "Beaucoup de bruit pour quelques fêtes. Pourquoi en 1791, une réforme du calendrier des fêtes suscita la passion," SCHEC, *Études d'histoire religieuse*, 60 (1994), 105-26.

population. In the former case, as Ronald Rudin argues, historical debates during the 1960s and 1970s about the place of the Catholic Church in Québec culture were in response to questions about the distinctiveness or “normality” of Québec’s social and economic evolution within the larger context of Western Europe and North America. Subsequently, Québec historians no longer saw the Church’s place in such developments as central, and they have marginalized its role in Québec culture.²⁰ Indeed, Michael Gauvreau and Ollivier Hubert point out that despite the importance of religion in people’s lives in the nineteenth century, churches and religious institutions in Canada, both Catholic and Protestant, have been “essentialized as passive entities acted upon, or belatedly responding to, larger processes of social change that are in the final analysis economic in character.”²¹ Jean-Pierre Wallot argues that in early-nineteenth-century Lower Canada the Church’s control over “a society of farmers and labourers of some affluence and little education” was weak and the state of their morals was no better than “normal” for a society undergoing social and economic change.²² He maintains that their distinctive “independence and easy manners, their relative affluence and their propensity to enjoy life in all possible ways” distinguished them from their French ancestors as well as their British North American neighbours.²³ Can these traits be found within the *habitants* and reconciled with what historians such as Wallot himself have identified as their sense of economic rationality and their affluence? Rudin suggests that Québec historians ought to consider “both the ways in which the province has been normal *and* the ways in which its experience has been unique.”²⁴ As Gauvreau and Hubert suggest, the way to do so is to recognize religion as a social fact.²⁵ Even before the ultramontane reorientation of Catholic discourse in the 1830s and 1840s, one indication that people felt Catholicism was important to them is that in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Québec, people’s religious devotion and the increased prosperity that Wallot

²⁰ Ronald Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec* (Toronto, 1997), 171-218.

²¹ Gauvreau and Hubert, *The Churches and Social Order*, 7-13.

²² Wallot, “Religion and French-Canadian Mores,” 93. See Rudin, *Making History*, 176-7.

²³ Wallot, “Religion and French-Canadian Mores,” 93.

²⁴ Rudin, *Making History*, 204.

²⁵ Gauvreau and Hubert, *The Churches and Social Order*, 15.

himself identified, enabled French Canadians to construct more churches, or to enlarge existing ones, and to make their interiors more elaborate.²⁶

But, while historians have acknowledged that religion influenced how people understood and responded to the world around them, their assessment about its influence over Québec culture diverges markedly. One of the most influential assumptions has been, as Rudin argues, that “Catholicism ceased to be somehow part of Quebec culture, to be seen instead as an ideology imposed on the people.”²⁷ René Hardy, the leading exponent of what might be termed the social control thesis, postulates that the Church secured its pre-eminent position as the result of a gradual extension of its educational and social infrastructure to every corner of the province. Hardy argues that nineteenth-century Catholic culture in Québec was a construct, a process of acculturation achieved through “l’influence déterminante des groupes sociaux dominants et la mise en place des institutions qui servent à diffuser leurs valeurs.”²⁸ Hardy found that in Trois-Rivières between 1830 and 1930, but notably after it became a diocese in 1852, the clergy and the bourgeoisie had a common agenda for social control, albeit for somewhat different reasons, and had achieved that control by the early twentieth century. The negative features, such as increased social pressure for outward conformity accompanied by inner self-repression, were the most salient part of the process. Nevertheless, Hardy cautions, external conformity was not necessarily always a reliable indicator of internal piety, and could in fact conceal more passive forms of resistance. He notes that although few dared openly to resist the Church, they employed “*le sacre*” - swear words using the most sacred articles of the Catholic Eucharistic celebration like the Host, the chalice or, most ubiquitously, the tabernacle. But swearing was merely a form of “symbolic resistance” rather than a real contestation of clerical authority, a relatively meaningless, even futile gesture, in the face of widespread conformity and social pressure.²⁹ Hugues Brunoni, a

²⁶ Luc Noppen, *Les Églises du Québec (1600-1850)* (Québec: 1977).

²⁷ Rudin, *Making History*, 185.

²⁸ René Hardy, “Regards sur la construction de la culture catholique québécoise au XIXe siècle,” *CHR* 88:1 (March 2007), 8.

²⁹ Hardy, *Contrôle social*, 227. For a study of the phenomenon of swearing in Québec, see Jean-Pierre Pichette, “Les Jurons au Canada français: étude de l’histoire, de la langue et de la littérature orale suivie du recueil des jurons” (M.A. Thesis, Université Laval, 1973); and André Bougaïeff, “Un Trait du français populaire et familier au Québec: le système des ‘sacres,’” *The French Review*, 53, 6 (May 1980), 839-47.

student of Hardy's, also argues in his study of a dozen parishes in Beauce County, including St-Joseph, that there was a profound change in the religious culture, and a tendency towards *encadrement clérical*. The term is perhaps best translated as "priestly direction," "clerical control," or more accurately, the imposition of a priestly frame of reference over most aspects of culture and society. Echoing Hardy, Brunoni argues on the basis of an examination of the *Rapports des curés* for these parishes, that this 'encadrement' was the result of "un lent processus d'acculturation" to realise the clerical goal of "uniformisation des rites et des pratiques." People's attendance at Sunday mass, frequent communion, attendance at vespers, membership in pious or devotional organizations at the parish level, respecting the Lord's Day, obeying rules of fasting and abstinence, paying the tithe to the *curé*, and obeying the rules of temperance all demonstrated the clergy's success in obtaining their compliance.³⁰ Like Hardy, Brunoni also argues that any resistance to this clerical domination was isolated and episodic by the start of the twentieth century, and grew even weaker in the period 1900-1940. The few recalcitrants became victims of constraint and social pressure.³¹

Lower Canada's Roman Catholic religious revival (or renewal) in the 1840s was not unique since there were what has been termed Catholic revivals elsewhere in North America.³² Consequently, in the 1840s some sectors of the populace may have been receptive to what E. P. Thompson called the "chiliasm of despair."³³ Hardy formulated such an interpretation when he noted that the gradual rise of religious fervour and the success of the temperance movement can be explained, on the one hand, by the climate of political defeatism after the failure of the rebellions and the forced Union of 1841, and on the other by "la croyance en un Dieu justicier dans le contexte d'une certaine culpabilité consécutive à la révolte armée qui bravait les interdits religieux."³⁴ He interprets the *habitants'* correspondence with the supernatural, their frequent demands for mercy from

³⁰ Hugues Brunoni, "Les pratiques religieuses en Beauce, 1852-1940" (M.A.thesis, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, 2002).

³¹ Brunoni, "Les pratiques religieuses en Beauce." See also Hardy, *Contrôle social*, 13-14; and Hardy and Gagnon, *L'Église et le Village*, in particular 9-33.

³² Jay P. Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience, 1830-1900* (Notre Dame, 1978).

³³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1980), 385-440. For a counter argument to Thompson, see J. A. Jaffe, "The 'Chiliasm of Despair' Reconsidered: Revivalism and Working-Class Agitation in County Durham," *Journal of British Studies*, 28 (January 1989): 23-42.

³⁴ Hardy, "Regards sur la construction," 29.

divine justice, and their hope in God's miraculous intervention as indications that "au plus profond des mentalités se loge la croyance en un Dieu qui intervient sur la terre pour sanctionner les comportements humains."³⁵ As Hardy points out, the Church's belief system allowed it to exercise its control over people since it possessed a monopoly over the ritual forms of access to the spiritual world. By the mid-nineteenth century with the triumph of the ultramontanes, the control that the Church in Québec exercised over these visible enactments of its discourse became more centralized. Hubert argues that the Church successfully asserted control over its rites, and thus over the people participating in them. Furthermore, as these rites became quite elaborate and more dramatic, they also served as effective devices for clerical domination over the faithful, "les vecteurs actifs, tangibles parce que gestes posés, de l'exercice d'un contrôle social."³⁶

Similarly, Christine Hudon's study of the diocese of St-Hyacinthe in the period 1820-1875 argues that two parallel evolutions in Québec Catholicism over the first half of the nineteenth century help to explain the increased power of the Church.³⁷ One was the extension of the parish structure into areas of recent French-Canadian colonization. The other development taking place in the larger Catholic world was religious, the ultramontane devotional revolution that inspired adjustments to the rules of outward behaviour as well as to inner spirituality. The Church softened its opposition to frequent communion, but also placed a greater insistence on attendance at mass every Sunday. It combined this new approach, one that was meant to be far more attractive to the spirits and senses of the faithful, with more dramatic Roman liturgical ceremony that emphasised elaborate ritual, incense, music and spectacular processions. It also accorded greater importance to a more demonstrative piety far removed from the austere ideal of the earlier part of the century.³⁸

In contrast to these materialist or social-control arguments, Rousseau argues that the central question is to understand Catholicism's historical place in Québec culture. Rousseau argues that Catholicism cannot be fundamentally defined in purely organizational terms nor, as Rudin points out, can the institution be understood if

³⁵ Hardy, "Regards sur la construction," 19.

³⁶ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 4-5.

³⁷ Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*.

³⁸ Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, 12-13.

questions of religion are pushed to the side.³⁹ Catholicism was essentially an ensemble of symbolic practices, rituals and rules, each of which possessed its own structure, but together they articulated general and particular ways of interpreting the world. The rituals allowed people to move through the transitions in the cycle of existence, while the rules constituted a code of moral conduct.⁴⁰ Rousseau looks upon the Catholic Church's increased power as a much more positive, even creative, development. Far from being an externally imposed force, it provided cohesion and meaning to people's lives and to Québec culture.⁴¹ Rousseau suggests that the main focus on the history of the Church in Québec should not be on the imposition of external constraints on people, but instead on how well the Church met their inner spiritual needs. The Church responded to a deeply-felt popular spiritual crisis of alienation and indifference in the aftermath of the failed Rebellions of 1837-38, and because of its own spiritual concerns and preoccupations, was uniquely qualified to address them.⁴²

Furthermore, unlike Hardy, who argues that clerical control was the result of a long process of gradual acculturation, Rousseau maintains that these profound changes happened relatively quickly. Noting the dramatic increase in Easter communions, the rising numbers of male and female religious vocations, and the array of new voluntary religious associations at the parish level, Rousseau argues that the 1840s should be seen not only as a period of religious revival that gave the institutional Church a new lease on life, but also as the period that inaugurated a profound cultural transformation within Lower Canada, with Catholicism at its centre. This phenomenon effectively made Québec "une société religieuse," suffused with a new Catholicism, not merely one where the clergy imposed its will on an unwilling or mystified population. Philippe Sylvain and Nive Voisine agree that the 1840s mark a clear dividing line between the earlier general religious indifference of a large sector of the French-Canadian population and the "implantation d'une nouvelle culture de masse" based on Catholic religious and cultural

³⁹ Rudin, *Making History*, 209.

⁴⁰ Rousseau, "À propos du 'réveil religieux,'" 229.

⁴¹ Louis Rousseau, "À propos du 'réveil religieux' dans le Québec du XIXe siècle: où se loge le vrai débat?" *RHAF* 49: 2 (Autumn 1995), 223-45.

⁴² For more on the immediate post-1837 aspects in the Montréal region, see Louis Rousseau, "Les missions populaires de 1840-42: acteurs principaux et conséquences," SCHEC, *Sessions d'étude*, 53 (1986), 7-21.

values, opening a new era for Catholicism in Québec.⁴³ Rousseau's view that the relationship between the Church and the faithful was symbiotic, rather than one of domination and submission is persuasive because cultural/religious questions cannot simply be reduced to what religion did *to* people; we also need to be aware of what people thought that it did *for* them. In addition, David Nash argues that it is important to recognize that religion was not "an imposed set of values which modern urban populations in particular outgrew or cast aside as evidence of growing sophistication."⁴⁴ As Hardy himself admits, this remains an area of Québec religious history that needs to be more fully explored "pour mieux éclairer le sens que les croyants donnaient aux dévotions pratiquées avec constance dans l'espoir de se rapprocher de Dieu ou d'être ignoré du diable, d'être reçu au ciel sans passer par le purgatoire."⁴⁵ This study will examine the encounter between clerical discourse and that kind of popular belief.

Clerical Hegemony: Challenges or Exceptions?

Behind social control arguments about the power of the clergy lies the unacknowledged but influential assumption that the Church was the active force in Québec Catholicism in the nineteenth century, and the people were a passive, inert mass for the clergy to act upon, and to dominate. However, as revealing and important as these insights into the clergy's preoccupations are, this study will examine the degree to which clerical discourse and the Church's attempts to shape the piety and behaviour of the faithful were successful. There is too often a tendency on the part of religious historians to become prisoners of ecclesiastical thinking, to be influenced by the Church's categories, and consequently, as Hubert points out, to treat the majority of Catholics like children.⁴⁶ However, that view limits our understanding of the "perspective from the

⁴³ Sylvain and Voisine, *Histoire du catholicisme: Réveil et consolidation*, 10.

⁴⁴ David Nash, "Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularization's Failure as a Master Narrative," *Cultural and Social History* 1:3 (2004): 302-25. This quotation is from p. 308. See also Gauvreau and Hubert, *The Churches and Social Order*.

⁴⁵ Hardy, "Regards sur la construction," 7.

⁴⁶ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 51. He and Hudon observe, on the basis of the annual parish reports that the Québec Church began requiring in the early 1850s, that "the individual was constructed as a communicant, the Catholic as someone necessarily involved in the liturgical observances offered by the clergy. Catholics were defined in terms of a religious exercise, the Easter or yearly communion, making it possible to decide which people were 'faithful' to their religious duties and which were 'unfaithful.'" Hudon and Hubert, "The Emergence of a Statistical Approach," 55.

pews” and distances us from understanding how the people responded to the Church’s messages from the pulpit or in the confessional. As François Lebrun once observed about studies on the role of the Catholic Church in early modern France, we arrive at a one-sided perspective where “il s’agit du catholicisme et non des catholiques.”⁴⁷ The hierarchical organization of the Church helps to reinforce this belief. Catholicism in the nineteenth century was a “highly clericalized religion, where laymen were to remain firmly in their place,” and Pope Pius X frankly proclaimed to the clergy and Catholic people of France in 1906 that “[t]he mass has no other duty than to let itself be led and, like a docile flock, to follow its pastors.”⁴⁸ Given the belief that only the clergy’s opinions on religious matters had any moral force, it is understandable that the ordinary Catholic parishioners have faded into the background of religious history, so that we have at best only a fragmentary appreciation of how they received the Church’s discourse.

As Guy Laperrière has observed, much of the analysis of ultramontanism in Québec has focused on French or Roman influences on the French-Canadian elite, and on power struggles among its various groups. He argues that “on présente trop souvent la religion catholique-canadienne-française comme un tout homogène,” and that we need to stop speaking of “la’ religion catholique comme un bloc sans nuance et sans fissure,” and particularly to avoid uncritically or unconsciously projecting the “monolithique, ritualiste et conformiste” image of the Catholicism of the 1950s onto the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ Without examining the parishioners, we are left wondering how effectively the Church’s agents even transmitted its discourse, let alone the extent to which the faithful acquiesced and internalized it. If we look carefully at external practices, it is possible to arrive at some sensible, albeit limited hypotheses about how the faithful felt about their religion, especially given the Catholic Church’s heavy emphasis on external observance as the outward sign of inner Christian convictions.⁵⁰ Full churches may well have

⁴⁷ François Lebrun, “Histoire religieuse et histoire culturelle (XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles), Bilan et perspective de la recherche en France,” J.-P. Wallot and Joseph Goy, eds., *Société rurale dans la France de l’Ouest et au Québec (XVIIe - XXe siècles) Actes des colloques de 1979 et 1980* (Montréal, 1981), 251.

⁴⁸ *Vehementer nos*, 11 February 1906, quoted in Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (London and New York, 1989), 56-7.

⁴⁹ Guy Laperrière, “Religion populaire, religion des clercs? Du Québec à la France, 1972-1982,” in Benoît Lacroix and Jean Simard, *Religion populaire, religion de clercs?* (Québec, 1984), 37-8. That image is one that “les universitaires ont gardée du catholicisme de leur jeunesse des années ’40 et ’50.”

⁵⁰ Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism*, 159.

indicated that people felt the need or the obligation to attend mass, but the extent to which they signified actual clerical domination over them is another matter. Even when large numbers of people received the various sacraments, the problem for the historian remains the same as for the parish priests in St-Joseph: deducing people's inner piety on the basis of their external behaviour.

Furthermore, even among the pious, belief did not necessarily translate into subservience. This becomes evident when we consider that different members of a Catholic family could have had the kinds of varying responses to their religion or their *curés* that the Dominican priest, Benoît Lacroix, observed about his irreproachably Catholic parents who spent their entire lives in rural St-Michel de Bellechasse, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River east of Québec City. The traditionalist unquestioning Catholicism of his mother closely resembled the clerical stereotype of the era, but, even though his *habitant* father's devotion was equally firm, it was more critically aware, "exhibitionniste, jaseuse et raisonneuse."⁵¹ He shared his wife's belief in the efficacy of praying to Ste Anne to ask God for good weather for his crops, but he did not expect Heaven to reap his hay for him. Describing himself as "pas pieux, mais r'ligieux," he did not hesitate to point out absurdities in clerical messages.⁵²

Since Catholicism was a total system of living that was concerned with shaping all areas of life, not only conduct in church, the other revealing way to measure the degree of popular submission to the clergy is to examine behaviour that the clergy regarded as "disorders." In its own terms, such a totalizing discourse could not consider that it had achieved success if its efforts faltered in controlling people's behaviour. Even though the Québec Church in the mid-nineteenth century encouraged frequent communion as a result of softening its traditional attitude on the unworthiness of man for divine grace, it left unaltered its strict interpretation of what constituted proper Christian conduct. Its support for the temperance movement in the mid-nineteenth century reflected an increased opposition to popular celebrations enlivened with dancing and drinking, and its nervousness about expressions of youthful sexuality remained as strong

⁵¹ Benoît Lacroix, *La foi de ma mère* (Montréal, 1999), especially 264-266 and also "Deux manières de croire," 390-394. Lacroix's parents were born in the early 1880s; he himself was born in 1915. See also Lacroix, *La religion de mon père* (Montréal, 1986).

⁵² Lacroix, *La religion de mon père*, 22.

as ever. However, several studies of religious behaviour and conformity in late-nineteenth-century Québec indicate that the Church was unable to control people's behaviour to the extent that many historians of religion have assumed. Louis Rousseau's study of the parishes of the south west of Québec between 1839 and 1882 shows that while the numbers of clerical complaints about people's "mauvaises attitudes," "mauvaise moeurs" or "luxe" were relatively low, many priests still found major problems in other areas related to daily behaviour. Clergymen deplored the lack of parental supervision over the young people of marriageable age, as well as their love of dancing and of holding evening parties (*veillées*). They repeatedly pointed out other "disorders" such as lax or insufficient religious practice, "mauvaises paroles," "bals et jeux déshonnêtes," and the extensive use of alcohol.⁵³ Since the latter three categories in particular were very heavily represented – alcohol use was mentioned in every one of their reports, closely followed by the frequency of social gatherings and the ungoverned conduct of the young – it is clear that such behaviour represented something more than occasional deviance. As Catholics would have been aware, these were not minor matters. The Church's traditional position was that drinking to excess was a sub-set of one of the seven deadly sins, gluttony. Drinking could easily lead to anger, swearing and blasphemy, dishonesty and "mauvaises paroles," as well as fornication or even murder.⁵⁴

Clerical attempts to control the people of three parishes in the Diocese of Trois-Rivières for the period 1850-1930 failed for a number of reasons.⁵⁵ André Audet found that in the parish of St-Hilarion at the start of the twentieth century the *curé's* complaints "visent plus qu'une minorité négligeable des habitants."⁵⁶ Carmen Rousseau found that in the neighbouring parish of Cap-de-la-Madeleine, site of one of Québec's most important Catholic shrines to the Virgin Mary, the clergy reported they were making little headway against alcohol consumption that accompanied family celebrations after baptisms and

⁵³ Louis Rousseau and Frédéric Castel, "Les conduites qui désolent," in Rousseau and Remiggi, *Atlas historique des pratiques religieuses*, 188.

⁵⁴ *Le Catéchisme des Provinces ecclésiastiques de Québec, Montréal, Ottawa: Approuvé le 20 avril 1888 par les Archevêques et Evêques de ces provinces et publié par leur ordre* (Québec, 1888), 23.

⁵⁵ Serge Gagnon and René Hardy, *L'Église et le village au Québec, 1850-1930* (Ottawa, 1979).

⁵⁶ André Audet, "Pouvoir, contrôle social et vie quotidienne à Saint-Hilarion, 1870-1925," in Gagnon and Hardy, *L'Église et le village*, 70.

similar religious occasions in the early the twentieth century.⁵⁷ Normand Séguin's socio-economic study of the colonizing parish of Notre-Dame d'Hébertville in the Lac Saint-Jean region in the last half of the nineteenth century offers insights on the boundaries to, and the relative ineffectiveness of, clerical domination. Without contesting their *curé's* leadership, the parishioners of Notre-Dame d'Hébertville did not submit to clerical dictate, expressing this refusal by passivity as well as by ignoring aspects of his normative universe through "une certaine autonomie d'agir."⁵⁸ Their priest lamented the lack of ardour in people's religious behaviour, the omnipresence of alcohol, long extended courtships and the behaviour of young men and women in general, and the indifference of most parents to their children's religious training. The observations of the *curé* serving the parish for the period 1875-91 on the weakening moral fibre and declining family spirit of the community were tinged with bitterness and discouragement.⁵⁹ J.I. Little's study of Scottish crofters and French-Canadian *habitants* in the parish of Winslow between 1848 and 1881 argues that for both ethnic and religious communities "there was more community-based autonomy [...] than historians of this country's 'social control' school would have anticipated."⁶⁰ On the level of popular culture, "drinking, dancing, and youthful insubordination" were features of life in the French-Canadian community, judging from the *curé's* frequent references to them in his sermon notes.⁶¹

Other historians have argued that these were the exceptions. When Hudon found many instances of people evading clerical proscriptions against drinking, sightseeing or engaging in courtship on religious pilgrimages in the era of steam and rail, she argues that these were aberrations to omnipresent and largely successful clerical regulation.⁶² But the persistence of such behaviour in the older as well as the newly-settled parishes makes it difficult to accept the argument that ordinary Catholics conformed to the initiatives and

⁵⁷ Carmen Rousseau, "Les oblats et l'encadrement paroissial au Cap-de-la-Madeleine, 1902-1918," in Gagnon and Hardy, *L'Église et le village*, 129.

⁵⁸ Normand Séguin, *La conquête du sol au XIXe siècle* (Sillery, 1977), 214.

⁵⁹ Séguin, *La conquête du sol*, 198-214.

⁶⁰ J.I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881* (Montreal and Kingston: 1991), 10.

⁶¹ Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 212.

⁶² Christine Hudon, "La sociabilité religieuse à l'ère du vapeur et du rail," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association/Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, NS, vol. 10, (1999), 147.

concerns of the priesthood, or were powerless to resist them. The instances of the clergy's limited success in controlling people's behaviour away from church were not the isolated episodes in the larger context of priestly domination; they *were* the larger context, a context that obviously varied across Québec when factors such as social class and the differences between the urban and rural conditions are taken into account. Examining the many-sided relationship between clerics and faithful by situating Catholicism in the social, economic and cultural context of a rural parish such as St-Joseph de Beauce permits us to observe how these country people actually responded to the clergy, and will shed light upon the important questions of power, hegemony, and popular agency. Without understanding the power of Québec's rural popular culture, we are left with accounts that overstate clerical influence and minimize the degree to which ordinary people exercised agency in relation to the institutions, social groups, and individuals that governed them.

Religion and the Affirmative Power of Popular Culture

Jean Séguéy argues that culture is made up of "l'ensemble des réponses institutionnalisées qu'un groupe se crée pour faire face aux grandes questions de l'existence."⁶³ Members of that group translate these responses into the attitudes and gestures of daily life.⁶⁴ Similarly, William Westfall's characterization of culture as "the set of ideas, beliefs, and attitudes through which an individual, society, or group interprets existence" provides a useful way to situate Catholicism within the context of daily life and seasonal celebration in the parish, and to interpret the interaction between the worlds of religion and popular culture in St-Joseph. The ways the *habitants* understood and ordered their world, as expressed in their popular culture, constituted a "pattern of interpretation for organizing the unstructured data of life."⁶⁵ In "a complex language of words and symbols" reflecting their experience, they acted out these interpretations on a daily basis through their work and personal interactions.⁶⁶

⁶³ Jean Séguéy, "Du culturel au culturel," *AESC* (septembre-octobre 1974): 1283.

⁶⁴ Ian McKay, "Historians, Anthropology, and the Concept of Culture," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 8/9 (Autumn/Spring 1981/82), 234.

⁶⁵ William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston, 1989), 13.

⁶⁶ Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 14-15.

If “culture” is a useful though exquisitely imprecise concept at the best of times, Ian McKay argues that the uses and abuses of the concept in an historical analysis of popular practices and beliefs can make it even more ambiguous and problematic. In the humanist-structuralist debate, the question has been whether ideas and values define one’s social being, or the other way around. Furthermore, although there is agreement that the mental elements of culture, as distinct from its material ones, encompass values, norms, beliefs, and expressive symbols, nearly three hundred definitions of the term exist.⁶⁷ When one adds the distinction “popular,” the complexity of the question further increases since popular culture is often regarded as derivative, handed down by the elite, an “unofficial culture, the culture of the non-elite, the ‘subordinate classes,’ as Gramsci called them.”⁶⁸ Marxists explain the complex relationship between power and cultural values by turning to Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, the process whereby the ruling class exercises its power over the mass of the population, less by coercion than by its intellectual and moral capacity to win their consent through a continuous process of negotiation and struggle. Intellectuals play a crucial role in the process by facilitating the cultural hegemony of the ruling class.⁶⁹ As Simon Gunn observes, the process of hegemony “involved the construction of a whole lived reality such that the existing political, economic and social structures would be taken for granted by the mass of the people.”⁷⁰ Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu and J.P. Passeron employ the concept of *habitus* to explain the process of value formation in various social, cultural, and pedagogical contexts. They define *habitus* as a long-lasting set of beliefs and actions produced by the internalization of a cultural absolute that is able to perpetuate itself after the cessation of the pedagogical action.⁷¹ As Ian McKay observes, it is composed of the unspoken habits and patterns of behaviour, “the unwritten and unexamined set of cognitive and motivating

⁶⁷ McKay, “Historians, Anthropology, and the Concept of Culture,” 185-241. See also Simon Gunn, “Culture,” in *History and Cultural Theory* (Harlow, England, 2006), 53-6.

⁶⁸ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), Prologue, n.p.

⁶⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (New York, 1971), 12-13. See also John Fulton, “Religion and Politics in Gramsci: An Introduction,” *Sociology of Religion*, 48:3 (1987): 204.

⁷⁰ Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, 85.

⁷¹ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London, 1990). See also Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, (Dublin, 2006); and *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott (Oxford, 1994).

structures [...] created in early childhood through family socialization [and] carried through life, although modified by encounters with the world.”⁷²

Since *habitus* implicitly precludes an affirmative potential on the part of the “dominated classes” to articulate their own values, or to exercise agency, Bourdieu and Passeron thus dismiss the autonomy of popular culture.⁷³ So does much of the Marxist tradition, possibly because, as Kate Crehan points out, Gramsci recognized that even though the popular culture, or “folklore,” of the subaltern people may have had its own conceptions of the world, it is “fragmentary, incoherent and contradictory.” It cannot be “counterhegemonic” because of “the inability of subaltern people to produce coherent accounts of the world they live in that have the potential to challenge the existing hegemonic accounts [...] in any *effective* way.”⁷⁴ The implication is that the people can only accept or resist authority from above; they are powerless to exercise agency. But is this so? As Little observes, citing Foucault, “power is a dynamic process which must be examined at all levels of society.” Not only are individuals “always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power,” but “there are no relations of power without resistance.”⁷⁵ Resistance in Foucault’s analysis, as Gunn points out, is not “the opposite of power, but its corollary.”⁷⁶ In cultural matters there is a dialectical play between resistance and incorporation.⁷⁷ John Fulton argues that, unlike many Marxists, Gramsci did not deny the existence of such a dialectic. However, since Gramsci’s remarks on Catholicism have not been translated into English, they have been unavailable to religious historians or Marxist theoreticians who do not read Italian. He recognized that the religion of the common people has a revolutionary capacity because of its “closeness to ongoing concrete experience.”⁷⁸

⁷² McKay, “Historians, Anthropology, and the Concept of Culture,” 233-4.

⁷³ Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*, 24. See also Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, 75.

⁷⁴ Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002), 104.

⁷⁵ J.I. Little, *State and Society in Transition: The Politics of Institutional Reform in the Eastern Townships, 1838-1852* (Montreal, Kingston, London, 1997), 5.

⁷⁶ Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, 93.

⁷⁷ John Storey, ed., *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader* (London and New York, 1996), 11. Furthermore, it may be a misreading of Gramsci’s position to attribute such pessimism to him because, as Walter Adamson points out, “Gramsci’s hegemony is not a static concept but a process of continuous creation which [...] is bound to be uneven [...] and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop.” Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution, A Study of Antonio Gramsci’s Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), 174.

⁷⁸ John Fulton, “Religion and Politics in Gramsci: An Introduction,” *Sociology of Religion*

Furthermore, popular culture needs to be regarded as more than merely a simplified articulation of the culture of the dominant classes.⁷⁹ José E. Limón argues that Marxists err in regarding folklore as “a vaguely oppositional force.”⁸⁰ While it may be argued that cultural values generally move from the top down, it is also true that cultural influences move in both directions.⁸¹ Even as E.P. Thompson argued that “the villager is wise within his own village but accepts the inevitable organization of the outer world in terms of the ruler’s hegemony,” he admits that beneath the overarching hegemony of the ruling class “there are innumerable contexts in which men and women, confronting the necessities of their existence, derive their own values and create their own mode of life.”⁸² If agency is the capacity of people to articulate and make meaningful decisions over their lives, we can recognize, as Thompson implicitly does, that their popular culture is not only oppositional, it is also potentially affirmative.

If we apply Thompson’s observations about the capacity of ordinary men and women to exercise agency over their lives to the context of nineteenth-century rural Québec, it is possible to identify secular customs and community standards of right and wrong that demonstrate how they functioned in the Beauce. As Gérard Bouchard argues, there were “deux univers culturels” in rural Québec. One was the European-centred “culture savante” of a fragile and often insecure French-Canadian elite, and the other a more vigorous North American “culture populaire” that the elite both mistrusted and did

48.3 (Fall 1987), 204. See also Arnaldo Nesti who argues that Gramsci recognized that “la culture subalterne est différente et en opposition aux valeurs officielles,” even if it is simultaneously made up of “éléments multiples inorganisés et même parfois en contradiction mutuelle.” Arnaldo Nesti, “Gramsci et la religion populaire,” *Social Compass* 12: 3-4 (1975), 350.

⁷⁹ For a thoughtful discussion on the ‘circularity’ of the relationship between popular and elite cultures, see also Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, John and Anne Tedeschi, trans. (New York, 1988), Preface to the Italian Edition, xiii-xxvi. For an examination, in traditional China of the penetration of popular values and tales to the elite via the contacts between their servants and their children, see David Johnson, “Communications, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China,” in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1987), 34-72.

⁸⁰ José E. Limón, “Western Marxism and Folklore – A Critical Introduction,” *Journal of American Folklore*, 96: 379 (January-March 1983), 34-52.

⁸¹ As Burke argues, “Traditional ways of perceiving and thinking form a kind of sieve which allow some novelties through, but not others.” Burke, *Popular Culture*, 60.

⁸² Limón, “Western Marxism and Folklore,” 42.

its best to “correct.”⁸³ Furthermore, as Ollivier Hubert points out, from the time of Bishop Saint-Vallier in the late seventeenth century, the catechism clearly identified “le vécu festif comme une ritualité concurrente au rite de l’Église.”⁸⁴ While the *habitants* shared the same religion and language with other social groups, their work and leisure activities were the bases of the distinctive beliefs and practices that differentiated them. Their collective experiences influenced what Hardy terms “les perceptions populaires bien ancrées dans les mentalités.”⁸⁵

Since “perception” has as many meanings in French as it does in English, in speaking of the *habitants* in the Beauce the term is meant in the active sense of “perception du bien et du mal: le sens moral,” or a “prise de connaissance” and an “opération de l’intelligence.”⁸⁶ This is quite different from the passive sense of merely absorbing information or experiences as fragments of a derivative belief system handed down by other social groups. Fulton argues that Gramsci’s conception of *senso commune* is not the equivalent of an individual’s “common sense” in English, but instead means “a sense in common, common consciousness or commonality of experience” that “is not simply perception” but entails conscience and consciousness.⁸⁷ It is important to make this distinction because the fundamental question is whether the *habitants*’ perceptions of themselves and the world around them were expressions of their own experience and were robust enough to retain an independent orally-transmitted *loi populaire* that existed beside those of church and state as a bulwark against clerical interference. As Hubert points out, historians have shown that the charivari expressed the values of “a social and moral order that lay beyond the actual conduct which the clergy disparaged.”⁸⁸ The guardians of the moral order were the family and the community, and even though the

⁸³ Gérard Bouchard, “Une nation, deux cultures: Continuités et ruptures dans la pensée québécoise traditionnelle (1840-1960),” in Gérard Bouchard and Serge Courville, dirs., *La construction d’une culture: Le Québec et l’Amérique française* (Sainte-Foy, 1993), 6-12. For a similar argument about the two cultural worlds of New France, see Serge Courville, “Espace, territoire et culture en Nouvelle-France: Une vision géographique,” *RHAF* 37:3 (December) 1983: 417-29. See also Hardy, “Regards sur la construction,” 7-40.

⁸⁴ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 74-5.

⁸⁵ Hardy, “Regards sur la construction,” 8.

⁸⁶ In the sense that Sartre also used it, “Dans la perception, un savoir se forme lentement.” *Petit Robert Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris, 1989), 1398.

⁸⁷ Fulton, “Religion and Politics in Gramsci,” 203. “Buon senso” translates as common sense.

⁸⁸ Ollivier Hubert, “Ritual Performance and Parish Sociability: French-Canadian Catholic Families at Mass from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century,” in Christie, *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760-1969* (Montreal and Kingston, 2002), 59.

charivari often reinforced the same moral values around the sanctity of marriage as did the Church, its significance lay in the fact that it was the community, not the Church or the state, that acted as the enforcer.⁸⁹ Madeleine Ferron argues that the manifestations of this *loi populaire* in the Beauce were based on the power of custom and habit, and were therefore not open to discussion, modification or debate.⁹⁰

Although the *habitants* did not exist in isolation from the values of the larger society, the obvious difference from other sectors of the population, such as the petite bourgeoisie and the urban working class, was that the people of rural Québec literally toiled to produce their daily bread. The people of rural Québec were participants in a process of adaptation that Thérèse Beaudoin argues had begun two centuries previously, as the early French colonists became familiar with their North American environment. Subsequently, with memory and the store of knowledge passed down through the generations, their descendants organised their way of living better to accord with a climate that was quite different from France.⁹¹ She concludes that, “En prenant ainsi peu à peu possession du temps et de l’espace, [the *habitant*] arrive à développer sa propre conception spatio-temporelle l’amenant à établir son rythme de vie en relation avec ses activités particulières.”⁹² J.-Alphonse Richard made a similar argument on the ways that the people of St-Sébastien de Beauce maintained their collective identity: “Ceux qui vivent, travaillent, se logent, s’habillent de la même façon, qui suivent les mêmes

⁸⁹ Allan Greer, *The Patriotes and the People: The Rebellion of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto, 1993), 69-86.

⁹⁰ Madeleine Ferron and Robert Cliche, *Les Beaucerons ces insoumis, suivi de Quand le peuple fait la loi: La loi populaire à Saint-Joseph de Beauce* (Montréal, 1972), 241-42. See also Madeleine Doyon-Ferland, “Rites de la mort en Beauce,” *Journal of American Folklore* (April-June 1954), 137-47; and her study, “Rites et voisinage chez trois populations rurales canadiennes (Beauce, Dorchester et Charlevoix),” in M. Doyon-Ferland, *Coutumes populaires du Canada français* (Québec, 1972) D1-D5. However, whether more recent arguments that a number of instances in the twentieth century, including in St-Joseph in 1972, of groups of people mobilizing in the Beauce against unpopular laws, and juries refusing to convict those whom they perceived to be victims of injustice might be modern expressions of *la loi populaire* equivalent to the ritual of the charivari is open to question. Jean-Claude Morin, “L’organisation judiciaire de la Beauce,” in France Bélanger, Sylvia Berberi et al, *La Beauce et les Beaucerons: Portraits d’une région 1737-1987* (St-Joseph-de-Beauce, 1990), 224-7.

⁹¹ Thérèse Beaudoin, *L’été dans la culture québécoise (XVIIe - XIXe siècles)* (Québec, 1987), 19. See also Jean Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent* (Montréal, 1996). On winter and the French settler’s cultural adaptation to the North American climate, see Sophie-Laurence Lamontagne, *L’hiver dans la culture québécoise (XVIIe - XIXe siècles)* (Québec: 1983).

⁹² Beaudoin. *L’été dans la culture*, 19.

prescriptions hygiéniques et qui, dans leurs loisirs, partagent les mêmes récréations, finissent par s'animer d'un esprit social commun.”⁹³

However, culture, and for that matter religion, need to be contextualized, and must be understood not simply in their own terms, but in relation to the specific economic and social realities that influenced the people who practiced them. Determining if St-Joseph's social and economic patterns continued along familiar pre-industrial paths after the 1830s, a period during which Québec agriculture underwent a number of significant changes, is not only of interest at the level of materialist economic analysis. It is also intimately linked to the larger question of the cultural *mentalité* that governed economic choices people made and the degree of agency they exercised in the areas of religion, material progress, and cultural change. As Raymond Montpetit argues, culture should not be considered “un domaine qui serait un ‘à parte’ d’innocence, un secteur ‘a-historique’ situé hors de la réalité sociale et à l’abri des conflits d’intérêts et de valeurs;” nor are cultural manifestations in Québec “étrangers à la structure politique du pays, ni à son mode de production agricole.”⁹⁴ This is not an argument in the deservedly criticized classical Marxist sense that the economic “base” determines the cultural “superstructure,” or that culture is an epiphenomenon of deeper, more fundamental, historical processes.⁹⁵ Since all cultures operate within material and social contexts, periods of economic transformation present potential challenges to their capacity to explain significant alterations in the fabric of the world they seek to interpret.⁹⁶ If a culture is resilient enough to account satisfactorily for increased influences of market forces, or if important social and economic developments occur gradually along familiar paths, people's faith in its capacity to interpret the world might be unaffected, perhaps even enhanced. However, if economic changes intensify social tensions or increase socioeconomic disparities, people might feel that traditional cultural mechanisms that once explained the world to them are no longer sufficient. Consequently, they might seek increased guidance from, or be more susceptible to, domination by institutions such as the Church, or the opposite might occur and they might reject religion altogether.

⁹³ J.-Alphonse Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien de Beauce (1869-1944)* (Joliette, 1944), 126.

⁹⁴ Raymond Montpetit, *Le temps des Fêtes au Québec* (Montréal 1978), 12-13.

⁹⁵ For a critique of this classical Marxist position, see Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 232-4.

⁹⁶ Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 16-17.

Understanding the context of popular culture in St-Joseph permits us to avoid the other extreme of situating it in a static, socially unstratified and folkloric ‘bon vieux temps’ unconnected with people’s actual working lives and their various levels of prosperity. As Béatrice Craig points out in her study of the relationship between capitalism and the household economy in nineteenth-century Madawaska, there has been too often a tendency among economic historians to assume that rural people did not exercise agency in economic matters. She argues that the people of Madawaska (whose way of life and economic experiences in the nineteenth century bore many resemblances to those of St-Joseph) were active agents, not passive recipients, in the process of economic development.⁹⁷ Since St-Joseph’s agriculture underwent a number of important changes during the nineteenth century, it is necessary to examine the interplay between the economic and social development of the parish.

On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that while popular culture conflicted in several fundamental respects with the behavioural expectations of the Church, people had always accepted that religion and its ministers occupied an important place in the community. There were many ethical values in popular culture that the Church itself preached, such as honesty, respect for one another, mutual aid, and the importance of family and friends. Other popular cultural practices, such as sustained indulgence in earthly pleasures, contradicted the Church’s expectations by offering an alternative, less restrictive model of behaviour. Perceiving this behaviour only as distractions, tumultuous disorders, or evidence of backwardness and superstition, as St-Joseph’s *curés* often did in their reports, overlooked the deeper cultural and ethical content behind the celebrations.

The place where the content of that popular culture is most visible, because it was on display throughout the year, is the parish. Narrowly defined in ecclesiastical terms, the Catholic parish is a zone of religious jurisdiction composed of a varying number of the faithful under the supervision of the priest appointed by the local bishop. The parish was the one place in the structure of the Church where ordinary Catholics played an active role, and where all the key aspects of their relationship with their *curés* were played out on a daily basis. Despite the important place that the parish occupies in

⁹⁷ Béatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada*, (Toronto, 2009), 227.

Québec's culture and its economic, social and religious history, it has received much less attention from historians of religion and culture than has the diocese. While historical studies of religion in Québec have largely focussed on the institution's preoccupations, they have not examined other important aspects of religious history such as the responses of ordinary Catholics in matters of religious belief or expressions of faith. Examining St-Joseph will allow us to determine if the *curé's* power was relatively limited in relation to the worldly factors in the *habitants'* daily lives, a response to Foucault's challenge to analyse the Church's power "in its effects rather than its sources and at the margins rather than at the centre."⁹⁸ It will also allow us to test the validity of Christian Morissonneau's observation that "La docilité apparente des ouailles pendant le sermon n'allait pas jusqu'à l'obéissance absolue dans tous les aspects de la fête profane."⁹⁹

The Québec parish was not just a place to live or to attend Sunday mass; it was also, as Serge Courville and Normand Séguin note, important in cultural terms as "un lieu de foisonnante sociabilité" that coloured all aspects of people's lives individually and in the community, in ways such as their views on education or their contributions to the Church.¹⁰⁰ However, parish and regional studies have tended to focus largely on institutional history. While many parishes have their own locally-produced chronological accounts, and, with the exception of a number of Master's theses in Québec universities, few late-nineteenth-century parishes have received detailed analytical treatment from the historians of religion. And most academic parish studies focus on urban rather than rural parishes, perhaps, as Hudon argues, in the belief that all that can be said about rural parishes has been said.¹⁰¹ Thus, although the the volume of the *Atlas historique du Québec* that examines the parish does discuss rural areas, it largely concentrates on urban parishes, particularly in the Montréal region. Clerical actors dominate Lucia Ferretti's

⁹⁸ Gunn, "Culture," in *History and Cultural Theory*, 92.

⁹⁹ Christian Morissonneau, "Genre de vie et religion populaire," in Benoît Lacroix and Jean Simard, eds., *Religion populaire religion des clercs?* (Québec, 1984), 221.

¹⁰⁰ Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, *La paroisse: Atlas historique du Québec* (Sainte-Foy, 2001), 1. On the pivotal role of the Québec parish as a community unit and the parish church as its concrete embodiment, see Allan Greer, *The Patriotes and the People: The Rebellions of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto, 1993), 58-60; and Hubert Guindon, "The Social Evolution of Quebec Reconsidered," in Marcel Rioux and Yves Martin, eds., *French-Canadian Society* (Ottawa, 1978), 137-61.

¹⁰¹ Christine Hudon, "Histoire religieuse des régions du Québec: bilan et perspectives," S.C.H.E.C., *Études d'histoire religieuse*, 67 (2001), 33-45.

study of Montréal's parish of St-Pierre l'Apôtre in the period 1848-1930, in which she argues that the Church attempted to apply the rural parish structure to the evolving industrial city. While she successfully traces the development of the Church's response to that urban context, it is the Oblate missionaries and parish notables who occupy centre stage while the ordinary parishioners remain largely invisible.¹⁰² Sylvain and Voisine's examination of the history of Québec Catholicism offers a number of rewarding insights into the clergy, but virtually none on the faithful or on their role in their parishes, and despite the importance of the rural parish, they devote barely six pages to it for the period 1870-1898.¹⁰³ However, the intertwined religious, political and social functions of the rural parish as a basic unit of traditional French-Canadian cultural identity make it the ideal place to examine the multi-layered encounter between the institutional world of Catholicism and the popular culture of its adherents.

Sources: "*Les lunettes des contrôleurs*"

The primary source for this study is the same as the archbishop relied upon for his information, the annual *Rapports des curés*, which the Catholic Church in Lower Canada first ordered collected in a systematic way in 1851. The annual parish reports and the additional periodic correspondence that the resident priests sent to the archbishop contain details of the successes they achieved and of the impediments they encountered. These documents contain data about the levels of religious observance, the vigour of institutions like the temperance society and the schools, and the degree to which popular behaviour conformed to the dictates of the Church. However, one problem with observing the *habitants* through the "lunettes des contrôleurs" is that their seminary training had furnished the *curés* with highly censorious theological spectacles through which to refract the behaviour of their rural parishioners. As is the case when one group describes and assesses another, the *curés*' answers to the non-quantitative questions on people's behaviour or religious attitudes that Turgeon and his successors received were subjective and inevitably reflected their authors' bias. In addition to originating outside the lives and experiences of the people they depicted, outsider accounts often contradicted each other,

¹⁰² Lucia Ferretti, *Entre voisins: La société paroissiale en milieu urbain: Saint-Pierre-Apôtre de Montréal, 1848-1930* (Montréal, 1992).

¹⁰³ Sylvain and Voisine, *Histoire du catholicisme: Réveil et consolidation*, 288-294.

were usually subjective, and sometimes incomplete. Another possible element of distortion was that the authors of parish reports could give the archbishop “les bonnes réponses.” They could initially have submitted discouraging reports and subsequently have provided more optimistic ones in order to demonstrate their zeal in attacking and overcoming the failings of their parishioners.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, as Louis Rousseau and Frédéric Castel point out, because of their personal biases, *curés* of differing temperaments could easily have given quite dissimilar assessments of the same parishioners and their reports could tell us more about the preoccupations of the clerical observer than about the actual people being observed.¹⁰⁵ That was not the case in St-Joseph in the period 1851-1901 where five of the six men of varying temperaments who served in the parish submitted fairly similar reports on their parishioners.

Despite such potential shortcomings, these documents have many strengths and there are several compelling reasons to give the parish reports considerable weight. As Hardy argues, the *curés*' reports are an excellent means of tracing parish life because the annual information they provided over an extended period allows the historian to construct a relatively detailed portrait of a parish, following the nuances of its evolution.¹⁰⁶ Evidently, as Gérard Bouchard and Michel Bergeron argue, a long-serving parish priest would have known his people better than would have government officials, and often the population statistics in these reports were superior to the government censuses, and far better than the Quebec municipal ones.¹⁰⁷

In addition to these reports, St-Joseph's parish archive contains the very detailed 1876 parish census in which the meticulous *curé*, Antoine Martel, noted each family's financial circumstances. It is difficult to imagine anyone but the parish priest having the kind of information needed to compile this rare socio-economic profile of his

¹⁰⁴ Francine Girard-Ducasse and Louis Rousseau, “Les lunettes des contrôleurs: contenus des questionnaires pastoraux montréalais avant 1880: Leur contenu et leur utilisation,” *Archives*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1990), 47-69.

¹⁰⁵ Louis Rousseau and Frédéric Castel, “Les conduites qui désolent,” in Rousseau and Remiggi, *Atlas historique des pratiques religieuses*, 187-9.

¹⁰⁶ René Hardy, “Regards sur la construction,” 30-31.

¹⁰⁷ Gérard Bouchard and Michel Bergeron, “Les rapports annuels des paroisses et l'histoire démographique saguenayenne: étude critique,” *Archives* 3 (December 1978): 13-15. On the other hand, as bases for demographic history, one caveat is that it is sometimes difficult to tell precisely to which year their population figures can be ascribed, particularly when parish boundaries changed and if the *curé* submitted his report before or after such a change.

parishioners. His knowledge reflected a provision in Catholic canon law requiring a *curé* to pay regular visits to his parishioners' homes in order to assess family circumstances as well as every individual's level of faith, the degree that he or she might have transgressed the Church's moral and religious teachings, and their children's knowledge of the catechism. In most parts of Québec, the *curé's* visit customarily took place during the Christmas season in the context of a charitable drive, the *Quête de l'Enfant Jésus*, held to collect food and other necessities for the poor of a parish. All of this information was to be recorded in the *Liber de Statu Animarum*, or *Livres d'âmes*. St-Joseph's, unfortunately, appear to have been lost as they are not in the archdiocesan archives, the archives of the Société du patrimoine des Beaucerons, or St-Joseph's parish archives. The *curés'* observations in the annual reports on the degree that parishioners were submissive to the Church as well as the material for their sermon notes in the *Cahiers de prônes* was probably based on the information that they recorded in these books.¹⁰⁸

Another way to measure people's levels of religious participation in order to construct 'a view from the pews' involves comparing their reported behaviour with what they would have learned at catechism class as children and possibly as young adults about their duties as Catholics. The catechisms authorized to provide children the rudiments of their religion in the Québec archdiocese in the period 1847-1900 clearly laid out the Church's discourse on the proper behaviour of the faithful. They summarized the essential Catholic doctrines in a series of short questions and answers in clear, simple terms. They contained the elementary standards by which priests and faithful alike could measure people's submission to the teaching of the Church and conformity to proper Catholic behaviour, as well as warnings against morally dangerous pastimes, such as drinking and "impurity". Archbishop Joseph Signay's *Petit Catéchisme* of 1847

¹⁰⁸ For more details on the relationship between the *Quête de l'Enfant Jésus* and the *Livres d'âmes*, see Jean Roy and Daniel Robert, "Les rapports annuels des curés et l'histoire des paroisses dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle," *Archives*, no. 3 (juin 1984): 34. The requirement for a "book of souls" had been in place for almost 250 years by the mid-nineteenth century. The *Rituale Romanum* (1614), sections XII and VI, was the first to mention that such register was required. Canon 470 §1 of the *Code of Canon Law* (1917) reaffirmed the need to keep a record of the spiritual state of the parish faithful. For the specific requirements, see sections 1162 and 1362 in *La Discipline du Diocèse de Québec* (Québec, 1937), 512 and 610; and the *Appendice au rituel romain* (Québec, 1919) for the Latin text of 1614. See also the *Directoire pour les actes administratifs des sacrements à l'usage du clergé* (Paris, 1954), 139-41.

represented the older rigorous discourse.¹⁰⁹ A few years later, at their first provincial council when they decided to collect annual reports from the parishes, the Québec bishops approved a new catechism. Two versions, *Le Petit Catéchisme* and *Le Grand Catéchisme*, were published in 1853.¹¹⁰ In 1888, the provincial council of prelates authorized another catechism that the Québec Archdiocese retained into the twentieth century.¹¹¹ But the effectiveness of these popularized expressions of the clerical discourse can only be appreciated by placing them into the context of the *curés'* comments on levels of catechism attendance. If parents were not diligent in sending their children for instruction, the discourse would have been ineffective. Similarly, the parish *Registres d'état civil* allow us to place doctrine beside behaviour and the extent that the *curés'* complaints about easy morality on the part of the young had any statistical validity. The length of time elapsing between a couple's marriage and the birth of their first child provide an elementary glimpse of pre-marital sexual morality in St-Joseph.

Determining the *habitants'* own informal codes of behaviour is more difficult, but it is not impossible to see the two distinct but interdependent worlds of the clergy and the *habitants* through the eyes of ordinary parishioners. If, as John C. Walsh and Steven High suggest, culture (and by extension popular culture) is an "imagined arrangement of the world," then historians of culture must attempt to decode that imagined world in order to "read" its linguistic and non-linguistic signs.¹¹² Unfortunately, rural popular culture generated an abundance of spontaneous or ritualized behavioural 'signs' but hardly any of its own written documentation. In the case of a rural parish where relatively few people were literate until the end of the nineteenth century, the difficulties in interpreting the signs accurately are further compounded. Fortunately, the *habitant* voice is audible in the collections of the Archives de folklore at Laval University that include hundreds of transcripts of tape-recorded oral testimony on all aspects of local popular culture and

¹⁰⁹ *Le Petit Catéchisme du Diocèse de Québec* (Québec, 1847).

¹¹⁰ *Le Grand Catéchisme de Québec A l'usage de toute la Province ecclésiastique de Québec* (Lévis, 1853). See also Renée Dubeau-Légentil, "Le Petit Catéchisme du premier concile provincial de Québec (1853) Défi de l'unité dans la diversité," in Raymond Brodeur and Jean-Paul Rouleau, dirs., *La production des catéchismes en Amérique française* (Sainte-Foy, 1986), 229-57.

¹¹¹ *Le Catéchisme des Provinces ecclésiastiques*. See also Nive Voisine, "Le catéchisme de 1888: victoire de l'uniformité ou compromise circonstanciel?" in Brodeur and Rouleau, dirs., *La production des catéchismes*, 279-313.

¹¹² John C. Walsh and Steven High, "Rethinking the Concept of Community," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 32:64 (November 1999): 269.

religion from elderly inhabitants of St-Joseph and neighbouring parishes. Historians of popular culture owe a great intellectual debt to the teams of Laval's ethnographers who visited the region in the late 1960s and early 1970s in order to interview people born late in the nineteenth century when the traditional rural way of life continued relatively unchanged in the Beauce.¹¹³ Many of them indicate that their parents or grandparents had handed down these beliefs and tales to them from earlier times, although it is difficult to determine how old some stories or legends really are. There is no indication of the origin of the tales, apart from attribution to parents, teachers or, in a few cases, *curés*. Even so, they clearly indicate what at least some people believed to be true. Moreover, it is no small thing that these people spoke in their own words to people from the same region, rather than to outsiders who may have missed significant cultural nuances.

Finally, government statistical materials enable us to chart the changes in the social composition and economic life of the community in the period 1850-1900. The published Lower Canadian censuses of 1851 and 1861 and the Dominion censuses of 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901, as well as the manuscript censuses of the parish for the same years, shed a great deal of light on the occupations, marital status and educational levels of the people of St-Joseph. Besides the demographic information, the published federal censuses contain informative tables on several important aspects of the economic life of the parish, although information from one census report is not always comparable to information from another. Examining the economic activities of the parishioners will enable us to measure the extent to which religious belief and economic rationality might have co-existed in the minds of the parishioners. One problem arising from these documents is that officials who recorded units of measurement on these bilingual censuses usually translated French *arpents* as acres and *minots*, or sometime *boisseaux*,

¹¹³ Among the many publications resulting from this research, see: Pierre DesRuisseaux, *Proverbes québécois* (Montréal, 1978); *Magie et sorcellerie populaires au Québec* (Montréal, 1976); *Croyances et pratiques populaires au Canada français* (Montréal, 1973). Jean-Claude Dupont, *Coutumes et superstitions* (Sainte-Foy, 1993); *Héritage de la francophonie canadienne: traditions orales* (Sainte-Foy, 1986); *Le légendaire de la Beauce* (Ottawa, 1978); *Folklore français d'Amérique: Mélanges en honneur de Luc Lacourcière* (Ottawa, 1978); *Le sucre du pays* (Ottawa, 1975); *Le monde fantastique de la Beauce québécoise* (Ottawa, 1972); Paul Jacob, *Les revenants de la Beauce* (Montréal 1977); and Maurice Lorent, *Le parler populaire de la Beauce* (Ottawa, 1977).

as bushels.¹¹⁴ In addition to these sources, documentation in the archives of the regional historical society in St-Joseph's former convent includes the proceedings of the municipal council and a large collection of maps and photographs of the parish. However, even though Bruce Curtis's study of the development of Canadian censuses in the period 1840-75 argues that these documents have serious limitations, careful use of the data permits us to chart important aspects of the economic life of the parish.¹¹⁵

Although few outsiders have studied either St-Joseph or the Beauce, the region has produced a number of local historians. Abbé Jean-Thomas Nadeau (1883-1934) was born in St-Joseph and maintained a keen interest in the history of his parish. During the last ten years of his life, he collected notes and information on his native parish, but died before being able to turn them into a book. His work is valuable nonetheless, given the thoroughness of his notes and the frank assessments of some of St-Joseph's *curés*. In the early 1960s, his sister published these notes in serial form in the local newspaper, *La Vallée de la Chaudière*, that later compiled the whole collection.¹¹⁶ Another source of local history is an active historical society, La Société du patrimoine des Beaucerons, that produced *La Beauce et les Beaucerons: Portraits d'une région, 1737-1987*, a collection devoted to the economic, social, and cultural history of the county.¹¹⁷ Among the other

¹¹⁴ For more discussion on the pitfalls of comparing the agricultural censuses between 1851 and 1871, see, among others, Courville, Poulin et al, *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 231; Christian Dessureault and Yves Otis, "L'impact du cycle de vie sur l'évolution des structures agraires dans la région de Montréal au milieu du XIXe siècle," in Christian Dessureault, John A. Dickinson and Joseph Goy, *Famille et marché XVIIe - XXe siècles* (Québec: 2003), 81-82; and Normand Séguin, "L'agriculture de la Mauricie et du Québec 1850-1950," *RHAF*, 35: 4, (March 1982), 540. For specific discussion of the problems associated with using the 1851-52 census see R.M. McInnis, "Some Pitfalls in the 1851-52 Census of Agriculture of Lower Canada," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 15: 27 (mai-May 1981), 219-231. See also Bruce Curtis, "Administrative Infrastructure and social enquiry: Finding the facts about agriculture in Quebec, 1853-4," *Journal of Social History*, 32:2 (Winter 1998), 309-328; and "Expert Knowledge and the Social Imaginary: The Case of the Montreal Check Census," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 28: 56 (November 1995): 313-332.

¹¹⁵ Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840-1875* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2001), 13-17.

¹¹⁶ Marie-Anne Nadeau, "Histoire de la paroisse de Saint-Joseph de la Nouvelle-Beauce d'après les notes de M. L'Abbé Jean-Thomas Nadeau." The newspaper produced a large number of unbound and unpublished offprints.

¹¹⁷ France Bélanger, Sylvia Berberi, Jean-René Breton, Daniel Carrier, Renald Lessard, eds., *La Beauce et les Beaucerons: Portraits d'une région* (Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, 1990). Two other recent publications of La Société du patrimoine des Beaucerons about St-Joseph are: Daniel Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel et le palais de justice de Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce* (Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, 2007); and Marcel Cliche et al, *Paroisse de Saint-Joseph-de-la-Nouvelle-Beauce 1737-2006: Répertoire des Baptêmes, Mariages, Sépultures et Annotations marginales et Répertoire des pionniers*, 2 volumes (St-Joseph-de-Beauce, 2007).

secondary sources are Honorius Provost's religious and civil history of the parish of Ste-Marie and a study of transportation in the Beauce.¹¹⁸ More recently, *L'Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, the study dedicated to the Beauce region from the Institut québécois de la recherche sur la culture (IQRC) series on the regions of Québec, brings together a number of aspects of the area's past and is the most substantial and dependable source on local history.¹¹⁹ Less rigorous, but still very informative is the popularly-written *Les Beaucerons ces insoumis, suivi de Quand le peuple fait la loi: La loi populaire à Saint-Joseph de Beauce*.¹²⁰ There is also a vast secondary literature on traditional Québec popular practices produced throughout the twentieth century.¹²¹

One of the most compelling reasons to examine St-Joseph is that if the *curés* of a parish in such an ostensibly pious area found that their flock did not submit quietly to the Church's control, it raises questions about clerical domination in other parts of Québec. On the surface, the Catholic Church in Québec at the end of the nineteenth century might seem to have been all powerful, and French Canadians to have become much more religious and submissive. But, as with other myths that seem imposing from a distance, a microhistorical examination of St-Joseph suggests that the image of a priest-ridden rural Québec does not withstand close scrutiny. We shall see that, in its own small way, St-Joseph's experience during the period 1736-1901, particularly the period after 1851, calls many prevailing assumptions and long-held stereotypical images about the increased power and influence of the Church in Québec into question.

¹¹⁸ Honorius Provost, *Sainte-Marie de la Nouvelle-Beauce: Histoire religieuse* (Québec, 1967); *Sainte-Marie de la Nouvelle-Beauce: Histoire civile* (Québec, 1970); *Chaudière-Kennebec: Grand chemin séculaire* (Québec, 1974).

¹¹⁹ Serge Courville, Pierre C. Poulin, Barry Rodrigue, et al. *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, (Sainte-Foy, 2003), 319-24.

¹²⁰ Madeleine Ferron and Robert Cliche, *Les Beaucerons ces insoumis, suivi de Quand le peuple fait la loi: La loi populaire à Saint-Joseph de Beauce* (Montréal, 1972).

¹²¹ From this rich array, see in particular Thérèse Beaudoin, *L'été dans la culture québécoise (XVII - XIXe siècles)* (Québec, 1987); Anne-Marie Desdouts, *La vie traditionnelle au pays de Caux et au Canada français* (Québec and Paris, 1987); Jean Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent* (Montréal, 1996); J.-Alphonse Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien de Beauce (1869-1944)* (Joliette, 1944); E. Z. Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes & industries canadiennes-françaises* (Montréal, 1924); Jeanne Pommerleau, *Corvées et quêtes: Un parcours au Canada français* (Montréal, 2002); Sophie-Laurence Lamontagne, *L'hiver dans la culture québécoise (XVIIe - XIXe siècles)*, (Québec, 1983); Soeur Marie-Ursule, *La civilisation traditionnelle des Lavallois* (Québec, 1951).

Chapter 1

Development and Transformation: St-Joseph de Beauce, 1736-1901

At the end of his seventy-kilometre journey from Québec City, the lawyer and Legislative Councillor Henri-Elzéar Juchereau-Duchesnay (1809-71), related by marriage to the powerful Taschereau family of nearby Ste-Marie, confessed to being most unimpressed with the small rural parish of St-Joseph de Beauce near the end of the 1850s.¹ When he saw the collection of whitewashed houses and commercial establishments in the centre of the parish, he remarked somewhat scathingly that the village, “si on peut donner ce nom à une douzaine de maisons éparses,” offered few advantages and had many disadvantages compared to Ste-Marie.² The most notable feature of St-Joseph’s tiny village was its large stone church, capable of holding at least 2000 people, or almost the entire population of the parish.³ The consecration of the imposing building in 1797 was a tangible indication that people thought their religion important enough to expend money and labour on it. Besides the church, there was not much else to catch the eye, as can be seen from Map 1.

Among the small houses stood the presbytery for the *curé*, an attractive storey-and-a-half wooden *maison canadienne* with dormers and upturned eaves. It contained the *salle publique*, where, under the chairmanship of the *curé*, were held the meetings of the *fabrique*, the vestry council, an executive board of three or four *marguilliers* (churchwardens) who oversaw the material affairs of this Catholic parish. Nearby was the recently-built schoolhouse, measuring twelve meters by ten meters, one of ten in the parish.⁴ In addition, the village had two notaries, a doctor and a few merchants. Since St-Joseph had a few taverns but lacked an inn, visitors to the parish would have found a bed

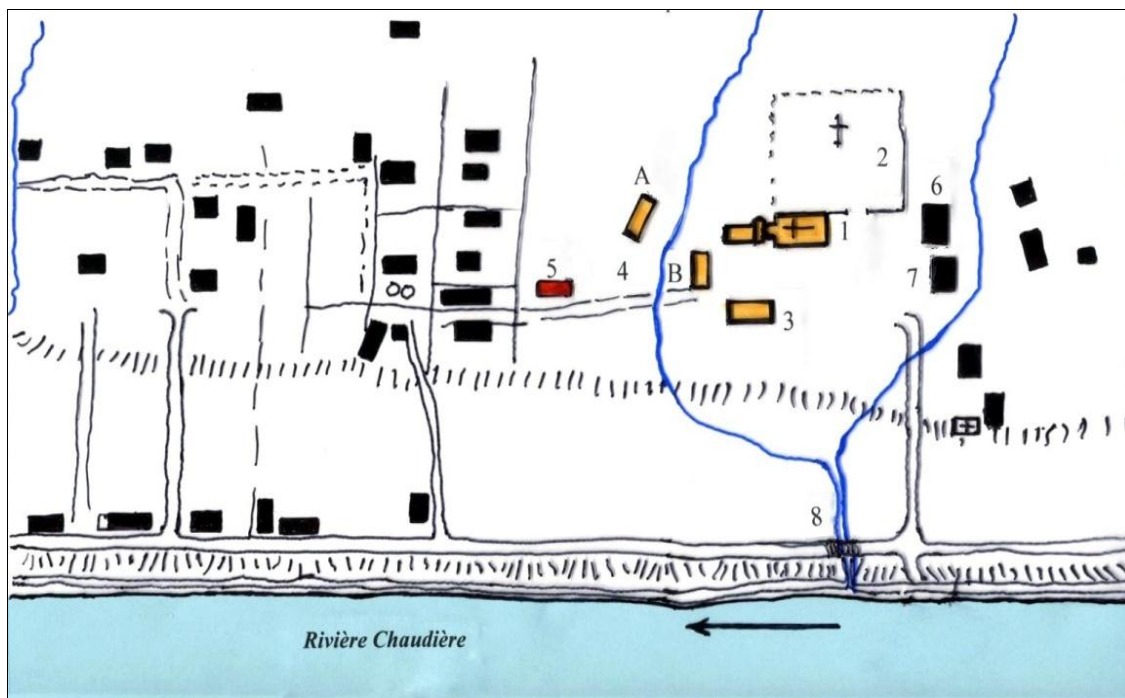
¹ Jean-René Breton, “De la terre à l’homme... l’exploitation du territoire,” in France Bélanger, Sylvia Berberi et al., *La Beauce et les Beaucerons: Portraits d’une région 1737-1987* (St-Joseph de Beauce, 1990), 61.

² Honorius Provost, *Sainte-Marie de la Nouvelle-Beauce - Histoire civile* (Québec, 1970), 312.

³ Honorius Provost, *Sainte-Marie de la Nouvelle-Beauce - Histoire religieuse* (Québec, 1967), 100.

⁴ Gérard Poulin et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987: 250 ans d’histoire et d’avenir* (St-Joseph de Beauce, 1987), 234-6.

for the night in someone's home. If they were curious about the place, they might have discovered that this was the oldest parish in the Beauce, having been established during the French Régime in 1736. After more than a century of settlement, however, it would not have seemed that much had changed in St-Joseph. Juchereau-Duchesnay might therefore be pardoned for concluding that there was nothing interesting about the place.



Map 1. *The Village of St-Joseph de Beauce Around 1850*

Adapted from a reconstitution made by Abbé Jean-Thomas Nadeau in 1929 showing the locations of the Parish Church (1), Cemetery (2), Presbytery (3), Priest's barn and stable (4 A, B), School (5), Home of J.O.C. Arcand, Notary (6), Home of François Bélanger, Notary (7), the Pont de la Chapelle (8), and several other houses, barns and stables. Source: Société du patrimoine des Beaucerons, Fonds Madeleine Ferron. PR36-C01-0)

Should the unsympathetic neighbour from Ste-Marie have returned a few decades later in 1900, on the other hand, he would not have recognized the place. At mid-century, St-Joseph had been a rather ordinary French-Canadian farming community, not much different than a hundred others in Lower Canada. By the start of the twentieth century, the tiny hamlet had blossomed into a large prosperous village. The tree-shaded main street, grandly called rue du Palais de Justice, ran in front of a classical stone courthouse, the seat of judicial administration for Beauce County. Thriving stores, businesses and a few hotels also lined this thoroughfare or were located on nearby side streets, interspersed

among the homes of the village residents. One block to the north of the courthouse, the high silvery steeple of the imposing stone parish church, which had been built in 1867 to replace the earlier, smaller one, would also have caught the visitor's eye. Two other impressive structures were the elaborate red brick presbytery across from the church, and the substantial brick convent of the Sisters of Charity behind the church, high on a hill overlooking the village.⁵ Political and economic decisions made elsewhere had brought the larger outside world to the parish due to the village's designation in the late 1850s as the centre of judicial administration for Beauce County. Its enhanced status gradually added several new professions into the ranks of the local middle class.

Juchereau-Duchesnay would also have found the journey to St-Joseph noticeably easier because a railway line had connected the parish to the outside world in 1876. The arrival of the railway enhanced the economic progress of the parish by permitting its farmers to transport their products to market more efficiently. The presence of the legal apparatus of the state after the village became the centre of judicial administration for Beauce County also brought greater occupational complexity in the parish, but the question that arises is how deeply did these changes affect how the people of St-Joseph carried on with their lives? In order to answer that question, this chapter will trace the major aspects of continuity and change in the evolution of St-Joseph during the period 1736-1901. It will start by examining key moments in the relationship between the people of the parish and the civil and religious authorities from the French régime through the nineteenth century. Then it will examine factors such as the choices its farmers made during this period, particularly after the 1830s, about land use, farm size, and what products they specialized in, and their response to climate and market challenges. By considering the combination of tradition and modernity upon which St-Joseph's late-nineteenth-century economic wellbeing was based we will be able to trace the degree of economic and social change the people of St-Joseph experienced, and their responses.

⁵ Daniel Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel et le palais de justice de Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce* (Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, 2007), 33-9.

The Early Development of St-Joseph, 1736-1851

European settlement of the Beauce began near the end of the French Régime in 1736, when Sieur Joseph Fleury de la Gorgendière, a government official from whose first name the parish of St-Joseph derived the name of its patron saint, was granted the Chaudière Valley's first seigneurie. The grant to Fleury, as well as similar grants to his sons-in-law in Ste-Marie to the north and St-François to the south, measured approximately fifteen kilometres by ten kilometres.⁶ Fleury soon had lots surveyed for the first *censitaires*. Most of his early settlers originated in the Québec City area: the Côte-de-Beaupré, the Ile d'Orléans, and the seigneuries of Charlesbourg, Lauzon and Bellechasse.⁷ By 1739, the population of the three seigneuries on the Chaudière, collectively known as 'la Nouvelle-Beauce,' reached 262 souls and they had already cleared 779 *arpents* of land.⁸ By 1762, according to the census of the government of Quebec, St-Joseph's population reached a total of 436 people in seventy-eight households, including two refugee families who fled there to escape the British.⁹ As Figure 1.1 indicates, St-Joseph's population increased steadily in the early nineteenth century. By 1831, nearly a century after its first settlers had arrived, it had 2098 residents. In 1851, St-Joseph's population boundaries were altered for the first time with the creation of the new, smaller, parish of St-Frédéric. From that point on, the parish's population grew slowly and unevenly. It reached 3,000 by the 1860s, and then declined slightly between 1871 and 1881 after an outlying section was chopped off to form new parishes. St-Joseph lost 85 families, or 491 people, to Les Saints Anges in 1875, and in

⁶ Well into the nineteenth century in the *curés*' reports, this was measured in leagues: "un terrain de trois lieues de front sur deux de profondeur des deux côtés de la rivière." Anne-Marie Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph de la Nouvelle-Beauce d'après les notes de M. L'Abbé Jean-Thomas Nadeau," (Unpublished MS, 1958-1964), 23.

⁷ Serge Courville, Pierre Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante* (Sainte-Foy, 2003), 124. See also Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph," 59.

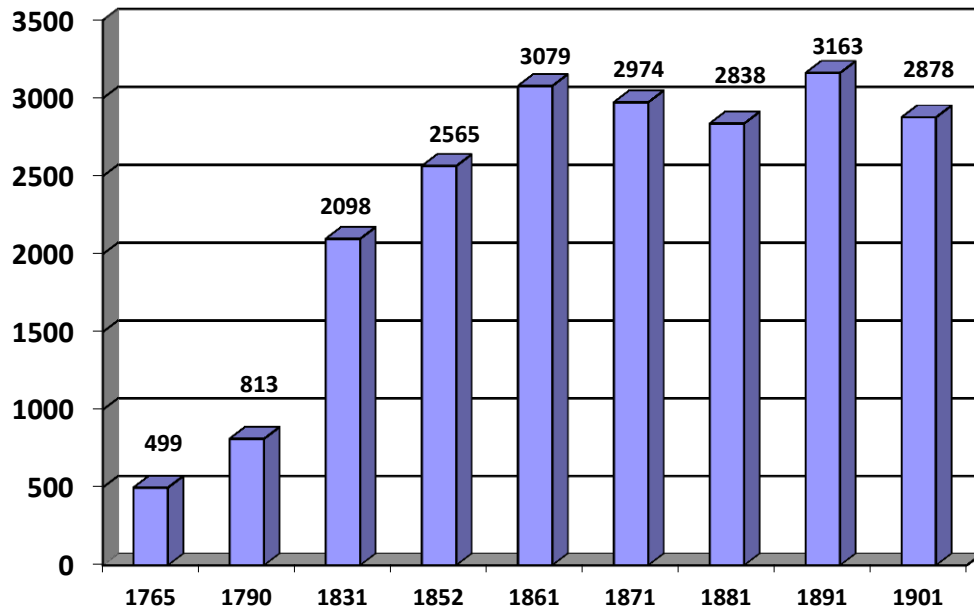
⁸ Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 116. See also Poulin et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 29-32; and Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph," 42.

⁹ *1762 Census of the Government of Quebec* (Pawtucket, Rhode Island, 1997), 59-62. See also Poulin et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 50-51 for a copy of the Census of 1762; and Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce - Etchemin - Amiante*, 123, for the number of households. On the refugees, see Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph," 77; *1762 Census*, 62.

1898 more of St-Joseph's parishioners became part of the parish of L'Enfant Jésus in the village of Beauce-Jonction (today's Vallée Jonction).¹⁰

Fig 1.1: Parish Population 1765-1901. St-Joseph de Beauce

Sources: Censuses 1765-1901



Another feature of this period was the dominance of the Taschereau clan whose members played prominent roles in Québec's political and religious affairs well into the twentieth century.¹¹ The rise of the Taschereau family began when Thomas-Jacques Taschereau married Fleury's daughter and sole heir. After his death in 1755, the seignury of St-Joseph passed into the hands of the Taschereau family, who seem largely to have ignored it. The Seven Years' War temporarily slowed the development of the seignury, though its isolation from the fighting around Québec saved it from General James Wolfe's fire-and-sword policies in the St. Lawrence Valley. Once the peace treaty was signed giving the British possession of Canada, the only indication from St-Joseph

¹⁰ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 407-11, and 555. As was the case in 1875, before the archdiocesan authorities granted the requests for parish status for what had previously been mission chapels of St-Joseph, the residents in these areas had pointed out that they lived five or six miles away from St-Joseph's parish church. Marcel Cliche, dir., *Paroisse Saint-Joseph-de-la-Nouvelle-Beauce 1737-2006, Répertoire des Baptêmes, Mariages, Sépultures et Annotations marginales et Répertoire des pionniers*, Tome I (St-Joseph de Beauce, 2007), 35-6.

¹¹ Sylvia Berberi, "Les Beaucerons et la politique," in Bélanger, Berberi, et al., *La Beauce et les Beaucerons*, 134-42.

noting the change was the letter of 22 June 1763 from the Récollet missionary Claude Loiseau (Père Théodore) to Jean-Olivier Briand confessing that he had tearfully sung the *Te Deum*, as ordered, to celebrate the colony's transfer of allegiance to new British monarch.¹² If some of the Taschereau family, who identified themselves more and more with Ste-Marie, were present, they may have been more outwardly composed, for they soon became loyal supporters of the British régime.

Compared to the Seven Years' War, the American Revolution was a more dramatic event in St-Joseph. At a parish assembly in June 1775, the *habitants* unanimously decided to disobey Governor Guy Carleton's call for the militia to take up arms, and ignored the exhortations of the seigneur and the *curé* to do so, decisively demonstrating their disregard for the pretensions to leadership and the pro-British sympathies of the Taschereau family and the Church.¹³ The seigneur was not even permitted to speak. This aggressive independence should not have come as a surprise because, in addition to agricultural skills and their religion, the new settlers brought a certain assertiveness that caught the attention of the civil authorities in Québec almost from the start of colonization in St-Joseph. They issued a special *ordonnance* in 1741 forbidding the inhabitants of la Nouvelle-Beauce from exchanging insults and from fighting in front of the church in St-Joseph.¹⁴ A special three-man investigative committee that the British authorities set up a year after the American invasion in 1775 in order to investigate French-Canadian behaviour found pronounced pro-American sentiment in St-Joseph. They reported that "this parish unanimously revolted and refused to acknowledge the King's authority, despite the good counsel of their priest," who "was insulted several times."¹⁵ The investigating committee also claimed that spies had repeatedly passed through the parish, and that "this parish's spirit has always leaned towards the rebels." Worse, the inhabitants received General Benedict Arnold's army with "affection" when it passed through St-Joseph in the late fall of 1775 on its way to

¹² Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 101.

¹³ Gustave Lanctôt, *Canada and the American Revolution, 1774-1783* (London and Toronto, 1967), 58-9, 118; Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph," 153-71.

¹⁴ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 49.

¹⁵ Michael P Gabriel., ed., S. Pascale Vergereau-Dewey, trans., *Quebec During the American Invasion, 1775-1776. The Journal of François Baby, Gabriel Taschereau and Jenkin Williams* (East Lansing, Michigan, 2005), 63. See also Poulin et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 75-76.

besiege Québec City.¹⁶ In a letter to the missionary priest serving the area, Bishop Briand expressed his surprise and profound sadness:

Nous avons appris avec une vraie douleur, Monsieur, que les habitants de St. Joseph et de St. François ont résisté aux ordres du gouverneur. Faites leur bien entendre qu'outre le péché qu'ils commettent contre leur serment, ils s'exposent à de grandes punitions [...] Je ne me serois figuré que la rébellion et la désobéissance commençât par votre petite endroit.¹⁷

Whether the pitiable condition of this exhausted American army aroused the sympathy of the *habitants* of the Beauce, or the money it brought inspired their cupidity, can still be debated, but there is no question that for the British, the Taschereau family, and the Church, the *habitants*' friendly or neutral response to the Americans constituted a major disappointment.¹⁸ A significant number of them even helped the Americans by conducting them downriver in their canoes.¹⁹ As if that were not bad enough, Taschereau had still more personal reasons for bitterness towards "his" people. After Benedict Arnold's arrival on 5 November, the American general installed himself for three days in the unpopular seigneur's Ste-Marie manor house.²⁰ A few months later, during their retreat, the Americans pillaged the Taschereau estate and mill. As the regional historian Honorius Provost disapprovingly notes, "toute la Nouvelle-Beauce en plein hiver" participated in the auction of the seigneur's household goods, farm tools, and assets.²¹ In St-Joseph, the local miller, "a great friend of the rebels," unresistingly surrendered to the invader-liberators all the wheat and money that Taschereau had entrusted to his care.²²

In political terms, since there is no mention of the War of 1812 having any impact on the parish, the next notable intrusion of the outside world into the region occurred in 1829 when Dorchester County was divided into the two counties of Dorchester and Beauce. St-Joseph became part of the new county of Beauce that had the right to elect

¹⁶ Gabriel, *Quebec During the American Invasion*, 76.

¹⁷ AAQ 22 A 4, Cartable S. Marie de la Beauce, No. 1", 'Copies des lettres des Évêques de Québec, 1768-1777,' J-O Briand to M. Verreau, Curé, Ste-Marie, 4 June 1775, p. 561, with the notation: 'Copie d'après l'original conservé à l'arch. de Québec.' Spelling left as in the original.

¹⁸ Poulin et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 73. See also Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 251-3.

¹⁹ Gabriel, *Quebec During the American Invasion*, 64; Poulin et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 76.

²⁰ Lanctôt, *Canada and the American Revolution*, 99.

²¹ For a detailed inventory of the goods auctioned for just over £50, and the names of the participants, see Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 73-75.

²² Gabriel, *Quebec During the American Invasion*, 64.

two members to the Legislative Assembly. In the general election of 1830, at the poll held in the family fief of Ste-Marie, Beauce County sent two members of the Taschereau clan to represent its interests at Québec.²³ In 1831, after nearly a century of settlement, the population of St-Joseph reached 2098 and its inhabitants began the formal process to become a canonically erected parish with a resident *curé* instead of remaining a mission served by itinerant priests who usually resided in Ste-Marie. Canon Law required the proposed parish to have the consent of the majority of property holders, a dedicated church building with an altar and tabernacle, and the liturgical vessels required for divine worship. It also needed a baptismal font, a confessional, a cemetery, and a register where the *curé* was to keep an exact record of all baptisms, marriages and burials. The parish also had to have a stable income to support a priest, and needed to provide him with a suitable dwelling.²⁴ Following customary procedure and legal requirements, the missionary priest announced the proposal from the pulpit on three consecutive Sundays and summoned an assembly of all St-Joseph's *francs tenanciers* (male property-owners) to consider the issue. Achieving parish status took four years, and in 1835 St-Joseph received canonical recognition from the Archbishop of Québec. In 1839, the parishioners began the formal process of enlarging their church in order to accommodate its growing population.²⁵

The tumultuous events of the Rebellions of 1837-38 in the Montréal and lower Richelieu areas of the province seem to have registered only a very faint echo in St-Joseph. There were no recorded instances of its people defying the authorities, except for the arrests of two prominent members of the parish. The notary, Michel Dostie, seems to have been the main beneficiary from the arrest and temporary removal of his more nationalist competitor, the notary J.O.C. Arcand, whom he had denounced to the

²³ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 275.

²⁴ See in particular J.U. Baudry, *Code des curés, marguilliers et paroissiens accompagné de notes historiques et critiques* (Montréal, 1870), 193-276; Joseph Desautels, *Manuel des curés pour le bon gouvernement temporal des paroisses et les fabriques dans le Bas-Canada* (reprint New York, 1968), 73-9; and Ernest Lapointe, 'Introduction' to Jean-François Pouliot, *Le droit paroissial de la Province de Québec* (Québec, 1919). See also William H.W. Fanning, "Parish," in Charles G. Hebermann et al. eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline and History of the Catholic Church*, Vol. 11 (New York, 1914), 499-503. Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 286-7.

²⁵ AAQ, "Registre des lettres," St. Joseph de B, I27, 28: 10 November, 1839: 'Projet d'allonger l'église; résolution de la fabrique demandant à en payer les frais.' For the customary formal procedure of meetings and financial levies on property holders, see Desautels, *Manuel des curés*, 79-84.

authorities along with militia Captain François Bélanger for concealing firearms in Bélanger's house. This must have been only a temporary setback for Arcand and Bélanger because in 1848 they are listed as president and secretary, respectively, of the parish's new temperance society.²⁶ However, one political effect of the rebellions was that the provisions of the proclamation of 1829 that created Beauce County were repealed, and the Act of Union of 1841 re-united the counties as Dorchester and reduced its political representation to one member.²⁷

Transportation and Communication

When Juchereau-Duchesnay made his invidious remarks about St-Joseph in the late 1850s, he touched upon a major disadvantage about which its inhabitants were probably already quite aware. Despite its relatively favourable climate, aspects of St-Joseph's geographical position, notably the Chaudière River, presented major challenges for farmers who wished to take advantage of their proximity to Québec City, roughly seventy kilometres away. The parish periodically suffered from the spring and autumn floods that rendered communication with the outside world on its rudimentary roads extremely difficult. On several occasions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the increased spring water levels coincided with the breakup of the ice that acted like dams, preventing the flow of water downstream. This caused serious flood damage to villages and towns, and isolated them from the rest of the province. Although most floods occurred early in the year because of snow-melt and ice, there were occasions in summer and fall when unusually heavy rains caused harvested timber floating downstream to pile up and form log jams, with unfortunate consequences to crops.²⁸ A letter from the *curé* to the bishop in 1848 noted the "dommages incalculables causés par le débordement de la rivière Chaudière" when a heavy summer rain storm caused the river to overflow its

²⁶ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 297-300. For the Temperance Society, see 322. For Arcand's work between 1848 and 1852 on the colonization scheme for the nearby Upper St Francis District in the Eastern Townships, see J.I. Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism and Colonization in Nineteenth-Century Quebec: The Upper St Francis District* (Kingston and Montreal, 1989), 90-97.

²⁷ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 274-75; Berberi, "Les Beaucerons et la politique," in Bélanger, Berberi, et al., *La Beauce et les Beaucerons* 138.

²⁸ For a concise analysis of the historic flooding problems along the Chaudière, see Daniel Carrier and Renald Lessard. "Un espace devient territoire," in France Bélanger, Berberi, et al., *La Beauce et les Beaucerons*, 4-6. See also Daniel Carrier, Lynda Cloutier and Johanne Lessard, *Imprévisible Chaudière* (St-Joseph de Beauce, 1991).

banks, almost entirely ruining the grain and hay crops in low-lying fields.²⁹ In October 1851 heavy rains and flooding washed away houses.³⁰ But even when it was flowing peacefully, the river was still no friend to the farmers of the parish. Surveyor General Joseph Bouchette observed in 1832, that the river was the only large waterway passing through the Beauce, but it was not navigable for boats over most of its course. He noted that the channel had varying depths and sudden drops in elevation, and even more dangerously, “its bed is rugged and much contracted by rocks jutting from the sides, which occasion violent rapids.”³¹

Land communication offered the only alternative to the river, but that meant cutting a pathway through forested or swampy land in order to connect the parish to the St. Lawrence. The elementary road, or more likely a wide path, that the first seigneurs of Ste-Marie, St-Joseph and Rigaud-Vaudreuil (St-François) undertook to construct in 1737 followed the eastern bank of the river from the seigneuries to the mouth of the Chaudière, and then followed the St. Lawrence for several kilometres to Lévis, across the river from Québec.³² In 1758, the residents of St-Joseph asked for a shorter route to the northeast of the Chaudière. One of the major proponents of this new route, subsequently nicknamed “la route Justinienne” in his honour, was the Récollet missionary Justinien Constantin who served in the Beauce from 1753 until his death in 1760. The route was to pass through the twenty kilometers of forest separating the Chaudière River at modern-day Scott from the village of St-Henri on the Etchemin River in order to connect with a road that passed through the settled areas of the seigneurie of Lauzon. This road covered the remaining twenty kilometers to the junction with the Chemin du Roy, parallel to the Saint Lawrence River, a few kilometers southwest of Lévis, across the St. Lawrence from the

²⁹ AAQ, “Registre de lettres,” ‘S. Frédéric’, I-2, 8 August 1848. See also Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 731.

³⁰ J. Edmond Roy, *Histoire de l’ancienne seigneurie de Lauzon*, Vol. I (Lévis, 1897), Introduction, xxx. See also Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 331. According to Albert Grondin who was 20 years old at the time and an eyewitness to the disaster, a similar flood in July, 1917 washed away animals and buildings of “cent pieds de long-là par cinquante. Ç’avait passé icite puis s’échouer au bout du village.” Morgan, *The Regional French of County Beauce*, 97-100.

³¹ “Chaudière river” in Bouchette, *Topographical Dictionary*. For a more detailed description, see Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce - Etchemin - Amiante*, 63.

³² Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 359.

capital.³³ (For the 1737 road and the Route Justinienne, see Map 2). It is unlikely that the project made much progress during the last years of the French régime, but Constantin's successor as resident priest in St-Joseph, Théodore Loiseau, wrote Governor James Murray in 1763 citing the need for a better road. Murray ordered the Grand Voyer (Inspector General of Roads), François-Joseph Cugnet, to impose a proportional levy on the people living along its route in order to cover the necessary costs, and to require property owners to perform maintenance and repairs each year.³⁴

Between 1763 and 1797, there were several attempts to improve and maintain the "route Justinienne" that had supposedly been completed in 1771, but by the end of the century the route still left much to be desired, especially at the large swampy area near St-Henri, where it was passable only in winter.³⁵ In 1767, Jean-Marie Verreau, the missionary priest who served St-Joseph, Ste-Marie, and St-François, wrote Briand that he preferred to remain in Ste-Marie as much as possible. Apart from the better quality of liturgical vessels and its newer presbytery, the poor state of the roads was the problem. He noted that in Ste-Marie "le curé aura 4 lieues de mauvais chemins de moins pour aller à confesse," adding that "les curés courent risque de leur vie" because "les habitants de la Beauce négligent beaucoup leurs chemins," making it almost impossible for the priest to visit sick parishioners at night.³⁶ In 1794, Gabriel-Elzéar Taschereau, seigneur of Ste-Marie, became the Grand Voyer in charge of the provincial road network, and naturally took a close interest in transportation matters so close to home. He reviewed the proportional levy of two decades earlier taking into account the growth of the population, decreed a new standard road width of not less than six meters between ditches, and ordered paving logs removed if they were too short. Bridges were to be rebuilt according to consistent standards, and the forest would be cut back 7.6 meters on each side of the

³³ Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 363-64. See also Martine Côté, "Route fluviale, routes terrestres: les communications," in Roch Samson et al., *Histoire de Lévis-Lotbinière* (Sainte-Foy, 1996), 219-21.

³⁴ For more on the administrative details of the system of *grands voyers*, see Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, *Le pays laurentien au XIXe siècle: Les morphologies de base* (Sainte-Foy, 1995), 30-32.

³⁵ Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 366-7.

³⁶ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 140-1. See also Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 369. On the reluctance of the *habitants* to maintain roads and ditches during and after the French régime, see Colin Coates, *The Metamorphoses of Landscape and Community in Early Quebec* (Montreal and Kingston, 2000), 114-17.

road.³⁷ His assistants were to take legal measures against property owners who neglected their responsibilities, and use any fines collected to hire others to do the work.

In addition, discussions on extending the road south in order to take advantage of the commercial possibilities of connecting Lower Canada with the American state of Maine became more concrete after the War of 1812. A rudimentary road to the border was in place by the autumn of 1815. Five years later, it had been improved to measure 5.5 meters wide. Although it still had no bridges, enough improvements had been made so that the completion of “the Kennebec Road” in 1830 enabled people and goods to pass directly between the capital of Lower Canada, through the Chaudière Valley to St. George and then along the Kennebec River valley into the neighbouring American states.³⁸ The Kennebec Road soon became a well-travelled route of French-Canadian emigration to the United States, to which the Beauce contributed a large share.³⁹ On 11 September 1830, the first travelers from Maine reached Lévis after covering the 150 kilometers from the border in their carriage.⁴⁰ In 1835, the trip by horse and carriage from Québec to Boston via the Kennebec-Portland Road took four days.

On the other hand, the trip from St-Joseph to Québec would often have taken local farmers, with their slow-moving and heavy wagons, at least two days to transport their produce over the rough roads unless they made the trip in the winter with sleighs.⁴¹ As can be seen on Map 2, if a farmer from the southern part of the parish of St-Joseph wanted to undertake the trip to the capital in the early 1830s, he would have traveled north along the Kennebec Road close to the river until he came to the small village at the centre of St-Joseph, where about fifty people lived in a dozen houses near the church.⁴² A few kilometres beyond the village of St-Joseph, in the wide valley dotted with long narrow fields and extensive tracts of uncleared forest, the passage became narrower as the

³⁷ Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 367-68. See also Honorius Provost, *Chaudière-Kennebec-Grand chemin séculaire* (Québec, 1974), 198-99.

³⁸ Joseph Bouchette, *The British Dominions in North America or a Topographical and Statistical Description of the Provinces of Lower and Upper Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia., etc.,* Volume 1 (London, 1831), 30. See also Roy, *Histoire de l'ancienne seigneurie de Lauzon*, I, xxxvii.

³⁹ James P. Allen, “Migration fields of French Canadian Immigrants to Southern Maine,” *Geographical Review*, 62:3 (1972), 366-83. See also “Migration par la route Chaudière-Kennebec, 1810-1860,” in Serge Courville, dir., *Atlas historique du Québec: Population et territoire* (Sainte-Foy, 1996), 134-5.

⁴⁰ Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 374.

⁴¹ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 278-80.

⁴² Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 253.

Appalachians came close to the river. Here, the farmer or traveler would have crossed into the seigneurie of Ste-Marie, even though nothing in the line of single-storey whitewashed houses lining both sides of the river indicated the transition from one seigneurie to the other.⁴³ Ste-Marie had a population of 4,600 people in 1832, twice the size of St-Joseph; its agricultural production was also more than double.⁴⁴ About six kilometres past the border of the seigneurie, he would have passed through the village of Ste-Marie, whose population of 303 was over six times larger than St-Joseph's hamlet, and the only real village in Beauce County.⁴⁵ The road then continued along the river for a few more kilometers before turning northwards through St-Bernard and St-Isidore. Thanks to that swampy section, farmers from the Beauce found that their legs were so covered with dark mud that they were called *jarrets noirs* (black hamstrings), a nickname that is occasionally used to refer to people from the Beauce.⁴⁶ From St-Henri, it was another twenty kilometers to the main road southwest of the cliffs at Lévis. At Lévis, he could take his produce to the local market, or use the ferries that had been in operation since 1820 and cross the St. Lawrence River to the markets of Québec City.⁴⁷ From there it was another six kilometers to the ford of the Etchemin River at St-Henri.

A proposal in 1835 for a railway to link Lévis with Portland through the Chaudière would have made the farmers' journeys to market much easier. American and British engineers submitted favourable reports, a company was formed and chartered, but nothing came of the project.⁴⁸ It remained a dream for forty more years until the 1870s when, as will be seen, the provincial government and the Church played active roles in making the project a reality. Meanwhile, one effect of the Rebellions of 1837-38 was that the authorities took more notice of the strategic importance of the Kennebec Road, given

⁴³ Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 159.

⁴⁴ Bouchette, *Topographical Dictionary of the Province of Lower Canada* (London, 1832).

⁴⁵ "Ste. Marie" in Bouchette, *Topographical Dictionary*. For its population, see Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 223. See also Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 225.

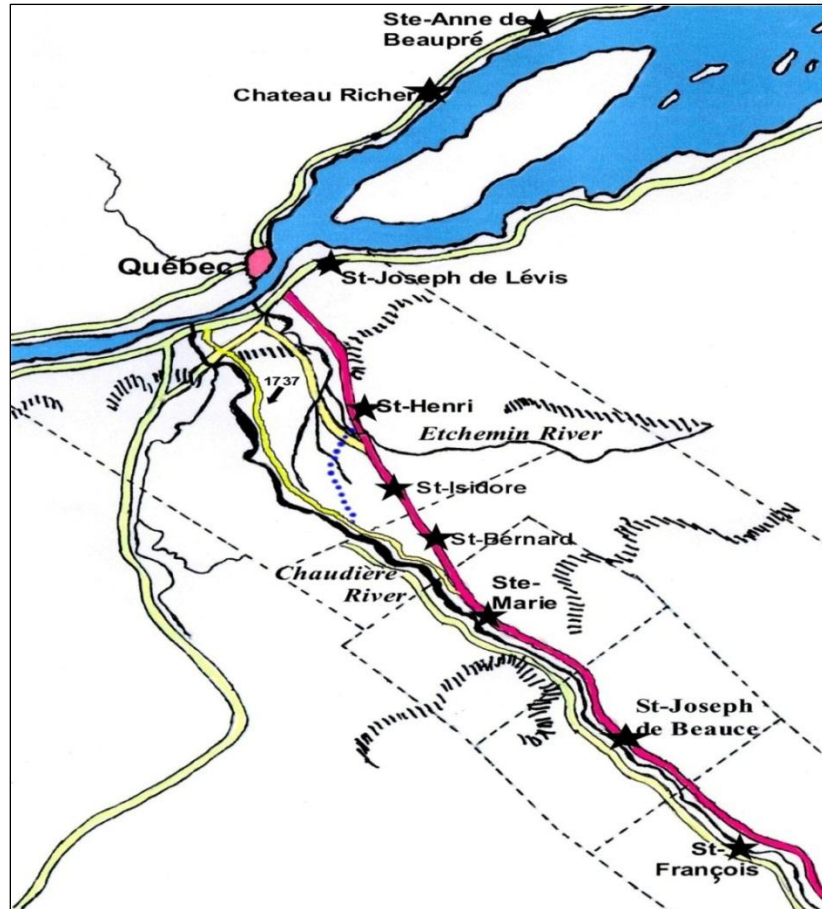
⁴⁶ Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 197. See also Morgan, *The Regional French of County Beauce*, 102-3.

⁴⁷ Sir James MacPherson Lemoine, *Quebec, Past and Present: A History of Quebec, 1608-1876* (Quebec, 1876), 456-58.

⁴⁸ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 279.

American sympathy for the uprisings and the fact that it was used as an escape route for Lower Canadian rebel fugitives.⁴⁹

Map 2. The Québec City Region, showing the road from St-Joseph to Québec. Adapted from Samuel Holland, “A New Map of the Province of Lower Canada, Describing all the Seigneuries, Townships, Grants of Land, &c.” (London, 1825) and “Electoral Map of Dorchester County, 1853”. (Library and Archives Canada, National Map Collection 93774). Dotted line is the Route Justinienne. Red line: Part of the Kennebec Road.



In the post-1837 period, improved relations with the United States allayed the political concerns somewhat, while improvements to the road opened an emigration route from Lower Canada to the nearby American states.⁵⁰ Traveling was difficult on some low-lying swampy sections at the end of the century, but the province made fitful attempts to maintain this transportation corridor. In 1846, it paid to improve the main road in St-Joseph so that it would be on higher ground away from the Chaudière.⁵¹ Some

⁴⁹ Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 278-9.

⁵⁰ Allen, “Migration Fields,” 366-83. See also “Migration par la route,” in Courville, dir., *Atlas historique du Québec*, 134-5.

⁵¹ Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire Civile*, 313.

communities financed their own improvements as they were required to do under the municipal system.⁵² However, the allocation of significant provincial resources for the improvement of road transportation in Québec had to wait until the twentieth century and the arrival of the automobile.⁵³

St-Joseph: *Chef Lieu* of Beauce County

Another development connected St-Joseph to the larger world occurred when it became more closely linked to the judicial apparatus of the emerging state. On 10 June 1857, the parliament of the Province of Canada transformed the small village of St-Joseph into the *chef-lieu* of the newly-restored Beauce County. The 1857 law creating thirteen new judicial districts, including Beauce County, meant that St-Joseph was about to embark on a more profitable and prestigious path. Even though the population of the parish (2,565) was smaller than either neighbouring Ste-Marie (3,263) to the north or even St-François (2,874) to the south, St-Joseph became the centre of the county's judicial administration, mainly because of its central location.⁵⁴ Adding a further sense of grievance to the neighbours was that Ste-Marie had hosted periodic sessions of the circuit court since 1794, but even the influence and eloquence of Juchereau-Duchesnay's arguments in favour of Ste-Marie were unable to convince the government.⁵⁵ In architectural terms at least, there was now a strong certainty that St-Joseph's stock of buildings would increase in quality as well as quantity. A suitable public building was needed to house the judicial services and a prison for the county. The plain but dignified façade of the courthouse, with its tall arched windows on the second floor and a simple

⁵² Provost, *Chaudière-Kennebec*, 311-17. For the development of the rudimentary road and bridge system in the region, see Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Échemin-Amiante*, 197-204. They note that contemporaries complained of the road's muddiness in the spring and fall.

⁵³ Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Échemin-Amiante*, 366-7. But the Beauce was not unique in that regard. See also Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher and Jean-Claude Robert, *Quebec: A History 1867-1929*, Robert Chodos, translator (Toronto, 1983), 83-4, who note that overall, "Québec's road system was the poor relation of its transportation infrastructure". For more details on the attempts to provide better roads since the end of the eighteenth century and the many obstacles preventing improvements, see Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby, *Histoire économique du Québec 1851-1896* (Montréal, 1971), 142-56.

⁵⁴ Poulin et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 288-90 and 387. See Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire civile*, 310-13, for his speculation about all the political favours called in to bring about the highly contentious decision that did not sit well with its two larger neighbours.

⁵⁵ Jean-Claude Morin, "L'organisation judiciaire en Beauce," in Bélanger, Berberi, et al., *La Beauce et les Beaucerons*, 221-2.

stone pediment on the front elevation, is an interesting complement to the equally restrained exterior of the new parish church of 1867, two blocks away and constructed by the same contractor.⁵⁶ Beside the building was a rectangular courtyard surrounded by a high stone wall where detainees exercised. On the ground floor were the district offices as well as rooms for various judicial services, while the main floor held the court room, a jury room and the offices of the judges and lawyers. There were also rooms for the Prothonotary, who was the chief court clerk, the sheriff, and the jailer. Proprietors of stores and hotels gradually set up their establishments in the village, adding to the parish's variety of occupations.



Illustration 2. *The Palais de Justice in St-Joseph, undated picture. The high wall on the right surrounded the prisoners' exercise area. ASPB: PR129-1-3-12-STJO-84*

The Arrival of the Railway, 1875-1881

The arrival of the Lévis-Kennebec Railway in the 1870s heralded important economic changes for the parish's agricultural sector. As the name implies, and the Company's prospectus promised, this railroad that was to come to St-Joseph was

⁵⁶ Poulin et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 388. St-Joseph's courthouse measured 27 meters by 14 meters. See also Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel*, 8-15.

intended to link Québec to the north-eastern United States via the Chaudière Valley, promoting colonization, facilitating the transport of agricultural products and firewood, obtaining access to the neighbouring markets of New Brunswick and New England, and carrying logs to the sawmills of Maine.⁵⁷ It would give St-Joseph a transportation advantage that would mean it no longer had to depend on notoriously bad roads. But the Lévis-Kennebec Railroad, chartered in 1869, was plagued by problems throughout its existence.⁵⁸ Even with a number of members of the provincial legislature and mayors on its board, support from the clergy, and \$500,000 from the City of Lévis, construction only began in 1875.⁵⁹ In the following year, as can be seen on Map 3, the line had reached the parish of St-Joseph. On 25 November 1876, even as the Québec Legislature was meeting to discuss provincial subsidies for the company, a trainload of dignitaries that included a London-based financier, the local MPP and the Speaker of the House, arrived at the temporary station in the village, because the end of track was still three kilometres away. The short drive by carriage into St-Joseph brought the delegation to a grand dinner in the station, followed by optimistic after-dinner speeches that received ample coverage in the main French- and English-language newspapers of Québec City. The capital's businessmen, as Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby have argued, were on the defensive against the more successful entrepreneurs of Montréal and wanted the regions surrounding the capital to be within the economic orbit of their city.⁶⁰ Despite the optimistic speeches and political support, however, the unidentified financier returned to London and argued against investing more money for the extension further south to St-Georges, pointing to the unsatisfactory growth of business on the line.⁶¹

It is unlikely that people in St-Joseph were aware of these developments because railway company representatives were still negotiating with parish officials to build a

⁵⁷ *Prospectus: The Levis-Kennebec Railway, Incorporated 1869* (Quebec, 1873), 6-17. See also Marcel Hamelin, *Les premières années du parlementarisme québécois (1867-1878)* (Québec, 1974), 103 and 114-15.

⁵⁸ The worst was the disastrous decision to use wooden instead of iron rails, but these problems were not unique to this company. Since railway construction experience was lacking in Québec, and the provincial government provided only a small budget, five other lines also used the technique until the government realised its mistake in 1873 and revised the budget. Hamelin and Roby, *Histoire économique*, 131-33.

⁵⁹ Hamelin, *Les premières années du parlementarisme*, 104; 191-92.

⁶⁰ Hamelin and Roby, *Histoire économique*, 293-5.

⁶¹ Provost, *Chaudière-Kennebec*, 380.

right-of-way across church land near the presbytery. A few months after the optimistic banquet, it thus seemed that the two miles separating the village from the line would at last see rails laid and trains rolling over them. On 18 March 1877, the churchwardens of St-Joseph met to deal with the anticipated extension into St-Joseph that summer. Rather than payment for the right-of-way, they decided to accept shares in the railroad instead.⁶² The deal was probably a good one for both parties since the parish could anticipate small but steady revenues over the years, and the company did not have to dip into its capital funds. But even if the company probably suggested the arrangement, it did not help the fortunes of the beleaguered railway to any appreciable extent. Furthermore, less than two months after the optimistic gathering of dignitaries in St-Joseph, the company's two principal owners were forced to declare bankruptcy.⁶³ This was partly because it only served local markets and partly because the Québec government was giving more financial support to lines on the north shore of the St. Lawrence, so that similar railway projects in other regions were rivals for diminishing provincial financial support.⁶⁴ Another problem for the Lévis-Kennebec line was that not all the initial subscribers contributed their promised investments, nor were all property owners along its route willing to grant it a right-of-way. Even Archbishop Taschereau, who sent a circular letter supporting the railway to his *curés* in October 1875, could not overcome the company's chronic lack of capital or customers.⁶⁵

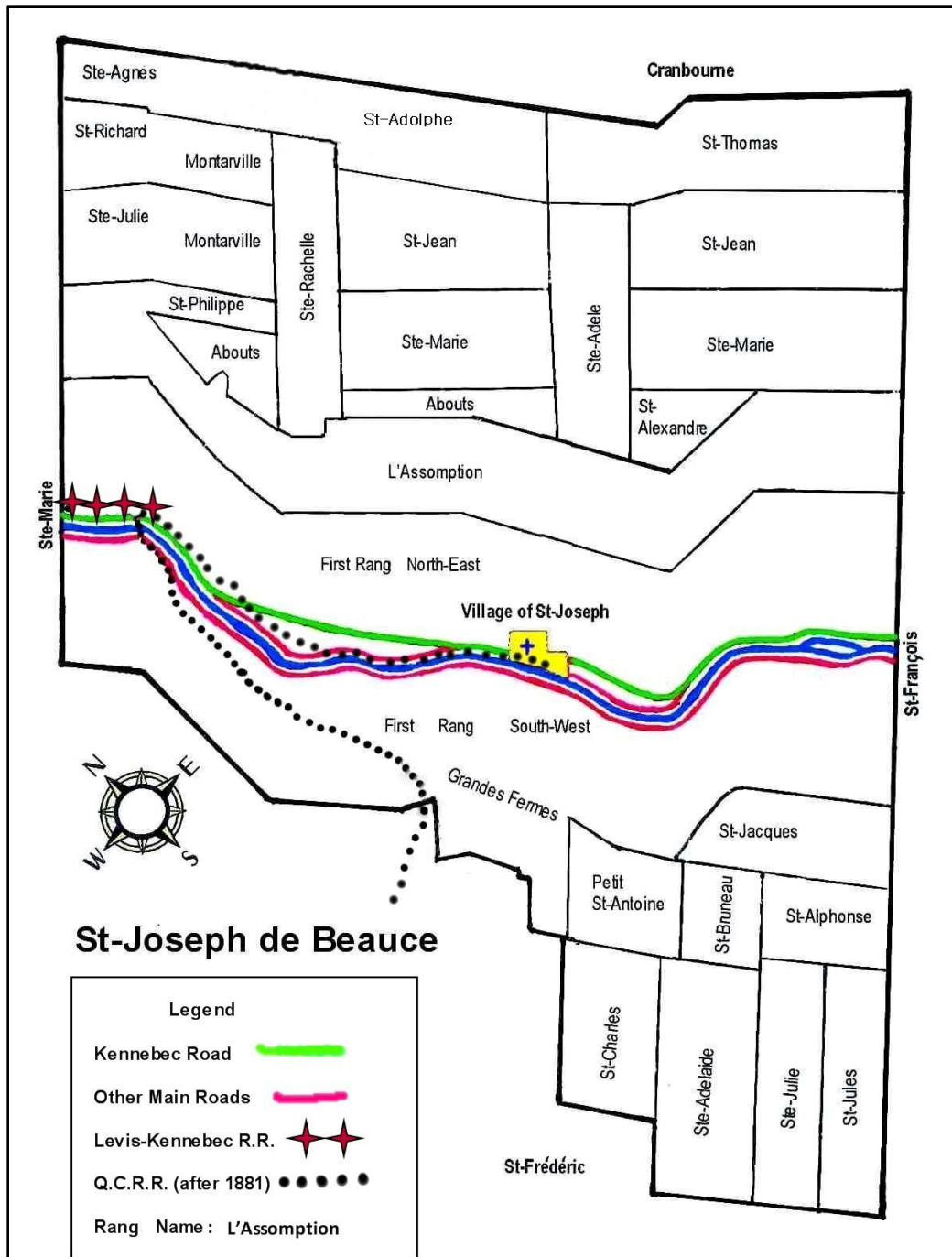
The sheriff's sale of the company's assets on 22 March 1881 to the Quebec Central Railway must not have come entirely as a shock to anyone. Whatever the corporate reorganization meant for shareholders, for the farmers of the Beauce it still

⁶² ASPB, FFSJ, 4.4, "Papiers juridiques et administratifs de la Fabrique." 'Extrait du Régistre des Délibérations de l'Oeuvre & Fabrique de St-Joseph de la Beauce,' 18 March, 1877. See also Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 436.

⁶³ Provost, *Chaudière-Kennebec*, 380. The fact that the regional economy controlled from Québec City was weak in comparison to the Montréal area may explain some of the railway's difficulties. See Brian Young, *A Short History of Quebec (Montréal and Kingston)*, 2002), 118-19; and Robert Armstrong, *Structure and Change: An Economic History of Quebec* (Toronto, 1984), 147-8.

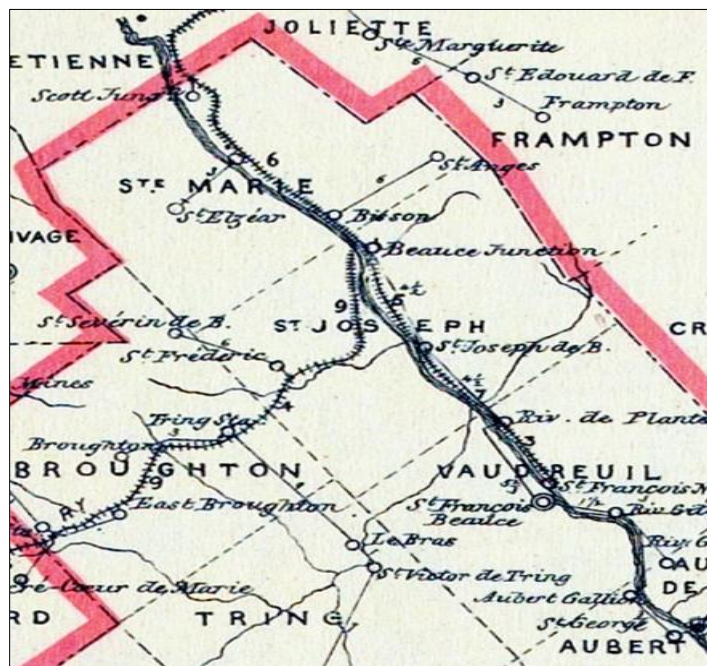
⁶⁴ Hamelin, *Les premières années du parlementarisme*, 199-203; 259-62.

⁶⁵ Provost, *Chaudière-Kennebec*, 372-7. See also Charles A. Scott, *The Lévis and Kennebec Railway and its Difficulties* (Quebec, 1877).



Map 3: St-Joseph de Beauce - Circa 1876-81. Adapted from an undated “Plan de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph de Beauce,” signed F.-X. Legendre, a surveyor until 1881. Note the two roads following close to the river, the route on the northeast side (1785) and the one on the southwest (1804), as well as the Kennebec Road that led to the U.S. The black dotted line indicates the Q.C.R.R. after 1881 when it took over the Lévis-Kennebec line (stars). Source: Archives de la Société du patrimoine des Beaucerons (ASPB). PR 34/C31

meant access to the outside world. The Quebec Central Railway from Sherbrooke had constructed a link with the Lévis-Kennebec Railway by crossing the Chaudière River at Beauce Junction (Vallée Jonction) in 1880 (see Map 4). The railway finally arrived in the village of St-Joseph in 1881. It provided faster access to the Québec City market for local products, and a link with New England via Sherbrooke and the Grand Trunk network.⁶⁶ But the line became notorious for late trains, unheated stations, uncertain length of journeys, and lack of power – sometimes even locomotion – on steep grades.⁶⁷ And the route through the village had not been located far enough from the river to avoid the periodic flooding of the Chaudière.



Map 4. Electoral District of Beauce, 1901 (Detail, northern section): The tracks of the QCRR are visible passing through Broughton and then through St-Joseph. The 1881 extension to the village of St-Joseph is clearly marked, as is the later (1886) line to St-François. There were further extensions to St-Georges and Lac Frontière (1907, 1914). Detail from *The Electoral Atlas of the Dominion of Canada, Beauce District 92, Map No. 88*. (Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN No. 191594 e000835594)

⁶⁶ Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 370-71.

⁶⁷ Provost, *Chaudière-Kennebec*, 382.

Agriculture in St-Joseph

While the arrival of the railway heralded greater opportunities for St-Joseph's farmers on the provincial market, changes in St-Joseph's agricultural economy had begun well before the 1870s. Key factors that comprise the essential elements of the socioeconomic changes in rural Québec during the nineteenth century can be discerned in St-Joseph's evolution towards commercially-oriented agriculture: the move away from field crops to an emphasis on livestock and dairying, the growth of large farms, and increased social stratification, one symptom of which was that the aspirations of the large farmers to middle-class respectability would have conformed more closely to the clergy's own concerns. The unresolved debate over how to interpret contraction and expansion in the province's agricultural economy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reflects a divergence of opinion on the extent to which the material conditions of French-Canadian life were (or were not) transformed. Underlying that debate is the equally contentious question about the role that the *mentalité* of its farmers played in promoting or retarding economic growth.⁶⁸ Fernand Ouellet has argued that there was an agricultural crisis in Lower Canada in the early nineteenth century as the consequence of primitive French-Canadian farming practices and unprogressive values inherited from the Ancien Régime.⁶⁹ Others have argued that the root of many of French-Canadian farming problems was not cultural because the same extensive farming practices were found in the wheat-producing areas in Upper Canada and other parts of North America.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ For the most recent analysis of that debate, see Cole Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada Before Confederation* (Vancouver and Toronto, 2008), 242-59.

⁶⁹ Fernand Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec 1760-1850*, Ottawa (1980); see also Ouellet, *Lower Canada, 1791-1840: Social Change and Nationalism* (Toronto, 1980), especially 118-26. For an extended discussion of that question, see Louise Dechêne, "Observations sur l'agriculture du Bas-Canada au début du xix^e siècle," in Joseph Goy and Jean-Pierre Wallot, dirs., *Évolution et Éclatement du Monde Rural: Structures, fonctionnement et évolution différentielle des sociétés rurales françaises et québécoises XVII^e-XX^e siècles* (Paris and Montréal, 1986), 189-202. See also T.G.A. Le Goff, "The Agricultural Crisis in Lower Canada, 1802-12: A Review of a Controversy," in Douglas McCalla, ed., *Perspectives on Canadian Economic History* (Toronto, 1987), 33. See also R.L. Jones, "French-Canadian Agriculture in the St. Lawrence Valley, 1815-1850," in W.T. Easterbrook and M.H. Watkins, eds., *Approaches to Canadian Economic History* (Montreal and Kingston, 2003), 110-26;

⁷⁰ See in particular R.M. McInnis, "A Reconsideration of the State of Agriculture in Lower Canada in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 3 (1984), 9-49; Frank Lewis and Marvin McInnis, "The Efficiency of the French-Canadian Farmer in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History*, 40:3 (September 1980), 497-514.

Many Québec historians have also argued that farmers were responding to, and participating in, a process of economic restructuring in the new demographic, economic, and social circumstances that Ouellet mistakenly misread as a crisis. Thus, Serge Courville and Normand Séguin argue that the years before 1850 witnessed a transformation of agriculture and a diversification of the “peasant” economy as wheat growing became marginalized, new areas were opened up for colonization, and towns and villages grew.⁷¹ According to Séguin, these factors pushed the Lower Canadian “peasant” away from self-sufficiency and towards a new way of thinking based on commercialisation.⁷² Serge Courville and others argue that there was not an abrupt transition in the Beauce region from subsistence agriculture to one oriented to the market.⁷³ Rather, they point out, farmers in the older areas of the county had been aware of market possibilities in Québec City since at least the 1830s, and had moved to meet some of that demand. The main agricultural products that the Beauce had traditionally produced were wheat, maple sugar, hay, wool, linen cloth, hogs, and cattle.⁷⁴ As they produced more than sufficient quantities to meet family needs, their increased productivity was evidence of “une agriculture de plus en plus orientée vers des activités spéculatives.”⁷⁵

Even before the economic developments of the mid-nineteenth century brought St-Joseph’s farmers into the expanding provincial market, most of them seem to have enjoyed comfortable livelihoods thanks to a relatively favourable location and climate. In 1815, Surveyor-General Joseph Bouchette observed that land was “in general very productive, adding that:

⁷¹ Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, *Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century Quebec* (Ottawa, 1989). See also Serge Courville, Jean-Claude Robert and Normand Séguin *Le pays laurentien au XIXe siècle: Les morphologies de base. Atlas historique du Québec* (Sainte-Foy, 1995), 1-6, and 61; Serge Courville, “Croissance villageoise et industries rurales dans les seigneuries du Québec (1815-1851),” in François Lebrun and Normand Séguin, dirs., *Sociétés villageoises et rapports villes-campagnes au Québec et dans la France de l’Ouest, XVIIe -XXe siècles* (Trois-Rivières, 1987), 205-19; and “Un monde rural en mutation: le Bas-Canada dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 20: 40 (November 1987), 237-58; and Jean-Pierre Wallot, “L’impact du marché sur les campagnes canadiennes au début du XIXe siècle,” in Wallot and Goy, *Société rurale dans la France de l’Ouest et au Québec*, 226-50.

⁷² Normand Séguin, “L’agriculture de la Mauricie et du Québec 1850-1950,” *RHAF* 35:4, 537.

⁷³ Serge Courville, Barry Rodrigue, Pierre Poulin and Claude Pronovost, “La Beauce québécoise au XIXe siècle,” *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies* 50 (2001), 63-86.

⁷⁴ Courville and Séguin, *Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century Quebec*, 17-18.

⁷⁵ Serge Courville, Pierre C. Poulin, Barry Rodrigue et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante* (Sainte-Foy, 2003), 237-40.

Timber of almost every description is found in great plenty. [...] On each side of the river [the Chaudière] there are settlements a little withdrawn from the bank, where agriculture has been carried on with good success. Besides these tracts, there are, in different parts of the interior, a few concessions that have also made considerable progress. The farm-houses by the road side, on each bank of the river, are numerous, neat, and substantial, with every appearance of ease and comfort among their occupants.⁷⁶

Beauce County has a growing season lasting between 160 and 180 days characterized by hot summers and long, cold winters with abundant snowfall. Summer temperatures average around 18° Celsius in the lower elevations of the Chaudière River valley where the relatively good farm land (Class 3) is located, as can be seen on Map 5.

In the upper elevations of the Chaudière valley such as the northeast corner of the parish, climate and soil conditions (Classes 4 and 5) favoured raising livestock, an activity that became increasingly important to many farmers by the end of the nineteenth century as the parish became closely linked to external markets.⁷⁷ But those who settled in the outlying parts of St-Joseph located at the highest elevations of the Appalachians on the steeper slopes of the northeast bank (Class 7) were much less well off, as will be seen in the last section of this chapter. Their lands were unsuitable for crops or even for pasture because of their steepness or stoniness, although they probably provided timber and firewood. The prosperous appearance of the parish that Bouchette saw in 1815 reflected the fact that settlement was still concentrated on the best land of the lower ranges beside the river on the southwest side.

During the period 1789-1829, St-Joseph experienced its share of the uncertainties of the growing season (bad weather, insect depredations, and crop failures), as the *curés*' letters to the archdiocesan authorities indicated on several occasions. Thus, on 13 March 1789, the Reverend Antoine Lamothe described to Bishop Hubert the “[é]tat de disette par suite du manque de récolte” that affected his parish.⁷⁸

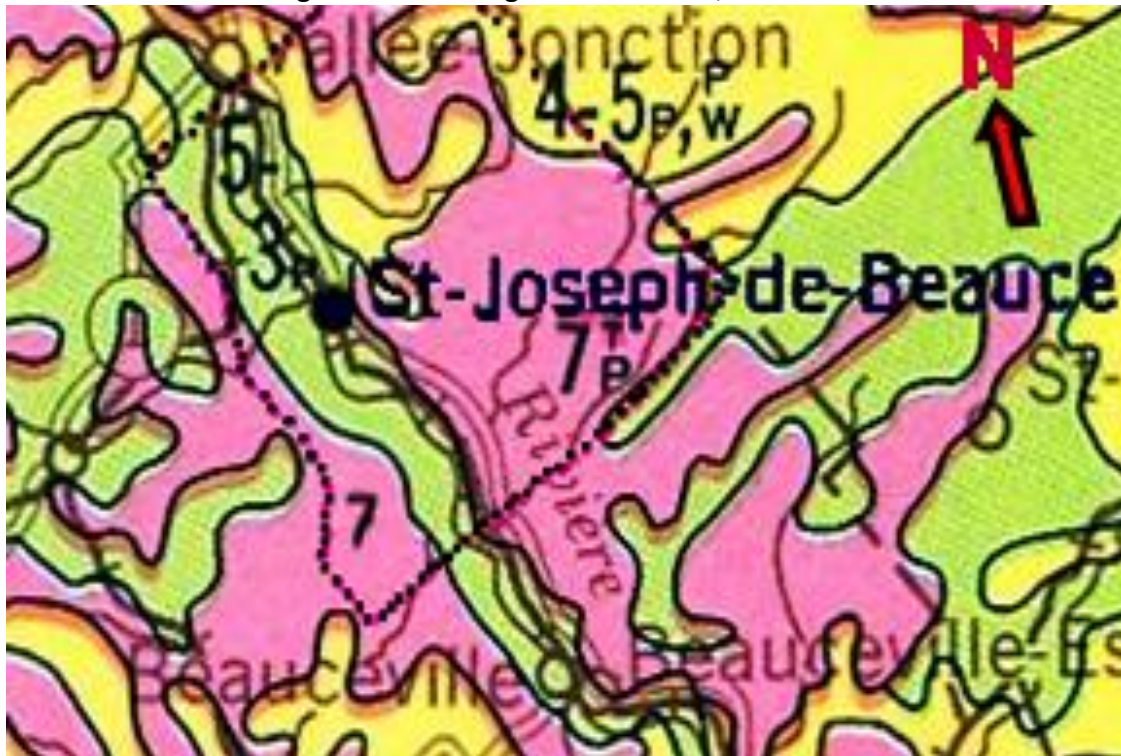
⁷⁶ Joseph Bouchette, *A Topographical Description of the Province of Lower Canada With Remarks Upon Upper Canada and the Relative Connexion of Both Provinces with the United States of America* (London, 1815), 500-02.

⁷⁷ Luc Ouellet, Michel Rompré, Dominique Carrier, and Gérard Laflamme, *Étude pédologique du Comté de Beauce*, (Québec, 1995), 9-11; See also Courville, Poulin, et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 29-31; Daniel Carrier and Renald Lessard, “Un espace devient territoire,” in France Bélanger, Sylvia Berberi et al., *La Beauce et les Beaucecons: Portraits d'une région 1737-1987* (St-Joseph de Beauce, 1990), 3-8.

⁷⁸ AAQ, “Registre de lettres,” ‘St. Joseph de B,’ I-36.

Map 5: Soil Quality St-Joseph de Beauce.

Source: "Canada Soils Map," National Soil Database, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 1998



Legend: Approximate Parish Boundary.....

5: Soil Classification P, T: Sub-Classifications (See below)

Class 3: Moderately severe limitations that restrict the range of crops. Under good management soils are fair to moderately high in productivity for a wide range of common field crops.

Class 4: Severe limitations that restrict the range of crops or require special conservation practices or both. Low to medium productivity for a narrow to side range of common field crops.

Class 5: Very severe limitations that restrict their capability of producing perennial forage crops. These soils are capable of producing native or tame species of perennial forage plants.

Class 7: Not capable for crop or pasture.

Sub-classes: **P:** Stoniness – Hinders tillage, planting, and harvesting. **T:** Steepness, stoniness.

For the second year in a row, the harvest had failed and the poor in particular were suffering so much that Lamothe encouraged them to leave the parish. He felt that staying in St-Joseph effectively condemned them to death.⁷⁹ Hubert was already aware of the problem. Three weeks earlier, he had canvassed the other parishes in his diocese

⁷⁹ AAQ, "Registre de lettres," 'St. Joseph de B,' I-36; Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph," 188.

for financial aid for the Beauce, and on 19 March had asked his priests to contribute to a subscription “en faveur des habitants qui n’ont pas de quoi semer.”⁸⁰ On 2 April, the bishop asked the diocesan archpriests to undertake a subscription to buy seed grain for the farmers of the Beauce.⁸¹ In 1791, the *habitants* of St-Joseph requested the *curé* to lead a religious procession to save their crops from insect attacks. The bishop granted the request but also warned the parishioners to practice penance so as to be more certain of divine mercy.⁸² There is no mention in St-Joseph of the disastrous summer and fall of 1816 in North America when Lower Canada, especially the Montreal region but also the District of Quebec, experienced heavy snowfalls from April to September that killed many crops. Unlike the reports from St-Joseph about the disasters that afflicted the parish in the late eighteenth century, the diocesan archives contain no reports from the *curé* in this period about the effects of that difficult year, but it is difficult to imagine that St-Joseph was unaffected.⁸³ Whether it was thanks to the clemency of natural or spiritual forces, the records do not indicate any more major agricultural disasters until 1829, when hail destroyed the wheat crop. Poverty and destitution were so widespread in several areas in the Québec City region that year that the deputy for Dorchester County, where St-Joseph was located, and three of his fellow members of the Assembly asked for government assistance.⁸⁴ As they had been on previous occasions, the bishop of Québec and his parish priests were concerned about the human costs of such disasters in several areas of the province; all the *curés* of Dorchester County testified on behalf of their affected people before the special Legislative Assembly committee formed to look into the matter.⁸⁵ However, the pleas of the clergy and the distress of so many people most decidedly did not move the powerful seigneur of Ste-Marie and member of the

⁸⁰ Nadeau, “Histoire de la paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 188.

⁸¹ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 199. Archpriest is an archaic term that referred to priests of the larger parishes with supervisory duties over their colleagues in the smaller ones.

⁸² Honorius Provost, *Sainte-Marie de la Nouvelle-Beauce - Histoire civile* (Québec, 1970), 543; Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph,” 203. St-Joseph was not the only parish affected, and although the nature of the infestation was not specified, it was probably the same plague of caterpillars and grasshoppers that Ste-Marie suffered from in 1791. Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 217.

⁸³ Dechêne, “Observations sur l’agriculture du Bas-Canada,” 197-8. See also Don Sutherland, “The June 1816 Snowfalls and the Cold Summer of 1816.” www.theedwardbulwer-lyttoninstitute.org/.../1/7/.../summer1816.pdf (Accessed 14 August, 2012).

⁸⁴ Gilles Boileau, “La paroisse de Lotbinière lance un cri de détresse,” *Histoire Québec* 9:2 (November 2003), 42-3.

⁸⁵ Lucien Lemieux, “Attentions du clergé bas-canadien aux personnes nécessiteuses, 1800-1840,” *SCHEC Sessions d’étude*, 50 (1983), 159-75.

Legislative Council, J.-T. Taschereau. He argued against giving any aid, saying that everyone had suffered, not just the people of the Beauce, and it would be a bad idea to accustom people to rely on the generosity of the government.⁸⁶ In the period 1830-36, the District of Québec remained the most unfortunate in the whole province, but even though various parts of the district sent the authorities thirty-six petitions for famine relief, none were from St-Joseph, and there is no record of severe hardships for the parish during the rest of the century.⁸⁷

The major reason for the improvement of prospects for agriculture in St-Joseph after the 1830s, and particularly in the period 1831-51, despite the wheat crisis in the 1830s and potato crop failures in the 1840s, was the marked shift away from growing wheat as a commercial crop, and a greater emphasis on crops more suitable for the soils and climate of the parish. In the past, farmers relied on a mix of marketable commodities – field crops, livestock, and forest products – rather than depending on any single product. In the early nineteenth century, as Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot point out, the increased local demand for agricultural products may have encouraged them to continue on this path, while the decline in wheat may have made them aware of the danger of specialization.⁸⁸ As Figure 1.2 indicates, St-Joseph's wheat production declined from thirty-one bushels per farm in 1831 to a mere two bushels per farm in 1851. On the other hand, farmers in the parish substantially increased the production of other crops, particularly oats in the same period. This was likely in response to the demands of the shanty market that first developed during the Napoleonic Wars, although commercial logging in the Chaudière Valley did not really begin until the late 1840s.⁸⁹ In the decade 1851-61, the average production of oats per farm rose further still (by 36 per cent) thanks to a rise in demand due in part to the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 and beginning of the American Civil War when the Union army mobilized thousands of

⁸⁶ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 273.

⁸⁷ Allan Greer and Léon Robichaud, "La rébellion de 1837-1838 au Bas-Canada: Une approche géographique," *Cahiers de géographie du Québec* 33: 90 (December 1989), 366, 373.

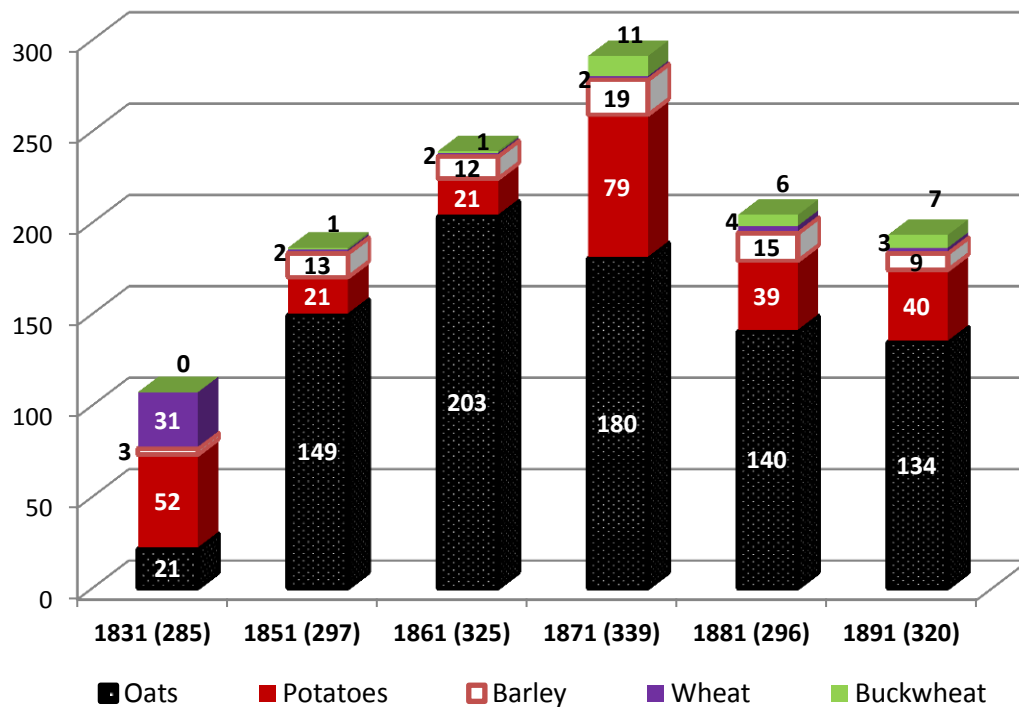
⁸⁸ Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot, *Le Bas-Canada au tournant du 19^e siècle: Restructuration et modernisation* (Ottawa 1988), 6.

⁸⁹ Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 141. The Chaudière River's disadvantages for navigation noted in the previous chapter presented obstacles to floating logs over much of its distance. The first large load of logs sent down the river was only in 1847, although some entrepreneurs had proposed doing so four decades earlier. Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 241-5.

horses.⁹⁰ After that exceptional demand, average oat production declined steadily, as Figure 1.2 indicates.

Figure 1.2: Average Farm Production in Bushels – 1831-91 – St-Joseph

Sources: Lower Canada Census 1831, Canada East Censuses 1852, 1861; Censuses of Canada, 1871, 1881, 1891 (Number of farms)



The year 1871 also had the highest average production figures for potatoes, barley and buckwheat, reflecting the rapid agricultural growth in Québec as a whole during that period.⁹¹ Subsequently, in the period 1871-91, there was stagnation in the production of these crops, as well as of oats. After its sharp drop in 1851, potato production on the parish’s farms may not have been sufficient to meet local needs, let alone serve as a commercial crop. Marvin McInnis’s study of potato production and consumption in Upper Canada in 1860 arrived at a figure of sixty-nine bushels as a rough measure of

⁹⁰ Courville and Séguin, *Rural Life in Nineteenth Century Quebec*, 17. Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2008), 119-63.

⁹¹ Courville and Séguin, *Rural Life in Nineteenth Century Quebec*, 17.

annual mean household consumption.⁹² Given that the average potato production even in 1871 was only eleven bushels, it would appear that St Joseph's farmers were purchasing some commodities that they did not produce in sufficient amounts for themselves, while marketing others of which they had a surplus.

One reason for the decline in crop production after 1871 was the gradual shift towards more livestock. Figure 1.3 on average livestock production per farm during the period 1831-91 indicates that farmers in the parish raised larger numbers of cows and other cattle, pigs, and horses, and substantially more sheep. The average number of horned cattle other than cows increased from 5.8 in 1851 to only 6.4 in 1891, and the number of cows from 5.4 to 6.5. Butter was another product that increased in commercial importance. In 1851, St-Joseph's farms produced an average of 124 pounds of milk, far less than the 258 pounds that McInnis has calculated was the mean household consumption for Ontario farms in 1861.⁹³ But the period 1861-1900 coincided with the spectacular expansion of the dairy industry in Québec, as regions such as the Beauce expanded their production thanks to their proximity to urban markets and the demand for butter and cheese in Britain.⁹⁴ The Beauce was among the leading areas of the province for dairy cattle in 1871, and remained so until at least 1901. Although the number of cows had not increased in 1891, St-Joseph produced an average of 434 pounds of butter per farm, which was three and one half times the amount produced in 1851, so presumably feeding and breeding were improving. The opening of St-Joseph's first cheese-making facility in 1878 was another indication of increased economic diversity and industrialization fostered by the rail link to the capital.⁹⁵ But even though the number of cheese factories in the county grew from four in 1881 to ten by 1891, their significance in this period should not be exaggerated. In the latter year, their total workforce

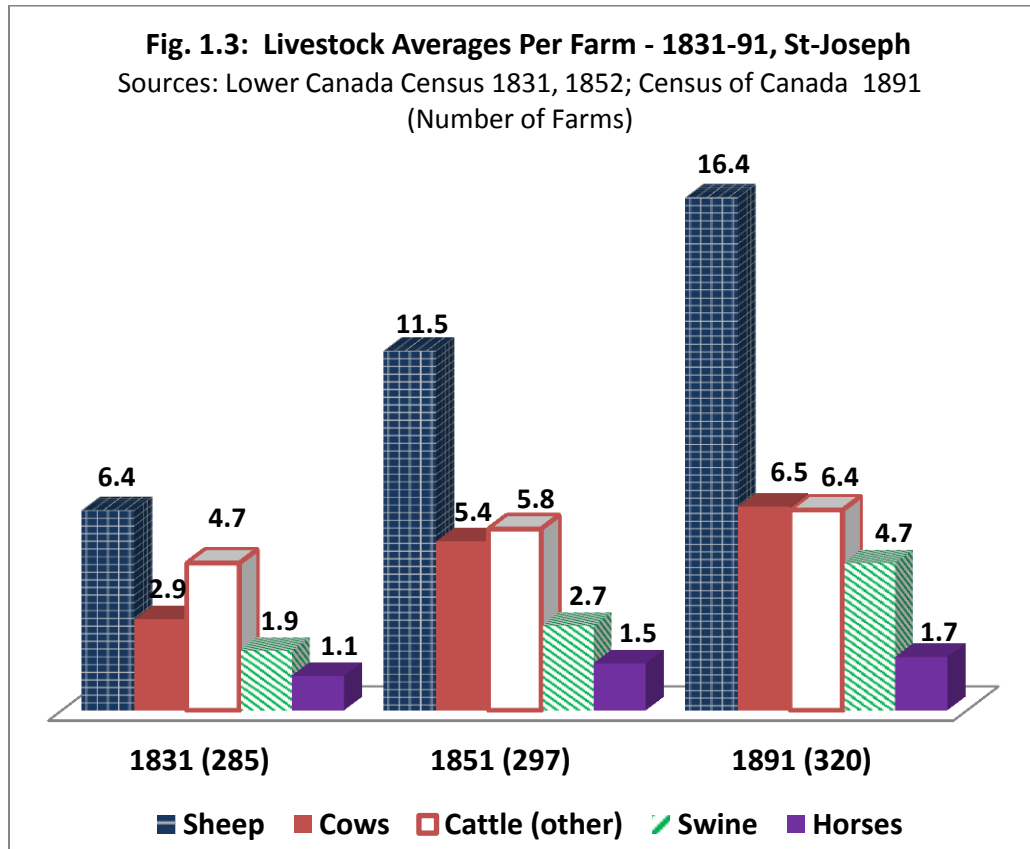
⁹² Marvin McInnis, "Marketable Surpluses in Ontario Farming, 1860," in Douglas McCalla, *Perspectives on Canadian Economic History* (Toronto, 1987), 49-50.

⁹³ *Census of the Canadas, 1852*, Vol. II - *Agricultural Products*, "General Abstract of Agricultural Produce &c, Lower Canada 1851-52", 160-5. See also Courville, Poulin et al. who estimate 135 pounds per farm, *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 240. See also McInnis, "Marketable Surpluses in Ontario Farming, 1860," 50. Régis Thibeault, "Périodisation et spatialisation des débuts de l'industrie laitière au Québec, 1871-1911," *Social History/Histoire sociale*, 19: 57 (May 1996), 140. See also Normand Perron, "Genèse des activités laitières, 1850-1960," in Séguin, *Agriculture et colonisation*, 113-40.

⁹⁴ Courville and Séguin, *Rural Life in Nineteenth Century Quebec*, 17.

⁹⁵ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 440. The province's first cheese factory opened in 1865. Hamelin and Roby, *Histoire économique*, 197.

consisted of only seventeen men, two women and one boy under the age of sixteen, or an average of only two workers per factory.⁹⁶



Another contrast with the undramatic, even flat, production figures for field crops in St-Joseph is the steady rise in the number of sheep. In 1831, there were an average of 6.4 sheep per farm; by 1851 the number nearly doubled to an average of 11.5.⁹⁷ By 1891, the number of sheep rose by 42 per cent since 1851, to an average of 16.4 sheep per farm. In 1901, farmers in the Beauce raised more sheep than any other county (44,133), leading

⁹⁶ *Census of Canada 1890-91*, Vol. IV₂ (Ottawa 1897) “Table IV - Various Farm Products,” 228-9. See also Courville, et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 486-9, on the more significant developments in this sector that occurred in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the 1890 census only gives production statistics for counties, not parishes; there are no figures on cheese production in St-Joseph.

⁹⁷ Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 238-9.

all counties in Québec in wool produced.⁹⁸ On the face of it, raising sheep might have been a sign of old-fashioned autarchy and poverty rather than a market response in St-Joseph's farming sector. The wool would have been used for domestically-worn homespun clothing, and flax was grown to produce linen for household uses, as well as being an important component of homemade woolen cloth. However, Béatrice Craig, Judith Rygiel, and Elizabeth Turcotte argue that homemade cloth production was not necessarily "a retreat into self-sufficiency." Its suitability for making winter work clothes made it a very marketable commodity.⁹⁹ Indeed, Courville and Séguin argue its greatest productivity occurred near urban centres such as Montreal and Quebec City.¹⁰⁰ While Upper Canada saw domestic cloth production decline by the 1850s, it increased in Lower Canada and the Maritimes in the period 1850-70.¹⁰¹ Although there is no information on when imported materials replaced the older traditional fabrics for day-to-day clothing in St-Joseph, J.-Alphonse Richard observed that this was starting to occur in St-Sébastien de Beauce by the mid-1880s. The *tuque* was the first to go, followed by the *ceinture fléchée*, but the highly durable, if unfashionable, older fabrics seem to have persisted in some areas until the 1920s. But for all the practical virtues of the homemade material for doing farm chores, few would have worn them to church, and anyone who did, as Richard recalled, had to put up with other people's derision for what had become a social *faux pas*.¹⁰²

On many farms forested land yielded a number of other products. Maple sugar was another important marketable commodity whose production increased in the nineteenth century. In 1851 St-Joseph produced an average of 381 pounds on its 297

⁹⁸ *Fourth Census of Canada, 1901*, Vol. II, *Natural Products*, (Ottawa: 1904), "Table VI - Livestock on Farms," 50-1. See also *Census of Canada 1880-81* (Ottawa, 1883), vol. III, Table XXIII, "Animals and Animal Products," 120-3. See also *Fourth Census of Canada, 1901*, Vol. II, *Natural Products* (Ottawa: 1904), "Table VII - Animal Products of Farms," 58-9.

⁹⁹ Béatrice Craig, Judith Rygiel, and Elizabeth Turcotte, "The Homespun Paradox: Market-Oriented Production of Cloth in Eastern Canada in the Nineteenth Century," *Agricultural History* 76:1 (Winter 2002), 51. See also Craig, *Backwoods Consumers*, 186-96; Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 145-6; and Thérèse Beaudoin, *L'été dans la culture québécoise XVIIe – XIXe siècles* (Québec, 1987), 29.

¹⁰⁰ Courville, Robert, and Séguin, *Le pays laurentien*, 60. They argue that production served larger consumer markets: "les chantiers, le village, la ville et aussi l'extérieur de la province, les pays d'en haut."

¹⁰¹ Craig, *Backwoods Consumers*, 182.

¹⁰² J.-Alphonse Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien de Beauce (1869-1944)* (Joliette, 1944), 138.

farms, nearly four times a family's estimated yearly consumption of 100 pounds.¹⁰³ On ninety-three farms, or 31 per cent of the total, production reached or exceeded 500 pounds or more; one even produced 1,800 pounds. On the other hand, seventy-one farms (24 per cent of the total) produced less than 100 pounds; over half of these (46 farms) produced none at all.¹⁰⁴ And even though St-Joseph's production remained quite stable at an average of 355 pounds per farm in 1861, it fell to 265 pounds in 1871.¹⁰⁵ Subsequent Dominion Censuses do not provide maple sugar production figures at the parish level.

Before the arrival of the railway, and given the difficulty of using the Chaudière to float logs out of the area, St-Joseph's small sawmills met local needs. By 1871, the parish had fourteen sawmills, most of them producing pine and spruce planks, an average of 157 linear feet per farm. But there was also an average of 3.5 cubic feet of maple or birch per farm, 30.5 cubic feet of tamarack, used for making railroad ties, and 286 cubic feet of other square timber, indicating that as farmers cleared their land, they may have sold small quantities on the market.¹⁰⁶ Firewood was sent to the market in Québec City and probably to the village. Jean Provencher noted that consumption of firewood on farms varied considerably depending on the length and severity of winters, but found that twenty-five to thirty "small" cords usually sufficed.¹⁰⁷ In 1871, St-Joseph produced an average of 39 cords of firewood per farm, indicating at least a small surplus for the market.¹⁰⁸

There are two ways to view these agricultural developments in St-Joseph during the six decades between 1831 and 1891, decades that coincided with the growth and diversification of Québec's agricultural economy. One way is to conclude that stagnation characterized farming productivity in St-Joseph because, with the exception of dairy cattle and butter making, sheep, homemade cloth, and maple sugar to a lesser extent, the

¹⁰³ For the estimate of a typical family's annual consumption of one hundred pounds, see Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 148. See also Dupont, *Le sucre du pays*, 45-51.

¹⁰⁴ Lower Canada, "Recensement agraire," 1852.

¹⁰⁵ *Census Report of the Canadas, 1861*, "Lower Canada Return of Agricultural Produce," 109. For 1871, see Courville et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 378.

¹⁰⁶ Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 246-7.

¹⁰⁷ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 432.

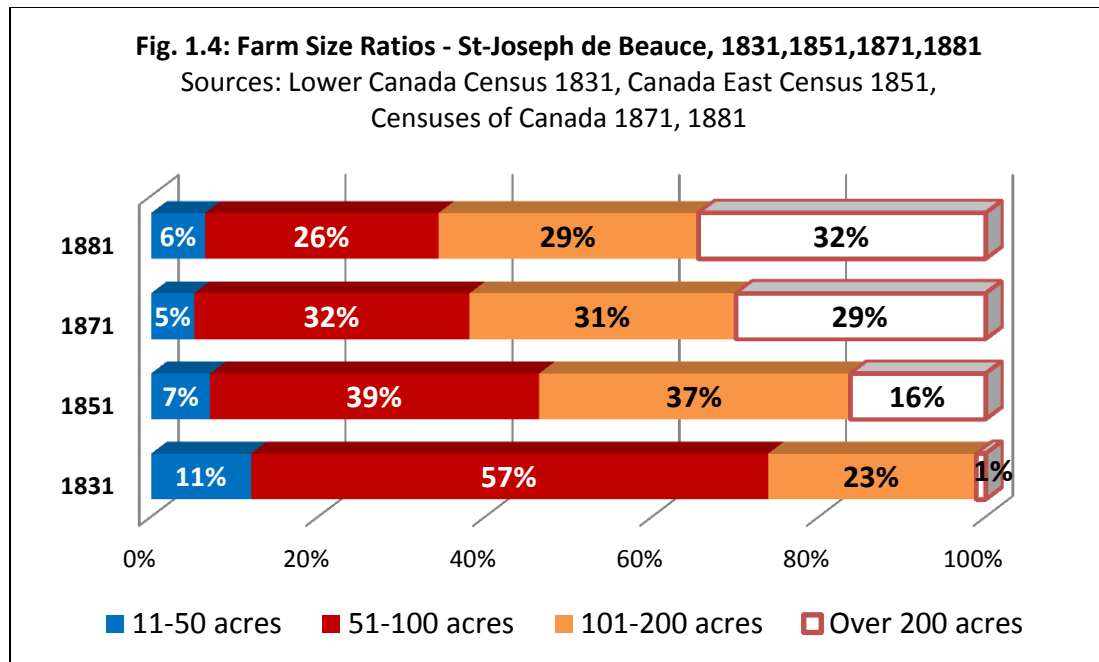
¹⁰⁸ *Census of Canada, 1871*, Vol. III (Ottawa, 1875), "Table XXV – Products of the Forests," 234-5; "Recensement de 1871, Province de Québec, District No. 158, Est-Beauce, Sous-District St-Joseph, Tableau No. 7, Produits des Forêts." See also Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 30.

average production figures indicate somewhat flat performance rather than dynamic growth geared to market demand for local products. They also indicate the persistence of the kinds of commodities that the parish had traditionally produced on its mixed farm, albeit in generally greater quantities. The other conclusion that can be drawn is that average production figures are deceptive. In St-Joseph's case, they lump the production of subsistence farms on marginal land together with the large commercial operations on more productive land. Low production from the much poorer land in the marginal areas of the parish would pull down the production averages for the parish, present a distorted picture of its agricultural growth, and understate the degree of real productivity on some farms, but not all.

As Figure 1.4 shows, the consolidation into large units that emerged in the period 1831-51 and especially after 1851, meant that there were increasing numbers of farms of from 100 to 200 acres. In 1831, 162 out of 285 farms in the parish (57 per cent) were between fifty and 100 acres, but twenty years later only 116 of them (39 per cent) were that size, and their numbers continued to fall. By 1851, 92 per cent of farms in St-Joseph were fifty acres or larger. In comparison, as Colette Chatillon points out, only 63 per cent of farms in Canada East in 1851 were fifty acres or larger.¹⁰⁹ By 1871, 73 per cent of Québec farms were larger than fifty acres, compared to 92 per cent for St-Joseph.¹¹⁰ By 1871, more than half of the farms in St-Joseph (61 per cent) were over 100 acres, and over half of these were larger still, over 200 acres. Because of their size and location in the parish, they probably produced the bulk of the commodities for the market that St-Joseph specialized in.

¹⁰⁹ Colette Chatillon, *L'histoire de l'agriculture au Québec* (Montréal, 1976), 36.

¹¹⁰ For the proportions of the other 12 sectors of the 'axe laurentien', see "L'espace agricole," in Courville, Robert, and Séguin, *Le pays laurentien*, 50-1. In the Rive Sud sector, where they place the Beauce, the figure was 79 per cent, the highest in the thirteen sectors of the "axe laurentien", but still well below the proportion for St-Joseph.



Socioeconomic Differentiation

The consolidation of these large farms also contributed to reinforcing the process of social stratification in St-Joseph. Over the course of the nineteenth century rural Québec became, in Cole Harris' words, "a more differentiated social space."¹¹¹ Even with large farms, as Little and Greer caution, more land did not necessarily mean greater prosperity because, on large farms as well as small ones, as families grew, there were more mouths to feed. Families often acquired more land as offspring got older, and then gave parcels to sons as they matured.¹¹² On the other hand, as important as changes in individual family circumstances may have been, Christian Dessureault's study of St-Hyacinthe for the period 1760-1815 argues that socio-economic differentiation had more to do with the inherent characteristics of the rural economy than with changes in the family life cycle.¹¹³ According to Dessureault, the traditional peasant society of the St. Lawrence Valley was not egalitarian; significant socio-economic distinctions characterized not only by different levels of wealth but also by "rapports à la production,"

¹¹¹ Harris, *The Reluctant Land*, 255.

¹¹² Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 23; Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 39-41.

¹¹³ Christian Dessureault, "L'égalitarisme paysan dans l'ancienne société rurale de la vallée du Saint-Laurent: Éléments pour une réinterprétation," *RHAF* 40:3 (1987), 373-407.

increased into the nineteenth century.¹¹⁴ In addition, he suggests that there is a strong likelihood that a permanent class of agricultural workers existed even before 1815.¹¹⁵

Similarly, even though the economic changes that came to the St-Joseph did not benefit everyone, this was not a departure from past socioeconomic patterns; rather, old patterns were accentuated. Small farmers and day labourers had been present in St-Joseph since the eighteenth century. Long before its agriculture became market oriented, slight socioeconomic differences were present in St-Joseph, but these increased markedly by the late nineteenth century. Judging from the 1762 census, St-Joseph was still at the pioneer stage and farm sizes and amounts of cleared land varied only slightly. Thirty-three out of seventy-five households had over four *arpents* of improved land, another thirty-eight households had 3-3.5 *arpents*, and five households had only 1.5 *arpents*.¹¹⁶ The differentiating factor within this landowning group was the number of livestock, especially draft animals which, Dessureault argues, was a key distinction in separating dependent from independent farm households.¹¹⁷ While all households had a few farm animals, usually one or two pigs, a few cattle, and three or four sheep, twenty-one households also had one ox, and thirty-three had two or more oxen, animals that were needed for ploughing fields and hauling farm products. On the other hand, twenty-one households had no oxen, indicating that they were less well-off than their neighbours. By 1831, thirty out of 315 family heads in the parish (almost 10 per cent) did not own land, including most of the twenty-four family heads classed as day labourers, only five of whom owned property.¹¹⁸ The growth of large farms in St-Joseph after 1851 created pressure on the land, which inevitably meant that younger sons of farming families

¹¹⁴ Dessureault, "L'égalarisme paysan," 397-99.

¹¹⁵ Dessureault, "L'égalarisme paysan," 387. Dessureault also examined the connection between family relationships and social status in his study of the old rural parish of Saint-Antoine-de-Lavaltrie in 1861 in which he notes the distinction between the well-established farmers who benefited from a wide network of relations, and the day labourers who did not. Christian Dessureault, "Parenté et stratification sociale dans une paroisse rurale de la vallée du Saint-Laurent au milieu du XIXe siècle." *RHAF* 54:3 (2001), 411-47.

¹¹⁶ *1762 Census of the Government of Quebec Including South Shore of the St. Lawrence River, North Shore of the St. Lawrence River* (Pawtucket, Rhode Island, 1997), 59-62.

¹¹⁷ Christian Dessureault, "L'égalarisme paysan dans l'ancienne société rurale de la vallée du Saint-Laurent: Éléments pour une réinterprétation," *RHAF* 40:3 (1987), 392-7. See also Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 38-9.

¹¹⁸ "Census and Statistical Returns of the Province of Lower Canada, 1831. District of Quebec, County of Beauce, Parish of St. Joseph."

occupied poorer land in the higher elevations on the margins of the parish.¹¹⁹

Consequently, the opportunities for these subsistence farmers to participate in the market would have been limited or non-existent and estimates of the general prosperity of the parish based on average production figures obscure important socioeconomic distinctions in St-Joseph.

These distinctions can be seen on Map 7 which shows the *cure's* estimate of how materially well off the parish's farming families were in 1876 and the relationship between their levels of wealth and locations of their farms. Map 7 on family means, for want of a better term, is based on an unusually detailed parish census that the Reverend Louis-Antoine Martel conducted in 1876 in which he added notations estimating the family means of the parish's 393 households, including the 240 farming families.¹²⁰ Not surprisingly, farmers in the valley were better off than those at higher elevations, many of whom were poor. A comparison of Map 7 with Map 6, which shows that soil quality of farms in the first range southwest and the first range northeast was of higher quality than farms on the concessions in upper elevations of the parish, makes it clear why farm family incomes differed to the extent that they did. Poor farmers plus the day labourers (DL on the map) constituted the largest income group in those areas furthest away from the best lands beside the river, which helps to explain their limited means.

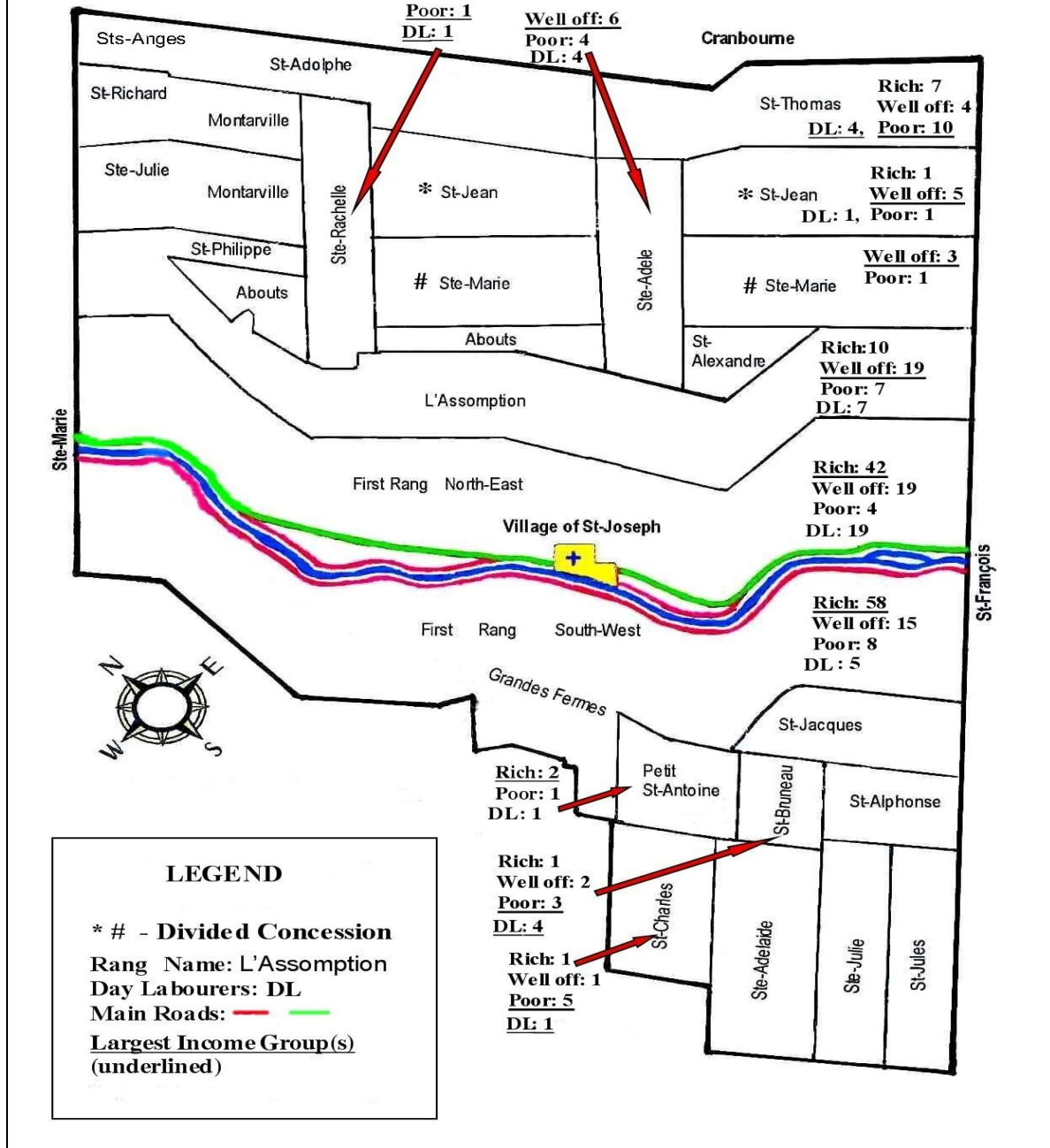
¹¹⁹ For more on population growth for the other areas of Beauce and Dorchester Counties in this period, see Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 213-40.

¹²⁰ The parish census normally listed only the names and ages of family members and whether children had made their first communion. Martel's estimate of his parishioners' financial means was unusual.

**Map 6: Estimated Means and Locations of Farm and Day Labourer Households-
St-Joseph de Beauce, 1876**

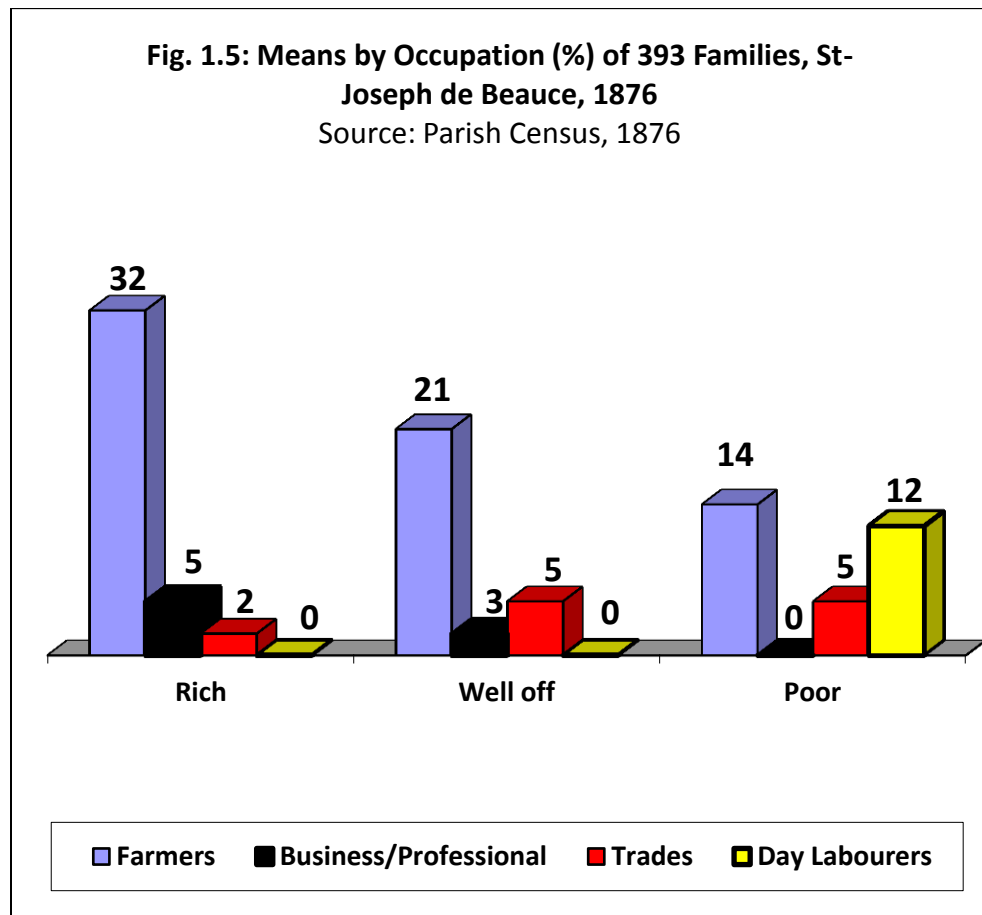
Source: "Recensement de la Paroisse de St-Joseph, Beauce, 1876"

Archives de la Paroisse de St-Joseph de Beauce



Martel's census reveals other dimensions of the social structure of St-Joseph in 1876 because it notes the presence of large numbers of comfortable and rich farmers and professionals, as well as tradespeople. On Figure 1.5, Martel's first three divisions –

“Very Rich,” “Rich,” and “Comfortable” (153 families) – have been combined to form the “Rich” category that encompassed 39 per cent of the parishioners. Similarly, his “Not rich” and “Mediocre” (114 families) divisions, comprising another 29 per cent of the families, form the intermediate “Well off” category. The last two, the “Poor” and “Very Poor,” constitute the “Poor” category (126 families) that encompassed 31 per cent of the family heads in Martel’s flock. Unfortunately, he did not provide financial figures or indicate his criteria for each category, or what constituted the difference between “Rich” and “Very Rich,” or “Poor” and “Very Poor.” Despite these limitations, this document provides a rare glimpse of the *curé*’s perceptions of the socioeconomic divisions in the parish nearly two decades after the establishment of the judicial apparatus and just before the arrival of the railway.



Over two-thirds of Martel’s flock were comfortable in the estimation of this meticulous *curé*, and indeed nearly 40 per cent were very comfortable. The farmers, who

were the largest (67 per cent) occupational category in St-Joseph in 1876, were found in all three of the major economic levels, but most notably in the “Well off” category. Many of these very comfortable farmers were in their late twenties and early thirties, and constituted 32 per cent of St-Joseph’s parishioners. This category also included professionals such as the greffier (the court clerk) as well as three merchants, plus two farmers who also operated hotels. The sheriff, a Taschereau, was another very rich parishioner. In the “Middle” category that comprised 29 per cent of the parish’s families, farm families were also the largest group, but they were joined by a lawyer and a doctor, as well as a number of tradesmen’s families. The thirty-seven farming families in the “Poor” category – 31 per cent of the parish – were again the largest single occupational group, but not by a wide margin, for the economic changes in the parish over the nineteenth century had led to an increase in the number of the day labourers who joined them in poverty.

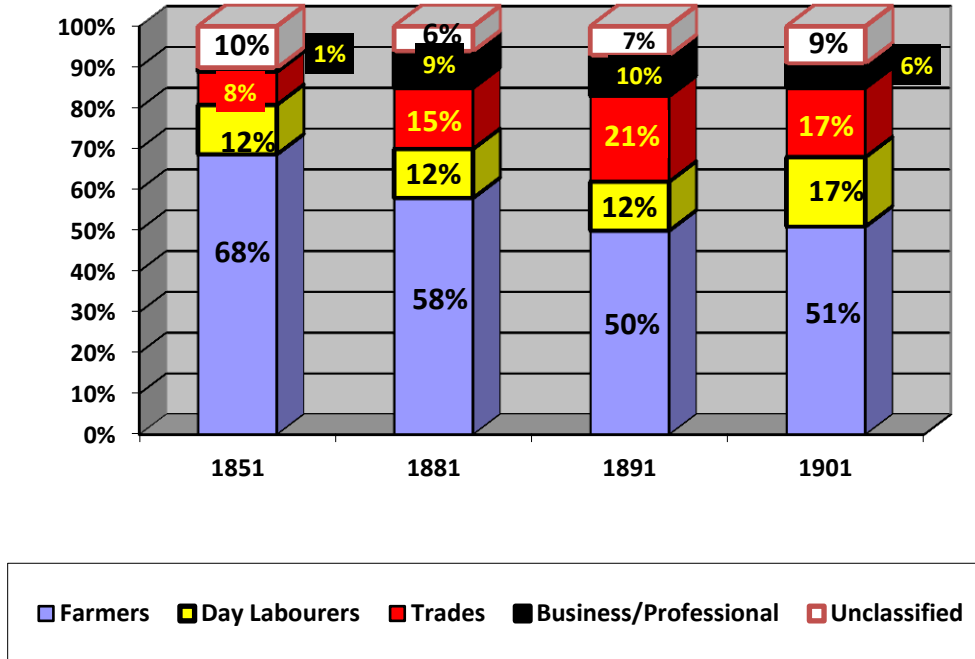
Twenty-five years later, as Figure 1.6 indicates, there were further changes. The ratio of *journaliers* (day labourers) rose from 12 per cent in the period 1852-91 to 17 per cent in 1901. Twenty-five years later, as Figure 1.6 which charts the occupations of household heads for the period 1852-1901 indicates, there were further changes, for the ratio of household heads that identified themselves as farmers steadily declined from 68 per cent in 1852 to 51 per cent in 1901. Farming still continued to be essential to the majority of households, and very large farms were increasingly the norm, but the ratio of *journaliers* (day labourers) rose from 12 per cent in the period 1852-91 to 17 per cent in 1901.¹²¹ Although the growth in the day labourer category by 1901 meant that more people may have been poorer than in previous decades, the large number of relatively large farms in St-Joseph suggests the availability of seasonal work. People who otherwise might have left may have stayed in the familiar surroundings of the parish, preferring to work as casual labour for local tradesmen, or in the small local industries such as the

¹²¹ Thérèse Beaudoin, *L’été dans la culture québécoise*, 114-15. She defines this group of rural proletarians as belonging to “cette catégorie de travailleurs [...] ne tirant pas leur subsistance des produits de la nature.” They worked for wages and included such occupations as: “les ouvriers agricoles travaillant à salaire sur une ferme et, d’autre part, tous les autres individus ayant un métier en relation avec l’exploitation forestière et la construction (charpentiers, menuisiers).” Finally, as Beaudoin notes, another characteristic was that, his place of work was generally different from where he lived compared to the *habitant* “qui vit et travail au même endroit.”

sawmills or fulling and carding mills, or they may have worked in logging camps during the winters.¹²²

The parish *Registres d'état civil* also contained over sixty other occupations for the fathers of new-born infants by the mid-1890s. There were important shifts in people's occupational categories. The census reports reveal that the ratio of St-Joseph's household heads working in the trades more than doubled in the period 1851-1901, from 8 percent to 17 per cent. By 1901, that sector included wheelwrights, saddle makers, millers, carpenters, masons, plumbers, engineers, shoemakers, railway employees, and artisans. There was also a fluctuation in the percentage of the parish population engaged in business or the professions. The business/professional sector was composed of ten merchants, nine cheese makers, three butchers, three tailors and five hotel operators, eight lawyers, two doctors, a notary and the prothonotary.

Figure 1.6: Occupations of Household Heads 1851 - 1901.
St-Joseph de Beauce
 Sources: Census of Canada East ,1852; Dominion Censuses 1881, 1891, 1901



¹²² On the structural changes in Québec agriculture in the period 1867-96 and the changes in the rural labour market, see Chatillon, *L'histoire de l'agriculture au Québec*, 44-55. See also Harris, *The Reluctant Land*, 254.

A comparison between the size of village that Henri-Elzéar Juchereau-Duchesnay saw in 1850 with its expansion by 1888, years for which maps are extant, indicates the extent of St-Joseph's transformation quite clearly. Courville and others note that the typical rural Québec village combined a number of important features for surrounding agricultural areas. They were service centres, rather than places of production, and their shops and *auberges* enabled them to play an important role in "le circuit des échanges, en plus de jouer un rôle dans la vie sociale."¹²³ In addition to artisans' shops, they contained the residences of the local petite bourgeoisie and retired farmers. As shown on Map 1, the tiny village of St-Joseph had only a rudimentary system of roads and paths around 1850. According to the Census of Canada East for 1851-52, St-Joseph had 2565 people, divided into 424 households.¹²⁴ The vast majority lived on farms; the village only had 104 residents, or about 4 percent of the entire parish population. Only some of what can be called the parish's very small *petite bourgeoisie* lived in the village, including its two influential notaries, artisan-shopkeepers who were the proprietors of three stores, two tavern keepers, and twenty-one artisans.¹²⁵ The 1852 census classified 11 percent of the occupations of the male household heads in the parish as artisans, businessmen or professionals. In addition to one store owned by the sole English-speaking family, the parish had twenty-eight small businesses, including fourteen carpenters /joiners (*menuisiers*), three shoemakers, and five men who combined farming with other occupations.¹²⁶ This mixed commercial category also included farmer-entrepreneurs who had small shops or operated sawmills on their properties, and tavern owners and innkeepers engaged in retail selling. Notary François Bélanger, son of the principal merchant, also ran his father's business.¹²⁷ Outside the village there were the seigneurial grist mill, six sawmills, two flour mills, a fulling mill and a carding mill. The motive

¹²³ Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 227. For detailed study of the growth of villages in Québec in the period 1815-51, see Serge Courville, *Entre ville et campagne: L'essor du village dans les seigneuries du Bas-Canada* (Québec, 1990).

¹²⁴ *Census of the Canadas, 1851-2*, Vol. 1 (Quebec, 1853), 343. Most of these were family groupings, but there were also 89 males and 65 females listed as living with people to whom they were not directly related, probably as servants or labourers.

¹²⁵ "St. Joseph," in Bouchette, *Topographical Dictionary*. The 1831 census, on the other hand, lists two grist mills, not one, ten sawmills, not six, and two fulling mills, not one, "Census and Statistical Returns, 1831." Nadeau indicates there was a notary. "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 281.

¹²⁶ "Canada-Est: Recensement personnel, District 14, Paroisse de St-Joseph, Comté de Dorchester, 1851." See also Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 222-27.

¹²⁷ Courville, Poulin et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 260-62.

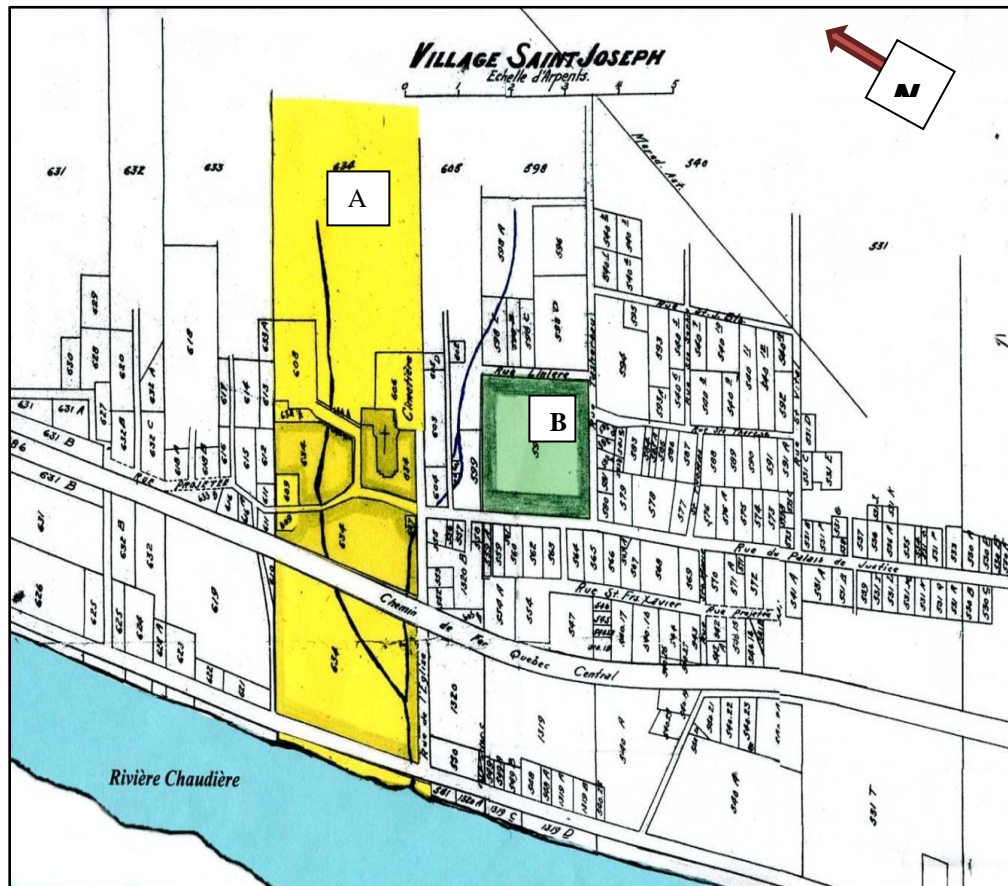
power for all these mills was water, indicating that they were located along the Chaudière or some of the small creeks flowing into it.

Had it not been for the railway and the St-Joseph's enhanced status as a judicial centre, the village might have stayed a small rural backwater. But it underwent a significant transformation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. According to the *curé's* annual report for 1900, about 57 per cent of St-Joseph's 489 families now lived in the village and accounted for over half the parish's total population of 2,859.¹²⁸ The extent of the village's physical transformation can be seen from Map 7 that is based on a plan drafted in 1888. The village contained more people, houses, and more clearly delineated streets, as well as surveyed lots. The railway is clearly visible parallel to the river, as are the courthouse and the land belonging to the *fabrique*.

The courthouse and the railway enhanced the importance of the village, which was incorporated as a separate municipality in October 1889. Coupled with the sharp differentiation in people's occupations over the fifty-year period and the presence of increased socio-economic stratification, these trends reflected a move away from a direct dependence on agriculture for many parishioners, even as farming remained the basis of St-Joseph's economy. At the same time, the village provided an important market for the products of the farms of the parish and, as the range of businesses indicates, was more developed as a service centre.

¹²⁸ AAQ 64 CD 17, "Rapports des paroisses, 1900," vol. 2 (J-Z) 'St-Joseph de Beauce:' 117-32.

Map 7. Plan of the Village of St-Joseph in 1888. Shaded Area A shows the lands owned by the *Fabrique*, including the parish church, indicated with the cross and below it, bisected by the Q.C.R. tracks, is the land for the presbytery, across from the church. The road angling off to the left of the church leads to the lot where the convent was built. Shaded Area B is the location of the courthouse. Adapted from the “Plan officiel de la paroisse de Saint-Joseph en vigueur le 25 février 1888”.
 Source: ASPB, PR 34-C59-0.



Conclusion: Change and Continuity

In the decades after the middle of the nineteenth century St-Joseph underwent a number of important transformations that affected parishioners and clergy alike as the parish became increasingly integrated into the expanding provincial market. St-Joseph became more occupationally diverse in the period 1852-1901 thanks to the village’s designation of *chef-lieu* of Beauce County and the arrival of the railroad. Its status as the judicial centre for the County linked the parish more closely to the administrative apparatus of the state. A major impetus to economic development occurred in the late 1870s when a railway linking it to Québec City and later to Sherbrooke and the United

States more efficiently tied the Beauce and its agricultural products to outside markets, and brought increased prosperity to the parish.

There is nothing to indicate, however, that St-Joseph's gradual economic transformation was disruptive. The parish remained culturally, religiously, and linguistically homogeneous. In 1853, the *curé* reported that, apart from one family of five Protestants, St-Joseph's people were all of French-Canadian origin.¹²⁹ Four decades later, except for one Protestant family and one or two families of Irish origin, everyone in St-Joseph was still French Canadian and Catholic.¹³⁰ The arrival of the state's judicial apparatus and the railway had the potential to turn the society of the parish upside down, not merely to change its outward appearance. But even here, continuity was more notable than disruption. The majority of fathers were farmers, and farming remained the primary occupation of half the household heads at the end of the nineteenth century. And the farmers of the parish continued to send the same kinds of commodities to the market that they had traditionally produced. Perhaps this was a lesson from the decline of wheat earlier in the nineteenth century. Even as the ground was shifting underneath St-Joseph's traditional agricultural way of life because of the increase in the size of the rural proletariat and the consolidation of large farms that accounted for most of the agricultural land in the parish, these gradual changes reinforced its essential features. The strength of St-Joseph's economy was not in its innovativeness but in its reliance on what had worked in the past: mixed farming and diversification in traditional products such as oats, wool, livestock, and maple sugar rather than reliance on any single cash crop. Similarly, while the proportion of day labourers, tradespeople, businessmen, and professionals increased in the same period, they constituted an increasingly larger market for the parish's agricultural products; in turn the economic viability of these occupations depended a great deal on the success of the parish's agricultural sector.

As will be seen next, information about which of St-Joseph's parishioners were prosperous and which were not helped their *curés* to evaluate their flock's ability to undertake several ambitious religious construction projects in the last decades of the nineteenth century. These included the rebuilding and decoration of the parish church, as

¹²⁹ AAQ 61 CD, St. Joseph de Beauce 2, "Rapport du Curé de St-Joseph, 21 juillet 1853."

¹³⁰ *Census of Canada 1890-91*, Vol. I (Ottawa, 1892), "Table IV – Religions," 292.

well as the construction of a convent and presbytery in a relatively short space of time. Added to the tithe and other contributions that many of St-Joseph's poorer families had to make to the Church, however, these extra levies would have been quite burdensome to that third of the parish population. But, at the start of the twentieth century, there were enough comfortable families in the parish to pay for a series of twenty-nine impressive memorial stained glass windows for the sacristy, choir and nave of the church, further evidence that piety and material success went hand in hand.¹³¹ While the parish's prosperity permitted St-Joseph's parishioners to finance tangible, even ostentatious, surface expressions of their religious devotion, subsequent chapters will examine whether or not the increasing material prosperity of St-Joseph actually translated into greater levels of their inner piety, or whether it had more equivocal implications for the relationship between the *habitants* and the Church.

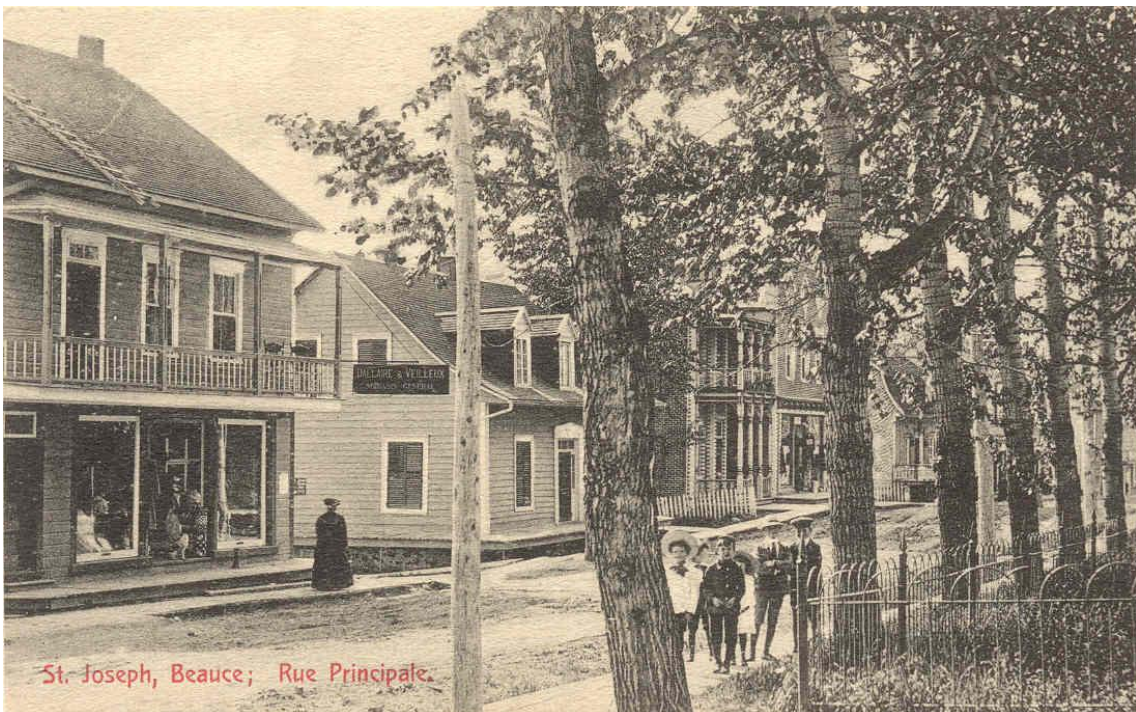


Illustration 3. *Tree-shaded rue du Palais de Justice, near the courthouse of St-Joseph de Beauce, c. 1905-1915.* Unfortunately, the trees no longer exist. Source: ASPB PR129-1-3-12STJO-87

¹³¹ Daniel Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel et le palais de justice de Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce* (St-Joseph-de-Beauce, 2007), 33-9.

Chapter 2

Rendering Unto God: Buildings and Belief

By far the best way to appreciate the architectural panorama of St-Joseph de Beauce today is not by way of the more direct highway running south from Québec City but to approach the village from the west on the longer road from Montréal. It passes through the Appalachians via Thetford Mines and descends into the Chaudière Valley from the neighbouring parish of St-Frédéric across the river from St-Joseph. Even from several kilometres away, the most visible landmark in this part of the Chaudière Valley is the tall silvery spire of its graceful stone church. Its granite steeple dominates the high ground at the end of the road crossing the river. As one draws nearer, the palatial two-and-one-half storey Second-Empire-style brick residence of the parish priest comes into view across the village's main street from the church. To the north of the church, on the rising ground behind it are the former convent and orphanage, two other four-storey red brick buildings with silver-coloured mansard roofs that echo the design of the rectory. South of them and on the same hill behind the church is the long maroon-coloured former college of the Marist brothers (Illustration 2.1).

By building these five religiously-inspired projects in the forty-six-year period between 1865 and 1911, the parishioners of St-Joseph dramatically transformed their relatively nondescript hamlet into an imposing and striking *ensemble institutionnel*. Unlike the new courthouse that the provincial government had paid for, these buildings were the largest collective projects that the parishioners had ever undertaken with their own resources. Thanks in part to the material comfort that a majority of St-Joseph's inhabitants enjoyed, the parish, whose population never went above 3,000, spent close to \$70,000 on a new parish church (1865-68), the convent (1887-88), and a palatial presbytery (1890-92), in the twenty-seven-year period between 1865 and 1892. These impressive buildings combined the skills of local craftsmen with the designs of professional architects, and while it is easy to calculate the total financial cost of these undertakings, it is more difficult to measure the value that the people of this French-

Canadian parish placed upon them, and by extension the fervour of their Catholicism. An obvious and by no means implausible explanation is that these projects reflected a high level of devotion to their religion. The Reverend Antoine Racine also recognized the devotion of his St-Joseph parishioners, at least insofar as their support for parish building projects was concerned. Although, as will be seen in Chapter Four, he complained of their pride and independence and did not credit them with high levels of religious devotion, he admitted at the end of a rather negative assessment of his parishioners in 1853 that “ils sont généralement zélés pour des bâtisses qu’ils ont à faire ou à entretenir et ils se côtitent eux-mêmes pour cet objet.”¹ His successors found that this assessment of their readiness to part with money for religious construction remained true down to the



Illustration 4. *North part of the village of St-Joseph de Beauce, from the west, early twentieth century. In the foreground the overflowing Chaudière River reaches almost to the presbytery and church. In the background, to the left is the convent; behind the rectory can be seen the roof of the orphanage (1907). In the distance to the right of the church is the Marist College (1911). Behind the village are the cleared fields; today they are again covered in trees. ASPB: PR 129-1-3-12-STJO-23.*

end of the century. Since the parish church was the major physical landmark of most Québec parishes, as well as the focus of so much care, attention and expense – and the

¹ AAQ 61 CD, St. Joseph de Beauce 2, “Rapport de Mr. A. Racine, 1853.”

occasional lively controversy – it is worth examining in some detail.² It is important to start with these impressive surface manifestations before delving deeper into the place of Catholicism in the lives of the people of St-Joseph. The scale of buildings such as these, particularly the lavishness of the many churches that dot the Québec landscape, speaks volumes about the cultural choices that the people made, and can easily give the impression that the Catholic Church exercised near-complete control over them especially after the mid-nineteenth century. In order to examine that question further, this chapter will look at the early history of church building in the parish because the religious construction projects of the last four decades of the nineteenth century had their precedents a century earlier when, supposedly, the *habitants* were far less religiously devoted. Then we will look at the different degrees of willingness that parishioners displayed to the three important building initiatives their *curés* presented to them between 1864 and 1892 when the church, the convent and the presbytery were completed. We will then contrast the sums spent on religion with the comparatively niggardly material support given to education in the parish during the same period in order to determine who decided that churches were more important than schools, and why.

The Earlier Parish Churches

The first religious building in St-Joseph was a rudimentary wooden missionary chapel built in 1738 on the southwest bank of the river, on the seigneurial domain. Prone to flooding because of its low lying position near the river, it soon fell into ruins.³ The second, also of wood, was constructed in 1764 near the site of the present church on the northeast side of the river, well beyond the reach of spring floods.⁴ By 1789, however, the increasing population of the parish had made it seem too small, and the parishioners started work on a third church that took nearly seven years to complete. As had traditionally been the case, the parishioners were actively involved in, and consulted about, all the stages of the process since they were supplying the money and labour. Their

² See J. I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants. Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881* (Montreal, Kingston, 1991), 202-205, on the divisions that could ensue in a parish over the location of this important building, and the necessity for the archbishop to mediate.

³ Daniel Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel et le palais de justice de Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce (St-Joseph de Beauce, 2007)*, 18.

⁴ Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel*, 19.

representatives had a voice in every aspect of each project, including the initial proposals, the decisions on funding, and the final design. During the French régime, all the male property-owning parishioners would have been eligible to choose syndics who oversaw the details of finance and construction, gathering the necessary materials and funds, constructing the building, and decorating its interior. They had also followed these steps under British rule when constructing the first presbytery in 1782.⁵ During the building of the church, the parishioners would have remained in close contact with the bishop in order to inform him of their progress, steps they dutifully followed in this project.⁶ However, for two reasons, the process was more complicated than in the past.

The first problem was that the Protestant British authorities had no policy for the construction or repair of Catholic churches, and there was to be none until the newly-granted Lower Canadian Assembly created the proper body, the *Cour d'homologation*, on 30 April 1791. Bishop Hubert had already seen the ruinous state of the old wooden church, and, on 30 September 1789, the day after he had received a petition from “les habitants de la paroisse St-Joseph, Seigneurie de Fleury dans la Nouvelle Beausse,” he gave his written approval for the parishioners to construct a new one in stone. But in his letter he also advised the *curé*, the Reverend Antoine Lamothe, in charge of St-Joseph in the period 1785-1817, to proceed very discretely because he did not want to offend the authorities by proceeding without their prior authorization. On 18 December 1789, the bishop's office advised Lamothe to obtain cost estimates for repairing the old church and constructing a new one. When appropriate, these would be submitted to the syndics of the future *Cour d'homologation* and then to the Governor's Council, along with the bishop's observations. Then they had to be sent to the Governor for his approval. Meanwhile, the *curé* should continue to gather materials, but take no further action.⁷

In his letter, the bishop also hinted obliquely at the second reason for proceeding slowly and cautiously. Above all, he urged Lamothe to maintain “la paix et la concorde” in the parish, and to show his letter of approval to parishioners only when he considered it absolutely necessary to do so, perhaps out of fear of offending the British authorities,

⁵ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 179.

⁶ AAQ, ‘St. Joseph de B.,’ “Registre de lettres,” I-37, I-41, I-42, I-43, I-46, I-49.

⁷ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 196-197. Provost calls this “la première mesure législative favorable au culte catholique sous le régime anglais.” *Sainte-Marie: Histoire civile*, 51.

although he did not specify why. Furthermore, he was not to reveal its contents to unnamed “gens tracassiers” because such people could upset the whole project. Judging from these oblique references, the construction of a new and larger stone church appears to have caused some difference of opinion among people in St-Joseph. Another hint of difference among the parishioners of St-Joseph was evident at the parish assembly of 25 October 1789. That assembly had the power to approve the financial levy on each parishioner and appoint syndics to oversee the details of the construction of the new church. Following receipt of the bishop’s cautious letter of approval of 30 September, the *curé* called an assembly of all the male property holders of St-Joseph in the customary way by announcing it from the pulpit on three consecutive Sundays. However, a significant minority of the eligible male parishioners did not attend the meeting. Even though their decision would have bound everyone to contribute proportional amounts of money or materials, the record of the assembly states that only three quarters of the male parishioners had assembled.⁸ The absence of so many heads of *habitant* households may just as likely have meant indifference instead of opposition. Those strongly opposed to the project would likely have attended the meeting to express their dissent. There may have been several reasons for people’s reluctance to embark on an ambitious project at that particular time. For some, the timing and the scale of the undertaking may have seemed too ambitious for the resources of the parish, while two years of bad harvests clearly left some families in financial difficulties.⁹

The project was so large that Lamothe had to devise more means of paying for it than the revenues of St-Joseph could handle. On 29 November 1795, in view of another bad harvest and the hardships many in the parish were enduring, but also noting the zeal of his flock to continue the work, he asked the bishop’s permission to devote money from the annual *Quête de l’Enfant Jésus* towards the costs of construction. He also asked for financial help from parishes that had obtained better harvests. Between 20 January and 28 February 1796, thirteen parishes in the diocese contributed approximately £700 towards building the new church.¹⁰ On 11 October 1797, Vicar-General J.-O. Plessis

⁸ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 192-95.

⁹ Nadeau notes there was probably “une minorité qui ne voulait pas d’une reconstruction, ou qui oulait bâtir ailleurs ou en bois.” “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 195.

¹⁰ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 214-16.

consecrated it. Ten days later the *curé* reminded his superiors of the zeal in the parish. The church had been built despite the several years of bad harvests that had left St-Joseph, in the words of Lamothe on 21 October 1797, “petite, affligée par les mauvaises années, remplie d’un grand nombre de pauvres”.¹¹

An impressive edifice even by the standards of Quebec’s religious architecture, the church was built of fieldstone covered in roughcast mortar, and could hold at least 2,000 people, nearly all of those who called St-Joseph their home. In 1840, the parishioners enlarged it by 30 percent to meet the needs of an expanding population. In the usual fashion of Québec parish churches, they would have removed the entrance wall and added a further nine meters onto the 30-meter length, though it still remained 24 meters wide and 22 meters high. The steeply-pitched roof was covered in dark red shingles that parishioners would usually repaint before the bishop’s visit of inspection, or roughly every four years. The 1840 renovation also saw the erection of two towers of different heights, double-lanterned, and roofed with tin. One contained a bell weighing 540 pounds.¹² According to the local historian, the exterior design resembled the church of St-Charles Borromeo in Charlesbourg near Québec City, although the historian Honorius Provost claims it was identical to the one in neighbouring Ste-Marie.¹³

The church’s simple exterior (Illustration 2.2) was misleading because, as was usual in Lower Canada’s Baroque architectural tradition, much local pride, not to mention a good deal of parishioners’ money, went into the interior embellishment.¹⁴ In 1799, two years after the church opened, the gilded tabernacle of the main altar, sculpted in Québec at a cost of over £3000, was put in place. Four years later the parish spent another £3000 on altars, tabernacles for the side altars, chandeliers, silver, gilding and painting; most of this money went to the well-known Québec City firm of Baillargé and Company.¹⁵ The large painting of St. Joseph that hung in a golden frame above the gilded main altar was bought in 1804 at a cost of £400. A gilded angel standing on a globe and holding a trumpet adorned the roof of the elaborately carved octagonal pulpit. Light

¹¹ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 217.

¹² Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 301.

¹³ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 357-8. See also Luc Noppen, *Les Églises du Québec (1600-1850)* (Québec: 1977), 95-97; and Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire religieuse*, 100.

¹⁴ On the distinctiveness of the Québécois architectural tradition for churches, see Alan Gowans, *Building Canada: An Architectural History of Canadian Life* (Toronto, 1966), 12-38.

¹⁵ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 359-60.

entered the church through the many small panes of clear glass in the five tall, arched windows along each side of the building.

But the church contained no organ or harmonium to supply music to accompany the choir on solemn occasions such as the weekly ‘high’ mass. In place of an organ, some members of the congregation would play their violins behind the altar during the solemn chanting of prayers in Latin by the priest and the responses from the choir, and the purification of the sanctuary with clouds of incense at key moments of the liturgy.¹⁶ In contrast to these edifying scenes of light and drama above, the dark basement with no windows or doors contained an indoor cemetery. If they did not wish to be interred in the parish cemetery located near the church, the owners of pews had the right to be buried there, although this would have been more expensive.¹⁷ Once every four years, to honour the visit of the bishop, the floors of the church would have been washed.¹⁸

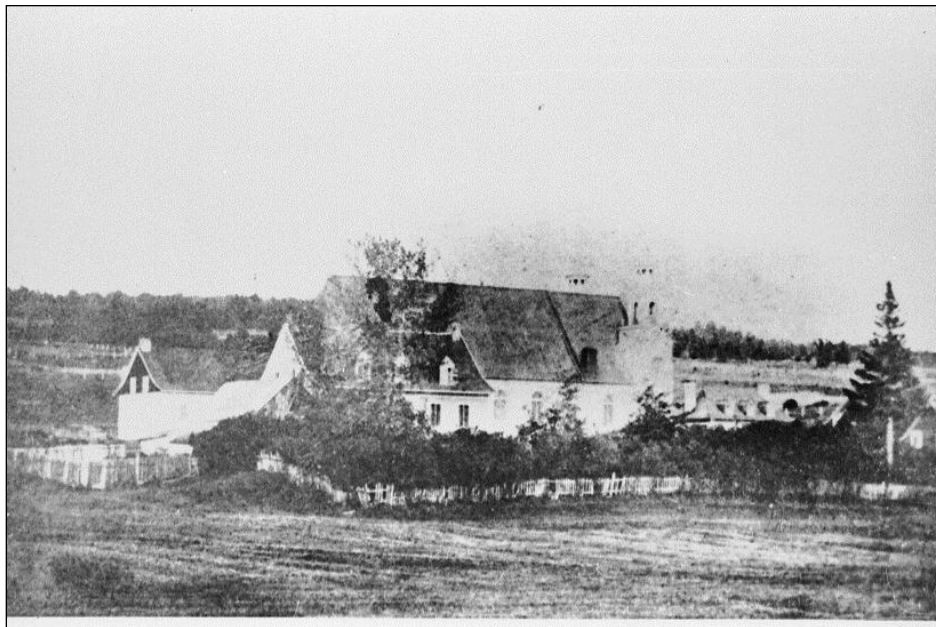


Illustration 5. Rare photograph of the parish church before its destruction in 1864. On the right of the church are its barely visible twin towers. The house in the middle foreground near the back of the church was the rectory. Source: ASPB: PL 21 No. 8. Collection Famille Georges Garneau.

¹⁶ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 359-60. For liturgical description, see Adrian Fortescue, “Liturgy of the Mass,” Hebermann et al, eds., *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 9 (New York, 1910), 790-800. ‘Low mass’ was a shorter ceremony, without music or incense.

¹⁷ On the socioeconomic status of those buried in churches, see Jean-René Thuot, “La pratique de l’inhumation dans l’église dans Lanaudière entre 1810 et 1860: Entre privilège, reconnaissance et concours de circonstances,” SCHEC, *Études d’histoire religieuses*, 72 (2006), 75-96.

¹⁸ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 357-361. He speculates that there must have been a strong combination of odours from the unwashed floors and the cemetery in the basement.

The New Parish Church of 1867

On the night of 27 December 1864, disaster struck the parishioners of St-Joseph when the church went up in flames. With the exception of the altars, baptismal fonts, churchwardens' bench, a painting of Saint John the Baptist, and a few pieces of furniture that some dedicated parishioners living nearby had retrieved from the flames, the building was a total loss by the next morning.¹⁹ Almost immediately, the parish chose syndics to plan a newer and larger church, and to oversee raising money and gathering material for the purpose. The role of a syndic in a rural parish is defined as someone elected to carry out the decisions of the general assembly of the parish – in this case, to oversee the building of a new church, with the legal authority to raise money from the members of the parish.²⁰ A syndic might not necessarily have been a serving or former church warden, but like that of a *marguillier*, the post of syndic was a position of some responsibility as well as prestige. For this project, the parishioners chose prominent local notables, the notary J.O.C. Arcand and the protonotary of the courthouse, Zéphirin Vézina, as syndics, as well as seven comfortable local farmers.²¹ Since most farmers at this time, even many of the well-off ones, were illiterate, the addition of notaries who were familiar with legal documents and language would have been advantageous in facilitating the syndics' task, and would have given the village representation in the process. Arcand had also been mayor of the parish for seven years between 1857 and 1864, while Vézina became the village's first mayor after its incorporation twenty-five years later, on 3 October 1889.²²

Nearly four months after the fire, in mid-April, 1865, the nine syndics were ready with plans and costs for the new edifice. They budgeted 6,595 "louis" (probably pounds, the approximate equivalent of \$26,380) for the project.²³ Roughly half of the money raised (3,575 louis or \$14,300) was to pay for excavation work and masonry, and the

¹⁹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 362.

²⁰ *Petit Robert Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris, 1977), 1906.

²¹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 363.

²² For the date of incorporation, see Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 514. For the names of its mayors up to 1928, see "Programme-Souvenir de Congrès Eucharistique Régional de Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce les 29, 30 juin et le 1^{er} juillet 1928," Gerard Poulin, Printer, 16-17.

²³ The first appearance of decimal currency to replace the pounds, shillings and pence in the parish accounts was in December 1867. Even then, there are instances in the early 1870s of notations in the British currency. Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 369.

other half (3,020 louis or \$12,080) was to cover the costs of carpentry.²⁴ They planned that the shell of the new church building would be completed in about two and one-half years, in other words by August, 1867. Furthermore, as an indication that the syndics, and probably the parishioners as well, wanted this new building to be an architectural statement, they engaged a professional, François-Xavier Berlinguet, to design the plans and to oversee some aspects of the carpentry and construction. Berlinguet was a member of the well-known Québec City dynasty of architects who had already designed, or would later design, parts of the churches of Notre-Dame-de-Québec, St-Augustin in Portneuf, Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours in L'Islet, and St-Georges in Cacouna.²⁵

In keeping with traditional Québec practice, the parish followed the usual steps by organizing the finances and by allocating tasks and resources. Decisions on all aspects of the church's construction, including design changes, were in the hands of the syndics. They coordinated the supply of materials that each holder of a bench in the new church was expected to provide in kind (stone or wood) or in labour. The syndics also had to supply funds to the contractor/mason whom they hired to oversee construction. They chose Augustin Trépanier of Québec City, who had built the local courthouse a few years before.²⁶ Both parties would have met with a notary, who would then have drawn up a detailed contract specifying numerous architectural details like the dimensions of the building, the thickness of the walls, the materials to be used, room and board for the masons, and a completion date.²⁷ Even then (how familiar to a modern homeowner!), they made numerous revisions of the original plans, with the inevitable delays. Furthermore, the money raised only covered the basic construction of the building. Additionally, even larger sums would have had to have been raised in the future, in order to pay for embellishing the church's interior.²⁸

²⁴ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 363.

²⁵ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 363-64. See also Noppen, *Les Églises du Québec*, 84, 134, 164, 204. See also Cole Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada Before Confederation* (Vancouver and Toronto, 2008), 260-1.

²⁶ Poulin et al, *St-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 387. Trépanier had also overseen the carpentry, painting and stonework of the courthouse. Thanks to the quality of this project and the local contacts he must have made, Trépanier may have had an advantage over other outsiders on the church project.

²⁷ Madeleine Gobeil Trudeau, *Bâtir une Église au Québec* (Montréal, 1981), 61-94. See her *Appendice 'C'* for an example of such a notarized contract.

²⁸ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 383.

Revenues collected over a five-decade period were sufficient to have made St-Joseph a comfortably well-off parish, as can be seen in Appendix C, but it is only necessary to look at the accounts for a year such as 1869 to see that the parish lacked the income for such an extraordinary expenditure without resorting to an additional levy on the parishioners. Almost two-thirds of the *fabrique*'s total income of \$3,126.82 for 1869 came from pew rents (\$2,126.69) with smaller amounts received from the sale of candles, burials, high masses, baptisms, marriages and special collections. The numerous small expenses (firewood, candles, hosts, altar wine, cleaning the church and altar linen, insurance fees, etc.) came to \$2,124.55, leaving very little left over for the sums required to build and then to furnish a new church.²⁹ Similarly, ordinary parish expenses for another typical year, 1876, included money spent on salaries for the beadle and constable (\$173.00), hosts (\$17.25), candles (\$312.02), lighting (\$22.62), firewood (\$128.32), cleaning the church (\$4.60), cleaning the altar linen (\$30.00), maintenance of the church building (\$788.99), insurance (\$105.56), altar wine (\$29.15), interior painting and repairs (\$55.93) and "divers" expenses (\$52.41), for a total of \$1072.04 out of the ordinary revenues of \$2445.91³⁰.

Within a year after the fire, however, and despite the delays, the sacristy had been reconstructed and mass was held there for the first time on Christmas Eve, 1865.³¹ Nearly three years after the project began, the building was completed. It was somewhat larger and even more imposing than its predecessor. In fact, when the Archbishop saw it for the first time in 1867, he was a little taken aback by its sheer size. "Grande et même trop grande", he mused, and hoped that the *fabrique* had not saddled itself with a burdensome debt.³² Measuring 55 meters in length, the new church of St-Joseph was over 15 meters longer than its predecessor, although its 18-meter width was slightly narrower. It boasted one tower instead of two, and its distinctive pointed silver-coloured steeple surmounted by a cross is still the tallest in the Beauce.³³ The exterior was fieldstone like the previous one, with finished stonework around the three front doors –

²⁹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 384.

³⁰ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 435. Nadeau converted dollars to pounds with the standard ratio of \$4 = £1. "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 393. See Appendix C.

³¹ Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel*, 22.

³² AAQ 69 CD 14. "Visites pastorales 1858 à 1868," notebook with handwritten entries, 210-211.

³³ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph, 455.

two simple Ionic pillars supported a stone porch over the the central door, the largest of the three – and the six round-arched windows on each side. Its steeply pitched roof was covered in tin.³⁴ In January 1869, the Association des Fabriques de Québec et des Trois-Rivières insured the still undecorated and largely empty church building, at \$6000, with another \$1500 divided between sacristy and rectory.³⁵ On 20 February 1870, the syndics presented their final accounts and they were discharged from their duties.³⁶

Although its exterior was impressive, the interior was silent and barnlike, with uncovered rafters, rudimentary woodwork, roughly cut stone pillars and bare stone walls. During the winter, despite four well-stoked stoves, people still complained that they felt frozen during divine services.³⁷ Unfortunately, the frigid interior of the new church may have seriously undermined the delicate health of the resident curé, James Nelligan, who died on 24 June 1868 after a long illness. A meeting in the new structure held in February of the same year to organize the first sale of benches probably weakened his already frail constitution and aggravated his illness. He was so weak that he had to support himself by leaning against the cold stone walls of the empty new church, where he never celebrated mass.³⁸ Instead, his vicar, Napoléon-Henri Constantin, held the first mass in the echoing, chilly, and bare interior of the church on 19 March 1868, or nine months after the originally proposed date of completion. A few months later, on 4 June, the official blessing of the new structure also took place in Nelligan's absence, less than three weeks before he died. Nelligan was buried in the crypt underneath the new building, to be joined there six months later by the remains of J.-O.-C. Arcand.³⁹ The embellishment of the church continued under his successors who decided that they would first acquire new bells.

³⁴ Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel*, 20-21. For its strong exterior and interior resemblance to the parish church of St-Michel de Bellechasse, see Lacroix, *La foi de ma mère*, 255-57.

³⁵ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 380-381.

³⁶ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 364-365.

³⁷ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 397.

³⁸ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 371.

³⁹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 369-70.



Illustration 6. *The parish church, c. 1900-1912. Part of the new rectory is visible on the left of the picture. Source: ASPB: PR129-1-3-12-STJO-53*

In March 1870, according to the Reverend Louis-Antoine Martel, “un certain nombre” of unnamed parishioners approached him with “un désir ardent” that the parish acquire three large bells, “de même grosseur que celle de Saint-François.”⁴⁰ As a result, the parish spent nearly \$2,000 to have them cast in England. They weighed a total of 3,800 pounds and replaced the single small bell in the small tower above the sanctuary, blessed by the future Cardinal Taschereau eight months earlier.⁴¹ The *fabrique* also authorized the *curé* to act through agents in Québec to have them delivered.⁴² In addition to the final amount raised by a public subscription that brought in over \$900 from St-Joseph’s parishioners, twenty-four “godfathers” and “godmothers” accepted the honour

⁴⁰ Nadeau takes this account from Martel’s own notes on the subject. “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 388.

⁴¹ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 383-85.

⁴² Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 385.

of donating more money to cover the balance of the expected costs for the bells. These two dozen patrons donated a total of \$1,400 to cover the cost of manufacturing, transporting and installing the bells.⁴³ At 4 pm on 22 September 1870, in the presence of a large crowd, the three bells rang out for the first time. The participation of over thirty priests made this the largest clerical gathering to take place in St-Joseph up to that time. The “godparents,” leading regional notables, were given places of prominence and respect. The notables included the notary Vézina, the wife of the sherrif, and several *cultivateurs* who must have been financially comfortable enough to donate between \$50 and \$100 each.⁴⁴ While most of them came from the parish, three were from neighbouring St-Georges, St-François, and St-Frédéric. The largest donation of \$120 came from F.-X. Dulac, the Prefect of the County. By their nature, rites are, after all, sanctifying rituals, but the place of honour given to these well-off benefactors meant that this spectacle was as much a benediction of social differentiation as it was a celebration of religious zeal. In his sermon to mark the occasion, former *curé* Antoine Racine praised the zeal and faith of the inhabitants of the Beauce who had erected “magnificent temples to God everywhere” that aroused the admiration of the traveller. Henceforth the bells would mark significant moments for the parishioners, ringing out joyously on days of celebration or sadly on days of mourning.⁴⁵ Sixty years later, the parish historian more rhapsodically described the occasion:

Pour la 1ère fois leurs grandes et vibrantes voix chantaient dans l’espace et s’en allaient sur l’aile de la brise, dans ce beau soir de septembre, sur les champs, et par delà les côteaues et les bois atteindre l’oreille attentive, émue, des habitants écoutant au seuil de leur demeure, ravis de la musique aérienne et lointaine qui très douce chantait la gloire de Dieu et célébrait leur générosité.⁴⁶

The Church: Interior Embellishment

On 18 December 1870, fewer than three months after the new bells had rung out over the valley for the first time to call people to mass, they rang for a different purpose.

⁴³ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 388-393. Three churchwardens went to Lévis at their own expense to bring the bells to St-Joseph. See also Carrier, *L’ensemble institutionnel*, 23-25.

⁴⁴ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 390-91.

⁴⁵ As reported in the *Journal de Québec* of 29 September 1870. Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 394.

⁴⁶ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 392.

They announced that a general meeting of the parishioners was to be held in order to consider another financial campaign. One week earlier, the *marguilliers* had resolved to ask a general assembly of the parish to approve a *cotisation*, an extraordinary levy on each parishioner, to finance the embellishment of the church's empty interior. They considered that, by themselves, the existing annual revenues of the parish were barely sufficient to meet the costs of maintenance and worship, without the added costs of ornamenting the church. At the assembly, the free-holders of St-Joseph resolved, "à très grande majorité," that the parish should finish the work of decoration, provided that the civil authorities recognize the legality of their vote to impose a financial levy on all parishioners to cover the cost, based proportionately on property size. The work of finishing the interior was to consist of completing the vaults, plastering the walls, constructing the choir stalls, the altar rails, the pulpit, the *banc d'oeuvre* or pew for the *marguilliers*, the baptismal font, and the main altar. In addition, they needed the archbishop's permission. Their letter to him on Boxing Day, 1870, requested a favourable reply as soon as possible for the proposed embellishments, for the levy on every parishioner, and for permission for the *fabrique* immediately to furnish \$5000 to begin the work. To demonstrate support from the parishioners for the proposed undertaking, "333 signatures des francs-tenanciers" accompanied the request.⁴⁷

Not to be hurried, the archdiocesan authorities sent Grand Vicar Louis Proulx, curé of neighbouring Ste-Marie de Beauce, to ensure that the petition really did express the will of the parishioners. From the perspective of those hoping for the archbishop's permission, Proulx was probably the ideal choice for this mission. He had built an elaborate new Gothic-style church in his parish in 1858 that had made it the largest church in the diocese outside of Québec City. Since his own experience had made him familiar with the problems of financing a beautiful religious monument whose own very sumptuously decorated Gothic interior had only been completed four years earlier, he would have been sympathetic to the St-Joseph project. If the authorities at Québec were looking for someone to give an impartial analysis, then Proulx was certainly an odd choice, because the Archbishop considered the church in Ste-Marie to have been overly

⁴⁷ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 396-397.

large, as well as being “prétentieux et téméraire.”⁴⁸ Even so, a week after Proulx submitted what must have been a favourable report to the archbishop, and after a second general meeting of the parishioners, the parish received the prelate’s assent on 15 February 1871 to proceed.

The procedure for organizing the financial details of the decoration project was the same as for constructing the church. The parish priest had formally to call a public meeting of the parish from the pulpit on two consecutive Sundays, and an announcement had to be posted on the church doors for three consecutive Sundays. Syndics had to be duly chosen to oversee a levy on each parishioner. On 18 April 1871, the new church bells again duly summoned an assembly of the parish for the purpose of choosing the syndics who would operate under the supervision of three Commissioners. On 5 May, nine syndics, eight of whom were listed as *cultivateurs* and the ninth, a notary, were confirmed in office. Nine days later, his fellow syndics elected the notary as chairman. Two weeks later, the group chose Joseph Ferdinand Peachy to design the interior refurbishing of the church and oversee the work. Peachy was a noted Québec City architect who had drawn up plans for, among other projects, the exterior restoration of Notre-Dame des Victoires (1858-61) in the Lower Town.⁴⁹

By the end of November, the syndics were authorized to raise \$16,215 after accepting the lowest of five bids for the work of decoration. That bid, from the sculptor M.L. Dion, had originally been for \$20,000 but he had been persuaded to modify some aspects and to reduce the sum by \$2,000. At the same time, the syndics decided to add more sculptures and to spend \$1,840 on the elaborate tabernacle of the main altar (they spent over 10 per cent of their budget, or a total of \$2,800, for the church’s three tabernacles alone). In September 1874, nearly halfway through the project, the syndics decided that the church needed to have a more elaborate pulpit than the one originally designed for it. Finally, by the fall of 1876, or eleven years after the construction of the new church had begun, the long and expensive process of embellishment was officially

⁴⁸ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 397-398. On Proulx’s experiences in erecting and decorating his church over six years, see Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire religieuse*, 147-152.

⁴⁹ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 400. For Peachy, see Noppen, *Églises du Québec*, 70, 179, 184-186; and also Raymond Gauthier, *Construire une église au Québec: L’architecture religieuse avant 1939* (Montréal, 1994), 214-15.

deemed terminated.⁵⁰ The final settling of accounts took place when the syndics were formally thanked and discharged on 13 August 1880 after making their final report for the period 1 March 1872 to 9 August 1880.⁵¹ The total cost of the interior embellishment came to \$28,224.⁵²

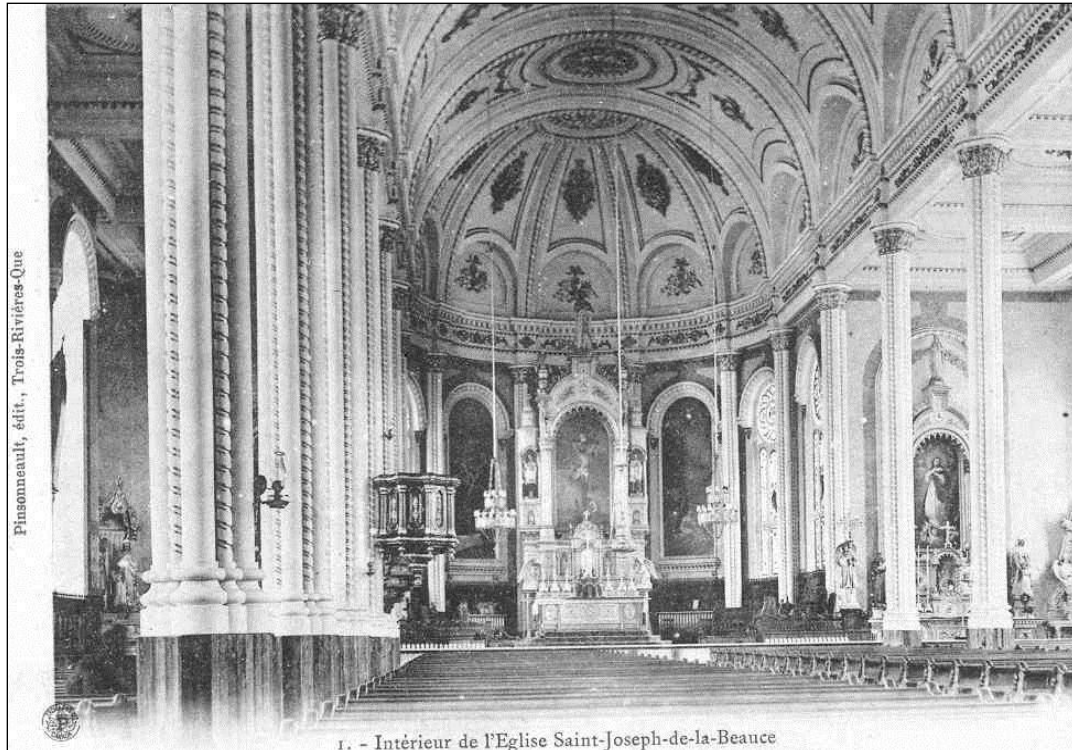


Illustration 7. *Interior of the Church, in the early twentieth century.* It looks almost exactly the same a century later. ASPB: PR129-1-3-12-STJO-18.

As can be seen from Illustration 7, the results were impressive. Anywhere else in Canada outside Québec it would easily have qualified as a cathedral. Although the new church was somewhat longer and narrower than the one it replaced, its 20-meter-high nave was twice as tall. The interior is a fantasy of white and gold plaster and woodwork, a dramatically raised sanctuary with an elaborate main altar, sculpted pillars and tall rounded windows. It is an excellent example of a trend in a number of Québec churches

⁵⁰ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 400-402.

⁵¹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 401.

⁵² Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 455.

of the era of, as Alan Gowans notes, “a transformation of Baroque style into a vehicle for bringing high Victorian picturesque eclecticism into Quebec church architecture.”⁵³ While an architectural historian might view the church in such terms, its Catholic parishioners would have seen messages about their beliefs instead. William Westfall points out that all cultures organize their environment and ascribe particular attributes to various areas of the environment, and religions do so as well. They associate certain places with the sacred, and although Christian religions preach that God is everywhere, churches in particular are defined as sacred spaces apart from the secular world where one comes closer to the divinity.⁵⁴ St-Joseph’s parishioners would no doubt have felt closer to the sacred in this building. A line of pillars down the central nave focused the eye on the raised sanctuary and the central altar where every day of the year but Good Friday mass would be celebrated. Above the central altar was a large painting of Christ’s crucifixion. Parishioners would have been aware that inside the tabernacle on the altar were kept the consecrated hosts they believed to be his body and blood. To the right of the main altar was a side altar dedicated to his mother, the Virgin Mary. As in all Catholic churches, on the side walls of the church there were also the “stations of the cross,” fourteen pictorial tableaux depicting the last hours of Christ on earth. And looming high above the congregation was the elaborate pulpit from which the *curé* preached the tenets of their religion.

As impressive as it was, however, the parish church of St-Joseph was far from the most ornate late-nineteenth-century church in the Beauce. That distinction easily went to the even more baroquely elaborate parish church in St-Georges (1900). Its long dramatic nave was flanked by a second floor gallery running the length of the church on both sides. Crystal chandeliers hanging from an elaborately carved and gilded ceiling illuminated the white and gold interior at night, and daylight entered through its tall arched windows.⁵⁵ A high central steeple over the main entrance was flanked by two smaller ones. Nor was St-Joseph the largest. The Reverend Proulx’s Gothic Revival church in Ste-Marie (1854-66), designed by the well-known Québec City architect

⁵³ Gowans, *Building Canada*, 112-13, and Plate 152 (n.p.).

⁵⁴ William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston, 1989), 126-7.

⁵⁵ For more on the interior of the church, see Carrier, *L’ensemble institutionnel*, 22-45.

Charles Baillargé, was on a larger scale.⁵⁶ Still, the new building must have amply gratified the parishioners of St-Joseph. They could finally have held their heads high, after having been sadly aware of the sorry state of their uncompleted church and the splendours of the churches in the neighbouring parishes. One might think that having accomplished so much construction and after contributing so much money for religious purposes, the parishioners would have been content to pause in their endeavours.

The Convent

However, even as the decoration of the interior of the new church was proceeding, Antoine Martel had apparently been looking for approval for a new convent from Archbishop Taschereau who noted after his pastoral visit of 1872, “M. Martel m’a demandé la permission de bâtir un couvent; il voudrait y consacrer ses épargnes. Je lui ai répondu que j’avais besoin d’y penser.”⁵⁷ Once he had received Taschereau’s permission, Martel began raising the necessary money and organizing the local transport of construction materials, as can be seen in his sermon notes for the twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth Sundays after Pentecost, late in the autumn of 1873. The first notice of a *corvée* for the convent is found in his “Livre de prônes” for the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, where he left a note to remind himself, “Avertir les gens que je leur demanderai une corvée pour charroyer la pierre du couvent qui est chez Narcisse Plante, une journée chaque”. One week later he wrote another note, “Nous commencerons à faire la corvée pour charroyer la pierre & la sable du couvent cette semaine.” This was followed by a list for each day of the week of the habitants from each *arrondissement* of the parish responsible for the work.⁵⁸ By 12 May, just over two weeks later, he had collected a subscription of \$3,800 from the parish, to be paid in four installments. Again, the parish followed the traditional procedure of choosing syndics to organise the details of construction and the *fabrique* donated the necessary land by the

⁵⁶ Christina Cameron, *Charles Baillargé Architect and Engineer* (Montreal and Kingston, 1989), 71-2; and Provost, *Sainte-Marie: Histoire religieuse*, 140-52. For a thoughtful discussion on the use of revived Gothic as the most suitable expression of Christian church architecture in Victorian Canada, see Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 126-58.

⁵⁷ AAQ 69 CD 15, “Cahier de visite 1869 et 1870 par Mgr. de Baillargeon, 1871 et 1872 par Mgr. Taschereau,” vol. 15, 202.

⁵⁸ ASPB, FFSJ. “Prônes, 1872, 14 Oct. à ...[n.d.],” 45-47.

end of April. On 24 September, the Archbishop came in person to bless the cornerstone.⁵⁹ The architect J.F. Peachy obligingly donated plans at no charge, and designed a building measuring 18 meters by 12 meters, with one floor of stone and two of wood, crowned by a small bell tower. Less than a year later, the resident five Sisters of Charity from Québec received their first pupils in the convent.

The numbers of students grew steadily over the next decade, reaching fifty registrations for September 1887 when a fire destroyed most of the building on 31 August. Work began right away on reconstruction when a second fire caused another setback. Finally, on 1 September 1888, the nuns took possession of the nearly completed and much enlarged new convent. The new building, again designed by Peachy, measured 24 meters by 18 meters, with the top three floors constructed of red brick and sitting atop the ground floor of stone. Of a style vaguely Victorian eclectic, sometimes called “Second Empire” in inspiration, it had a mansard roof with small dormers, and an ornate bell tower sitting on a shallow projection that relieved the plainness of the facade. The tall slightly arched windows were surrounded in pale yellow brick and an imposing double stairway led up to the front door.⁶⁰ Set on the rising ground about 60 meters north of the church, the building has a panoramic view of the village, the Chaudière and gently rising hills on the southwestern side of the river.

Shortly thereafter, another expense associated with the decoration of the church arose when, on 11 February 1877, an assembly of the churchwardens budgeted another thousand dollars for Antoine Martel to spend in Europe for statues and candelabra for the altars, a monstrance, a carpet for the choir, and the like. The *curé* was travelling to Rome to help celebrate Pius IX’s golden jubilee as a priest, and the *marguilliers*, or perhaps Martel himself, appear to have considered this, the first voyage by a parish priest of St-Joseph overseas, to be an ideal opportunity to acquire high-quality religious objects for the parish. Martel’s return six months later on 25 July was the occasion for a triumphal celebration. A hundred carriages welcomed him home, and in the evening, the village was illuminated by candles in the windows of the houses. Neighbouring priests attended

⁵⁹ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 484-85. The *fabrique* also generously voted to permit the nuns to pasture a cow on parish land, free of charge.

⁶⁰ Poulin et al., *St-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 204. It remained a convent until 1973. Since 1979, when the municipality took it over, it has been the home of the Musée Marius Barbeau and the archives of the Société du patrimoine des Beaucerons.

to welcome Martel's return. He brought with him eight statues, a new monstrance, other unspecified religious ornaments, a candelabrum, a black funeral pall to be draped over the casket during a requiem mass, a new carpet for the choir, and banners.⁶¹ Four years later, the same year as the railroad arrived in the village of St-Joseph, the parishioners spent \$2,300 for an organ. Built by Louis Mitchell of Montréal, it was formally inaugurated with a solemn mass, followed by a public concert on 12 July 1881.⁶²

The Campaign for a New Presbytery

While the parishioners seem to have contributed their time and money over two decades to the various projects noted above without perceptible murmurs of dissent, the same cannot be said for the next proposed financial expense. On 4 January 1885, the *curé*, Antoine Martel, raised the issue of the need for a new presbytery at a meeting of the freeholders (*francs tenanciers*) in the sacristy of the church. The existing presbytery was too small for the *curé*, his two vicars, and visiting clergymen, but could be used as the "salle publique pour les habitants" when a new one was built. This was just the first step in a rather prolonged process of discussion and negotiation that would see seven more years pass before a palatial new presbytery was finally completed, one that was even grander and far more expensive than the one that Martel had initially dared to propose. Martel envisaged a two-storey rectory in brick or stone, but also warned that it would not cost the parish less than \$8000. In order to meet that kind of expense, he proposed that the Archbishop be asked to authorize the *fabrique* to borrow half that sum, while the parishioners would be assessed for the balance. However, while recognizing the need for a new presbytery, the leading churchwarden, Zéphirin Vézina, proposed that the sum levied on the parishioners be reduced to \$3000, with the rest to be made up by a correspondingly larger loan. Martel was displeased, but the majority of the freeholders at the meeting sided with Vézina.⁶³

After the vote went against him, Martel declared he would never raise the matter again. He was as good as his word, because, by the end of September, he had submitted

⁶¹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 435-438.

⁶² Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 456-7. In 1912-13, the parish paid another \$6,045 to the Casavant brothers of Saint-Hyacinthe to restore and enlarge the original organ. See also Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel*, 44-5.

⁶³ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 477-78.

his resignation. The next time he returned to St-Joseph was in 1903, after his death, when he was buried beneath the choir of the parish church.⁶⁴ It fell to his successor, François-Xavier Gosselin, to see the project through to completion, but three years passed before the next round of discussions even began. It was during the course of his pastoral visit of inspection of 22-23 June 1888 that Cardinal Taschereau himself re-opened the matter. Writing that he had nothing but praise for the way the parish accounts had been managed for the years 1884-87, Taschereau noted the solid state of the *fabrique*'s finances recalling the resolution of three years earlier to build the new presbytery, and he urged the parish to proceed with the task.⁶⁵

The following spring Gosselin dusted off the original plans that the Québec architect Ferdinand Peachy has prepared for Martel four years earlier. Peachy's connection with the parish's previous construction plans might have been expected to have given him an advantage over other architects, but Gosselin also seems to have had discussions with the architect Georges-Émile Tanguay, recently returned from Europe. Tanguay even offered to prepare a set of new plans for the presbytery at no charge. "J'ai une grande envie de lui accorder sa demande," wrote Gosselin to the Cardinal on 26 May 1889.⁶⁶ No wonder! Tanguay's design was even more ambitious than the original. It called for a small palace of white brick, two storeys tall, with a mansard roof, central heating, and an attached kitchen wing. There was also to be a barn/stable beside the building. Taschereau gave his approval to the ambitious plans, noting again that someday the Beauce would have its own bishop, that St-Joseph's parish church would become his cathedral, and that it was therefore necessary to think about the future. Nevertheless, the shock must have been tremendous when the price tag for the putative episcopal palace came in at \$22,700, over two and one-half times more than Martel's original estimate of \$8000. Also, given the state of the parish finances that had shown a surplus of only \$500-\$600 per year, Gosselin stated that the originally-projected debt of \$5000 could be managed, but not much more. Another assembly of the churchwardens had to be called to decide whether to proceed with a higher extraordinary levy upon the parishioners, or to abandon the project altogether. According to Gosselin, the reason for a much larger

⁶⁴ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 482.

⁶⁵ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 512.

⁶⁶ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 514.

projected outlay than had been originally foreseen was because the cost of labour had gone up substantially in the intervening few years.⁶⁷

It is a measure of Taschereau's great interest in the project, perhaps because of his family's long ties to nearby Ste-Marie where he was born in the seigneurial manor house in 1820, that he replied the very next day in a letter he appears to have written personally, rather than dictating to a secretary.⁶⁸ "Bon courage toujours!" he wrote, "les meilleures oeuvres sont précisément celles qui remontent plus de difficultés." Taschereau continued, "Il faut songer à l'avenir et disposer le tout de manière que si, avant la fin du monde, il y a un évêque à Saint-Joseph, on puisse commodément y ajouter ce qui sera nécessaire."⁶⁹ In 1882 he had turned down a request for an industrial college in the village, noting that planning for an eventual seminary for the future bishopric would be a better idea. Returning to the enticing theme that he had used seven years before on a future bishopric in the Beauce, and brushing aside the financial fears, Taschereau argued that the parish could easily assume a debt of \$7000 and, if some unnecessary details like a cheaper red brick could be substituted for the white, and if the furnace were installed later, the work could and should proceed.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, despite the Cardinal's overt support, an assembly of the freeholders decided a week later, on 8 December, that this project was just too costly for St-Joseph. Again they rejected a levy of \$4000, and also a second motion for an additional levy of \$2000, although in the second case by the narrowest of margins, eighty-five to eighty-three votes.⁷¹ The assembly thus signified that it thought a new presbytery, or at least on that grandiose scale, was no longer possible. Normally, that should have been the end of the matter.

The petition that circulated to the male property holders in the parish between 17 December 1888 and 4 January 1889, in favour of going heavily into debt in order to build the imposing new rectory, is another indication that the presbytery project had determined support, although it also appears that adult male literacy at least had not

⁶⁷ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 516.

⁶⁸ Henri Têu, *Les Évêques de Québec* (Québec, 1889), 645.

⁶⁹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 465

⁷⁰ SPB:FFSJ 4.2.2 Correspondance, no. 32, Taschereau to Gosselin, 30 November 1889. The theme, "avant la fin du monde, il y aura un évêché en Beauce," though a favourite of Taschereau's, has been turned around by one sceptical inhabitant of the Beauce, whom I heard declare in May, 2005, "avant un évêché en Beauce, il y aura la fin du monde!"

⁷¹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 521.

progressed very much. Of the 444 signatories on the document, 333 of them – or 75 per cent – indicated their support for the proposal with an ‘X,’ rather than by writing their names.⁷² This can be interpreted in different ways. It may have meant that three quarters of the male family heads in the parish were unable even to sign their names, or it was simply a desire on the part of some not to seem more learned than their neighbours, or perhaps an inability to read and understand the contents of the petition on their own.⁷³ A few months later, with the arrival of spring in 1890, the project for the grand presbytery arose from the dead. On 20 April, another general assembly of the men of the parish met and not only reversed their previous decision, they went a step further. They not only voted to proceed with building a new presbytery, but also decided to build an even larger one than the proposal they had recently rejected. It was to be five feet wider, the furnace would be retained after all, and the parish would go into debt for a total of \$16,000. As might have been expected of men in their positions, the faith of Gosselin and Taschereau was strong enough to move mountains, or at least the odd recalcitrant parish council. If, as has been claimed, the Lord works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform, then it is surely true that Taschereau worked in equally subtle ones.

While the parishioners could differ with their *curé* on matters such as this, they found it much more difficult to resist the power and prestige of the persuasive Taschereau on those occasions when he took a personal interest in the affairs of St-Joseph. In addition to being their archbishop, he had, since 1886, also been Canada’s first cardinal, a prince of the Catholic Church and one of the handful of men eligible to elect, and even to become, the pope. Having outmaneuvered influential ultramontane prelates like Bourget of Montréal and Laflèche of Trois-Rivières in the course of his career, overawing a small vestry council must have presented few problems for the aristocratic prelate.⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, three days after the general assembly had agreed to the larger expenditures, the parish received Taschereau’s “très content” approval to proceed.⁷⁵ Taschereau must have felt that merely passively waiting for the correct decision to come about was not the

⁷² SPB: FFSJ, 4.2.1, “Actes de Syndics #6: Pétition des paroissiens de St-Joseph pour la construction d’un nouveau presbytère à St-Joseph, par F.X. Gosselin, curé, St-Joseph, 4 janvier 1889.”

⁷³ For more on the difficulties of measuring literacy in other French Canadian communities from the parish registers and government censuses during this period, see Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 222-3.

⁷⁴ Nive Voisine and Jean Hamelin, “Monseigneur Elzéar-Alexandre Taschereau et la création du diocèse de Nicolet,” SCHEC. *Sessions d’étude* 52 (1985), 35-50.

⁷⁵ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 524-5.

most effective way to accomplish the Lord's work. Miracles do happen, but, as the local historian Abbé Nadeau noted, it was under "l'influence du cardinal, du curé doux et tenace, de quelques citoyens influents" that the parishioners overcame their reluctance to contract such a large collective debt.

While it never became the episcopal palace of the phantom diocese of the Beauce, the completed building that Gosselin blessed on 21 February 1892 certainly had what can be deemed palatial proportions.⁷⁶ It still is impressive by any standard, and more resembles a small château than a humble clerical residence. The building measures 16.5 meters by 12.6 meters, and was built in an eclectic Second Empire Renaissance style of red brick with dressed stone corners and window surrounds. The rectory's two-and-one-half storeys have a mansard roof topped with dormers, round lantern windows and lacy cast iron fleur-de-lys decorations. The front and rear elevations are identical, and a covered veranda runs around three sides, the fourth being the attached kitchen building that measures 7.8 meters by 9.3 meters.⁷⁷ When the syndics made their final accounting for the rectory on 26 September 1897, the total that the parishioners had spent came to \$22,279, or over twenty times the price of an average farm in the parish, as noted at the beginning of this chapter.⁷⁸ On a fine day from his spacious south-facing veranda overlooking the Chaudière River, the *curé* could occasionally reflect on the progress of religion in the parish and watch as the trains of the Quebec Central passed by his garden.

⁷⁶ For the history of, and the end of any hopes for, a diocese in the Beauce by 1951, see Courville, Poulin, et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*, 583-7.

⁷⁷ Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel*, 47.

⁷⁸ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 554.



Illustration 8. *The presbytery of St-Joseph, north side, facing the church across the street, circa 1900. Source: ASPB: PR129-1-3-12-STJO-67.*

The Educational Infrastructure

If the *curé* went to the north side of the presbytery, he could also compare the imposing parish church and the unimpressive schools, symbols of the slow progress of education in St-Joseph. Across the street from the presbytery, could be seen the latest addition to the parish's educational infrastructure, one that symbolized the hopes and disappointments of clerical and lay school promoters in St-Joseph. The *fabrique* voted unanimously on 8 February 1891 to donate the former presbytery to the local school commission for use as a boy's school.⁷⁹ In 1895 the parish school commission decided to spend \$410 to build a one-room schoolhouse in arrondissement number one.⁸⁰ The total cost of \$4,920 for a dozen of these spartan wooden schoolhouses, and some that were built earlier cost much less, stands in marked contrast to far vaster sums totalling \$70,000 that the parish dedicated to its parish church, presbytery, and convent. Shortly thereafter, the parishioners also raised \$25,000 for an orphanage (1907-08) and \$14,000 for a boy's

⁷⁹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 528.

⁸⁰ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph de Beauce*, 255.

school (1911).⁸¹ The parishioners initially budgeted \$5,000 to decorate the interior of the church and to furnish it with ritual objects, statues and paintings, but the final cost was over \$28,000.⁸² To put these sums into perspective, Yves Roby and Jean Hamelin have estimated that the gross revenues that Québec farmers earned from agriculture, on average, were \$230 annually in the late nineteenth century, less than half what Ontario farmers derived from their land.⁸³ In the period 1852-91, there were approximately 300 farmers in the parish whose holdings varied in size and quality, and whose financial contributions would have been levied proportional to their income. By dividing the cost of the church, convent, and rectory among them over the twenty-seven-year period we arrive at a mean annual contribution of \$8.60 each. In 1887, that sum would have paid for nearly four gallons of wine (at \$1.50 per gallon).⁸⁴ Three years later, the fifth published volume of the *mandements* and pastoral letters of the bishops of Québec cost the parishioners \$2, and in 1894, a ladder cost them \$7.52.⁸⁵ The levies for religious construction projects such as these were in addition to the tithes that farmers paid to support the Church, and the municipal school taxes. Figures on individual farm incomes are unavailable for St-Joseph, but in 1885 the estimated value of a farm of 100 arpents in the parish was in the range of \$900-\$1000. This might suggest that parishioners could easily afford to contribute the sums they devoted to these projects, although no records have been found on the extent of their levels of indebtedness, or the numbers of them carrying farm mortgages.⁸⁶

Despite strong clerical support for elementary schooling, St-Joseph's parishioners seem to have been much more tight-fisted when it came to the education of their children, although they were far from exceptional in that regard. Roger Magnuson has pointed out that one of the most perplexing and intractable problems facing educational officials in late-nineteenth-century Québec was the poor state of the province's rural schools. They

⁸¹ For an excellent overview, see Daniel Carrier, *L'ensemble institutionnel et le palais de justice de Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce* (Ville de Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, 2007).

⁸² Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 398, 405.

⁸³ Hamelin and Roby, *Histoire économique du Québec, 1851-1896* (Québec, 1971), 22.

⁸⁴ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 510. In 1887, the churchwardens recorded that they paid \$45 for thirty gallons of wine for the year and \$89.82 for firewood to heat the church.

⁸⁵ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 523, 546. For prices for other consumer goods in the Eastern Townships in 1871, see also Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 167-8.

⁸⁶ SPB, Fonds Rémi Bisson, "Abregé du Cadastre de la Paroisse de St-Joseph de Beauce, 1885." On farm mortgages, see Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 172-9.

suffered from a variety of afflictions that included an indifferent provincial government, “defiant and tight-fisted school boards, a weak tax base, and unqualified and inexperienced teachers.”⁸⁷ At the local level, the low salaries paid to teachers, the indifference of parents to educational matters that resulted in their children’s high rates of absenteeism, and the many deficiencies of the school buildings were concerns that persisted well into the twentieth century.⁸⁸ These problems were to be found in full measure in St-Joseph.

If the majority of St-Joseph’s parents were indifferent to education, the same could not be said of its parish priests. The first mention of schooling in the parish was during the tenure of Bernard-Benjamin Decoigne, who served as *curé* from 1823 to 1829, a cleric extremely interested in the cause of education for the young of the parish.⁸⁹ In 1824, with the passage of the Act of the Assembly that permitted *fabriques* to finance elementary schools in their parishes with one quarter of their annual revenue, the Reverend Decoigne bought a plot of land next to the property of the *fabrique*, perhaps intending that it should be used for a school.⁹⁰ Whether he actually did establish a school, however, is unclear because, as Christine Veilleux notes, few schools actually opened in the Beauce.⁹¹ In 1845, shortly after Lower Canada’s Elementary Schools Act came into effect that mandated the establishment of locally-elected school commissions in parishes and townships, St-Joseph experienced a flurry of activity over educational matters.⁹² The four elected school commissioners of the parish met under the chairmanship of the *curé*, Charles-E. Poiré, a school commissioner *ex-officio*, and began their work of dividing the parish into thirteen *arrondissements scolaires*, that they formalized seven months later. They also engaged teachers for nine of their schools and decided that the texts to be used

⁸⁷ Roger Magnuson, *The Two Worlds of Quebec Education During the Traditional Era, 1760-1940*, (London, Ont., 2005), 95. For similar observations that applied to Trois-Rivières, see Jocelyne Murray, “La scolarisation élémentaire en Mauricie (1850-1900): esquisse de la population scolaire et des résultants de ses apprentissages,” *RHAF* 55: 4 (Spring 2002), 573-601.

⁸⁸ Magnuson, *The Two Worlds of Quebec Education*, 177-84. For more details on conditions in the rural schools in the early twentieth century, see Jacques Dorion, *Les écoles de rang au Québec* (Montréal, 1979), and Auguste Lapalme, *Un pèlerinage à l’école de rang* (Montréal, 1928).

⁸⁹ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 277.

⁹⁰ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 265, 277.

⁹¹ Christine Veilleux, “L’instruction en Beauce,” in France Bélanger, Sylvia Berberi, Jean-René Breton, Danile Carrier, and Renald Lessard, *La Beauce et les Beaucerons: Portraits d’une région, 1737-1987*. (Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, 1990), 203-4.

⁹² Jean-Pierre Charland, “L’histoire de l’éducation au Québec - regard sur la production récente”, *RHAF* 50: 4 (Spring 1997), 604-5; Little, *State and Society in Transition*, 212.

would include a primer, and manuals of arithmetic, religion, geography, grammar and the history of Canada.⁹³ More controversially, they also conducted a property assessment in the parish in order to determine the size of each owner's share of the new compulsory school levy. They also attempted to calculate the number of children in each *arrondissement* in the five-to-sixteen-year-old age group in order more equitably to distribute the government grant for education among the *arrondissements*.⁹⁴

The compulsory school levy inspired a great deal of popular resistance and caused conflicts elsewhere in Lower Canada, particularly in the Bois-Francs in 1846, and the District of Trois-Rivières that witnessed the notorious "guerre des éteignoirs" in 1850.⁹⁵ A number of the same popular grievances were to be found in Dorchester County, including St-Joseph. The most contentious issue was that people were unhappy about the property assessment that was to be the basis of the compulsory school levy. In 1846, school commissioners reported that they had met with silence, which they attributed to "mauvais vouloir" from many people on the number of school-age children, although they calculated there were 765 potential pupils in the thirteen *arrondissements*.⁹⁶ One commissioner even reported that nearly forty property owners still refused to pay the levy, and that "des scènes scandaleuses, même dangereuses ont eu lieu," including insults hurled at commissioners, broken windows, and threats of arson to the homes of education supporters.⁹⁷ But no violence occurred and by December 1850, after a year-long campaign led by the *curé*, Frédéric Caron, the *fabrique* voted to cede a section of its land in order to construct a school near the parish church that cost approximately \$200, reversing their decision of five years before.⁹⁸

Despite the acceptance of schooling, at least in principle, as early as the 1850s, Lower Canada's Superintendent of Education Jean-Baptiste Meilleur cited the lack of

⁹³ ACSBE, "Journal des procédés des Commissaires d'école pour la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce." See also Gérard Poulin, Diane Doyon, Suzanne Poulin, Jean-Claude Morin, and Réal Audin. *Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce 1737-1987: 250 ans d'histoire et d'amour* (St-Joseph-de-Beauce, 1987), 232-33.

⁹⁴ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce*, 233.

⁹⁵ Little, *State and Society in Transition*, 212-18; Wendie Nelson, "'Rage Against the Dying of the Light: Interpreting the Guerre des Éteignoirs,'" *CHR* 81.4 (December 2000), 551-8

⁹⁶ ACSBE, "Journal des procédés des Commissaires d'école pour la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce."

⁹⁷ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph de Beauce*, 233.

⁹⁸ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph de Beauce*, 235-6. "La fabrique demande la permission de céder un morceau de son terrain pour une maison d'école." AAQ, "Registre des lettres," I-225. 9 December, 1850. See also Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph," 328, for the dimensions: "90 pieds de largeur sur $\frac{3}{4}$ d'arpent de profondeur."

adequate and properly maintained and furnished schoolhouses and their lack of even the most basic learning materials such as paper, pens and ink.⁹⁹ In 1864, the provincial Superintendent of Education noted that the three main problems in the educational system continued to be the difficulties in procuring educational material, books, and maps; the inadequate and even unhealthy nature and small size of most schools, and the low salaries paid to teachers.¹⁰⁰ Even so, P.-E. Béland, for several decades School Inspector for Beauce County, found that seven of the eleven schools in St-Joseph to be “bien tenues” and three in particular were first class.¹⁰¹ Even though his report for 1876-77 characterized the school houses of the parish as being “too small,” with the exception of the “magnificent convent,” he found the schools generally satisfactory.¹⁰² Louis-Antoine Martel, on the other hand, found the condition of the schoolhouses in the parish less than satisfactory. In a sermon note for the fourth Sunday of Advent, just before Christmas, 1881, he criticized the school buildings as being too small and cold, and lacking in books, tables and even blackboards.¹⁰³ In 1894, little had changed. The Superintendent told St-Joseph’s school commissioners that two of their schools needed to be rebuilt, four more needed to be repaired, and the rest were badly furnished.¹⁰⁴

In addition to living with the unimpressive state of the buildings, the parish had a history of cutting corners on the salaries of its teachers. At first, as Antoine Racine noted in his 1853 report to the archbishop, there was sufficient willingness in the parish to support financially the five female teachers and the male schoolmaster. He also thought it would not be long before it would be possible to hire good schoolmasters.¹⁰⁵ In 1850, St-Joseph’s school commission reported that it paid its ten teachers, six of whom had diplomas, between \$84 and \$140 per annum, depending on their qualifications.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ J.-B. Meilleur, *Rapport du Surintendant de l’Éducation pour Bas-Canada pour 1850-51* (Québec, 1852). For the same observations, see Pierre O. Chauveau, *Rapport du Surintendant de l’Éducation pour Bas-Canada pour 1864*, (Québec, 1865), v.

¹⁰⁰ *Rapport du Surintendant de l’Éducation pour le Bas-Canada pour 1864* (Québec, 1865), v. For the persistence of the complaint on low salaries in the district, see the report of Béland’s successor as inspector, Amédée Tanguay, in *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Province of Quebec for the Year 1891-92* (Quebec, 1898), 74.

¹⁰¹ *Rapport du Surintendant de l’Éducation, 1864*, 89.

¹⁰² *Report of the Superintendent of Education, 1876-77*, 53.

¹⁰³ ASPB FFSJ, “Prônes du 30 Octobre 1880 au 19 Décembre 1886,” 45.

¹⁰⁴ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph de Beauce*, 255.

¹⁰⁵ AAQ 61 CD, St. Joseph de Beauce 2, “Rapport de Mr. A. Racine, 1853.”

¹⁰⁶ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph de Beauce*, 236.

However, J.O.C. Arcand reported to Meilleur in March 1860 that one consequence of the lack of sufficient school funds in St-Joseph was that he and his fellow commissioners felt obliged to hire teachers without certificates. These less qualified teachers could be paid half the salary of a teacher with a certificate, enabling all the schools in the parish to remain open. Otherwise, he argued, it would be necessary to close four schools. Meilleur remained unmoved, noting that there was no shortage of qualified teachers, and insisting that St-Joseph's commissioners hire them or lose their grant.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, because many teachers received very small salaries, it was not surprising, as the local inspector Béland pointed out in his report to Meilleur in 1853, that very few people felt encouraged to embrace a career "which is now so thankless, so little respected and so unprofitable," a theme he reiterated in reports over the next several years.¹⁰⁸ In 1877, the school commissioners wanted to get rid of the one male teacher because his salary of \$300 was costing them too much, and hire a sixteen-year-old female with no diploma. In the end they agreed to keep him on, but reduced his salary and hired the young woman. In 1879, the Superintendent threatened to withhold the school subsidy unless the commissioners let the young woman go and improved the parish schools.¹⁰⁹ But in 1892, wages had not improved. The annual salaries of St-Joseph's eleven female teachers ranged between \$68 and \$100.¹¹⁰ In comparison, in 1894, the parish paid the organist \$80 a year, and the beadle in the church \$240, or more than twice a teacher's salary.¹¹¹

Another inconsistency, this time on the part of the clergy, can be seen in their attitude towards the education of young males. For boys in rural areas who might have wished to obtain an education geared to their practical needs, there was yet another obstacle that Béland had identified. In his 1874-75 report, he argued that "on a trop de collèges classiques et pas assez d'écoles modèles."¹¹² Some of that imbalance in educational priorities can be attributed to the attitude of the Church, as the parishioners of

¹⁰⁷ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph de Beauce*, 241.

¹⁰⁸ *Report of the Superintendent of Education for Lower Canada for 1853*, 86. He noted the same situation in his 1864 report. *Rapport du Surintendant de l'Éducation pour le Bas-Canada pour 1864* (Québec, 1865), 88-9.

¹⁰⁹ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph de Beauce*, 244.

¹¹⁰ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph de Beauce*, 252-3.

¹¹¹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 546.

¹¹² *Rapport du Surintendant de l'Instruction publique pour l'année 1875-76 et documents relatives à 1874-75* (Québec, 1876), 153.

St-Joseph found out for themselves a few years later. Archbishop Taschereau sent a discouraging response on 20 December 1882 to their proposal to build an industrial and commercial school for boys in the parish, despite their pledge to provide \$18,000 to construct it. Taschereau argued that since there was already such an institution in Ste-Marie, a mere half-hour distant by train, prospective students from St-Joseph could attend it instead. Moreover, there was already an overabundance of “jeunes gens déclassés” who found it difficult to obtain employment. Furthermore, since one day there might be a bishop in the Beauce, with a strong hint that St-Joseph would be his seat, it would be necessary to establish a seminary. He urged the “brave and courageous citizens” of the village to concentrate their resources on building a good school with good teachers that would be more profitable for themselves and their families.¹¹³ This was also the same time when the campaign for the new presbytery began.

Advanced schooling for the majority of boys of St-Joseph would have to wait another three decades until 1911, when the parish spent \$14,000 to build a small college run by the Marist Brothers.¹¹⁴ But a small number of more privileged boys in St-Joseph did not need to avail themselves of the school in Ste-Marie because they attended the private model school in their village that a dozen leading citizens decided to set up for their children in 1884. They paid the teacher \$300 per annum and also undertook to cover the cost of heating, lighting and equipping the building, “L’Académie de St-Joseph, which had twelve students aged between ten and sixteen years of age when it opened.¹¹⁵ Amédée Tanguay, Béland’s successor as school inspector for the counties of Beauce, Dorchester and Megantic, called it a “very satisfactory” institution in his 1889 report, and noted that parents of boys there could be assured their sons would receive “une instruction pratique qui les mettra en position d’exercer des emplois dans le commerce ou dans l’industrie.”¹¹⁶ On the other hand, the following year, Tanguay informed St-Joseph’s school commissioners that progress was still slow and that a number of deficiencies continued to plague the other parish schools. While he professed himself satisfied “on the whole,” with the twelve schools that he inspected, Tanguay also indicated that only

¹¹³ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 464-65.

¹¹⁴ Carrier, *L’ensemble institutionnel et le palais de justice de Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce*, 57.

¹¹⁵ Poulin et al, *Saint-Joseph de Beauce*, 246-7.

¹¹⁶ *Rapport du Surintendant de l’Instruction publique pour l’année 1888-89* (Québec, 1889), 80.

three of them were good, thanks to very competent female teachers. In four others the lower quality of the teachers was partially to blame for their mediocre or passable rating, and five were poor or unsatisfactory for the same reason.¹¹⁷

In addition to the poor quality of other teachers, Tanguay noted the lack of discipline in a number of the inferior schools, as well as “élèves ignorants et bien dissipés,” cold and unhealthy classrooms, and insufficient furniture and teaching materials.¹¹⁸ By the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, Tanguay, the school inspector, was more optimistic on educational matters. In his 1891-92 report to the Superintendent, he evaluated the schools in St-Joseph as “very good.” In his report for 1899-1900, he indicated that St-Joseph had the two best school municipalities (the village and the rest of the parish) in his area of inspection. Out of a possible score of sixty points, he awarded the three village schools fifty-four points and the eleven schools in the other parts of the parish forty-six points.¹¹⁹ The village schools in particular scored the highest possible marks, ten out of ten, for observing the course of study and for using approved books, and nine out of ten for the general condition of the school buildings and furniture, teacher salaries, and the success they obtained.¹²⁰

While the schools in the rest of the parish came close to matching the quality of these in the village, their scores were lower because of the condition of their furniture, the teachers’ salaries, and the lower success that the teachers had obtained with their pupils. He characterized the model school as excellent and the private academy in the convent as also being very good.¹²¹ His positive assessment of the convent school, with its 341 pupils in 1901, agreed with the Church’s own inspector who characterized the building and the furnishing as being very good with ten competent religious and two lay teachers.¹²² However, even though the convent had four pianos and two harmoniums, and twenty-seven “tableaux de catéchisme,” this best school in St-Joseph, possessed only

¹¹⁷ ACSBE, Amédée Tanguay to Commissaires d’écoles, St-Joseph, Beauce. 12 March 1890.

¹¹⁸ ACSBE, Amédée Tanguay to Commissaires d’écoles, St-Joseph, Beauce. 12 March 1890.

¹¹⁹ *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Province of Quebec for the Year 1899-1900* (Quebec, 1901), 102.

¹²⁰ *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1899-1900*, xlii.

¹²¹ *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1899-1900*, 240-41.

¹²² *Bulletin Statistique Concernant les Académies et Ecoles indépendantes de l’archi-diocèse*, 1901.

one terrestrial globe, and lacked good geographic maps, scientific charts, instruments for physics, and materials to teach geology, ornithology, botany, or entomology.¹²³

Conclusion

The combination of apparently contradictory impulses – large elaborate churches and rudimentary school houses, prickly personal independence and support for the Church – suggests that the relationship between the people and their religion was more complex than surface appearances would have indicated. The time, effort, and money that the parishioners of St-Joseph devoted to constructing their parish churches and ancillary religious buildings since the late eighteenth century shows that support for the outward manifestations of their religion was not a function of a sudden revival of interest in the 1840s. By 1900, the number and scale of the parish's religious buildings certainly suggests people's submission to the clergy. Despite such physical evidence, however, there are several reasons why it would be premature to conclude that the physical domination over the the parish by its sacred architecture concretely symbolized the spiritual domination by the Catholic Church, or that the priests were shepherds of a flock of docile sheep who simply prayed, obeyed, and paid for whatever projects their priests may have had in mind. In addition to their spiritual or religious inspiration, the practical reasons for building some of these structures were closely linked to the social services that the Church provided in the parish. Rather tellingly, the only project about whose necessity the Church authorities needed to expend considerable effort, including the personal intervention of Cardinal Taschereau, was to persuade the parishioners to construct the rather grandiose presbytery. Possibly, as Greer has noted for an earlier period, the Church's definition of the presbytery as the lodging for the *curé*, rather than the *habitants'* view that its public rooms were for the use of the parishioners for vestry meetings since they had paid to build it, was one reason why the projected cost of the presbytery had also occasioned much more resistance among the parishioners.¹²⁴

In contrast, there was no recorded resistance to constructing the convent to house the nuns and their school for the young women of the parish possibly because a convent

¹²³ Bulletin Statistique Concernant les Académies et Ecoles indépendantes de l'archi-diocèse," 1901.

¹²⁴ Greer, *The Patriotes and the People*, 61-3.

might have been seen as benefitting more people than the parish priest, and more in keeping with the needs of parishioners. At the same time, however, the poor state of the school buildings and low salaries paid to the teachers ultimately reflected unwillingness in the parish to devote the same proportion of their resources to education as they did for the church. In stark contrast to the large sums the parishioners spent on the church, convent, and presbytery, parishioners and *curés* alike were only willing to spend relatively negligible sums on St-Joseph's school buildings. But the question is: whose reluctance? The discrepancy between priorities is so great that one must ask the obvious question of whether only the *curés* were to blame for the lopsided deployment of the financial resources of this rich parish. But St-Joseph was not alone in its lopsided priorities. Normand Séguin found that in the Saguenay parish of Notre-Dame d'Hébertville at the end of the nineteenth century that "il en coûtait plus cher aux citoyens pour maintenir le curé et la fabrique que pour administrer la municipalité et l'organisation scolaire."¹²⁵ In St-Joseph's case, certainly Archbishop Taschereau's preference for religious over academic projects in the parish was an influential factor in delaying an industrial school for boys in St-Joseph. At the same time, several *curés* promoted education in the face of indifference from parents and elected parish officials, although they did not support education nearly as strongly as they did the religious building projects in the parish.

As much as the *curés*, or perhaps even more, the parishioners of St-Joseph made key decisions themselves on the extent to which they would contribute to these projects. In the mid-nineteenth century, parishioners were militantly reluctant to pay compulsory school levies, but in the following decades showed no such resistance in taxing themselves for even larger sums for the church and convent. Part of the answer may be that everyone was concerned with the state of their souls, but not everyone felt that education was important whether or not they had school-age children. Another factor may have been that they more willingly agreed to compulsory levies on themselves for the latter, but the state compelled them to pay for education. Then there is the striking contrast between the apparent lack of most parishioners' interest in the parish's

¹²⁵ Normand Séguin, *La Conquête du sol au XIXe siècle* (Sillery, 1977), 190. The combined total revenues for the parish municipality and the school commission amounted to roughly 70 per cent of the combined revenues of the *curé* and the *fabrique* in 1885, and a little over 80 percent in 1895.

elementary schools and the very keen interest that some leading citizens demonstrated in making sure that their children received a good education. They did not have to concern themselves with the public schools, since they could afford to send their offspring to the private institutions they established: the academy for boys and the convent for girls.

Despite noting his parishioners' indulgence in pleasure, and the fact that he found them not as religiously scrupulous as he hoped, Louis-Antoine Martel's 1869 report recognised their generosity in providing the funds to finish the interior of the new church. He concluded, "j'ai bien d'être satisfait de mes paroissiens. On y rencontre dans St-Joseph quelquefois des misères, mais je crois moins que dans d'autres lieux."¹²⁶ But, as the next two chapters will show, the mere fact that the parishioners raised so many impressive buildings for religious purposes does not in itself tell us the extent to which they obeyed or even respected their priests, or how attentive they were to the duties of their Catholic religion.

¹²⁶ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2. A. Martel, "Mémoire sur la Paroisse de St. Joseph." 1872.

Chapter 3

Ministering to a Rural Parish: The Curés of St-Joseph, 1761-1901

No study of the role of religion in a small rural parish such as St-Joseph can proceed very far without looking at the place of the parish priest in the community. Surveyor General Joseph Bouchette observed in 1831 that the parish priest in Lower Canada was an honoured member of the community, and that the majority of the province's parish clergy well deserved the esteem that they received. They were, he said, "labourious in their duties, frugal in their living, decorous in their manners; possessed of much intelligence, and some learning, they are gentle, modest, and benevolent."¹ As will be seen, such positive remarks could equally have been applied to most of the *curés* of St-Joseph. Many of them exemplified the high standards expected of men in their calling, and deservedly received the approbation of their parishioners, although their vocation required them to pay a high personal cost.

The Lower Canadian flock over whom these men were called to be shepherds was not noted for its docility. As Cornelius Jaenen found, most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century visitors remarked on how struck they were by the "independence, assertiveness and ingenuity of the Canadian *habitant*."² Obedience to the clergy, or even to the civil authorities, had not been a notable feature of French-Canadian behaviour in the French colonial period; intendants and bishops alike had regularly complained about their insubordinate spirit.³ According to Jean-Pierre Wallot, such characteristics persisted into the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁴ In 1830, Pierre de Sales Laterrière observed that the most noticeable trait of his fellow *Canadiens* was their "bold spirit of independence," combined with their sense of personal dignity. These characteristics

¹ Joseph Bouchette, *The British Dominions in North America or a Topographical and Statistical Description of the Provinces of Lower and Upper Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia., etc.* Volume 1, (London, 1831), 4-14.

² Cornelius Jaenen, *The Role of the Church in New France* (Toronto and Montreal, 1976), ix.

³ Jaenen, *The Role of the Church in New France*, 122-24, 140-44.

⁴ Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Religion and French-Canadian Mores in the Early Nineteenth Century," *CHR* 52: 1 (March 1971): 51-94.

made them “courteous in their manners, polite in their address, they offend not by rude and rough familiarity, or indifference to the comfort of others; neither do they forget their own dignity, even though they be poor; they cringe not, they fawn not.” Laterrière argued that circumstances had produced people who lived “not in fear of any man’s power or influence” because, “upon themselves only – on their own industry do they depend for subsistence.”⁵

While people’s adherence to the Catholic religion was never in doubt, the expectations of the clergymen about their flock’s behaviour outside of church and how the *habitants* went about the business of living left plenty of potential for conflict. If people had their own ideas of how they wanted to behave that differed from the standards that the Church expected the *curé* to enforce, the personality of the parish priest may have been an important element in resolving or accentuating conflicts. Since the *curé* was the visible representative of the Church – in effect, he *was* the Church – positive perceptions of its man on the spot were of great importance to the hierarchy, if for no other reason than negative perceptions could seriously have impeded the important work of saving souls. If the priest was perceived to be presumptuous, arbitrary, or combative instead of being reserved, modest, and fair, it was not only his own reputation that might have suffered, but the image of the clergy as a whole.⁶ Ultimately, the *curé*’s power over his parish relied “essentiellement sur la volonté de la majorité de la population.”⁷ Similarly, although the French-Canadian colonists in Winslow in the period 1848-81 did conform to orthodox Catholic rites and morality, such as baptizing newly-born infants and receiving communion at Easter, J.I. Little found that “resistance to clerical dictate was persistent enough in the early years to demonstrate that the Church depended heavily on popular consent.”⁸

⁵ From Pierre de Sales Laterrière, *A Political and Historical Account of Lower Canada*, by “A Canadian,” (London, 1830), cited in Bouchette, *The British Dominions in North America*, 412-13.

⁶ Christine Hudon, “Beaucoup de bruits pour rien? Rumeurs, plaintes et scandales autour du clergé dans les paroisses gaspésiennes, 1766-1900,” *RHAF*, 55: 2 (Autumn 2001), 233.

⁷ René Hardy, “Le greffier de la paix et le curé: à propos de l’influence du clergé paroissial en Mauricie,” *Annales de Bretagne et les pays de l’Ouest*, 95, 4: *Les Dynamismes culturels en France et au Québec, colloque France-Québec*, Rennes, 2-3 June 1988, 461.

⁸ J.I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881* (Montreal and Kingston: 1991), 218.

While St-Joseph was largely a peaceful parish where overt conflict with the *curé* was relatively rare, a number of instances of tension between its people and representatives of the Church in the period 1736-1901 illustrate why it was far from being a placid sinecure for the clergymen posted there. In these small communities human relationships counted for a great deal so that the priest's personality and approach to his parishioners influenced people's attitude to the Church. As the examination in Chapter One of St-Joseph's history for the period 1736-1901 has indicated, its parishioners demonstrated independent character traits from the eighteenth century down to the start of the twentieth. As this chapter will show, a *curé* was often caught between the expectations of his vigilant ecclesiastical superiors at Québec and his equally watchful flock; he had to convince both of his adherence to the high standards of good conduct considered essential for the Lower Canadian clergy. We will first describe the Church's expectations about a rural *curé's* desirable inner and exterior qualities and the kinds of missteps he needed to avoid. Then we will examine how the varied experiences of *curés* who served in St-Joseph between 1761 and 1901 matched this benchmark, the extent to which the Church's standards coincided with those of the parishioners, and what happened when his flock determined that a *curé's* behaviour was unsatisfactory. As will be seen, the tenure of the Abbé Frédéric Caron, who served the parish in the period 1847-51, provides a notable example of how aggrieved parishioners resolved a conflict with their *curé* by successfully petitioning the Archbishop of Québec for a his removal. Conflicts are important in revealing one aspect of relations between shepherd and flock in a rural parish, but only as part of the larger more complex relationship between the people and their religion. The several instances when the people of St-Joseph defended their *curés*, or otherwise showed marked signs of respect for them, are equally instructive in revealing the many-sided relationship between Catholicism, the clergy, and the people.

The Country *Curé*

Fulfilling the numerous duties of a rural *curé's* ministry was not easy because, in addition to the many great and small tasks he had to perform for his parishioners, the conduct of his daily life and religious activities had to conform to the detailed expectations of the Church. Understanding the world of a *curé* posted to a rural parish

such as St-Joseph must begin by examining the extent to which the combination of his character and his seminary training might have prepared him for the isolated life of a country parish, far from colleagues to commiserate with or to consult on practical or spiritual matters. The numerous duties that a *curé* was required to fulfil meant that his ministry was never an easy one. In addition to the many great and small tasks he had to perform for his parishioners, the conduct of his daily life and religious activities had to conform to the detailed expectations of the Church as well as his flock. As Christine Hudon has observed, the Church considered that men with certain predispositions of docility, as well as submissiveness, studiousness and, above all, piety were ideal candidates for the priesthood. In addition, their attraction to the elaborate theatricality of the Catholic liturgy, especially after the ultramontanes had succeeded in supplanting local ritual forms by importing “la chorégraphie romaine” to make it more dramatic, had perhaps already differentiated them from their more worldly or less serious friends.⁹ Even though many priests assigned to rural parishes may have grown up with the same customs and family celebrations as their parishioners, their seminary training had imposed a distance from secular pleasures on them and an alternative spiritual vision, a reserve that, as will be seen shortly, they were required to maintain once they had been posted to a parish. The seminary further separated them from the people around them, such as their families, friends, and future parishioners, by making the rules of piety and strict morality integral parts of their inner being.¹⁰ Furthermore, they had to be prepared to renounce all close personal relations of any kind with women and men.¹¹

There were several inherent contradictions within, and between, his many roles, that the country *curé* had to resolve as best he could. Besides the onerous nature of his many duties, he had to take into account the nature of his parishioners and balance them with the expectations of his ecclesiastical superiors. A priest had to be devoted and

⁹ Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles dans le diocèse de Saint-Hyacinthe*, 162-209. For more on the thoroughness of the seminary experience in the formation of the candidates for the priesthood, see Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 102-109; and Serge Gagnon, *Quand le Québec manquait de prêtres: La charge pastorale au Bas-Canada* (Sainte-Foy, 2006), 12-34.

¹⁰ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 142.

¹¹ Christine Hudon and Louise Bienvenue, “Entre franche camaraderie et amours socratiques: L’espace troublé et tenu des amitiés masculines dans les collèges classiques (1840-1960),” *RHAF* 57: 4 (Spring 2004), 481-507.

available, chaste, pious, studious and circumspect.¹² Even for the most devoted priest such an unceasingly busy life in St-Joseph, among strangers who closely watched his every move, must have been an extremely taxing one, both physically and mentally. It would have been even more difficult for the man who looked upon a career in the Church as the means to a comfortable existence. He was entering a community where everyone knew everyone else but where he probably knew no one. Ralph Gibson's observations on the French clergy of the same time period could easily be applied to St-Joseph's *curés*: "The standard of pious behaviour required was too demanding to have been conformed to by anyone who had not internalized the dominant values of the clergy of the time."¹³

Thus there were already aspects of his posting that doubly isolated a country priest, and, once he was installed in his rural parish, there were other personal and practical pressures. He was the key member of the community by virtue of the many aspects of his role as its spiritual leader. In the eyes of the Church and his parishioners, the *curé* was the mediator between the visible practical everyday world and the unseen but influential spiritual one, able to placate the powerful metaphysical forces with appropriate rites that the Church controlled and that only he, in the long-held tradition of "the eminent dignity of the priest," could perform. The *curé's* presence reached into practically every household because, by officiating at the rites of passage that sanctified birth, marriage and death, he was involved in the most important stages of every individual Catholic's life. Once posted to his rural parish, the *curé* could not be absent for any length of time, and never without permission from the archbishop. He had to be available at a moment's notice to administer the last rites to the dying, or to baptise the new-born infants as soon as possible. He had to conduct annual visitations to each household, often over poor roads and long distances.¹⁴ St-Joseph's *curé*, Frédéric Caron, informed one of his colleagues in Québec City on 26 March 1851 that his Easter preparations kept him so busy that he only had time in the evening for his breviary. While his flock enjoyed drinking their rum and dancing, and the young held long

¹² Hudon, "Beaucoup de bruits pour rien?" 234.

¹³ Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (London and New York, 1989), 73.

¹⁴ For a more detailed enumeration and description of the duties of a country clergyman in early-nineteenth-century Lower Canada, see Gagnon. *Quand le Québec manquait de prêtres*, 34-93.

courtships, he had to hear nearly 2000 confessions, and in the previous week he had buried fourteen of his parishioners.¹⁵

A *curé* would have evaluated his effectiveness by the numbers of people who sought his advice, attended Sunday high mass and other devotions, sent their children to the catechism classes, and came to confession in order to receive communion. His daily public religious duties included officiating at mass every day of the year except for Good Friday, as well as the demanding work of preaching and teaching catechism, or ensuring that his vicar did so. In addition, the *curé* had to visit the home of each parishioner at least once a year. As the Reverend A.-C. Dugas wrote of his own experience in another part of Québec, “comme un bon pasteur, il doit connaître tous ses paroissiens, leur état moral et religieux, leurs besoins spirituels; pour cela il fait son recensement et profite de son passage pour bénir les objets pieux qu’on lui présente et offrir lui-même une médaille aux enfants qui n’ont pas communiqué.”¹⁶ Such a visit of inspection probably had different effects on different people, depending on their level of religious participation, intimidating the less devout, but impressing the more faithful.¹⁷

The *curé* was an important community figure in more mundane ways. According to canon law and provincial statutes that regulated the legal minutiae of parish administration, he was ultimately responsible for the temporal administration of his parish. By right of his office, he presided over all parish assemblies and over meetings of the vestry council of the *fabrique*, composed of *marguilliers* (churchwardens) who administered its finances. As Allan Greer notes, parish revenues came from “pew rentals, voluntary contributions, and a share of fees from special masses.” Expenses included maintaining the church, the presbytery, and buying the wine and hosts for mass, as well as liturgical vessels and vestments, paintings and statues.¹⁸ Minutely detailed instructions on his many duties were available to him in compilations of “droit paroissiale, [...]

¹⁵ AAQ 61 CD, St-Frédéric 1, Frédéric Caron to M. Ferland, 26 March 1851. Whether the figure of 2000 confessions was meant to be exact is open to question. In the early 1850s, the number of Catholic communicants in the parish was just over 1400.

¹⁶ A.-C. Dugas, Ptre., “La Quête de l’Enfant Jésus,” in E. Z. Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes et industries canadiennes-françaises*, (Montréal, 1924), 50.

¹⁷ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 460.

¹⁸ Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 1985), 115.

l'ensemble des règles qui régissent le gouvernement temporel des paroisses.”¹⁹ In addition, the state charged him to make careful record of the parish’s vital statistics.²⁰ He also needed to ensure that his parishioners fulfilled their legal obligation to pay the tithe (*dîme*) and other monetary obligations in a timely manner, as well as contribute to a special collection (*quête*) or a building project. As Normand Séguin found in his study of the Saguenay parish of Notre-Dame d’Hébertville in the second half of the nineteenth century, financial matters of necessity preoccupied its *curé* and coloured his relations with his parishioners. His control over the sources of parish revenue – the tithe, the *casuel*, the supplement and the *capitation* – made him one of the principal financial personages in the community, and its biggest moneylender. At the same time, he had to find sources of money to borrow, negotiate loans, and exhort his flock to pay their contributions, and threaten to pursue them under the law if they failed.²¹

Furthermore, the *curé* was already differentiated from the average *habitant*, not to mention his own family, by the nature of his calling and his training at the seminary. Despite all the human contact that his office imposed upon him, clerical discourse stressed the importance of maintaining and reinforcing a thorough separateness between a priest and his parishioners at the personal level. An important part of his training included the Archdiocese’s published codes of conduct emphasizing how such distance would better maintain clerical discipline and the sacerdotal function. In 1830, Thomas Maguire, who had served for twenty-two years (1805-1827) as *curé* of the rural parish of St-Michel de Bellechasse, and was later the Grand Vicar of the Québec Diocese, drew upon his own experience to develop a rigorous set of practical and moral guidelines for the newly-appointed country priest. Much of the advice in his *Recueil de notes diverses sur le gouvernement d'une paroisse, l'administration des sacrements, etc., adressées à un jeune curé de campagne par un ancien curé du Diocèse de Québec* was interspersed with warnings that were based on the maintenance of distance and differentiation between the

¹⁹ See in particular ‘Administration du temporel par la fabrique,’ in J.U. Baudry *Code des curés, marguilliers et paroissiens accompagné de notes historiques et critiques* (Montréal, 1870), 193-276; and Ernest Lapointe, ‘Introduction’ to Jean-François Pouliot, *Le droit paroissial de la Province de Québec* (Québec, 1919), xvii. This compilation received the *Imprimatur* of Cardinal Bégin of Québec.

²⁰ For a detailed description of these responsibilities, see Baudry, *Code des curés* 103-18.

²¹ Normand Séguin, *La Conquête du sol au 19e siècle* (Québec, 1977), 189-96.

curé and his parishioners, in all matters great and small.²² Presumably, after the book's publication, any priest who had trained either at the Québec Seminary, or the neighbouring seminary in Nicolet, including all the *curés* of St-Joseph, would have been expected to familiarise themselves with its semi-official prescriptions, and to govern themselves accordingly.

Summing up what a country *curé* might expect in his new position, and implying that too much familiarity breeds contempt, Maguire urged him to maintain a respectable distance from his parishioners without appearing to be aloof from or indifferent to them. Rebuffing all forms of familiarity meant that a *curé* had to avoid socializing and dining with his parishioners so as to avoid forfeiting “le fruit de ses travaux dans le ministère,” or to become “l’objet de la jalousie, et des sarcasmes, et, peut-on ajouter, la fable du public.”²³ He was a different and special kind of person, a separate, religious being in the midst of the world, a man whom “le rite rend supérieur aux autres humains.”²⁴ In St-Joseph, the *curés* occasionally made this point explicitly to their parishioners, as Louis-Antoine Martel did in 1873 when his sermon notes for three different Sundays focussed on the theme of the respect and submission that were due to priests.²⁵ Expected to be like a distant constellation upon which all could gaze, but never approach too closely, many men must have found it a difficult role to play. As the parish priest was on constant public display, Maguire insisted that he had to shine with “l’éclat de toutes les vertus; à l’exemple de l’apôtre, il se doit tout à tous, et comme lui, son dévouement doit le porter à sacrifier sa vie pour ses ouailles.”²⁶ Ideally, even his most mundane encounters with his parishioners had to be accompanied by an aura of spirituality and mystery. The *curé* had gently to rebuff all “services, familiarités, dons, etc.,” but also to be a good shepherd. He also was supposed to know their spiritual lives intimately, but to keep his own well hidden from them. Maguire conceded that the country priest could only, on very rare

²² Thomas Maguire, *Recueil de notes diverses sur le gouvernement d’une paroisse, l’administration des sacrements, etc., adressées à un jeune curé de campagne par un ancien curé du Diocèse de Québec* (Paris, 1830). For a brief summary on Maguire’s career, see Abbé J.-B.-A. Allaire, *Dictionnaire biographique du clergé Canadien-français, vol. 1, Les Anciens*, Montréal, 1910), 356.

²³ Maguire, *Recueil de notes diverses*, 275.

²⁴ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 96-97. See also Gibson, *Social History of French Catholicism*, 79.

²⁵ SPB, FFSJ, “Prônes, 1872-1875,” 48-50. Two sermons: “Sur le respect dû aux prêtres,” and a “Sermon sur le respect & la soumission dûes au Curé.” 75.

²⁶ As Maguire concluded, “il doit être au milieu de ses paroissiens comme une seconde Providence.” *Recueil de notes diverses*, 72.

occasions, relax among his colleagues from nearby parishes. The *curé* had to divide his time between “le saint ministère, les oeuvres de charité et l’étude de ses devoirs.”²⁷ Apart from that, he was expected, with the help of his books, “se suffire à lui-même dans sa solitude; et plaise au Ciel qu’il veuille graver profondément dans sa mémoire cet avis très important.”²⁸ Above all, Maguire counselled the *curé* to cultivate the diplomatic arts and to master the forms of polite society, since all the talent and virtue in the world would not, in a public position like his, help to compensate for rudeness or lack of tact.²⁹

In addition to Maguire’s *Recueil*, the Archdiocese also published three editions of its own code of conduct for priests, the *Discipline diocésaine*, between 1865 and 1895.³⁰ Like Maguire’s book, but in much greater detail, these alphabetical compilations were designed to regulate the minutest aspects of a priest’s responsibilities, standards to strive for in his personal conduct and dangers to avoid. The 1895 edition listed such perilous tendencies as excessive preoccupation with material interests, as well as the tendency for a priest to allow his life to become a mere matter of routine. Two dozen “Principes de conduite” required that a priest sleep no more than seven hours a night, that he intersperse his waking hours with spiritual exercises, and that he read regularly from the Gospels, the texts of theology, and “des rubriques du Missel, du Rituel, et du Bréviaire.”³¹ In addition he had scrupulously to care for his outward appearance by always wearing his *soutane*, and to avoid any hint of dissipation or informality in his personal life. In all of his actions, he had to be an example of tranquillity, sobriety and decency for his parishioners. Finally, in addition to his own spiritual health, he had to think of his parishioners’ salvation by conscientiously preaching, teaching the Catechism, hearing their confessions, and visiting the sick.³²

There were additional obligations for a young priest serving as a vicar to a *curé*. These included submission and obedience to his colleague’s wishes, and unquestioning

²⁷ Maguire, *Recueil de notes diverses*, 72-74.

²⁸ Maguire, *Recueil de notes diverses*, 275-276.

²⁹ Maguire, *Recueil de notes diverses*, 274.

³⁰ Diocèse de Québec, *Recueil d’ordonnances synodales et épiscopales du Diocèse de Québec publié par Monseigneur l’Administrateur de Diocèse, Second Édition revue et corrigée* (Québec, 1865); *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec par Monseigneur E.-A Taschereau, Archevêque de Québec* (Québec, 1879); and *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec par S. G. Mgr E.-A Taschereau, Archevêque de Québec. Deuxième Édition* (Québec, 1895).

³¹ “Règlement du prêtre,” in *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec (1895)*, 205-06.

³² *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec (1895)*, 205-06.

support for him. As the *Discipline* carefully pointed out, such support meant that he “s’élouignera de toute coterie de paroisse, quelqu’en soit le but; il se gardera d’écouter les confidences des mécontents de la paroisse contre leur curé.”³³ Like the *curé*, he was specifically required never to hear women’s confessions without a grille, and to converse with them only in the presence of witnesses, even then always briefly, and “jamais dans sa chambre.”³⁴ Neither cleric was ever to play cards with lay persons, hunt, behave informally with servants, “tutoyer aucun paroissien jeune ou vieux,” or to pay informal visits to the houses of parishioners, and certainly not to dine with them.³⁵

While the Church may have had valid reasons to believe that distance imposed awe and therefore deepened respect for the *curé*, there was also a counter-productive element in separating the priest from his flock. As Ollivier Hubert points out, “Plus ‘parfaits,’ les clerics sont également marginalisés [...]. Le sacré se présente comme un domaine réservé, idéal mais inaccessible à la majorité.”³⁶ By attempting to resolve the contradiction between the requirements that he be completely independent of his parishioners, and yet become familiar with their spiritual needs, the *curé* could just as easily have become isolated from them. The Church saw it as both desirable and necessary to underline the gravity of the priestly function, and the austerity of his life, by insisting on separation and distance because the priest was intended to be, as Pichette notes, a “personnage à la fois mystérieux et supérieur.” However, the *curé* was already so different from the people in his parish, as Pichette observes, that he was also a man apart, “le port de la soutane le distingue néanmoins des autres paroissiens, et crée déjà un fosse.”³⁷ The black biretta (“p’tit cass’ carré”), and especially the skirt-like black *soutane* were the distinctive clerical dress code, “qu’il faut très tôt imposer au futur prêtre afin de l’élouigner, à ses propres yeux et de manière définitive, du reste du monde, de la masse des profanes.”³⁸

³³ *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec* (1895), 208.

³⁴ *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec* (1895), 209.

³⁵ *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec* (1895), 209.

³⁶ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 77; 95-102.

³⁷ Jean-Pierre Pichette, “Le curé à travers les chansons traditionnelles au Québec,” in Robert-Lionel Séguin et al, *Ethnologie québécoise* (Montréal, 1972), 167.

³⁸ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 99-100.

But inevitably, people who knew few details about the man made those details up for themselves.³⁹ Consequently, far from escaping from rumours, the *curé's* mysteriousness and distance may have magnified them. His comings and goings, his health, even his smallest gestures, constituted ideal fodder for the parish gossips.⁴⁰ If he was usually a distant and mysteriously powerful figure, popular tradition had humanised him by mocking his imagined sexual escapades in the confessional, his treatment of his housekeeper, his lax interpretation of his vows, and his leisure hours. Perhaps from the Church's point of view, amused ridicule of apparent clerical hypocrisy was more deplorable than ignorance or distrust of the priest because it suggests that the man and the institution he represented did not need to be taken seriously. As Pichette notes, however, even though the priest was the central figure in a number of traditional popular songs that circulated in the various regions of Québec, people almost always distinguished between making fun of the man's foibles and respecting his calling. Most importantly, there was no questioning of the Church or of its teachings, "il se moque de la mamelle, mais, il en suce le lait."⁴¹ Ultimately, the parishioners' image of the ideal priest was one they had constructed on the basis of the Church's own teachings. Ironically, as Serge Gagnon observes, parishioners themselves often insisted on maintaining the gulf between priests and laity, and informed his superiors if a *curé* made unusual modifications to his clerical attire.⁴² They would apply the Church's code of priestly conduct to any cleric whose practice deviated from it and were often even more insistent than his superiors that a *curé* embody these very exacting standards. If not, as will be seen for St-Joseph, they would seek redress through petitions, and even spread rumours about him.

But not only did the *curé* need at all times to be a master of his own conduct, he had to be even more careful with the people who composed his family and household, especially the female members. This injunction was necessary in order to prevent the faintest whiff of scandal or impropriety emanating from the presbytery.⁴³ As several of St-Joseph's *curés* learned, a rural parish could be a turbulent place where social pressure

³⁹ Pichette, "Le curé à travers les chansons," 170.

⁴⁰ Hudon, "Beaucoup de bruits pour rien?" 218.

⁴¹ Pichette, "Le curé à travers les chansons traditionnelles," 178.

⁴² Gagnon, *Quand le Québec manquait de prêtres*, 27.

⁴³ Maguire, *Recueil de notes diverses*, 73-74. Not surprisingly, it was a mortal sin, according to the Latin texts that Maguire cited, for a priest to cohabit with a woman.

came in many forms, not all of them to the clergy's liking. One informal aspect of this "social universe in which community pressure formed the primary element," and one that the Church did not succeed in totally dominating was the double-edged power of gossip and rumour. While the *curé* could harness these devices to his advantage and use them in order to exercise control over parishioners, he could also become their most prominent victim.⁴⁴ In close-knit small communities, parishioners could indulgently overlook their own failings, but not so quickly forgive a priest's slightest misstep. The small size of the average rural community made it an ideal place for spreading rumours of every kind.⁴⁵ And priests were not the only ones who suffered. Ollivier Hubert argues that "these small societies were constantly fraught with tension caused by malicious gossip."⁴⁶ Although Christine Hudon found few women's names on petitions in the Gaspé parishes during the period 1766-1900, women were active in verbal discussions and in spreading rumours. Although noting their potential to cause more harm than good, and that vicious rumours could unfairly make or break reputations, she spends little effort sympathising with their clerical targets. Rightly or wrongly, gossip and rumours about the clergy functioned as an instrument for the population to control the priests. In a society of male predominance these can be seen as "le moyen, pour les femmes, d'exercer un pouvoir [...] un outil à la disposition d'un groupe privé du droit de parole."⁴⁷

Priests and People in St-Joseph, 1761-1850

The first to learn the difficult lesson about the exacting standards that parishioners applied to priests was Didace Cliche, the Franciscan (Récollet) missionary who served St-Joseph only for a year in 1760-61. On 6 November 1761, an anonymous "complaint from several inhabitants of the Beauce" about Cliche's drinking and other unsuitable

⁴⁴ See Ollivier Hubert, "Ritual Performance and Parish Sociability: French-Canadian Catholic Families at Mass from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century," in Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760-1969* (Montreal and Kingston, 2002), 46-52; and Hudon, "Beaucoup de bruits pour rien?" 217-40.

⁴⁵ Hudon, "Beaucoup de bruits pour rien?" 220-221.

⁴⁶ Hubert, "Ritual Performance and Parish Sociability," 44. For a discussion of the useful functions of gossip in small communities, see Willeen Keough, *The Slender Thread: Irish Women on the Southern Avalon, 1750-1860* (New York, 2008), 155-216.

⁴⁷ Hudon, "Beaucoup de bruits pour rien?" 240.

behaviour asked Vicar General and future Bishop of Québec Jean-Olivier Briand to remove him:

Nous vous supplions très humblement de vous loire bien écouté et exaucé nos prière cest avéque paine cause que nous vous demendons que vous vouslie bien nous accordé un autre aummonie que celui que nous avons n'étant propre que pour lui-même et etant indigne de célébré la messe et daministre les sacrement et ce causé par la triste use quil maille.⁴⁸

After this letter, which followed other complaints, Briand wrote Cliche a week later that he was granting the request of the parishioners and relieving him of his duties.⁴⁹

However, the aggrieved Cliche did not go without protesting his innocence. In a long letter of 9 December 1761, he tried to refute the criticisms and justify his conduct. An older woman living in the rectory was a near relative of sixty-eight whom he considered as highly as his own mother. Since she had threatened to commit suicide, they had also taken in a young woman out of pity and concern for her safety, and so that she might help with the housework in the rectory. Furthermore, he painted himself as the victim of slanderous gossip on the part of another young woman and her mother who “n’ont point voulu m’écouter et m’ont chargés des injures les plus atroces et les plus énormes.” In addition, he argued, most parishioners had sided with him when he had forbidden these women from entering the church, having often told him “que ces deux personnes mériteraient d’être chassées de la paroisse par les insultes qu’ils on fait à tous les missionnaires.” But Cliche’s eloquence failed to convince Briand.⁵⁰

While it is not surprising that Briand dismissed Cliche in the light of what appeared to be a sex scandal, the importance that the parishioners placed on the appearance of propriety in their *curé* is significant, as is their sense of power over him. Cliche’s two immediate successors, Jean-Baptiste Gatien (1761-62) and Claude Loiseau (1762-66), who took the religious name Père Théodore, also had difficulties. Gatien must have left a deferential parish before coming to St-Joseph because, as he indicated, the people of St-Joseph spoke to him with “bien plus d’hauteurs et d’impertinence.” They

⁴⁸ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 1:2. “Plainte de plusieurs habitans de la Beauce, 6 novembre 1761.” Original spelling retained. This document written in large and almost indecipherable handwriting, is the first in the Archdiocesan Archives relating to St-Joseph.

⁴⁹ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 80-81.

⁵⁰ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 81-84. For instances elsewhere and the curés’ “lettres de justification, souvent pathétiques,” see Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 101, 110-12.

had also hinted broadly that they could have him transferred just as his predecessor had been if he did not let them do as they pleased. Gatien identified the same problem of women's gossip that had brought the short unhappy tenure of the Reverend Cliche to its ignominious end:

Quelques femmes qui ont la langue assez déliée et qui comptent pour rien les temps et les peines qu'ils se donnent d'aller de maison en maison recueillir la voix des suffrages des habitants et de les soulever et de les faire même parler contre leur intention et leur volonté sont les auteurs et la source des maux et des scandales qui ont précédé et que je ne me fais pas fort de pouvoir arrester; ainsi je ne me compte pas à l'abri de leur calomnie.⁵¹

Loiseau, Gatien's successor, encountered problems of a different nature with the St-Joseph parishioners. He complained to Bishop Briand in 1763 that the *habitants* sold liquor to the native people, and were drinking far too much of it themselves. He lamented that he was unable to prevent, "Leurs ivrogneries et leurs batailles continuelles" when he refused them the sacraments. Even his ultimate and extremely serious threat to withhold sacraments at Easter (missing communion at Easter was a mortal sin, after all) in order to prevent drunkenness and fighting had no effect.⁵² Fortunately for him, at least his parishioners did not petition the bishop to remove him. But neither did they cease their alcohol trade with the Abenaki for furs. Loiseau's successor, Jean-Marie Verreau, observed to Briand on 16 December 1767, that he had no success in discouraging the trade in St-Joseph and St-François. The previous winter he had witnessed a drunken Native chase his wife with a knife; he would have killed her if someone had not taken the weapon from him. Despite the "scandals" it caused, most people did not think supplying alcohol to the Natives was a serious matter since there were no specific prohibitions against it.⁵³

Verreau was so unimpressed with the conditions and the people in St-Joseph, that he chose instead to serve his three parishes from Ste-Marie where the population was

⁵¹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 86-9; Doyon et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 51-52. For the gendered gradations of gossip and slander, in the context of Upper Canada's Protestant churches, see Lynn Marks, "Rattling, Tattling, and General Rumour: Gossip, Gender, and Church Regulation in Upper Canada," *CHR* 81: 3 (September 2000), in particular 395-400.

⁵² AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 1:21. "Le Père Théodore de la Beauce, 6 février 1763. Se plaint de la vente des boissons enivrantes." See also Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph," 104-05; and Doyon et al., *Saint-Joseph de Beauce 1737-1987*, 52-53.

⁵³ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 136-7.

greater, the rectory was new, and where there were far fewer “parents très pauvres et d’une conduite peu réglée” than he had found in St-Joseph. A few years later, on 9 October 1773, Verreau found more reasons to be critical of his St-Joseph parishioners, noting their laxity and evasiveness on paying the tithe on grain for the support of the priest. He told the bishop that many believed that each *habitant* had the right to an *arpent* of land that was free of the obligation to pay the tithe. Further, by planting beans or potatoes instead of grain, they could pay the *curé* even less, and he could foresee a time when over half the fields in St-Joseph would be exempt from the tithe.⁵⁴

Parishioners did defend their *curés* when they thought the diocesan authorities acted unfairly, as St-Joseph’s petition of 1 November 1820 to Bishop Plessis in favour of Gabriel-Léandre Arsenault demonstrates. The origin of the complaints about Arsenault is unclear, but the petition to which eighty-seven of the males of the parish put their marks was a strong testimonial to his character. The petitioners rejected charges of Arsenault’s drunkenness and asserted that “son aversion pour le vice nous est notoirement connu.” They said they had never observed more “régularité” than he displayed both in his preaching and in the other functions of his “ministère pénible.”⁵⁵ A local notary who had lived at the rectory for seven months added his own testimony that he had never known Arsenault to be guilty of any of the sins that false information had placed into the bishop’s hands. Perhaps this strong show of support convinced Plessis, because Arsenault remained in St-Joseph for another three years. But one *curé* found trouble from an entirely unexpected quarter. In the fall of 1817, Antoine Lamothe, who had been *curé* in St-Joseph for thirty-two years, was first suspended and then removed, though not due to complaints from his parishioners. Rather, it seems to have been another priest, his neighbour in St-François, Charles-Joseph Primeaux, who was responsible. The local historian Nadeau obliquely condemns Primeaux for Lamothe’s dismissal, making vague reference to Primeaux’s later behaviour. Briefly in charge of St-Joseph in 1823, Primeaux

⁵⁴ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 150-51. See also J.I. Little, “The Parish and French Canadian Migrants to Compton County, Quebec, 1851-1891,” *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 11 (1978), 136-8.

⁵⁵ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce I: 79, “Témoignage des paroissiens de St-Joseph en faveur de Mr. Arsenault, 1 nov. 1820.”

seems to have alienated the churchwardens by keeping for his personal use a sum of money donated to celebrate masses for departed souls.⁵⁶

Another *curé*, Bernard-Benjamin Decoigne, ran afoul of at least one parishioner powerful enough to cause him difficulties with his superiors in Québec. Decoigne had only been ordained for four years when he came to St-Joseph in 1823 at the age of 28. He remained there for the next six years. Unfortunately, he seems to have alienated the notary, Michel Dostie, and perhaps others. It did not help that he brought with him another young man whom, according to Nadeau's diplomatic description, he treated as an adopted son and confidant. All that was needed was a hostile tongue to start some malicious gossip that Dostie supposedly provided in full measure.⁵⁷

Frédéric Caron and his Parishioners, 1847-1851

The final installment in St-Joseph's tradition of petitions to the religious authorities at Québec for or against their *curé* occurred in 1851, and ended the tumultuous tenure of Frédéric Caron. Despite ample encouragement to do so, Caron, the *curé* of St-Joseph from 1847 to 1851, did not bend, and seems to have been unable to compromise with his parishioners on any matter great or small, even when Archbishop Turgeon strongly suggested that he should be more flexible. Caron had been ordained as a priest ten years before he arrived in St-Joseph at age forty-one; this parish was the third where he served as *curé*, and probably his least successful assignment in his forty-five-year career (1837-82).⁵⁸ The epicurean, abrasive Caron expressed a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the post when Turgeon offered it to him in 1847.⁵⁹ When he left the parish at the end of 1851 under a very dark cloud, not only had he alienated a sizable

⁵⁶ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce I: 86, "Messés pour les âmes - difficultés entre les marguilliers et M. Primeau, leur ancien curé, 30 nov. 1823." Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 241-5.

⁵⁷ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 277. Nadeau does not supply any evidence to support his insinuation about Dostie.

⁵⁸ For his many postings in various parts of the archdiocese, see J.-B.-A. Allaire, *Dictionnaire biographique du clergé Canadien-français: Les Anciens* (Montréal, 1910), 97-98.

⁵⁹ AAQ 61 CD Saint-Joseph de Beauce, vol. I, Letter 140, Caron to Turgeon, 15 September 1847. Caron had reluctantly left the comfort of four years at Ile aux Grues in 1847 and only came to St-Joseph "avec repugnance" according to Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 316.

number of his parishioners, he had also incurred the wrath and, worse, the contempt of his ecclesiastical superior, Archbishop Turgeon.

Before arriving in St-Joseph, Caron had already demonstrated some of the traits that alienated people in St-Joseph. He had been the subject of a petition in an earlier posting when, on 11 June 1842, the parishioners of St-Isidore asked to have another *curé*.⁶⁰ Within a year of arriving in St-Joseph, Caron had filed a complaint against Marie Prussien, described as “sans métier ou profession connue, atteinte d’aliénation mentale depuis un grand nombre d’années avec des intervalles lucides,” and the local authorities jailed her in 1848 for irreverence during Sunday mass.⁶¹ A year later, the first rumblings of discontent from St-Joseph about his abrasiveness had already reached Archbishop Turgeon. On 4 September 1849, several parishioners sent Turgeon a petition charging that, as a priest, Caron was “rempli de chicane, aimant à en faire, rempli de médisance, d’atrocité de manque de confiance, du prêt chargeant à usure, dévoué à faire du mal, insultant tous vos humbles pétitionnaires dans ses prônes, serments, les traitant de bêtes, d’animaux, boeufs, bâtards et autres mots.”⁶² Because the petition contained only half a dozen signatures, the archdiocesan authorities may not have felt the need to take it seriously, as there is no recorded response.

Nearly six months later, on 23 February 1850, thirty parishioners, half a dozen of whom were serving or former church wardens sent a second petition. The neatly handwritten (if slightly repetitive) petition, that ran to four folio pages, also claimed that the petitioners had lost all confidence in him as their *curé*. The petitioners alleged that, at a recent parish assembly, Caron had called the residents of one school district “de voleurs, d’égöistes, de butons, de rétifs et de canailles.”⁶³ In addition to deploring that such colourful but intemperate language had issued from the mouth of their pastor, the aggrieved parishioners also claimed that Caron had insulted the wife of one church warden, Joseph Poulin, by taking her by the arm and forcibly conducting her out of the sacristy. Indeed, his conduct had become so objectionable that many habitants no longer even wanted to approach him in the relative anonymity of the confessional. They could

⁶⁰ AAQ, St-Isidore, I-64.

⁶¹ BAnQ, Cour des Sessions de la Paix, District de Québec, 1800-1900, Matière criminelle, Archives judiciaries, TL 31, S1, S51, Case 16563. See also Hardy, “Le greffier de la paix et le curé,” 450.

⁶² AAQ, 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce, I: 150.

⁶³ AAQ, 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce, I: 159.

no longer hear him conduct the Sunday mass or other prayers with any respect, so often had they been “insultés, méprisés et menacés que leur confiance est entièrement perdue envers lui leur dit curé.” The situation had deteriorated so badly, they argued, that they would rather depend on the charity of neighbouring priests for confession than to seek absolution from Caron. Even more seriously, they had decided no longer to go to mass on Sundays or feast days while he remained as parish priest. Furthermore, if the religious authorities did not promptly remove Caron from St-Joseph, the implied threat was serious: “Il soit commis quelques scandales ou fait quelque chose contre ce curé qui affligeait et chagrinait le clergé.”⁶⁴ This petition called upon the archbishop to conduct his own enquiry, with a disinterested third party, to determine the facts, but the prelate took no action.

Shortly thereafter, one of the signatories, Jean Doyon, *père*, received a letter from the archbishop’s secretary on 3 April in reply to his complaint that Caron had refused his son permission to be readmitted as a choir boy. But the Archbishop politely declined to become involved, informing Doyon that the priest had the right to decide who would be admitted to the choir, and who would not.⁶⁵ Shortly thereafter, thirty of Caron’s supporters mobilized themselves, and sent the archdiocesan authorities their petition in his favour. Dated 14 April 1850, this document carried the signatures of a number of influential parishioners, including one serving and a few former church wardens, a prominent notary, three militia captains, and a schoolteacher, in addition to the X-marks of ordinary habitants. The document denounced the allegations against their *curé* as completely false and without the least foundation. It charged that since Caron had accepted the post of school commissioner for the new municipality, the real reason for the trouble he was now in came from “l’opposition factieuse que la plupart des signataires de la requête firent il y a quelques années, et font encore aujourd’hui au fonctionnement des lois des écoles.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ AAQ, 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce, I: 159.

⁶⁵ AAQ, 210 A, “Registre de lettres 23, 1849-1851,” Letter 361, 3 April, 1850, p. 238. ‘Lettre à Jean Doyon père, cultivateur St-Joseph de Beauce.’ Of course, Caron may have had legitimate reasons for his decision: voices change, too many altos, etc. But one has to wonder. For a similar conflict in a small parish in the Eastern Townships in 1878 that required the mediation of the Bishop, see Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 214.

⁶⁶ AAQ, 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce, I: 172.

It was true that, since 1846, educational questions had indeed divided the parishioners between those, such as Caron, who were in favour of school taxes and those opposed to them, as was the case elsewhere,⁶⁷ the archbishop soon realized that the real issue was Caron himself. The encounter between the implacable force of the imperious Caron, and the equally immovable resistance of increasing numbers of his flock to being bullied, meant that there could be no peace in the increasingly divided parish. Caron's confrontational methods, what French historian Ralph Gibson calls the clerical "esprit de domination," were the exact opposite of Maguire's advice that country priests lead their flock by their good example rather than issue imperious commands.⁶⁸ To make matters worse, Caron was involved in another court case, this time as a defendant. Although he successfully deployed the law against defenseless members of his parish, his ruthlessness gave less easily intimidated parishioners the same recourse. In July 1850, Louis Gagnon initiated civil proceedings against Caron for usury. Caron appears to have attempted to deflect the Archbishop's attention from his own failings by attacking the credibility of Gagnon's witnesses, claiming, "je ne puis le dissimuler à V.G. nous avons affaire à la plus grande canaille de St-Joseph, dans ces deux familles de Vachon, ils sont capables de tout pour parvenir à leur but."⁶⁹

Still, the hesitant prelate remained unwilling to act against him. But the dispute did not go away. It even began to attract the attention of outsiders. On 13 August, forty parishioners (11 per cent of the 350 family heads in St-Joseph), signed yet another petition calling for Caron's removal. Three days later, the notary J.N. Chassé from neighbouring Ste-Marie even offered his services as a channel of communication between the discontented parishioners and Turgeon.⁷⁰ Ten days after that, on 26 August 1850, the archbishop's secretary sent Chassé a polite but frosty reply, declining the offer. He noted that "Sa Grandeur [...] respecte trop son clergé pour ne punir aucun de ses

⁶⁷ On that question, see Wendie Nelson, "Rage Against the Dying of the Light: Interpreting the Guerre des Éteignoirs," *CHR* 84: 4 (December 2000), 551-81; and J.I. Little, *State and Society in Transition. The Politics of Institutional Reform in the Eastern Townships, 1838-1852* (Montreal and Kingston, 1997), 171-210. Educational matters in St-Joseph will be discussed in Chapter Four.

⁶⁸ Gibson, *Social History of French Catholicism*, 79-80.

⁶⁹ AAQ, 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 1, Letter 182, Caron to Turgeon, 4 September 1850. A month later he referred to "des malveillants qui essayent d'exercer une vexation à mon égard," implying that it was beneath his dignity to deal with "canaille." AAQ, 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce, Letter 185, Caron to Turgeon, 29 October 1850.

⁷⁰ AAQ, 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce, J.N. Chassé to Turgeon, 16 August 1850.

membres sans forme de procès.”⁷¹ Instead, Turgeon admonished Caron to modify his imperious behaviour towards his parishioners, while telling the aggrieved parishioners that they could expect their priest to treat them with charity and good will.⁷² Finally, even the forbearing Turgeon seems to have concluded that his advice to Caron that he imitate the patience of Christ had not fallen on the ears of an active listener. On 11 January 1851, declaring that he found Caron too strict (“exigeant”) with his parishioners, Turgeon testily told him to work out yet another conflict with another church warden “de façon qu’elle ne revienne plus vers moi.”⁷³

By the end of 1851, worse news about Caron reached Turgeon. On 4 November, Caron was found guilty of usury by the Quebec Circuit Court in the aforementioned Gagnon case and ordered to pay a fine of £30.⁷⁴ Even though by the mid-nineteenth century, the Church had softened its uncompromising position against laymen lending money at interest by recognizing that the practice could be condoned if the interest rate was reasonable and legally sanctioned, a usurious cleric was something else.⁷⁵ Caron’s practices took legitimate concerns over financial matters much too far. Consequently, in a letter of 26 November, the archbishop ordered him to come to Québec without delay to discuss his future in the Church (darkly implying that Caron might not have one). In what must have been one of the most stinging letters of rebuke and dismissal he had ever sent to a parish priest, the prelate bitingly reminded him of his court conviction in the Gagnon case. He pointed out that the conviction was “universellement regardé comme

⁷¹ AAQ, 210 A, “Registre de lettres, 23, 1849-1851,” 372, Letter 544, ‘À J.N. Chassé, N.P., 26 août 1850.’

⁷² On 11 January 1851, Turgeon told him, “Mais souffrez que je vous dise, mon cher curé, que le moyen de réduire une opposition n’est pas de faire les choses à l’encontre d’un décret émané de l’autorité.” AAQ 210 A., “Registre de lettres, vol. 23, 1849-1851,” 597-8, Letter 863. A month earlier he had told Doyon that he and his family could certainly go to another priest for confession but that his own *curé* should welcome him. AAQ 210 A. “Registre de lettres, vol. 23, 1849-1851,” Letter 807, p. 551, 10 December 1850.

⁷³ AAQ 210 A, “Registre de lettres,” vol. 23, 1849-1851, pp.597-8, Letter 863.

⁷⁴ AAQ, 210 A, “Registre de Lettres, vol. 24: 14 mars 1851 à 17 décembre 1852,” 292-3, Letter 462, Turgeon to Caron. 26 November 1851. For the judgement, see AAQ, 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce, “Copie du jugement, Province du Canada, Circuit de Québec: ‘Louis Gagnon, Demandeur vs. Rev’d. M. Fr. Caron, Défendeur. 4 Novembre 1851, No. 190 de 1850.’” The fact that one of his own clergymen had publicly humiliated the Church by being convicted of charging a rate of interest excessive enough to be considered usurious in a civil court must have made Turgeon sufficiently livid finally to take action against Caron.

⁷⁵ For the evolution of the Church’s position on lending money at interest, see Christine Hudon, “Prêtres et prêteurs au XIXe siècle,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 26:52 (November 1993), 229-46.

équitable, qu'il a causé un grand scandale et que vous restez avec la réputation d'un homme intéressé au point de ne pas craindre d'avoir recours à l'usure pour satisfaire son amour du gain."⁷⁶ As if that was not serious enough, Turgeon also mentioned Caron's past highhandedness towards his parishioners, including "votre conduite arbitraire, de vos brusqueries, de vos procès sans nombre pour des bagatelles."⁷⁷

In addition, the archbishop referred obliquely to "un document" which would convince Caron that he no longer had any allies in the parish to come to his defence. Coming as it did after three conflict-ridden years in the parish, the *abbé* could not have mistaken Turgeon's missive for unexpectedly early Christmas greetings. Caron was curtly informed that he was dismissed him from his position as the *curé* of St-Joseph. Fortunately for him, however, the Christmas spirit may have worked its accustomed magic and softened the archbishop's ire somewhat. On 30 December 1851, a second letter from the archiepiscopal palace informed Caron that his future would be a bit brighter than he might otherwise have had reason to expect. Instead of dismissal from the priesthood, there was to be penance. He was transferred to the new, smaller and poorer neighbouring parish of St-Frédéric, recently carved out of the southwest corner of St-Joseph. He remained there until 1856 as the founding parish priest, applying his zeal for financial matters – that the archbishop had commented so acidly upon – to the construction of its first chapel and rectory within the short space of a mere two years.⁷⁸ Even though the standard the parishioners employed to measure a priest's conduct mirrored the Church's own parameters, Caron's case suggests that it could take a great deal of persistence to move a reluctant archbishop to take corrective measures and transfer a *curé* out of a parish. But the encounter also demonstrated that a clergyman

⁷⁶ AAQ, 210 A, "Registre de Lettres, vol. 24: 14 mars 1851 à 17 décembre 1852," 292-3, Letter 462, Turgeon to Caron, 26 November 1851. Nadeau, the parish historian, who was usually so well informed on parish matters, did not mention this, though he did note Caron's "esprit d'économie, poussé dit-on jusqu'à l'avarice et la ladrerie." "Histoire de Saint-Joseph d'après les notes," 316.

⁷⁷ AAQ, 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 1, Turgeon to Caron, 26 November 1851.

⁷⁸ AAQ, 210 A "Registre de Lettres, Vol. 24: 14 mars 1851 à 17 décembre 1852," 316. Letter 505, Turgeon to Caron. 30 December 1851. Caron served in three other parishes down to his death in 1882, though without inspiring respect. After repeated warnings to cease insulting an unnamed respectable person from his pulpit in the parish of St-Henri de Lévis in 1858, Turgeon's successor as Archbishop of Québec, Charles-François Baillargeon, abruptly removed Caron's right to preach to the faithful there.⁷⁸ Nadeau notes an undated occasion in St-Romauld, where Caron officiated at the Litany of the Saints. The children in the choir were supposed to chant the response "Ora pro nobis," but were punished for muttering instead "Caron-la-Babiche" (lapdog). Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 316-17.

could not impose his will by force or coercion on the Catholics of St-Joseph, and that his superiors could not continue to ignore the discontent of a sizable section of the parish. The parishioners persisted in their complaints against Caron for nearly three years in the face of his threats, and the archbishop's initial unwillingness to get involved in their internal parish matters. Since the conflict also divided the parish, the archbishop's initial hesitation is not surprising. Finally, Caron himself gave ample proof of his unsuitability. This was the last and most dramatic of the relatively few occasions after the late eighteenth century when the parishioners of St-Joseph felt it necessary to express their opinions on the suitability of their *curé* to the bishop at Québec. Not unexpectedly, the archbishop was usually willing to give his subordinates the benefit of the doubt. On the other hand, as complaints mounted, he could not ignore the existence of a problem.

While the details of the particular conflicts varied with each case, the consistent thread linking them is the similar set of expectations about proper clerical behaviour that characterized the parishioners' petitions with the archdiocesan authorities. When faced with the combination of discontented and assertive members of their flock and the impatient scepticism of their superiors, some of Caron's predecessors had found their time in St-Joseph cut short. If the lessons of history were lost on Caron, the same can certainly not be said of his parishioners. Accounts of experiences with earlier *curés* were probably readily available from habitants with long memories. On the other hand, the parishioners of St-Joseph could also exercise their power in more positive and affirmative ways. As we are about to see, they did not hesitate publicly to acknowledge their esteem for Caron's successors whom they found worthy in meeting these difficult standards.



Illustration 9. Frédéric Caron (1847-52) and Antoine Racine (1852-53)

Source: "Souvenir des curés de Saint-Joseph de Beauce depuis 1738" in the parish church. (F. Abbott photograph)

After Caron: St-Joseph's *Curés*, 1851-1901

When Antoine Racine, arrived in St-Joseph in early January 1852 after Caron's precipitous exit, he was just about to turn thirty years of age; this was his third posting in the diocese since his ordination. Born the son of a blacksmith near Québec City, he had only been a priest for fewer than eight years.⁷⁹ Local gossip, or the archdiocese's own rumour mill, must have made Racine well aware of the reasons behind his predecessor's ignominious departure, and his one-year tenure was free of any such conflicts. The 1853 parish report that he submitted, the first from St-Joseph under the new system of the "Rapports des curés," outlined the more diplomatic approach that he would adopt towards his parishioners. He also expected that exposure to education would give the habitants a better appreciation of their religious duties since, in their ignorance, they looked elsewhere and found "amusements condamnés par la religion."⁸⁰

No controversies with parishioners troubled the three years that his successor, David Martineau, served in St-Joseph (1853-56).⁸¹ Nor did any hints of conflict emerge in the longer tenure of his successor, James Nelligan, although he had been known for his opposition in 1842 to the introduction of an early unfair system of municipal government in Lower Canada, and for polarizing Irish and French-Canadian Catholics in the parish of St-Sylvestre during his fifteen-year tenure (1835-51).⁸² After the disastrous fire in 1864 that destroyed St-Joseph's parish church, he oversaw the building of its larger replacement, but died just before it was consecrated. Nelligan had been ill for several years and he seems to have been unable to fulfil all the duties of his post.

His successor, Louis-Antoine Martel, stayed in the parish for seventeen years (1868-85). He was the longest-serving *curé* in the last half of the nineteenth century and

⁷⁹ J.-B.-A. Allaire, *Dictionnaire biographique du clergé*, 459. Nadeau describes him as, "Homme d'éloquence au-dessus d'ordinaire; très cultivé." "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 332. After his short stay in St-Joseph, he spent 21 years as the *curé* of St-Jean-Baptiste in Québec (1853-74), before becoming the first bishop of Sherbrooke (1874-93). In 1880, in response to a number of British colonization companies operating in the Eastern Townships, and in hopes of attracting more French-speaking settlers to the area, Bishop Racine founded the short-lived Compagnie de Colonisation et de Credit des Cantons de l'Est. J.I. Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism, and Colonization in Nineteenth-Century Quebec: The Upper St. Francis District* (Kingston and Montreal, 1989), 190-201.

⁸⁰ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, "Rapport de Mr. Racine de St-Joseph de la Beauce, 1853."

⁸¹ Allaire, *Dictionnaire biographique du clergé*, 372.

⁸² For his political involvement in the Chaudière District, see J.I. Little, *State and Society in Transition*, 148. For his role in St-Sylvestre, see Matthew Barlow, "Fear and Loathing in Saint-Sylvestre: The Corrigan Murder Case, 1855-58," MA Thesis (Simon Fraser University, 1998), 30-31.

he seems to have gained the respect of most of the people of St-Joseph. Described as pious, zealous, corpulent, and frank, with a talent for administration, he could, argues Nadeau, be placed among the ranks of the finest kind of French-Canadian *curé*.⁸³ He was thirty-five years old and had been a priest for twelve years when he arrived in St-Joseph. Despite his concerns about people's irregular payment of the tithe, and the drinking and partying that seem to have gone on as much as it had in the past, Martel concluded in 1869 that his parish was a good one, "animée d'un bon esprit, composée d'un nombre très considérable d'excellentes familles qui se donnent de la peine pour bien élever leurs enfants & pour remplir leur devoir."⁸⁴ The parishioners seem to have reciprocated that respect. In addition to his regular duties as *curé*, Martel took a personal interest in furthering the educational opportunities for the people of St-Joseph. In January 1882, with his own money, he established a \$2000 scholarship at the Collège de Ste-Anne de la Pocatière for deserving students from St-Joseph. He abruptly left St-Joseph in 1885, mainly due to the disputes over the new rectory. When he died in 1903, his remains were brought to St-Joseph and interred beneath the choir of the church.⁸⁵

François-Xavier Gosselin's contribution to the religious life of St-Joseph (1885-95) was the introduction of practices from the ultramontane Cercle Catholique that emphasized collective religious exercises like the annual celebration of the feast of the Sacred Heart and the feast of St-Joseph. Members of the Cercle attended mass together, received communion and participated in an evening meeting with appropriate prayers and speeches. Gosselin organized St-Joseph's first parish pilgrimage to the shrine of Ste-Anne de Beaupré in 1885, the kind of public religious gathering that Pierre Savard describes as "une des manifestations les plus spectaculaires du Cercle."⁸⁶ On the other hand, making no reference to his affinity for ultra-clerical views, both Nadeau and P.G. Roy, who knew him, describe him as very gentle and unassuming. Nadeau argues that he displayed more interest in the care of souls than in financial matters, and notes his lack of firmness in collecting money due to him from the parishioners. Still, Roy's extremely

⁸³ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 481-2. See also Allaire, *Dictionnaire biographique du clergé*, 369.

⁸⁴ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2 (II:68), L.A. Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph pour 1869 à Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Québec." He repeated the theme in his "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph, Beauce, pour l'année 1870-71," AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2 (II: 79).

⁸⁵ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 461-463.

⁸⁶ Pierre Savard, *Aspects du catholicisme canadien-français au XIXe siècle* (Montréal, 1980), 107.

sympathetic biography does show that the otherworldly Gosselin was responsible for completing St-Joseph's imposing new presbytery.⁸⁷ Perhaps he saw no contradiction between combining his personal humility and simple life with a conviction that the Church needed a magnificent public presence.



Illustration 10. David Martineau (1853-56) and James Nelligan (1856-68)

Source: “*Souvenir des curés de Saint-Joseph de Beauce depuis 1738*” in the parish church. (F. Abbott photograph)



Illustration 11. Louis-Antoine Martel (1868-85), François-Xavier Gosselin (1885-96)

Source: “*Souvenir des curés de Saint-Joseph de Beauce depuis 1738*” in the parish church. (F. Abbott photograph)

Gosselin's successor, François-Narcisse Fortier (1835-99), had spent most of his ecclesiastical career in or near Québec City before coming to St-Joseph in 1896. Although, somewhat abrasive, he also seems to have been much respected. His austere and ascetic reputation had preceded him, and his initial reception, according to Nadeau, was rather cold, although very respectful. Nadeau argues that his parishioners soon

⁸⁷ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 502; Pierre-Georges Roy, *Trois curés de Lévis: Mgr. Dézile, Mgr. Gauvreau, Mgr. Gosselin* (Lévis, 1947), 223-4.

discovered his many good qualities, and eventually came to admire him for the reserved exterior which apparently hid “une âme très sensible.”⁸⁸ After only three years, however, Fortier’s health deteriorated. His farewell in the packed parish church two weeks before his death, on 22 August 1899, amidst figurative clouds of incense, was the ideal earthly exit that most *curés* would have desired. In an emotional scene after high mass, he gave his last blessing to his tearful parishioners. Climbing to the pulpit with some difficulty, he spoke weakly, asking pardon for any offence he may have given. He admitted that he may have been somewhat difficult, but it was his duty: “Vous savez, lorsque je suis venu au milieu de vous, je ne suis pas venu pour vous plaire, je suis venu pour vos âmes!”⁸⁹

Adalbert Blanchet, the last of the *curés* to serve the parish in the period 1851-1901, was described as physically imposing, intelligent, with good manners and an impressive voice for preaching and singing. He also seems to have been a good administrator who submitted detailed and highly critical reports on his parish to the archbishop. His strong but not domineering personality seems to have won the respect of his parishioners because he was also an effective fund raiser. In 1900, he convinced them to pay for stained glass windows for the church, a new steam heating system, an enlarged sacristy, stronger support for the façade, and several new statues.⁹⁰



Illustration 12. François-Narcisse Fortier (1896-99), Adalbert Blanchet (1899-1904)

Source: “Souvenir des curés de Saint-Joseph de Beauce depuis 1738”.

⁸⁸ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 548.

⁸⁹ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 561-2. Gaspard Pacaud, the source of Nadeau’s account, was a witness to what must have been an extremely moving experience.

⁹⁰ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 563-4.

Conclusion

Parish priests, as most Catholics know – certainly the people of St-Joseph de Beauce did – come in all shapes and sizes: physically, temperamentally, intellectually, and religiously. Despite such differences, most of the *curés* of St-Joseph in the period 1761-1901 exemplified the hardworking, frugal, benevolent, and decorous qualities that, as Joseph Bouchette noted in 1831, made the Lower Canadian clergy so admired. St-Joseph's parishioners embraced, and on occasion, rallied behind, clerics who demonstrated those personal or edifying qualities, while they called upon the ecclesiastical authorities to remove those who did not. Although a *curé's* many estimable personal qualities earned him respect, his parishioners also demonstrated that they were far from being a flock of sheep, amenable to the firm guiding hand of their priestly shepherds. By their refusal to be passive recipients of clerical dictate, or to submit to imperious clergymen, the parishioners of St-Joseph lived up to the insubordinate reputation of the people of their region.⁹¹ Furthermore, the man who had offended their standards of proper clerical deportment could not expect to hide behind the mystique of the *soutane*.

On a number of occasions, the parishioners' expectations about the qualities of a priest that enhanced or impaired his ability to fulfil all his sacerdotal duties exemplified their proprietary interest in the affairs of the parish. On the official level, they showed this sense of ownership by using the power of petitions to the Bishop (after 1851, the Archbishop) of Québec in two ways. In 1820, the positive use of a petition was to support the *curé*, Gabriel-Léandre Arsenault, whom the parishioners felt the ecclesiastical authorities had unfairly treated on the basis of false information. The parishioners' standards for judging clerical behaviour came from a clear sense of fairness, and of what was fitting and seemly in clerical behaviour, exacting criteria that matched the Church's own. The second use of a parishioners' petition was to express grave concerns about the behaviour of *curés* who had offended local standards, and by asking for their removal from St-Joseph. At the most basic level, as Christine Hudon has argued, the faithful shared the same values as the clergy, and insisted that clerical practice be consistent with

⁹¹ Madeleine Ferron and Robert Cliche, *Les Beaucerons, ces insoumis*, (Montréal, 1974), in particular "Moeurs et comportement," 181-231.

clerical theory. If the diocesan authorities ignored the concerns of parishioners, the faithful could passively resist or impede matters of episcopal concern. Although the prelate had the final say about a *curé's* success or failure in his rural charge, he could not afford to ignore how the parishioners defined a good or a bad clergyman.⁹²

The conflict-ridden tenure of Frédéric Caron in St-Joseph (1847-51) demonstrated what qualities that the parishioners of St-Joseph expected a good *curé* not to possess, and how relations could quickly deteriorate between an unbending *curé* who was unwilling to charm and unable to cajole parishioners who refused to be intimidated. Eventually the heads of forty families, a significant but persistent minority, questioned his fitness to be their pastor, and were not deterred by the unwillingness of the archdiocesan authorities to become involved. Caron's time in St-Joseph stands in sharp contrast to the experiences of most of his predecessors and all of his successors, most of whom realised that the best means for a *curé* to achieve his goals was not to issue imperious commands but to employ all the diplomatic arts. Such *curés* found that their parishioners were prepared to respect those whom they judged worthy, and they supported the priests who persuaded rather than cajoled. Louis-Antoine Martel's letter to the archbishop in 1869, a year after arriving in St-Joseph, is a good illustration of how a dedicated but diplomatic *curé* could earn the respect and cooperation of his flock. Martel indicated that he preferred to complete the work on the unadorned and inhospitable interior of the new parish church as quickly as possible, but that the best approach was to be patient and to count on his parishioners' good will, even if it meant waiting for a long time. He was quite prepared to let them contemplate the bare and chilly interior for as long as necessary because "le meilleur moyen de stimuler leur générosité sera d'attendre que la demande vienne d'eux-mêmes et non de moi."⁹³ His reverse psychology worked. Within six years the interior of the church achieved most of its present splendour.

Furthermore, since the *curé* stayed in a parish for a time, and then was posted elsewhere, he was a transitional figure from the outset while the *habitants* looked upon it as their home. In such a small tightly-knit community, the *curé* was the outsider and the parishioners had considerable power to determine his future in the Church. In addition to

⁹² Hudon, "Beaucoup de bruits pour rien?" 234.

⁹³ AAQ, St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 68, L.-A. Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph pour 1869 à Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Québec."

being a lonely stranger, he was even further isolated because of his clerical calling and the strict rules of conduct and personal aloofness he was expected to obey. Since none of the *curés* who served the parish originated in St-Joseph, all were newcomers who would have to prove themselves by becoming familiar with their flock and its expectations. They had to fit into an unfamiliar community, and avoid the extremes of laxity in their behaviour or of severity in judging the conduct of a flock whose members frequently liked to drink, dance and enjoy themselves (but did not wish their priests to criticize them for it). Although their parishioners were prepared to respect or even to admire individual clergymen, and did contribute time and money to realise a number of ambitious building projects, such as two parish churches, a convent and a new rectory, it could be argued that they were unconsciously hypocritical in insisting that their *curés*' conduct be far more irreproachable than their own, particularly when some clergymen were the subjects, of parish gossip. Of course, it could also be argued with equal force that the parishioners expected their *curé* to practice what he preached, and to live up to the far more rigorous standards of his clerical vocation. Not surprisingly, then, a rural parish could be a minefield for an unwary or misbehaving priest. But, as will be seen in the following chapters, whatever a *curé*'s personal qualities or diplomatic skills, the real, and by far the most challenging, measure of his effectiveness was the extent to which he convinced his parishioners to attend mass more frequently and to curtail their traditional sociability.

Chapter 4

The Sacred and the *Sacre*: Catholicism in St-Joseph

Almost in the same breath as he described the independent nature of the *habitants* in 1830, the surgeon and author Pierre de Sales Laterrière (1789-1834) recognized the largely positive, or at least harmless, influence of Catholicism over the *habitants*. Laterrière argued that the Church did not exercise untrammelled power, or that “a complete subjection of the people has not taken place, and a grovelling superstition and furious bigotry” had not been introduced, even if many were mildly “superstitious:”

It may be said, and perhaps with truth, that the Canadian population are, for the most part, superstitious; but this is a failing common to all uneducated persons; and we can hardly consider it a vice, unless it lead to cruel conduct towards one another [...] superstition, with us, merely multiplies the prayers of the fearful peasant, and occasions a somewhat lavish use of holy water and candles.¹

The popular image of the hedonistic irreligious *habitant* that Krieghoff popularized in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the claim by some observers that there was a sharp decline in people’s moral and religious behaviour, tends to obscure the equally important role that Catholicism played in their lives.² Serge Gagnon’s study on the clergy in Lower Canada before the 1850s details the heavy workloads of the clergy who ministered to the religious needs of an expanding population. The large numbers of confessions, communions and confirmations indicate that the *habitants* still accorded an important place to their religion.³ As Christine Hudon notes, however, it is important not to overstate the ‘tiedeur’ of religious belief at the start of the nineteenth century, nor to confuse resistance to clerical authority with lack of religion.⁴ Similarly, it is best not to

¹ Pierre de Sales Laterrière, *A Political and Historical Account of Lower Canada*, cited in Joseph Bouchette, *The British Dominions in North America or a Topographical and Statistical Description of the Provinces of Lower and Upper Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia., etc.* Volume 1, (London, 1831), 412.

² Jean-Pierre Wallot, “Religion and French-Canadian Mores in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *CHR* 52: 1 (March 1971): 51-94.

³ Serge Gagnon, *Quand le Québec manquait de prêtres* (Sainte-Foy, 2006).

⁴ Christine Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles dans le diocèse de Saint-Hyacinthe 1820-1875* (Sillery, 1996), 427.

equate increased religious observance with greater clerical control over the non-religious aspects of people's lives. This chapter will examine the *curés*' reports on how faithfully they thought St-Joseph's parishioners fulfilled their duties as Catholics by participating in the Church's sacramental process and will focus on baptisms, Holy Communion, attendance at Sunday mass, and catechism instruction at church or in school. Thus, we will be able to evaluate how punctiliously the parishioners observed the external requirements of Catholicism, in order to determine the degree to which the people of this parish did or did not keep their religion in one compartment of their lives and their daily behaviour in another.

As Ralph Gibson has also pointed out in his study of Catholicism in nineteenth-century France, however, even though it is possible to note the visible indicators of religious practice, there still remains "the nagging doubt as to whether such external forms bear much relation to inner experience."⁵ Gibson points to the relationship between the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century and the large numbers of French peasants who had little connection to or sympathy with the Church, but still participated in its sacramental occasions marking birth, marriage and death. His explanation for this apparent paradox was that they felt "some kind of sacralization of life's crucial moments was indispensable."⁶ As we shall see, the people of St-Joseph also shared the belief that the Church's seven sacraments were necessary rites of passage in a person's life. Indeed, their *curés* often wondered if that was all that their religion meant to their parishioners.

Fulfillment of Religious Duties

It is difficult to determine with any precision the extent of parishioners' religious participation in St-Joseph before the 1850s when the annual parish reports were instituted. Prior to that point, the records of pastoral visits in the Archdiocesan archives are the main sources of information on these matters. In the course of their pastoral visits

⁵ Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (London and New York, 1989), 158. For a similar observation in Québec on the difficulty of deducing real piety by simply measuring numbers of people attending mass or taking communion at Easter, see Pierre Savard, "L'historien et la religion populaire au Canada français," in Benoît Lacroix and Pierre Boglioni, *Les religions populaires. Colloque international 1970* (Québec, 1972), 102.

⁶ Gibson, *Social History of French Catholicism*, 165.

in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, successive bishops seem to have found the levels of religious participation satisfactory. They recorded the numbers of baptisms, communions, and confirmations. They also noted the large numbers of people making their Easter Communion and receiving the sacrament of Confirmation, the high levels of the baptism of infants immediately after their birth, and, in the 1790s, the construction of the elaborate parish church.⁷ As can be seen in Table 4.1, the figures on those receiving confirmation during the bishop’s pastoral visit and the yearly figures for communions distributed indicate that even before the 1840s St-Joseph’s parishioners fulfilled their sacramental obligations of with reasonable punctiliousness.

Table 4.1: Confirmations and Communions, St-Joseph de Beauce, 1791-1837

Sources: Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph;” AAQ, “Visites pastorales”

Year	Population	Communions	Confirmations
1791	813	n.d.	150
1799		n.d.	201
1806		n.d.	128
1824		784	241
1825	1775	1100	211
1837	2098 (1831)	1600	251

Christine Hudon found for the majority of twenty parishes in the Diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe in the periods 1853-55 and 1873-75, and even earlier, that the vast majority of parents brought newborn infants to church to be baptized on their day of birth or the following day. Similarly, Hudon and J.I. Little found that 72 per cent of baptisms after 1858 in St. Romain took place within the first three days of life.⁸ Table 4.2 indicates that during the latter half of the nineteenth century, almost all of St-Joseph’s parishioners also had their newborns baptised either on the day of birth or the day after.

⁷ AAQ 69 CD 13, CD 14, “Visites pastorales.”

⁸ Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, 364-72.; J.I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants. Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881* (Montreal and Kingston, 1991), 217

Baptism was the beginning of a Catholic individual’s sacramental progress through life. It occurred within a day or two after birth in order to remove the stain of “Original Sin.” Hudon cautions that the consistently high numbers of baptisms of all the Catholic newborns in the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe since the 1820s was not necessarily a sign of increasing clerical influence.⁹ It seems likely, given the fragility of life for a newborn (St-Joseph’s parish registers record numerous instances of infants living for only a few hours or days), that people subscribed to the basic Catholic belief that unbaptised souls were ineligible to enter paradise.

Table 4.2: Days From Birth to Baptism: St-Joseph de Beauce, 1850-1895

Source: Registres d’état civil, St-Joseph de Beauce

Year	Baptisms	% Same Day	% Next Day	Total %	Year	Baptisms	% Same Day	% Next Day	Total %
1850	181	45%	44%	89%	1880	127	47%	50%	97%
1851	177	46%	40%	86%	1881	108	49%	49%	98%
1852	147	38%	53%	91%	1882	144	51%	47%	98%
1853	125	47%	49%	96%	1883	129	49%	48%	97%
1854	125	33%	59%	92%	1884	138	52%	44%	96%
1855	141	40%	52%	92%	1885	137	47%	47%	94%
1860	121	42%	50%	92%	1890	161	53%	40%	93%
1861	133	54%	41%	95%	1891	156	43%	53%	96%
1862	128	46%	46%	92%	1892	152	53%	43%	96%
1863	140	40%	54%	94%	1893	168	51%	46%	97%
1864	132	45%	52%	97%	1894	151	50%	49%	99%
1865	136	43%	50%	93%	1895	167	53%	47%	100%
1870	119	46%	46%	92%					
1871	144	53%	44%	97%					
1872	131	48%	45%	93%					
1873	137	45%	50%	95%					
1874	152	49%	47%	96%					
1875	134	43%	51%	94%					

Between ten to fourteen years after baptism and after appropriate instruction in Catholic beliefs from the diocesan catechism, a child became eligible to receive the sacrament of penance, the prerequisite for the sacrament of communion. Penance involved confessing all one’s sins to the *curé* or vicar, asking for divine forgiveness, and

⁹ Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, 426-28.

performing a penance of prayers or good actions.¹⁰ Communion was a small wafer of unleavened bread that was believed to transform into the body and the blood of Jesus Christ during mass, the ceremonial celebration of the divinity of Christ.¹¹ Unlike the other sacraments that were usually administered only once in a person's life – remarriage on the death of a spouse being a possible exception – going to confession in order to be worthy to receive communion was supposed to be frequent. The bare minimum requirement was obligatory confession and communion at Easter, the most important feast in the Church's liturgical calendar.

The next rite of passage for a Catholic in the late teenage years in St-Joseph occurred when the Archbishop of Québec conferred the sacrament of confirmation during his visit of inspection to each parish, usually every four years. The prelate officiated at a special mass and conferred the sacrament with a symbolic blow to the recipient's cheek, reminding the person to be strong in the faith. Young couples proceeded to their religiously-sanctioned married life when the *curé* administered the sacrament of matrimony at a mass in the parish church. As with baptisms and deaths, the *curé* or his vicar recorded all the marriages in the parish, since these were civil matters. A few young men from the parish chose to join the priesthood and received ordination from the archbishop; young women who became nuns underwent a similar rite. Finally, the parish priest administered extreme unction just before a person's death.¹²

But the Church also expected Catholics not only to participate in these sacramental occasions but to assist regularly at mass in their parish church. Every parish

¹⁰ Diocèse de Québec, *Recueil d'ordonnances synodales et épiscopales du Diocèse de Québec publié par Monseigneur l'Administrateur de Diocèse, Second Édition revue et corrigée* (Québec 1865), 30. "Nous estimons que l'âge de discrétion dans lequel les enfants doivent se disposer à communier ne peut pas commencer plus tôt ordinairement qu'à dix ans, et plus tard à quatorze. Nous voulons bien cependant en laisser le jugement à faire aux curés."

¹¹ "Dans l'Eucharistie, sous les espèces du pain et du vin, Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ lui-même est contenu, est offert, est reçu." Diocèse de Québec, *Discipline Diocésaine publiée par l'autorité de S. Em. Le Cardinal Villeneuve, O.M.I., Archevêque de Québec*, Troisième Édition (Québec, 1937), 401.

¹² Among the works which go into greater detail about these Catholic religious observances, a good overview for Québec can be found in Raymond Brodeur, *Catéchisme et identité culturelle dans le diocèse de Québec de 1815* (Ste-Foy, 1998). See especially "La vie chrétienne," 197-262. See also Philippe Sylvain and Nive Voisine, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois: Les XVIIIe et XIXe siècles, Volume II, tome 2: Réveil et consolidation 1840-1898* (Montréal, 1991), 327-45. For an excellent description that links religious observance and popular culture, see A.J.B. Johnston, *Religion in Life at Louisbourg 1713-1758* (Kingston and Montreal, 1984), 18-21, 108-50.

priest was obliged to say mass at least once a day every day of the year except Good Friday. Mass on Sunday was the religious highlight of the week, and all Catholics were expected to attend. The Québec archdiocesan authorities expected priests “d’en parler souvent, d’en expliquer les paroles et les cérémonies, d’en rappeler l’excellence et les fruits, d’exhorter le peuple chrétien à y assister chaque jour et à y communier sacramentellement.”¹³ The priest recited the prayers of the mass in Latin, with his back to the congregation for almost the entire time. Normally this “low” mass had no music or sermon, and would have been concluded within half an hour.¹⁴ The weekly “high” mass on Sunday morning, was far more elaborate and solemn, and was of longer duration. The three tall candlesticks on each side of the tabernacle would have been lit (as opposed to the two smaller ones used during the week). Accompanied by an organ or harmonium, the choir sang the responses in Gregorian chant to the priest’s short prayers as well as longer Latin prayers such as the Credo and the Gloria. Solemn music accompanied the ritual purification of the sanctuary with incense, and the consecration of the bread and wine.¹⁵ It was religious spectacle at its most solemn, dignified, and mysterious.

Since they commemorated Christ’s birth and resurrection, Christmas and Easter midnight masses were the most elaborately ceremonial rituals of the Church’s liturgical year.¹⁶ While deep piety probably brought some people to church, the drama and pageantry or the perceived efficaciousness of the rites brought others, and some no doubt combined the religious occasion with an opportunity to see members of the community, Such times would have found Québec’s Catholic churches packed with many more

¹³ Diocèse de Québec, *Discipline Diocésaine*, (1937), 401. Reiterating a typically traditional Catholic belief on the importance of the mass, Pius XII wrote in 1947, “It is desirable that all the faithful should be aware that to participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice is their chief duty and supreme dignity, and that, not in an inert and negligent fashion, giving way to distractions and day-dreaming, but with such earnestness and concentration that they may be united as closely as possible with the High Priest.” Hugo H. Hoever, ed., *Saint Joseph Daily Missal*, 1.

¹⁴ For a typical example of the format in Latin with English translation, see “The Ordinary of the Mass,” in Rev. Hugo H. Hoever, ed., *Saint Joseph Daily Missal: The Official Prayers of the Catholic Church for the Celebration of Daily Mass* (New York, 1959), 642-99. For the Latin text with a French translation, see “L’Ordinaire de la Messe,” in Lacroix, *La foi de ma mère*, 469-95.

¹⁵ For details on the ceremonial aspects of the celebration, see “Liturgy of the Mass,” *Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York, 1910) Vol. IX.

¹⁶ For some idea of the Christmas rites, see Soeur Marie-Ursule, *Civilisation traditionnelle des Lavallois* (Québec 1951), 69-70.

people than usual, as can be seen in Illustration 5.1. It is easy to imagine the dramatic effects of a nighttime service in St-Joseph's parish church: the light of the altar candles reflected on the white-and-gold walls, the statues and paintings around the church, the vestments of the priest, and the gold and silver religious articles, the fragrance of incense and the sound of Gregorian chant, accompanied after 1881 by the organ music reverberating from the walls and the high rounded ceiling of the nave. As Ollivier Hubert has pointed out, these "grands et pompeux offices" would have worked their magic on the susceptibilities of the faithful. They were the ideal means to render people "touchés aux larmes" and therefore brought closer to the message of the Church. Hubert also notes that the rite as spectacle was the expression of a kindlier dialogue between faithful – no longer seen as eternal sinners – and the merciful divinity.¹⁷

Such high levels of participation at the dramatic and colourful ceremonial rituals that solemnly marked the Christmas and Easter seasons, to name the two most dramatic ones, can be interpreted in different ways. Serge Gagnon has argued that in the early nineteenth century the Church itself was well aware that it needed to discover the most effective means of keeping the faithful from becoming mere consumers of rites and gestures, accompanied by words in Latin that nobody really understood.¹⁸ The recourse to sensory appeals in order to convey deeper religious or spiritual content had certain inherent risks and might, on some levels, even have been self-defeating. Rather than being proof of widespread submission to the clerical triumph in Québec, the increasing numbers of pilgrimages and public religious spectacles, or the larger numbers of people reported to have received communion at Easter, might have reflected a somewhat superficial attraction to pomp and ceremony. As some clergymen in St-Joseph found, too, the medium sometimes overshadowed the message. That may have been what the Reverend Louis-Antoine Martel had in mind in announcing the midnight mass for Christmas 1868. He reminded himself in his "Cahier de prônes" to urge them to come to church "avec recueillement - & non pas comme à un spectacle."¹⁹

¹⁷ Ollivier Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel: La gestion des rites par l'Église catholique du Québec (fin XVIIe - mi-XIXe siècle)* (Sainte-Foy, 2000), 142.

¹⁸ Gagnon, *Quand le Québec manquait de prêtres*, 4-5.

¹⁹ SPB FFSJ, 4. 3.33, "Cahier de prônes et annonces, 30 Novembre 1869-1872," 57.



Illustration 13. Edmond-Joseph Massicotte, *Le Retour de la messe de minuit* (1919)
Source: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ), no. 69.404.

Attendance at Sunday mass during the rest of the year was lower even though it was a fundamental obligation for all Catholics, and was thus a matter of concern to St-Joseph's *curés*. They reported that parishioners had a variety of reasons for staying home on Sunday. The Reverend David Martineau, who served as *curé* in the period 1853-56, recognized that mitigating factors, such as occasional geographic or climatic impediments, explained some parishioners' absences. One of the main difficulties for those on the southern side of the Chaudière River was its flooding at various times of the year. Even at the best of times, however, the river was difficult to ford. Martineau also admitted that the location of the parish church added to the difficulties of people living on the farthest concessions where "les gens ne viennent pas à l'église même au grandes fêtes de l'année, et où les malades meurent sans sacrements."²⁰ When people did come to Sunday mass, they did not stay for other religious devotions later in the day or in the

²⁰ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, David Martineau, "Rapport fait par le Curé de St. Joseph de la Beauce à Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Québec pour l'année 1854."

evening, as Martel observed in 1872. Some families lived over twelve kilometers from the church, and usually went home directly after mass, a problem that clergymen observed in other rural areas.²¹ Martel argued that establishing places to say mass from time to time in the distant areas of the parish would have helped mitigate some of those difficulties for parishioners. The creation of the new parishes in the northeastern part of St-Joseph, Saints-Anges in 1873 and L'Enfant Jésus in 1898, presumably made people's access to church much easier.

Furthermore, attending mass had multiple meanings for people beyond its specifically religious aspects. As the French sociologist of religion Jean Séguy has observed, people's attendance at Sunday mass is more than a simple concrete gesture; it is rather part of a complex cultural configuration, the product of their *habitus culturel*.²² Sunday mass was an occasion for young males and females to meet; it provided a market for rural traders to conduct business, and it served as a focal point for the life of the community.²³ In rural Québec, as Ollivier Hubert has noted, certain male behaviours, such as leaving the church during the sermon in order to congregate outside the church doors, were the customary and symbolic assertions of their independence from clerical control. No more ideal public setting could have been found for this purpose than Sunday mass.²⁴ Furthermore, Hubert argues, the first time an adolescent male left the church during the sermon, he was undergoing a traditional male rite of passage. He was also making a public statement to the community about that transition, since the Sunday mass was also "the venue where one affirmed one's own status and attempted to have it recognized by others."²⁵

Further to reinforce their flock's piety, St-Joseph's *curés* encouraged participation in pious organizations known as confraternities and archconfraternities which were

²¹ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2 (89), Antoine Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce Pour l'année 1872-73;" and AAQ 61 CD ST-Joseph de Beauce 2 (93), "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce Pour 1876-1877." See also Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, 337.

²² Jean Séguy, "Du cultuel au culturel," *AESC* (September-October 1974): 1285.

²³ Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism*, 160.

²⁴ Ollivier Hubert, "Ritual Performance and Parish Sociability: French-Canadian Catholic Families at Mass from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century," in Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760-1969*, (Montreal and Kingston, 2002), 60-61.

²⁵ Hubert, "Ritual Performance and Parish Sociability," 60- 61.

intended to strengthen people's religious and moral development.²⁶ During the 1840s in Lower Canada, not only confraternities, but pious works as well as retreats and missions began to become more numerous throughout the province, providing complements to the regular priestly work of teaching the catechism and delivering Sunday sermons. They were open to men, women, and children.²⁷ In St-Joseph, the archconfraternity of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary that Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montréal established in his diocese in 1841 was introduced much later, in 1869. Its rules only recommended saying a daily "Hail Mary," invoking the Virgin, going to confession once a month, and wearing a miraculous medal.²⁸ The Reverend Martel's report for 1872-3 indicates that it had 1525 members. As was the case elsewhere, its devotions that took place the first Sunday of each month were well attended.²⁹ That may not be surprising since people were in church anyway. The only other confraternity mentioned in the parish reports was the archconfraternity of Notre Dame des Victoires de Paris, established even later in St-Joseph, in 1877, thirty-nine years after it was founded in Paris with the goal of promoting devotion to Mary and of reforming sinners.³⁰ There is no indication why these devotional groups took so long to arrive in St-Joseph, although the often testy relations between Bourget and the Archbishops of Québec may have had something to do with it.³¹ Furthermore, both of these archconfraternities were established when the Reverend Martel was *curé*, suggesting that he may have been more drawn to them than his predecessors. On the other hand, the annual reports cited disappointing participation in a Novena to St. Francis Xavier, the Forty Hours devotion, and evening Vespers, all of which required the parishioners to make extra efforts to attend. The Reverend F.-X. Gosselin's reports for the late 1880s and early 1890s noted sparse attendance at Sunday

²⁶ Sylvain and Voisine, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois: Réveil et consolidation 1840-1898*, 347-64. See also Brigitte Caulier, "Bâtir l'Amérique des dévots: Les confréries de dévotion montréalaises depuis le régime français," *RHAF* 46:1 (Summer 1992), 45-66. See also Jacques Monet, "French Canadian Nationalism and the Challenge of Ultramontanism," *Historical Papers*, 1:1 (1966), 41-55. Canadian Historical Association,

²⁷ Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, 346-53

²⁸ Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, 346.

²⁹ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2 (89), Antoine Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce Pour l'année 1872-73." AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2 :102a, Antoine Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour 1879-80, à l'occasion de la visite épiscopale."

³⁰ www.notredamedesvictoires.com/unionpriere.htm. Accessed 30 May, 2012.

³¹ For more on this subject, see Jacques Grisé, *Les conciles provinciaux de Québec et l'Église canadienne (1851-1886)* (Montréal, 1979).

vespers for the reasons Martel had identified in 1872: the long distances people had to travel. When Gosselin reported in 1886 that many parishioners did not attend vespers, he urged a shorter more attractive devotion instead.³²

But some parishioners' excuses were not convincing to the clerics. The Reverend David Martineau reported in 1854 that many came to mass only in good weather, and even then women were notable for their absence from divine services. Still less justifiable was the habitants' "*compassion désordonnée pour les chevaux.*" Such solicitude often meant people did not come to mass except when the roads were in good condition.³³ In 1872, Martineau's successor, Louis-Antoine Martel, remarked that Sundays and holy days were generally well observed, at least in the sense that people refrained from working, but, as far as attendance at mass or other religious ceremonies went, if the weather or the roads were bad, "un grand nombre ne se fait pas scrupule de rester à leurs maisons."³⁴ Both Martineau and Martel felt that the weather or financial difficulties were less to blame for low church attendance than people's basic lack of motivation. In his 1854 report, Martineau wrote that there was no real piety in the parish, "même parmi le grand nombre de ceux qui se présentent à la sainte table plusieurs fois dans l'année."³⁵ Martel's sermons in the early 1870s also featured warnings for those who arrived late for mass or who came drunk.³⁶ Furthermore, over a three-week period in 1876, he found it necessary to issue public warnings to parishioners against fighting, or threatening to fight, in front of the church.³⁷ In the late 1870s and early 1880s, despite reporting that his parishioners were zealous enough for those aspects of Catholicism that involved parish building projects, Martel found that they were less so for religious exercises.³⁸

³² AAQ 64 CD 8, "Rapports des Paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec," 1886", vol. 2 (I-Z), 186, François-Xavier Gosselin, Rapport annuel. He repeated these observations in his 1887 report as well as in 1890 and 1892.

³³ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Martineau, "Rapport fait par le Curé," 1854. Original underlined.

³⁴ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Antoine Martel, "Mémoire sur la Paroisse de St. Joseph présenté à Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Québec à l'occasion de la Visite Episcopale en 1872," 23 June 1872.

³⁵ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, "Rapport fait par le curé de St Joseph," 1854.

³⁶ ASPB, FFSJ, "Prônes, 1872-1875," 96-98.

³⁷ ASPB, FFSJ, "Prônes, Janvier 1878-Septembre 1880," 34-38. Late fall and early winter were the usual times for these warnings, 22 and 23 Sunday afters Pentecost ("Avis à ceux qui se battent ou veulent se battre à la porte de l'église," and "Avis aux chicaniers - perron de l'église"), and again just before Christmas ("Avis contre les désordres").

³⁸ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Antoine Martel, "Rapports sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph": 1877-78; 1878-79; 1879-80; 1882-83.

A few people in St-Joseph deliberately stayed away from church, but these were exceptional. Martel's 1871 report indicated that about eight or nine parishioners did not go to confession, a number he considered too high despite the fact that it is rather insignificant given the number of possible communicants (2,042).³⁹ His 1877-78 report noted a more specific reason why eight or nine parishioners still had not come to confession in over a year. Several of them, he said, were not doing so because of their "stubbornness" in not paying a new levy ("capitation") of two dollars on non-farming families.⁴⁰ In 1876, recognising the increasing numbers of families in St-Joseph who did not cultivate farms and therefore had contributed little or nothing to the parish revenues, Archbishop Tachereau decreed that such families (*emplacitaires*), as well as families of *cultivateurs* whose tithe was less than two dollars, would henceforth pay the *capitation*. Single individuals such as servants, schoolteachers, workers, and the like would pay fifty cents. Anyone who refused "ne peut être admis aux Sacrements de l'Église, même à l'article de la mort," unless they repented and paid.⁴¹ Possibly because this new levy was not a legal obligation, unlike the tithe, the several recalcitrant parishioners evidently felt no sense of urgency in paying it. And the *curés* rarely reported problems of people not paying the tithe or any other financial obligations to the Church, such as the *supplément*, a levy on crops such as hay or potatoes that were not normally tithable, as was grain.⁴² An exception was in 1886 when thirty parishioners owed \$50.00, and the following year when sixty-two parishioners owed \$100.00. Included in this number were twenty farmers and forty-two *emplacitaires* (people who did not make their living by farming).⁴³ The *curé's* reports did not indicate if these two years had been especially difficult ones for farmers.

³⁹ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph, Beauce, pour l'année 1870-71."

⁴⁰ AAQ 69 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Antoine Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour 1877-78."

⁴¹ ASPB FFSJ, "Lettres," Elzéar-Alexandre Taschereau, Archevêque de Québec, "Aux fidèles de St-Joseph de Beauce." 2 August, 1876. Handwritten 3-page letter.

⁴² Louis Rousseau and Frank W. Remiggi, dirs., *Atlas historique des pratiques religieuses. Le Sud-Ouest du Québec au XIXe siècle* (Ottawa, 1998), 83-5. See also J.I. Little, "The Parish and French Canadian Migrants to Compton County, Quebec, 1851-1891," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 11 (1978), 134-143.

⁴³ AAQ 64 CD 3, "Rapports des Paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec," 1886, and AAQ 64 CD 4, "Rapports des Paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec," 1887.

In the 1890s, the Reverend F.-X. Gosselin observed that the religious devotion of adults was unsatisfactory for reasons that had nothing to do with principle, climate, or distance from the church. While he reported few problems in getting people to abstain from rich food during the forty days of Lent, he observed in 1891 that many parishioners were less punctilious about fasting after midnight before receiving Sunday communion or before certain feast days. Many of them gave what he thought were extremely transparent excuses in order to be granted a dispensation, usually given only to those engaged in heavy manual labour, or who were seriously ill. Gosselin noted that, “très peu jeûnent, chacun croyant avoir des raisons pour se dispenser de cette obligation.”⁴⁴

Easter Communion

One way historians have tried to calculate levels of religious devotion a little more precisely than relying on subjective clerical observations has been to measure the number of people taking communion at Easter. Easter is the one time of the year when it is obligatory for all Catholics to receive communion. Louis Rousseau argues that it served as a reliable barometer of people’s religious adherence: “moins la pratique pascale est générale, plus elle est révélatrice du niveau d’engagement religieux individuel.”⁴⁵ Similarly, in her study of the Diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe between 1820 and 1875, Christine Hudon argues, in effect, that the gradual rise in the numbers of people taking communion at Easter between 1846 and 1878 indicated increased piety, and was therefore a factor behind the larger transformation of society and “l’essor d’un catholicisme triomphant.”⁴⁶ But, the number of Easter communions is an indicator only of people’s dutiful conformity to the requirements of acceptable Catholic religious behaviour, not religious fervour. The Church considered that any Catholic who went to communion no more than once a year was merely fulfilling the barest minimum requirement of the religion.⁴⁷ The catechisms taught that those who did not to receive

⁴⁴ AAQ 64 CD 8, “Rapports des Paroisses de l’Archidiocèse de Québec,” 1891, vol. 2 (I-Z): 67, 473-75, F.-X. Gosselin, 22 August, 1891.

⁴⁵ Louis Rousseau, “La communion pascale,” in Louis Rousseau and Frank Remiggi, dirs, dirs. *Atlas historique des pratiques religieuses. Le Sud-Ouest du Québec au XIXe siècle* (Ottawa, 1998), 161.

⁴⁶ Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, 427.

⁴⁷ *Le Catéchisme des Provinces ecclésiastiques de Québec, Montréal, Ottawa: Approuvé le 20 avril 1888 par les Archevêques et Evêques de ces provinces et publié par leur ordre* (Québec, 1888), 102-03, Questions 465, 466.

communion at Easter were guilty of committing a mortal sin.⁴⁸ By itself, a full church at Easter when most parishioners received communion would not have convinced St-Joseph's *curés* that there were satisfactory levels of piety in the parish. It therefore offers little insight into the degree of people's religious fervour, and it fails to indicate that they demonstrated any more piety or devotion after 1850 than in earlier decades.

Table 4.3 on Easter Communion in St-Joseph, based on the *curés*' annual reports for the period 1853-95, indicates a clear shift over the course of nearly half a century, although the rate is consistently better after 1885. It remained very high down to

Table 4.3: Easter Communion, St-Joseph de Beauce: 1853-57, 1872-74, 1885-1895

Source: AAQ Rapports des Curés de St-Joseph. 1853-1895

Year	Communicants	Easter Duty	Percentage at Easter
1853	1461	1213	83.0%
1854	1542	1150	75.0%
1857	1500	1210	81.0%
1872-73	2031	1884	93.0%
1873-74	2123	1922	91.0%
1885-86	1958	1951	99.6%
1886-87	1956	1951	99.7%
1887-88	1897	1889	99.6%
1888-89	1952	1947	99.7%
1889-90	1985	1980	99.8%
1890-91	1952	1947	99.7%
1891-92	1976	1972	99.8%
1892-93	1985	1981	99.8%
1893-94	1985	1981	99.8
1894-95	2085	2081	99.8%

⁴⁸ *Catéchisme des Provinces ecclésiastiques (1888)*, 104, Question 469.

end of the century, when it encompassed all but a very few parishioners. In the period 1853-7, roughly 80 per cent of the communicants in St-Joseph fulfilled this elementary requirement of Catholicism. The lowest ratio is for 1854, an anomaly and one that coincided with the arrival of James Nelligan, the only *curé* of St-Joseph who did not submit annual parish reports, either. The relatively lower ratios of the 1850s needs to take into account an additional problem that the *curés* encountered. For reasons of their own, some parishioners had no difficulty in splitting hairs over the exact definition of Easter. It may be, as the Reverend Martel reported in 1872, that several people did not hesitate to forego receiving communion during Holy Week or on Easter Sunday in order to go to their sugar shanties instead. They used the pretext that they had already gone to communion weeks before, during a Novena to St. Francis Xavier held near the beginning of Lent.⁴⁹ By 1872-73 and 1873-74, the Easter communion ratios rose to over 90 per cent. In the early 1890s, that figure had risen to encompass all but four or five parishioners. After 1895, the priests reported they did not know the exact numbers. Clearly, the parishioners were becoming more religiously observant, but the fact remains that the *curés* reported no increase in religious devotion in St-Joseph.

Frequency of Communion

A better measure of religious belief than the dutiful but disengaged passage through the stages of the Church's sacramental order is the number of times a person took communion throughout the year. Frequent, even daily, communion had been a recognized practice in the early Christian Church down to the seventeenth century, after which a more rigorous interpretation of man's worthiness to receive the sacrament prevailed until the early nineteenth century.⁵⁰ The influence of St. Alphonsus de Liguori (1696-1787) who was canonized in 1839, the rise of ultramontanism, and the spread of devotion to the Sacred Heart, saw a move away from rigourism and a return to the older generous tradition. Hudon shows that in the Diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe in the period 1820-75 the ultramontane influence inspired the Church to encourage the faithful to receive communion much more frequently than in the past. In the 1840s, that meant, ideally,

⁴⁹ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Martel, "Mémoire sur la Paroisse de St. Joseph," 1872.

⁵⁰ Thomas Scannell, "Frequent Communion," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6. New York, 1909.

once or twice a month for seminarians and college students, and every month for others.⁵¹ As Hudon notes, frequent communion became viewed as “le rite sacramentaire par excellence, celui qui fortifiait, guérissait l’âme et le corps, assurant le salut éternel.”⁵² On the other hand, while exhorting the faithful to receive communion frequently, the catechisms of the Québec Archdiocese between 1847 and 1882 did not always provide specific minimum figures to guide them.⁵³ In the *Petit Catéchisme* of 1847, in answer to the question of what would be appropriate for a Christian to do each month, the answer was that one should confess one’s sins and take communion.⁵⁴

In his *Manuel des parents chrétiens* of 1851, the former Vicar General of the Québec Archdiocese, the abbé Alexis Mailloux, indicated that ideally a good Catholic should receive communion two or three times annually, or even more.⁵⁵ As a result, people seem to have been left to use their own judgement. Less helpfully, to the question on whether it was good to receive communion frequently, the diocesan catechism of 1888 responded that, “Oui, il est bon, et assez fréquemment nécessaire, de recevoir la sainte communion, qui augmente en nous la grace et nous fortifie contre le mal.”⁵⁶ Beyond that cryptic formulation, there were no clear guidelines on what did constitute acceptable frequency of communion for Catholics, although there are some indications that the Church’s expectations increased. Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII, and Pius X who reigned in the second half of the nineteenth century supported frequent, even daily, communion.⁵⁷ But distinctions between the old and new positions of the Québec Church on the frequency of communion may have been sharper in theory than in actual practice. As Serge Gagnon notes, it seems unlikely that parish priests had actually been as unbendingly rigorous before the 1840s in the dispensation of absolution to penitents as

⁵¹ Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, 395-400.

⁵² Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, 426.

⁵³ See *Le Petit Catéchisme du Diocèse de Québec, Nouvelle Édition revue, corrigée et examinée par ordre de Monseigneur Joseph Signay, Archevêque de Québec* (Québec, 1847); *Le Grand Catéchisme de Québec A l’usage de toute la Province ecclésiastique de Québec* (Lévis, 1853); and *Le Catéchisme des Provinces ecclésiastiques de Québec, Montréal, Ottawa: Approuvé le 20 avril 1888 par les Archevêques et Evêques de ces provinces et publié par leur ordre* (Québec, 1888 and 1908).

⁵⁴ *Petit Catéchisme du Diocèse de Québec*, (1847), 47.

⁵⁵ Alexis Mailloux, *Le Manuel des parents chrétiens* (Québec, 1851), 122.

⁵⁶ *Catéchisme des Provinces ecclésiastiques* (1888), Question 277, 64.

⁵⁷ Pius X, “Sacra Tridenta Synodus” (decree of the Congregation of the Council), 20 December 1905, in Scannell, “Frequent Communion.” Pius X (1903-1914), proclaimed in 1905: “Frequent and daily communion [...] should be open to all the faithful, of whatever rank and condition of life.”

the discourses of that era would suggest. A rural *curé* would have known that he had to provide hope as well as judgement to his penitents, and no doubt many realized the wisdom in tempering a severely discouraging interpretation of divine wrath with a judicious recognition of God's fatherly mercy.⁵⁸ In that sense, as Pierre Hurtubise points out, it is also necessary to distinguish between the "discours clérical" of the distant hierarchy and the "discours de clerc" of priests who were in touch with their parishioners' religious needs and might soften official pronouncements to fit the local context.⁵⁹

Even before the effects of the ultramontane revival were felt, the clergy seems to have had few complaints, or perhaps lower expectations, about the people of St-Joseph in that regard. For his visit in 1853, Archbishop Turgeon noted 1461 communions at the mass he held.⁶⁰ This is the same number of annual communions Antoine Racine gave in his parish report one month later. The figure is derived from taking the total number of parishioners (2565) and subtracting the number of children not yet making their first communion (1104).⁶¹ Despite the Church's public support for a more generous interpretation of the rules surrounding communion, however, the frequency of individual communions in St-Joseph rose slowly but steadily over period 1868-92. Again, there are no figures for Nelligan's tenure in St-Joseph. Table 4.4, based on the number of hosts distributed in a year divided by the number of eligible communicants, traces the average number of times in a given year that each communicant received the sacrament during the period 1868-85, and for 1891-92. The lowest average number of individual communions occurred in 1868-69, 3.6 times per person per year. The highest average, 8.3 times, was 1891-92. These ratios are very low by modern Catholic standards, but not for the late nineteenth century. René Hardy dates the Church's official encouragement of weekly communion in Québec to 1888, but suggests that most of the faithful did not adopt the practice before the mid twentieth century.⁶²

⁵⁸ Gagon, *Quand le Québec manquait de prêtres*, 8.

⁵⁹ Pierre Hurtubise, Comment on Serge Gagnon, "Morales d'aujourd'hui, morales d'hier," in Benoît Lacroix and Jean Simard, *Religion populaire, religion de clercs?* (Québec, 1984), 98.

⁶⁰ AAQ 69 CD, "Visites Pastorales," vol. 13, p. 353.

⁶¹ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, "Rapport de Mr. A. Racine, 1853".

⁶² *Catéchisme des Provinces ecclésiastiques* (1888), 64; René Hardy, "Regards sur la construction de la culture catholique québécoise au XIXe siècle," *CHR* 88:1 (March 2007), 34.

Table 4.4: Individual Communions Per Year - St-Joseph de Beauce (1868-1892)

Source: AAQ, Rapports des Curés de St-Joseph, 1868-1892

Year	<u>Communicants</u>	Hosts Distributed	<u>Average /Person</u>
1868-9	1800	6,515	3.6
1869-70	2032	8,839	4.3
1870-71	2042	8,939	4.4
1871-72	2122	10,224	4.8
1872-73	2031	9,752	4.8
1873-74	2123	8,909	4.6
1874-75	1815	10,203	5.6
1875-76	1833	10,267	5.6
1876-77	1862	10,363	5.6
1878-79	1871	10,711	5.7
1879-80	1880	8703	4.6
1880-81	1887	10,944	5.8
1881-82	1928	13,965	7.2
1882-83	1969	13,794	7.0
1883-84	1903	13,965	7.3
1884-85	1959	13,435	6.9
1891-92	1976	16,500	8.3

The progressive trend to more frequent communion in St-Joseph can be interpreted differently. Even if the numbers remained quite low, the ratio did more than double in a quarter century, which suggests that people were becoming more religiously observant. On the other hand, depending on the individual, infrequent communion could mean either religious indifference or its exact opposite, namely the persistence of the older belief that humans were unworthy to receive Christ too often, even if they led good Christian lives. But those persistently low ratios, even at the end of the nineteenth

century, also indicate that some people were indifferent to the Church's new discourse or unwilling to change their old habits in order to conform to it. It is also likely that people may not even have been very interested in, or not have understood, the fine theological distinctions. Depending on the kind of message that the *curé* conveyed to his parishioners, it could have meant that many clergymen still believed in the older message of man's unworthiness and discouraged frequent taking of the Eucharist. This does not seem to have been the case in St-Joseph between 1868 and 1885, however, as Antoine Martel's few comments in his sparse sermon notes, as well as his more detailed annual reports, lead one to conclude that he was the kind of generous-minded cleric who had a more optimistic interpretation of the gospel and of human worthiness for divine mercy. Thus, he concluded in 1871, his problems were small and "on peut dire avec raison que la paroisse de St-Joseph est une excellente paroisse."⁶³ However, comments from some of his more stringent successors indicate that they were every bit as strict as Bishop Laval had been, even though the Church's own official discourse had softened considerably.

Religious instruction: Learning the Catechism

Apart from having different temperaments, there may have been a number of reasons for people's varying views on, or knowledge of, their religious duties. The *curés* of St-Joseph down to the start of the twentieth century invariably complained that even the most elementary tenets of Catholicism were beyond the grasp of too many children. The key tool for implanting religion was the catechism, but children had to be in school or attend Sunday classes in the church in order to be exposed to it. The *curés* blamed lax attendance at catechism classes primarily on parental indifference. If children's knowledge of their religion and their general literacy were low, the logical assumption was that badly-trained children would turn into inadequately religious adults unless their parents took the proper steps. The Church had a clear definition of the primarily spiritual role of education, one that was articulated in its corpus of canon law as well as the publications of the Québec Archdiocese. Canon law required that nothing contrary to the

⁶³ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Antoine Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph, Beauce, pour l'année 1870-71."

Catholic religion be part of a young child's education, and that his or her moral and religious formation occupy the most important place.⁶⁴ In order to guarantee children's religious education, the archdiocesan authorities insisted that Catholic parents and school inspectors ensure the catechism was taught at the elementary level.⁶⁵ School was an ideal place for sustained exposure to religious lessons because children had gathered there for their elementary education under the supervision of their teachers. Learning the catechism at school would prepare them for their first communion, and expose them the Church's message about proper conduct in life.

The Diocese of Québec had produced several catechisms since Bishop Saint-Vallier approved the first one in 1702, but in the nineteenth century it issued three revised versions in a comparatively short time, in 1847, 1853, and 1888.⁶⁶ These small booklets contained simple questions and answers that had been designed to give children a basic understanding of the main principles and components of the Catholic faith, as well as to prepare them for their first communion and the other sacraments. Raymond Brodeur argues that since the first diocesan catechism in 1702, the Church in Québec had different definitions of a catechism's purpose and content, at least in the sense of what it emphasized as the larger purpose of human existence.⁶⁷ In Bishop Saint-Vallier's time, the catechism was defined as that familiar instruction where one learned the Christian truths, how to serve God, and how to save oneself.⁶⁸ The Québec Archdiocese put more

⁶⁴ Raoul Naz, *Traité de droit canonique, Tome Troisième, Livre Trois* (Paris, 1954). 157,§1372.

⁶⁵ *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec par S.G. Mgr. E.-A. Taschereau, Archevêque de Québec, Deuxième Édition* (Québec, 1895), 93-94. These concerns were repeated in the 1879 and 1937 editions. See also Naz, *Traité de droit canonique*, 158.§1373; and Brigitte Caulier, "Enseigner la religion dans le système scolaire confessionnel au Québec (XIXe-XXe siècles)," in Raymond Brodeur and Brigitte Caulier, dirs., *Enseigner le catéchisme. Autorités et institutions XVIe-XXe siècles* (Québec, 1997), 265-84.

⁶⁶ *Le Petit Catéchisme du Diocèse de Québec, Nouvelle Édition revue, corrigée et examinée par ordre de Monseigneur Joseph Signay, Archevêque de Québec* (Québec, 1847); *Le Grand Catéchisme de Québec A l'usage de toute la Province ecclésiastique de Québec* (Lévis, 1853); and *Le Catéchisme des Provinces ecclésiastiques de Québec, Montréal, Ottawa: Approuvé le 20 avril 1888 par les Archevêques et Evêques de ces provinces et publié par leur ordre* (Québec, 1888 and 1908). See also Raymond Brodeur, *Catéchisme et identité culturelle dans le diocèse de Québec de 1815* (Sainte-Foy, 1998). For the Québec experience in the context of the larger French-speaking world, see Raymond Brodeur and Brigitte Caulier, dirs., *Enseigner le catéchisme: Autorités et institutions, XVIe-XXe siècles* (Sainte-Foy, 1997), in particular Brigitte Caulier, "Enseigner la religion dans le système scolaire confessionnel au Québec (XIXe-XXe siècles)," 265-84.

⁶⁷ Brodeur, *Catéchisme et identité culturelle*, 3.

⁶⁸ Fernand Porter, ed., *Catéchisme du Diocèse de Québec 1702* (Montréal, 1958), 2.

emphasis on the last point in the mid-nineteenth century, by which time the 1853 edition of the *Grand Catéchisme* defined the catechism as the place where “on y apprend à se sauver.” This catechism taught children that there were three things necessary for salvation: believing the teachings of the Church, fleeing from sin, and practicing good works.⁶⁹ At the parish level, one of the most important duties of the *curé* or his vicar was ensuring that young children were adequately prepared to receive their first communion by the age of ten. It was their responsibility to see that the schools used the diocesan catechism as the basis of their pupils’ compulsory religious instruction. Actual catechism lessons during the ten months of the year that schools were normally in session would have been the responsibility of the teacher.⁷⁰

To encourage parental compliance in sending their offspring for religious instruction, the answers to the fourth and fifth questions of the Catechism of 1853 stated that children who did not attend catechism were committing evil, and parents who did not make them do so were offending God.⁷¹ Furthermore, in his *Manuel des parent chrétiens*, the Abbé Alexis Mailloux, exhorted parents not only to send their children to catechism classes but personally to reinforce the efforts of the clergy by going over the catechism at home with them in order to make sure they grasped the rudiments of their faith and were ready to receive their first communion properly. The small size of the 1847 *Petit catéchisme* made this task easier for them since it contained sixty-eight pages and 329 questions. Mailloux also thought that the best time for children to absorb these religious ideas was between the ages of seven and ten. Conscientious parents needed only have them learn two questions, or a total of three or four lines, a week in order to fulfill this duty. However, he deplored the fact that too many parents neglected to do even this.⁷²

Mailloux also regretted that many parents waited until their children were twelve or even fourteen years of age before first sending them to catechism class. (Presumably

⁶⁹ *Grand Catéchisme*, (1853), 13.

⁷⁰ A contract dated 3 September 1851 between the school commissioners of St-Charles, Richelieu County, and their teacher, Eusèbe Blanchet, required him to teach the catechism one hour per day in order to prepare eligible children for their first communion, to teach them their daily prayers, as well as to inspire his charges with a love of virtue, and a horror of vice. Jacques Dorion, *Les écoles de rang au Québec* (Montréal, 1979), 381-85.

⁷¹ *Grand Catéchisme*, (1853), 13.

⁷² Alexis Mailloux, *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, 1851, (Montréal, 1977) 119.

that meant these children also had not attended school.) By then it was too late, Mailloux argued, because, after age twelve they already had a thousand other things on their minds.⁷³ This complaint would have sounded quite familiar to the *curés* of St-Joseph in the last half of the nineteenth century. Their annual reports made it clear that, thanks to the ‘indifference’ of their parents, far too many were not even at school for their lessons or for the compulsory period of daily religious instruction. Was it any surprise, the Reverend David Martineau asked rhetorically in his 1854 report from St-Joseph that children grew up in “ignorance” when their mothers preferred to work in their gardens on Sunday, or to look after the animals, or to help at sugaring, instead of coming to church? The lack of religious instruction among the young was a direct result.⁷⁴

The other reason was, as his successors pointed out, that the parents did not send their children to school. That might have been expected in the 1850s when the educational reforms were beginning to take place in the province, but all the *curés* reported high rates of children’s absenteeism from school in every decade down to the start of the twentieth century.⁷⁵ In his 1854 report, the Reverend Martineau attributed the parents’ lack of enthusiasm to several factors such as the inability of some to appreciate the importance of education, the hostility of others, the avarice of some that kept them from paying the teachers, and their desire to keep their children at work on their farms rather than sending them to school. The result was that “L’ignorance est à un point déplorable.”⁷⁶ Children who did not attend school still had the option of attending catechism class that the *curé* or the vicar taught during the week so that they might be prepared for their first communion. Martel noted as well that either he or his vicar taught first communion classes every day of the week, and that there was also time set aside in all the schools in the parish for catechism classes, but even so, as he noted on 13 August 1873, a major reason for the lack of adequate communion preparation was that many parents did not send their children to school or to the Sunday classes held after mass in

⁷³ Mailloux, *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, 120.

⁷⁴ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, “Rapport fait par le curé de St Joseph,” 1854

⁷⁵ See Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles*, especially 298-302, for a similar situation in Saint-Hyacinthe.

⁷⁶ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Martineau, “Rapport fait par le Curé de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour l’année 1854.”

the church.⁷⁷ A year later, Martel used his sermon on Pentecost Sunday to announce from the pulpit that catechism classes would begin the next morning at nine o'clock for the children of the parish and admonished the parents: "Qu'ils vien (sic) assidus, attentifs - & *propres*."⁷⁸ Perhaps Martel wanted to emphasize that outwardly dirty children reflected neglect of their spiritual welfare, but he was more understanding in his report to the bishop, perhaps because low catechism attendance reflected poorly on his own efforts. Martel's report of 1879-80 noted that while 429 pupils were registered for the parish schools, there were frequent absences because the parents did not make sure their children attended school.⁷⁹ In his sermon notes the following year Martel claimed so many pupils were absent from class that parents were paying school levies for nothing.⁸⁰ School inspectors agreed that parents thought their children's time was better spent in contributing to the economic survival of their families than in pursuing abstract knowledge in the far-from-ideal settings of St-Joseph's one-room schools.⁸¹

While not minimizing the role of parental indifference to education in general, the *curés* understood, but did not necessarily condone, the fact that it was for usually reasons of necessity. Martel wrote that a mitigating factor to children's absenteeism was the great distances that many parishioners had to travel in order to get to church, and the hardships they could encounter in bad weather. Many lived on farms twelve to fifteen kilometers from the parish church in the village.⁸² Even so, in all Martel's reports down to his last one in 1885, the children's inattentiveness to catechism lessons and the negligence of

⁷⁷ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, "Mémoire sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph présenté à Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Québec à l'occasion de la Visite Episcopale en 1872."

⁷⁸ ASPB FFSJ, "Prônes, 1872-1875," 72. (Underlined in the original)

⁷⁹ AAQ 69 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Louis-Antoine Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour 1879-80". He made the same comments in each of the following years down to his departure from the parish in 1885.

⁸⁰ ASPB FFSJ, "Prônes du 30 Octobre 1880 au 19 Décembre 1886," 45.

⁸¹ Lower Canada's Superintendent of Education, Jean-Baptiste Meilleur, noted in his 1853 *Report* that one of the greatest contributing factors to the pupils' frequent absences from school remained "those domestic services which the comfort and welfare of their families render necessary through the severity of our climate." *Report of the Superintendent of Education for Lower Canada for 1853* (Québec 1854), 10. See also *Rapport du Surintendant de l'Éducation pour le Bas-Canada pour 1864* (Québec, 1865), xv; and *Rapport du Surintendant de l'Instruction publique pour l'année 1875-76 et documents relatifs à 1874-75* (Québec, 1876), 151-53.

⁸² AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2 (89), Louis-Antoine Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce Pour l'année 1872-73."

their parents in sending them remained constant themes. Martel's observations on parental indifference about their children's attendance at catechism were echoed in his successor's annual reports. The Reverend François-Xavier Gosselin (1885-95) complained in his report of 1888 that the Christian education of the children of the parish was "bien négligée," a more forceful restatement of the tone of some of his other reports.⁸³ In 1890, Gosselin reported the same unsatisfactory catechism results.⁸⁴ Finally, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the situation seemed to improve. In his report of 1900, the new *curé*, Adalbert Blanchet (1899-1904), admitted that although the parents were still negligent, the children at least were slightly better. Two years later, however, he reversed this optimistic assessment and returned to the familiar theme of his predecessors. There were, Blanchet wrote, inattentive or absent children at catechism and far too many ("beaucoup trop") neglectful parents.⁸⁵ For the Sunday morning of 25 May 1902, he put the matter even more strongly in a plan for a sermon to his parishioners. He regretfully announced that he had to refuse first communion to "a large number" of children when he examined them on their preparation for the sacrament. "Ils ne savent rien [...] Les uns sans intelligence [...] on n'a pas compris l'information des écoles," he wrote in his sermon notes. Indeed, the problem went even further. Once first communion was made, the children seemed to think their religious instruction was complete, and there was no onus on them to learn any more about their religion, or to prepare themselves for other sacraments, or to deal with the temptations of adolescence. As Blanchet regretfully wrote in his 1902 notes, no matter what their age, "On ne vient plus au catéchisme; quelques un (sic) ne viennent pas même au confesse chaque mois; c'est la faute des parents."⁸⁶ Henceforth, he vowed to take a much more stringent approach, and if he had reasons to send children back for more instruction, he would.⁸⁷

⁸³ AAQ 64 CD 6, "Rapports des paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec, 1888," vol 2, I-Z. 161-175. F-X Gosselin 'Rapport annuel de la Paroisse de St-Joseph de Beauce, 1888,' 5 June, 1888.

⁸⁴ AAQ 64 CD 7, "Rapports des Paroisses, 1890", vol. 2 (I-Z), 219-234, F.-X. Gosselin, "Rapport du curé, 1890, St-Joseph de Beauce."

⁸⁵ AAQ 61 CD 17, "Rapports des paroisses, 1900," vol 2, J-Z, 117-132. Reports up to 1915 modify the picture a little, noting that parents were more scrupulous in sending their children, especially in the summer (1907, 1908), and that those in the village had a better record than those from the more distant parts of the parish. (1915).

⁸⁶ ASPB, FFSJ, "Livre de prêches, 28 avril 1901 - 28 février 1906", 82.

⁸⁷ ASPB, FFSJ, "Livre de prêches, 28 avril 1901 - 28 février 1906", 82.

Table 4.5 shows the number of first communions that the *curés* of St-Joseph reported they administered for selected years in the period 1853-1901. In 1853, the Reverend Racine noted that 123 children of the parish made their first communion, a relatively high number given that in the 1870s and 1880s the average was fifty or sixty.⁸⁸ There are no extant annual parish reports in the Archdiocesan Archives for the period 1854-68 because the years of James Nelligan's tenure in St-Joseph were marked by his long illness and the fire in the parish church. These considerations probably did not enable him to devote the necessary time or effort to the annual parish reports or to teach the weekly catechism classes. But the numbers do not tell the whole story, and are difficult to assess because, except for 1869, as will be seen shortly, there is no indication of the total number of potential communicants in the catechism classes who could have received the sacrament if they had been sufficiently prepared. But even when children were exposed to the catechism, successive *curés* found that the results of these religious lessons were far from satisfactory, likely from so much absenteeism. The Reverend Martel reported in 1869 that out of more than 180 applicants for first communion, he ultimately administered the sacrament to only seventy-four, or a mere 41 per cent of them. He had turned the vast majority away because of their "ignorance sans bornes," and decided that he would have to start all over with them.⁸⁹ But, because most of them were in their early teens and some were between sixteen and eighteen years of age, Martel was still inclined to admit them to the sacrament. Perhaps he hoped that they would eventually absorb the essentials of their faith through osmosis by attending mass, but, as Mailloux recognized, when they became parents, the potential to produce another generation of indifferent or at least unprepared Catholics would have been high.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Antoine Racine, "Rapport de Mr. A. Racine pour St-Joseph de la Beauce, 1853."

⁸⁹ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2 (II: 68), Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph, Beauce, pour 1869."

⁹⁰ Mailloux, *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, 120.

Table 4.5: First Communions: St-Joseph de Beauce, 1853-1901

Source: AAQ, *Rapports des Curés de St-Joseph, 1853-1901*

Date	No.		Date	No.
1853	123		1884	76
1854	57		1885	74
1869	74		1886	72
1871	70		1887	99
1872	63		1888	89
1873	70		1889	140
1874	51		1890	63
1875	67		1891	66
1876	49		1892	111
1877	62		1893	84
1878	65		1894	87
1879	91		1895	78
1880	68		1896	63
1881	51		1898	74
1882	83		1900	88
1883	105		1901	72

Le sacre québécois

Ironically, perhaps, an unintended consequence of people's greater exposure to some of the lessons of the catechism, or more likely through a combination of irreverence and the informal rituals of male socialization, was that clerics noted with alarm the increasing prevalence of swearing and blasphemy in Québec by the end of the nineteenth century. While some parishioners could name all the important sacred objects associated with the Eucharist, far too often they used them blasphemously rather than reverentially. Certainly the Reverend F.-X. Gosselin noted the same trend in 1890 in his report from St-Joseph: "Les blasphémateurs sont très nombreux malgré tous les efforts que nous faisons pour les convertir."⁹¹ A year later, in his report that put the factors of youth, drink and swearing together, Gosselin lamented, "*Le blasphème n'est pas rare.*"⁹² One reason for

⁹¹ AAQ 64 CD 8, "Rapports des Paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec," 1890, vol. 2 (I-Z), 551.

⁹² AAQ 64 CD 8. Gosselin, "Rapports des Paroisses," 1891, 231. Underlining in the original. In 1892, a colleague in St-Martin observed that nothing had changed despite all his efforts and sermons. He concluded disconsolately, "c'est décourageant parfois." AAQ 64 CD 9, "Rapports des Paroisses," 1892, vol. 2 (I-Z), 501.

the increased ecclesiastical concern about swearing may have been the changes that occurred by the middle of the nineteenth century, when the vocabulary evolved from the names of saints or divine personages to the ritual objects associated with the Eucharist: the chalice that is used to consecrate wine at mass (*calice*), the host that is the body of Christ (*hostie*), and the tabernacle, the small locked cupboard on the altar where they are stored.⁹³ When people employed words associated with Christ's last moments on earth and Catholicism's most sacred belief in transubstantiation as swear words, they were breaking implicit and explicit bans on using such sacred words outside the reverential context of the mass.⁹⁴ When an emphatic "maudit" is added to any of these terms to provide still more force, simple swearing can verge on blasphemy, that is, deliberate insult to the divinity. It can cause even greater scandal to good Catholics, as in the expression, "Maudit calice, je suis tanné de travailler de même!"⁹⁵

René Hardy argues that the rise in the new form of swearing, which began to spread in the 1870s and 1880s, coincided with the increased influence of the clergy over society and was a reaction against it. One consequence of people's indulgence in swearing was that, "la réprobation social pesait alors si lourdement sur les récalcitrants qu'il leur était pratiquement impossible de contester les prescriptions du clergé," so that indulging in swearing was merely "un type de transgression purement symbolique."⁹⁶ A more likely explanation places swearing at the centre of male socialization rituals, rather than seeing it as a transgressive feature of a small isolated minority. Clerical alarm indicates that the practice was something that more than a small minority indulged in because, as René Hardy notes, the Catholic hierarchy in Québec had become so alarmed

⁹³ Jean-Pierre Pichette, in Michel Amyot and Gilles Bibeau, eds., *Le statut culturel du français au Québec: Actes du Congrès langue et société, Tome II* (Québec, 1984), Atelier 8 "Les Jurons". Accessed 12 January 2012: on: <http://www.cslf.gouv.qc.ca/bibliotheque-virtuelle/publication-html/?tx-iggcplplus-pi4%5B>. See also René Hardy, "Ce que sacrer veut dire: à l'origine du juron religieux au Québec," *Mentalités, histoire des cultures et des sociétés*, no. 2, *Injures et blasphèmes* (Paris, 1989), 102-05; and Peter N. Moogk, "'Thieving Buggers' and 'Stupid Sluts': Insults and Popular Culture in New France," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 36:4 (October 1979), 539.

⁹⁴ André Bougaïeff, "Un Trait du français populaire et familier au Québec: le système des 'sacres'," *The French Review* 53: 6 (May 1980): 839-47.

⁹⁵ Bougaïeff, "Un Trait du français populaire," 841.

⁹⁶ Hardy, "Ce que sacrer veut dire," 120. Similarly, André Bougaïeff characterizes the *sacre* in Québec as a reaction to the power and presence of the Church, a form of protest, or at least, "une des façons de prendre de la distance par rapport à l'Église." Bougaïeff, "Un Trait du français populaire," 840-41.

that the provincial council of bishops designated blasphemy as “un des péchés capitaux des Canadiens.”⁹⁷ Since swearing was primarily, if not exclusively, a male phenomenon, because more males than females were absent from the schools and catechism classes, and hence the influence of the *curé* or the teacher, there were fewer restraints on their behaviour. Discouraging numbers from the clergy’s perspective are to be found in school registrations in 1851 and 1901. As Figure 4.6 indicates, in 1851, only 160 out of 889 children (18 per cent) aged between five and sixteen years were registered in the parish schools. By 1901, 630 out of 1072 (59 per cent) of the children of that age group in the parish were registered for school.⁹⁸ Of course, the number of children who actually attended school on a regular basis was even lower. And, as, Inspector Béland noted in his report for 1876-77, that, unlike the boys, “the girls all receive a sufficient education.”⁹⁹ In his district, “a little more than half of these children attend school regularly. Two thirds of this half are girls.”¹⁰⁰ That imbalance can be seen in Figure 4.6 that compares boys’ and girls’ school registrations in St-Joseph for the period 1851-1901. Although the numbers of school registrations rose, the gender imbalance was a constant feature of education there. In the 1850s, only 19 per cent of the boys and 25 per cent girls in the parish were registered for school compared to 1901 when 50 per cent of boys and 66 per cent of girls were registered. The main reason was that their parents were poor and they needed their young boys as field labour. However, the net result was that when the boys returned to school, “they are discouraged and no longer do anything.”¹⁰¹ There were a number of religious implications in these figures. The obvious one is that boys would have known less about the catechism and their Catholic beliefs than did the girls.

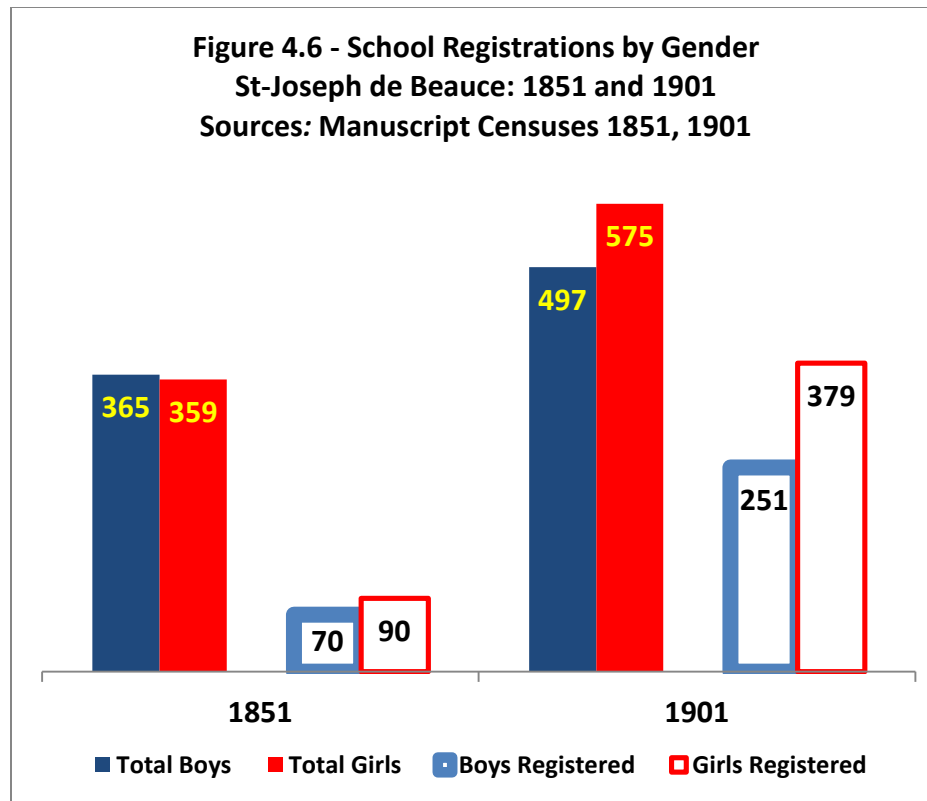
⁹⁷ Hardy, “Ce que sacrer veut dire,” 113.

⁹⁸ “Canada-Est: Recensement personnel, District 14, Paroisse de St-Joseph, Comté de Dorchester, 1851,” and Fourth Census of Canada, 1901, “Province of Quebec, District No.139 Beauce, Polling Subdivision St Joseph. Schedule I – Population.”

⁹⁹ *Report of the Superintendent of Education of the Province of Quebec for the Year 1876-77* (Quebec, 1877), 47.

¹⁰⁰ *Report of the Superintendent of Education 1876-77*, 50.

¹⁰¹ *Report of the Superintendent of Education 1876-77*, 50.



By itself, the low numbers of boys registered in school would not account for the numerous complaints from the *curés* of St-Joseph concerning unacceptable male social behaviour, particularly the unholy trinity of young men, strong drink, and swearing. Still, young males worked and socialized in settings where they were exposed to the attitudes and profane language of their compatriots and elders, and these factors probably played an important enough part in the process of mutual socialization to constitute an informal rite of passage into adulthood. Hardy has noted that swearing often characterized men in isolated logging camps away from their normal lives, where they were exposed to too much alcohol that lowered their inhibitions. Certainly, as Normand Séguin found in the Saguenay, the *curés* blamed the logging camps for implanting habits of blasphemy and worse in the young men of Notre-Dame d’Hébertville who returned to the parish from them.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Normand Séguin, *La conquête du sol au XIXe siècle* (Sillery 1977), 203-4.

Besides heeding the prohibitions on swearing emanating from the Church, some religious groups took what might be termed a pro-active approach. In 1890, in addition to their practices as individuals, members of Québec's Ligue contre le blasphème et l'intempérance pledged to receive communion together four times a year.¹⁰³ In some cases as well, popular culture reinforced the clerical message by instilling the fear of Hell rather than the hope of Heaven in potential or actual blasphemers. In his study of swearing in French Canada, Jean-Pierre Pichette found numerous stories of retribution, where the devil carried off the unrepentant blasphemer to hell.¹⁰⁴ Jean-Claude Dupont collected one tale from East Broughton, not far from St-Joseph in August 1965 that is typical of the kind of moral lesson it contained. In 1905, when Ernest Couture was around twenty years old, he was working in a logging camp in Maine that was composed of twenty-five men. Some were Catholics, "pi y en avait des protestants pi y en avait des 'rough'."¹⁰⁵ One of these roughs was particularly rude to a visiting priest who failed to convince him to mend his ways. When the clergyman showed him the crucifix, all he got for his efforts were curses until a large black dog appeared and the camp filled with smoke. When it had cleared, both dog and blasphemer had vanished. Couture was convinced. "C'était le diable qui était venu le chercher. J'ai vu ça moi-même."¹⁰⁶ But the existence of popular tales carrying the same message as the Church of divine retribution for swearing did not necessarily mean that people had internalized it or were obeying it.

¹⁰³ Pierre Savard, "L'historien et la religion populaire au Canada français," in Benoît Lacroix and Pierre Boglioni, *Les religions populaires. Colloque international 1970* (Québec, 1972), 103.

¹⁰⁴ Jean-Pierre Pichette, "Les jurons au Canada français: Étude de l'histoire, de la langue et de la littérature orale, suivie du recueil des jurons," MA Thesis, Université Laval, 1973, 169-87.

¹⁰⁵ AFEUL, Jean Claude Dupont Collection, Ernest Couture to Jean-Claude Dupont, August 1965 (Recording 461), "Chien noir entre dans un camp." This tale can also be found in Jean-Claude Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce* (Ottawa, 1978), 125. There are far too many similar stories from elsewhere in Québec in the Archives d'ethnologie et folklore (hereafter AFEUL) to include here, but typical ones include: Sylvie Bélanger Collection, "Le sacreur dans un camp de bûcherons ou la manifestation du diable;" Gilles Bernier Collection, "Le bûcheron enlevé par le diable" (Recording 57); Michel Boucher Collection, "Blasphémateur puni" (Recording 110, Reel 2), "Le bûcheron sacreur" (Recording 40, Reel 2), "Apparition du diable (en chien) à un blasphémateur" (Manuscript 9).

¹⁰⁶ AFEUL, Jean Claude Dupont Collection (Recording 461), "Chien noir entre dans un camp."

Rails and Religion

The arrival of the railway also had several implications for religious life in the parish, not all of them positive, and the clergy quickly came to regard it as somewhat of a mixed blessing. In 1875, the annual report from the *curé* of Ste-Marie to the archbishop noted that the main disorders in his parish that year stemmed from the train station in the village. These problems occurred because of the “Boisson et danses introduites par des étrangers récemment s’établis ici pour faire fortune.”¹⁰⁷ A year later, in his *Cahier de prônes* for the third Sunday after Pentecost, the Reverend Antoine Martel made a note to warn his parishioners against railway excursions.¹⁰⁸ And in his report for 1881-82, Martel also observed that for the past year trains had made trips on Sundays, often without needing to do so.¹⁰⁹ Even such apparently innocuous voyages as the railway’s special weekend pleasure trips between Lévis and Newport, Vermont, first begun in 1881, encountered clerical disapproval. These excursions left on Saturday and returned on Monday afternoon. Some travel inevitably took place on Sundays, and, if a stopover was necessary, it sometimes occurred where there was no Catholic mass available for French-Canadian passengers. On 26 September 1887, Cardinal Taschereau sent a circular letter to all the parish priests of the Beauce reminding them of his *mandement* of 1880 forbidding excursions for pleasure on Sundays as well as other days of the week when there was a *fête d’obligation*, on pain of committing a mortal sin.¹¹⁰

On the other hand, the clergy soon began to see the potential benefits to piety that the railway could provide. By the late 1880s, Québec clerics were organizing large excursions on specially hired trains that conveyed hundreds of people to the province’s famous religious shrines, most notably that of Ste-Anne de Beaupré near Québec City.¹¹¹ Typically, people from distant parishes located on the other side of the St. Lawrence from the shrine hired a boat as well as a train, and made the trip to Ste-Anne an all-day excursion. At the shrine, morning activities of a typical parish group of pilgrims and

¹⁰⁷ Provost, *Chaudière-Kennebec*, 378.

¹⁰⁸ ASPB, FFSJ, “Prônes, 1878 ... [n.d.]” 21.

¹⁰⁹ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 111, L.-A. Martel, “Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour 1881-82.”

¹¹⁰ Provost, *Chaudière-Kennebec*, 389.

¹¹¹ For more on the positive and negative spiritual aspects of train travel and pilgrimages, see Christine Hudon, “La sociabilité religieuse à l’ère du vapeur et du rail,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association/Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, NS, vol. 10, (1999), 129-147.

their *curé* included reciting the Rosary together, confessing their sins, lighting votive candles, attending mass, and hearing a sermon, sometimes from “un Père capable de faire peur et qui parle fort pour y arriver.”¹¹² In the afternoon, they would have participated in the blessing of the sick, the veneration of the relic of St. Anne, and a visit to the museum before returning home at the end of the day.

The first pilgrimage from St-Joseph took place in 1885, four years after the arrival of the railway into the village, thanks to the efforts of the ultramontane *curé*, F.-X. Gosselin.¹¹³ After he left the parish in 1896, Gosselin offered a number of practical suggestions on the organizational details of the pilgrimage in a ten-page letter to his successor, François Narcisse Fortier. First, it was necessary to determine the date of the pilgrimage with the priests at Ste-Anne. Then, he would need to engage a special train from the Quebec Central Railway to transport the pilgrims on the nearly two-and-a-half-hour journey to Lévis. From there it would be necessary to hire a boat to take the group downriver to Ste-Anne and, after a stay of six to seven hours at the shrine, to return them to Lévis and the train back to St-Joseph.¹¹⁴ Gosselin also suggested to Fortier that he guarantee to the railway that there would be at least 300 pilgrims, but to ask for space for twice that number in first- or second-class carriages, since many bought their tickets at the last minute. But he also warned Fortier that the number of pilgrims had diminished in recent years, dropping from 700 in 1894 to 500 in 1895. For some the parishioners, at least, the novelty of travel by train on a pilgrimage under clerical supervision seems to have quickly worn off. Gosselin concluded, “L’attrait de la nouveauté disparaissant pour plusieurs, un bon nombre va plus rarement”¹¹⁵

As edifying as pilgrimages involving large numbers of people might have sounded from a clerical perspective, the blessings were mixed with some unanticipated behavioural problems associated with males and alcohol. In 1901, the new *curé*, Adalbert Blanchet, anticipated the forthcoming pilgrimage to Ste-Anne’s shrine with more trepidation than religious exaltation. In his Sunday sermon notes for 6 June, he included some surprising last-minute instructions for the large number of people who

¹¹² Benoît Lacroix, *La foi de ma mère* (Montréal, 1999), 245-50.

¹¹³ Nadeau, “Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph,” 476.

¹¹⁴ ASPB, PR-34, FFSJ, “Des Curés de St-Joseph,” F.-X. Gosselin to F.-N. Fortier, 5 May 1896.

¹¹⁵ ASPB, PR-34, FFSJ, “Des Curés de St-Joseph,” Gosselin to Fortier, 5 Mai 1896.

were to participate a few days later in an excursion to the shrine. He sternly warned his parishioners against any mingling between young men and women, and threatened dire punishment for anyone drinking on the train. If he caught anyone in a state of intoxication on the trip, he promised, the guilty would immediately be thrown off the train wherever it happened to be.¹¹⁶ A week later, however, it was with some relief that the Reverend Blanchet pronounced himself satisfied that the pilgrimage had proceeded without incident. But the very fact that he saw such behaviour as a strong possibility, and felt it necessary to resort to dire threats in order to prevent drunkenness or worse on a religious excursion, makes it difficult to accept the completeness of clerical supremacy in this parish. As Christine Hudon has shown, the Reverend Blanchet was not the first Québec clergyman on a railway/steamship pilgrimage to encounter the problem of “menus plaisirs volés ‘au bon Dieu.’”¹¹⁷

Conclusion

Cornelius Jaenen has argued that people in New France “seem to have practiced their religion more out of social convention and habit than out of over-zealous conviction or superstitious fear.”¹¹⁸ In the last half of the nineteenth century, that assessment could have applied to the parishioners of St-Joseph. While the parishioners never seem to have doubted their Catholic religion and probably considered themselves devoted to it, the *curés* regularly reported that the majority fell far short of the exacting standards of fervent Catholicism. And who would have known better than the parish priests? They described their flock as dutifully receiving the sacraments and attending mass. They observed the Church’s requirement of baptizing newborn infants as soon as possible, took communion at Easter, were confirmed, and were married according to the regulations and rites of the Church, but they did not burden themselves with excessive devotion. The

¹¹⁶ ASPB, FFSJ. “Livre de prônes. 28 Avril 1901-28 Février 1906,” 6 June 1901, 11-12.

¹¹⁷ Hudon, “La sociabilité religieuse,” 147. Nor were these problems confined to the Catholic Church, as J.I. Little found. In the same period Adventist organizers in Québec near the Vermont border encountered a combination of religion and rowdyism when they attempted to blend the advantages of modern railway travel with revival meetings. J.I. Little, “Railways, Revivals, and Rowdyism: The Beebe Adventist Camp Meeting, 1875-1900,” in *The Other Quebec: Microhistorical Essays on Nineteenth-Century Religion and Society* (Toronto, 2006), 197-221.

¹¹⁸ Cornelius Jaenen, *The Role of the Church in New France* (Toronto and Montreal, 1976), 150.

curés were equally dissatisfied with the frequency that people took communion. At the dawn of the twentieth century, while some of the more pious parishioners might have received the Eucharist frequently, many did so less often than the Church recommended. Beyond these obligations, their annual reports indicated that majority of the flock of St-Joseph de Beauce was generally lukewarm about any additional optional pious exercises such as vespers or novenas. In that, as habitual practioners rather than fervent devotees, they resembled their eighteenth-century ancestors.

Although in some respects the picture brightened a little by the end of the century, almost word for word down to the beginning of the twentieth century the *curés*' reports regularly blamed the children's weak religious education on the indifference and bad examples of their parents. And the prospects for the next generation were no more encouraging. The *curés* invariably complained that even the most elementary tenets of Catholicism were beyond the grasp of many children in the parish. In addition, the Reverend Adalbert Blanchet found the rise in swearing and blasphemy alarming. Although they did not seem to doubt their parishioners' Catholicism, the *curés* often expressed their disappointment about the level of true piety in St-Joseph. Blanchet, however, did concede in an extremely rare positive observation that most people regularly attended mass and observed the rules of fasting and abstinence "rather well."

Finally, just as the railway made transporting the parish's agricultural products to market much easier, it also opened up new possibilities for expanding the religious side of parish life by introducing mass excursions to nearby religious shrines. But material success brought its own problems. In the late eighteenth century, poverty and distress made parishioners more attentive to their *curé* and they willingly participated in religious processions to implore divine protection for their fields. However, by the last part of the nineteenth century, the *curés* found that their flock's increased prosperity had given the secular side of life in the parish a boost at the expense of the spiritual one. Although the Reverend Blanchet's apprehensiveness about his parishioners' drinking and socializing on the pilgrimages to Ste-Anne de Beaupré was unfounded in 1901, he evidently knew he could not take his parishioners' submission to strict norms of outward piety for granted,

or assume that his flock made the same kinds of clear distinctions between spiritual concerns and temporal distractions that he did. As will be seen in the next chapter, however, whatever their level of devotion, the ceremonies and practices of the Church did not constitute people's entire spiritual universe in this part of Québec.

Chapter 5

Beliefs, Superstitions, and Popular Spirituality

Important as it was in the life of the parish, institutional Catholicism did not hold uncontested sway over the spiritual terrain of St-Joseph. A popular metaphysical world that constituted a significant sector of the mental universe of the *habitants* existed beside it, presenting an alternative to, and a reinforcement of, the Church's own teachings. Guy Laperrière argues that the work of Québec folklorists reveals a whole series of phenomena rooted in the people, phenomena that have distinct religious content but that largely escaped clerical regulation, even though the clergy was to some extent a concerned party.¹ A number of ethnographic studies have described many features of this world, beginning with the ethnologist/folklorist Madeleine Doyon-Ferland who began investigating its popular customs and beliefs in the early 1950s when many people still adhered to them.² In the 1970s, the ethnographers Jean-Claude Dupont and Paul Jacob extended these investigations and interviewed informants in the Beauce, including people born in St-Joseph late in the nineteenth century.³ Additionally, Monique Lachance-Fortin's investigation of the linguistic and ethnographic contents of the dialect of the Beauce uncovered a number of popular religious beliefs embedded in people's everyday

¹ Guy Laperrière, "Religion populaire, religion des clercs? Du Québec à la France, 1972-1982," in Benoît Lacroix and Jean Simard, *Religion populaire, religion de clercs?* (Québec, 1984), 27.

² Madeleine Doyon-Ferland, "Folk Dances in Beauce County," *Journal of American Folklore* 63 (April-June 1950): 171-175; "Rites de la mort en Beauce," *Journal of American Folklore* (April-June 1954): 137-147; "Carnavals et déguisements traditionnels en Beauce," and "Rites et voisinage chez trois populations rurales canadiennes (Beauce, Dorchester et Charlevoix)," in Madeleine Doyon-Ferland, *Coutumes populaires du Canada français* (Québec, 1972). For a brief guide to the earliest expressions of interest in Québec folk customs in the nineteenth century, see Jean Du Berger, "Bilan des études des folkloristes du Canada français dans le domaine de la mentalité religieuse populaire," in Lacroix and Boglioni, *Les religions populaires*, 79-90.

³ Jean-Claude Dupont, *Coutumes et superstitions* (Sainte-Foy, 1993); *Le légendaire de la Beauce* (Ottawa, 1978); *Folklore français d'Amérique: Mélanges en honneur de Luc Lacourcière* (Ottawa, 1978); *Le sucre du pays* (Ottawa, 1975); *Le monde fantastique de la Beauce québécoise* (Ottawa, 1972); Jean-Claude Dupont, Jacques Mathieu, *Héritage de la francophonie canadienne. Traditions orales* (Sainte-Foy, 1986); and Paul Jacob, *Les revenants de la Beauce* (Montréal, 1977).

language.⁴ Although historians of religion in Canada have not made this well-documented system of popular beliefs an object of serious study, Nive Voisine argues, that greater collaboration between historians and folklorists will allow us more fully to understand the influence of this “religion vécue” on people’s lives, and on their relationship with the Church.⁵ In that regard, Ollivier Hubert’s remark that there was a fundamental difference between a popular culture of spontaneity and the clerical culture of discipline not only provides us with a useful means to frame a discussion about the encounter between the worldly side of popular culture and the Church in St-Joseph, it also sheds light on the related question of how the metaphysical aspects of popular culture and Church teachings interacted with one another in this part of rural Québec.⁶ This chapter will examine the degree to which the difficulty that the clergy encountered in controlling, much less eliminating, some of these popular *habitant* beliefs and practices in the Beauce meant that ordinary people combined a certain degree of spiritual autonomy with their Catholicism.

For a number of reasons, historians have found it difficult to determine what to call popular expressions of spirituality in rural Québec and their antecedents in the French countryside. One reason may be, as Hubert points out, people accepted the clerical supernatural as a given part of daily life, and constantly resorted to Catholic sacramentals or paracatholic rituality, such as the use of holy water collected at Easter to ward off illness, to act upon the world. At the same time, these beliefs demonstrated “une certaine cohérence du monde, qui échappe aux taxonomies cléricales et savants.”⁷ Although the term ‘popular religion’ might encompass those beliefs and practices by

⁴ Monique Lachance-Fortin, “Le vocabulaire des croyances populaires de la Beauce: Étude linguistique et ethnographique,” Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Université Laval, 1980.

⁵ Nive Voisine, “Histoire religieuse et folklore: quelques réflexions,” in Jean-Claude Dupont, ed. *Mélanges en l’honneur de Luc Lacourcière* (Ottawa, 1978), 435. See also Laurent Bouchard and Michel Champagne, *Les bronzes d’Alfred Laliberté-Collection du Musée du Québec: Légendes, coutumes, métiers* (Québec, 1978), a study on the 214 small bronze sculptures on traditional legends, customs and trades that the famous sculptor of the rural tradition was commissioned to produce between 1928 and 1932.

⁶ Ollivier Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel: La gestion des rites par l’Église catholique du Québec (fin XVIIe - mi-XIXe siècle)* (Sainte-Foy, 2000), 74.

⁷ Ollivier Hubert, “La religion populaire est-elle une légende du XIXe siècle?” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 36: 71 (May 2003), 97; See also Voisine, “Histoire religieuse et folklore,” 435.

which people in St-Joseph expressed their metaphysical concerns outside the confines of the parish church and doctrinal Catholicism, historians have found it provisional, problematic, and ultimately inconclusive at best. As Ralph Gibson observes, while there is no pure form of popular religion to begin with, the term does encompass the recognizable area of Catholic religious belief and the behaviour of the “mass of the population, in so far as this differs from the model offered by a clerical or lay elite.”⁸ In Québec there have been concerns that attempting to define an already ambiguous concept with an imprecise label can lead to even more ambiguity. Is it meant to apply to the practices of the greatest number of people, socially defined? And how do we distinguish between the religion of the people and that of the elites when we know that they were always interconnected?⁹ If there was a Québec popular religion, the concept must encompass a broad range of beliefs and behaviours ranging from practices that might be termed superstitious to those that were fully acceptable to the Church.¹⁰ In France, some have suggested the plural term ‘popular religions’ because three different elements are to be found: “mal-croyance, syncrétisme ou quasi-néo-religion, et enfin ‘pratiques traditionnelles.’”¹¹ In any case, as the French historian, Bernard Delpal cautions, the very vagueness of the term ‘popular religion’ means that discovering what people’s beliefs

⁸ Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (London and New York, 1989), 134-5. To add to the complexity of the question of definition, Gibson proposes the equally if not more ambiguous concept of ‘natural religion’ as an amalgam of superstitious practices which fused Christian and pre-Christian elements into a larger belief system, and had taken on Christian forms without obtaining clerical sanction. The French clergy by the nineteenth century were extremely uneasy about the popular religious practices of the subordinate classes, and labeled many of them as superstitions.

⁹ See in particular Nive Voisine, “Histoire religieuse et folklore,” 431-435. See also Jean Simard, Jocelyne Milot and René Bouchard, *Un patrimoine méprisé. La religion populaire des Québécois* (Cité de LaSalle, Québec, 1979); Benoît Lacroix, *La religion de mon père* (Montréal, 1986) and *La foi de ma mère* (Montréal, 1999); and Benoît Lacroix and Jean Simard, *Religion populaire, religion de clercs?* (Québec, 1984).

¹⁰ Lapierre, “Religion populaire, religion des clercs?” in Lacroix and Simard, *Religion populaire, religion de clercs?* 19-51.

¹¹ Jean Séguy, “Multiplicité et non-univocité dans le phénomène religieux populaire,” in Benoît Lacroix and Pierre Boglioni, *Les religions populaires. Colloque international 1970* (Québec, 1972), 45. For more on the debate, see Bernard Delpal, “La religion populaire en questions. Un débat à l’intérieur de l’historiographie religieuse récente,” *Études d’histoire religieuse* 67 (2001), 131-141; and Jean Seguy, “Du cultuel au culturel,” *AESC* (septembre-octobre 1974), 1280-1290. See also Philippe Poirier, *Les enjeux de l’histoire culturelle* (Paris, 2004), especially “Histoire religieuse et histoire culturelle: à chacun son territoire?” 274-82.

actually meant to them is much more fruitful than finding a ‘good’ definition.¹² As we shall see, applying that approach to the popular cosmology of the Beauce will allow us to arrive at a fuller understanding of, in Fernand Dumont’s words, “la dynamique qui se développe entre les catégories sociales et les cultures, entre le vécu et le prescrit.”¹³

Before this chapter explores the rich variety of those spiritual beliefs, however, we must examine how the problematically pejorative term ‘superstition’ was employed to dismiss or marginalize the cosmology of rural Québec. We need to consider how easily and uncritically we accept, and are subtly influenced by, the ideological imperatives and assumptions behind the construction of the allegedly opposing categories of religion and superstition. By defining superstition in his 1702 Québec diocesan catechism as being inspired by the Devil and therefore a “détournement de la vraie religion,” Monseigneur Saint-Vallier distinguished between the approved ritual expressions of faith controlled by the Church and people’s appropriation for profane purposes of Catholic rituality or objects that the Church did not control.¹⁴ But, as Hubert asks, how can we accept that the population’s receptiveness to Catholic rites and metaphysical assumptions was perfectly reasonable, and yet at the same time unconsciously agree that their popular culture, so heavily structured by the same magic-intellectual framework of the Church, was “superstitious”?¹⁵ In Europe, centuries of cohabitation between pre-Christian religions and Christianity produced doctrinal incongruities such as rural French legends and tales

¹² Delpal, “La religion populaire en questions,” 133-40. See also Laperrière, “Religion populaire, religion des clercs?” 37. The Québec sociologist Fernand Dumont raised the issue of terminological clarity in 1970. Fernand Dumont, “À propos du concept de ‘religion populaire,’” in Benoît Lacroix and Pierre Boglioni, *Les religions populaires. Colloque international 1970* (Québec, 1972), 25-31.

¹³ Dumont, “À propos du concept de ‘religion populaire,’” 25-27. See also Voisine, “Histoire religieuse et folklore,” 434-5; and Pierre Savard, “L’historien et la religion populaire au Canada français,” in Lacroix and Boglioni, *Les religions populaires*, 102.

¹⁴ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 53. See also Msgr. Saint-Vallier, “Difficultés qui regardent les Sauvages, dont on demande la solution,” in Mgr. H. Têtu and l’abbé C. O. Gagnon. *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires des Évêques de Québec*, Vol. I (Québec, 1888), 446.

¹⁵ Hubert, “La religion populaire est-elle une légende?” 96-8. For an extended discussion of the more traditional view, see Judith Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind: French Peasants and the Supernatural in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1987). Devlin found many expressions of the popular mind to be disturbing, such as tales about encounters with extraordinary phenomena and creatures. While she acknowledges that such beliefs were useful “by helping people express and exorcise their anxieties and regrets,” she argues rather harshly that “this legendary vocabulary instilled a tendency to intellectual deviousness and reinforced the deeply-rooted popular rejection and distortion of reality: in this, it merited the anathema which the Enlightenment heaped on it.” (98-9.)

of supernatural phenomena that pre-dated the French colonists' migration to New France.¹⁶ Moreover, by superimposing some of its most important feast days such as Christmas and Easter over the holy days of earlier religions, the Church itself was partly to blame for the persistence of the very 'superstitions' it condemned. Because of the resulting mixture of Christian and pre-Christian elements in the popular cosmology, it is not surprising that there were almost as many ambiguous clerical reactions in Québec (as in France) as there were condemnations of the 'superstitious' nature of its beliefs and practices. On the one hand, the Church gradually moved to reduce the number of its rituals by making them more specialized, by making the sacred more confined to the clergy, and, thanks to its "formidable capacité discursive," by making the profane more and more "méprisé."¹⁷

A more understandable reason for unease from the Church's perspective, as Michel Meslin argues, was that popular religion tended to distort or downplay the Christian message of eternal salvation by establishing "des relations immédiatement rentables entre le monde des dieux et celui des hommes" in order to procure the rapid satisfaction of various temporary needs.¹⁸ A central characteristic of French popular religion with which the Church had made some very uneasy compromises remained the expectation of success in the "attempts by French men and women to manipulate the concrete world by spiritual means," such as the popular belief in the quasi-magical powers of the village *curé* to lift spells or to control the weather.¹⁹ A further reason for the uneasy cohabitation between Church doctrine and popular religious practice may have been, as Antonio Gramsci points out, that the Church always strove to maintain doctrinal unity by avoiding the "official" formation of two religions, one for the "simple" and one for the intellectuals. That meant just enough toleration of popular beliefs to keep ordinary people in line without alienating the more intelligent, as well as very gradually,

¹⁶ Jean-Claude Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce* (Ottawa, 1978); 12, and Jean Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent* (Montréal, 1996), 352.

¹⁷ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 40-58.

¹⁸ Michel Meslin, "Le phénomène religieux populaire," in Lacroix and Boglioni, *Les religions populaires*, 6. He argues, "le phénomène religieux devient populaire lorsqu'il manifeste une hostilité à l'objectification systématique de la croyance religieuse [...] lorsqu'il humanise le dieu pour le sentir plus proche, et qu'il veut en capter la puissance à travers des techniques dont il est l'inventeur." (7)

¹⁹ Gibson, *Social History of French Catholicism*, 134-5. Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind*, 20-21.

so as not to alienate the “simple,” accepting “to a certain extent” the demands of philosophy and science in order to placate the intellectuals.²⁰ Judgements on the “naïve” or “primitive” nature of popular beliefs simply reflect clerical biases similar to distinctions between “high” and “low” culture, and condescension to the subordinate classes: “la religion [...] du côté des clercs, et la magie tout à fait du côté du peuple.”²¹

Even though religion’s identification with the learned culture of the elite may render it more theologically sophisticated than popular beliefs, is one concept essentially more rational or irrational than the other? Do they not amount to two different but interdependent aspects of the same thing? Since many of their operative assumptions are similar, the question ought to be about where on the continuum of metaphysical belief ‘superstition’ ends and ‘religion’ begins. Both are essentially based on people’s belief in objectively unverifiable phenomena, especially the subjective faith in supernatural beings such as deities, angels and devils. It might even be argued that religion is a literate form of superstition. While popular practices associated with Catholic sacramentals such as medals, rosaries and the like so closely skirted the boundaries of superstition and magic that they caused the Church some embarrassment, their continued popularity demanded that their exercise at least be validated and their forms transmitted.²² The most striking example of the Québec Church’s accommodation to popular belief is the famous shrine of Ste-Anne de Beaupré near Québec City, revered for its curative powers since the seventeenth century; hundreds of crutches once adorned its pillars. The ultramontane clergy promoted it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, as noted in a previous chapter, St-Joseph’s *curés* organized a number of parish pilgrimages there in the 1890s. It could not have existed without belief in the power of faith and prayer to ameliorate all manner of physical infirmities, that is, to manipulate the realities of the concrete world by spiritual means.²³

²⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York, 1971), 328-9.

²¹ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 5. See also Jean-Claude Schmitt, “‘Religion populaire’ et ‘culture folklorique’ (note critique),” *Annales ÉSC*, 31:4 (1976), 941-53.

²² Hubert, *Sur la Terre comme au ciel*, 49-51.

²³ Simard et al, *Un patrimoine méprisé*, Deuxième partie: “Autour des pèlerinages et des thaumaturges,” 79-126.

On the other hand, the apparent surface contradictions in Québec between Church doctrine and popular belief masked many important similarities. Even though many of the popular beliefs made the clergy uneasy, they also articulated values such as the necessity for honesty, respect for others, and marital fidelity that the Church itself promoted and that the community, for its own pragmatic reasons (honesty in business affairs, harmony within families, to name but two), found equally necessary. These existed beside confidence in the healing powers of certain saints, the therapeutic uses of Easter holy water, the efficacy of pieces of palm distributed on Palm Sunday, and tales about the visits of the Devil to transport misbehaving people to Hell. As Hubert points out, striking parallels existed between popular belief and the Church's own doctrines, and some popular practices ought to be considered the counterpart to "l'univers tissé de sacralité et de ritualité que l'Église propose."²⁴

But other popular beliefs of the Beauce, such as attitudes toward death and tales about the magical powers of sorcerers and parish priests, were less compatible with Catholic teachings and owed much to pre-Christian practices, as did spells and sorcery that the Church condemned as superstitious. But even then, when prayer failed, the folklorist Jean-Claude Dupont argues, sorcery appeared to complement, rather than contradict, the Church's teachings. It provided the means to obtain what prayer did not always grant.²⁵ According to oral accounts, sorcerers were not even opposed to the Catholic religion, nor were priests always opposed to sorcerers. The county's traditional tales of sorcerers' prayers, incantations, and herbal remedies usually depicted them as rivals to the priests, alternate sources of hope for the poor and the sick in a number of capacities, "tantôt sorcier, tantôt charlatan, tantôt soigneur de mal de dent ou de corne."²⁶ At the same time, there was room in the popular imagination for priests and sorcerers, both of them considered to be powerful beings with quasi-magical powers, occasionally to collaborate. One of Dupont's informants told him a late-nineteenth-century popular tale from the Beauce in which a *curé* asking a reputed sorcerer to silence frogs in a

²⁴ Hubert, "La religion populaire est-elle une légende?", 96-7.

²⁵ Jean-Claude Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce* (Ottawa 1978), 13.

²⁶ Jean-Claude Dupont, *Le monde fantastique de la Beauce Québécoise* (Ottawa, 1972), 19.

nearby pond during the Forty Hours devotions, when his own efforts had failed.²⁷ In another case, when a *curé's* horse fell ill, he turned for help to a 'sorcerer' whom he had previously forbidden to practice his cures. When the horse recovered, the *curé* stopped his opposition to the sorcerer.²⁸ A story from St-Joseph at the end of the nineteenth century tells of a sorcerer who had cast a spell on a young woman. Her *curé* told her to cut a loaf of bread with a sharp knife, knowing that in her enchanted state she would cut herself. When she made the sign of the cross on the wall with her blood, she was released from the spell.²⁹ These unverifiable tales where the clergy were participants in a popular magical lore heavily tinged with Catholic symbolism demonstrate that, in the popular mind, there was a metaphysical grey area where there were no contradictions between their Catholic religion and magical practices. These tales suggest that people felt the relationship between the Church and popular culture in rural Québec was much more nuanced than leading clergymen admitted, and that such informal compromises between doctrine and the necessities of life were possible and perhaps even desirable. After all, both popular culture/religion and the Church were concerned with the same essential human preoccupations: death, knowledge, morality, sex, money, and social position.³⁰ Observing that practitioners of popular religion had no trouble in borrowing from the canonically approved rituals of the Church, Hubert's quip that, for many ordinary people at least, "un peu d'eau bénite ne gâte jamais la sauce," is an apt way to illustrate their pragmatic syncretism in matters spiritual.³¹

Séances and Tables tournantes

However, the reverse was not the case. The Church wanted no unhallowed ingredients in its spiritual pantry, and there is no evidence that the Québec religious authorities sanctioned the kinds of practices that popular lore condoned. Indeed, the

²⁷ Dupont, *Le monde fantastique de la Beauce*, 23.

²⁸ Dupont, *Le monde fantastique de la Beauce*, 24.

²⁹ AFEUL, Louise Gosselin Collection, MS. 12 .Mme. Albert L'Heureux (age 81) to Louise Gosselin, 18 March 1972.

³⁰ Hubert, "La religion populaire est-elle une légende?" 97.

³¹ Hubert, "La religion populaire est-elle une légende?" 95.

Québec religious authorities very rarely gave them any public acknowledgement at all.³² One notable exception was the Pastoral Letter of 2 January 1854 to the faithful of the Québec Archdiocese entitled “Concernant les tables tournantes” in which Archbishop Turgeon used the popularity of séances and similar occult practices to articulate at some length the Catholic doctrine forbidding the living from attempting to communicate with the spirit world.³³ Monseigneur Turgeon may have regarded the issue of séances as an opportunity for him forcefully and clearly to reiterate official Catholic teaching on ‘superstition,’ and to have his *curés* warn their flocks not to deviate from it. This discursive pastoral letter is important because it was not intended for wide broadcast. Ordinarily, neither Catholics who were attracted to new spiritual fads nor those believing in older ‘superstitious’ practices should have been able to plead ignorance about the Church’s uncompromising position on the doctrinal standards to be applied to communication between the living and the dead. However, in a circular that accompanied his pastoral letter Monseigneur Turgeon advised all his *curés* that it would not be necessary to read his letter to their parishioners if they did not know about the fad.³⁴ Given the widespread belief in the supernatural Monseigneur Turgeon’s silence on popular beliefs about communication with the dead that were an integral part of rural folklore suggests that the clergy may have feared that public acknowledgement of any such beliefs would only encourage people to take them more seriously. Instead, ignoring them and hoping that they would go away on their own, or, as Hubert argues, treating them with condescension would have the opposite effect.³⁵

While the Church had reluctantly tolerated traditional beliefs in werewolves and the like, the recent popularity of séances and *tables tournantes*, particularly in France,

³² For a rare example from 1793, see “Mandement aux habitants de Saint-Jean-Port-Joli et des paroisses circonvoisines pour arrêter la superstition,” in Têtu and Gagnon. *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires*, Vol. II, 457-9. See also Hubert, *Sur la Terre comme au ciel*, 44.

³³ Pierre-Flavien Turgeon, “Lettre pastorale Concernant les tables tournantes,” in Têtu and Gagnon. *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires*, Vol. IV, 135-43.

³⁴ “Circulaire,” 15 January 1854, in Têtu and Gagnon. *Mandements, lettres pastorales*, Vol. IV, 144.

³⁵ Hubert, *Sur la terre comme au ciel*, 58-9.

was worrisome, and the fad was spreading in English-speaking Protestant circles.³⁶ The prelate may have feared the secularizing and even assimilating potential of this Anglo-Protestant practice, although at least some middle-class French Canadians likely found that their popular culture and Catholicism had sufficient spiritual rites and practices that they did not immediately embrace séances. As Hubert Larue observed in 1861, “[J]e préfère les feux follets et les loups-garous du peuple aux mediums et aux tables tournantes des philosophes.”³⁷ Whatever their popularity may have been elsewhere, séances and the like were not a major concern to the *curés* in St-Joseph, although numerous tales of people’s encounters with the spirits of the dead circulated freely in the Beauce, including St-Joseph, down to the mid-twentieth century. As will be seen shortly, popular lore abounds in tales of communication with the dead through people’s encounters with those who returned to earth (*revenants*), or with werewolves (*loup-garous*). But the *curés*’ annual reports over five decades made no mention of them, and their sermon notes contain only the most general references to ‘superstition.’ None of the questionnaires from the archbishop even asked about people’s superstitious practices, indicating either that the Church was not concerned about them, or more likely that it hoped they might disappear on their own.

As the clergymen who received the pastoral letter would have known, the doctrinal contents about communication with the afterlife were far from new. Turgeon reiterated the Church’s traditional position that all activities related to contact between the living and the dead were “illusions les plus dangereuses,” “monstreuses erreurs,” and “superstitions damnables.” Any vain attempts to communicate with the dead would lead to “conséquences funestes” because, essentially, they were yet another of the Devil’s unceasing means of seducing the souls of the unwary. Even supposing that there really

³⁶ For France, see John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2008); for Britain, see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, 2004). For this little-studied subject in Canada, see Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto, 1985), as well as his “Spiritualism: Science of the Earthly Paradise,” CHR 65 (March 1984), 4-27. See also Walter J. Meyer Zu Erpen and Joy Lowe, “The Canadian Spiritualist Movement and Sources for its Study,” *Archivaria* 30 (Summer 1990), 71-84.

³⁷ Hubert Larue, “Voyage autour de l’île d’Orléans” (1861), cited in Aurélien Boivin, *Les meilleurs contes fantastiques québécois du XIXe siècle* (Montréal, 2001), 21.

were spirits present, they could not possibly have been the souls of the just. The only true way to communicate with them was through the means that religion provided, but that could only occur on the Day of Judgement. Therefore, if people did succeed in coming into contact with any apparitions, they were more than likely to be the agents of Satan, always in search of new victims to drag down into the eternal abyss. Furthermore, anyone presumptuous enough to ask these infernal beings about the secrets of the past and future, or of heaven and earth, would richly deserve divine punishment.

Monseigneur Turgeon then argued that, since God is merciful, He would not allow the souls of the faithful to be at the mercy of such a dangerous enemy. Consequently, such oracles and their revelations were more likely the products of people's own fevered imaginations, or their own guilty thoughts. In that case, they were practicing the very criminal and satanically-inspired form of superstition known as divination that he defined as having "recours au demon pour découvrir des choses cachées, dont nous ne pouvons acquérir la connaissance par des moyens naturels."³⁸ Such "criminal" curiosity about the future could also only come from the Devil. He alone had the power and interest to "favoriser vos coupables désirs," because God would not want to.³⁹ All forms of superstition, Turgeon reiterated, were different varieties of idolatry, all of satanic inspiration. By their very nature, therefore, whatever means people adopted to communicate with the souls of the departed were superstitious practices. He warned them to be afraid of falling into the clutches of Satan by such means, because they would be deceived and would find themselves "en commerce réel avec les anges de ténèbres, en voulant [vous] entretenir avec les âmes des morts."⁴⁰

However, clerical and popular assumptions parted company on some of the origins and purposes of these metaphysical encounters. While Monseigneur Turgeon assumed that it was only the living who initiated communication with the dead, many popular beliefs were based on tales that messages often came *from* the dead. Furthermore, despite Turgeon's assertion that all communication between the living and

³⁸ Turgeon, "Concernant les tables tournantes," 138-9.

³⁹ Turgeon, "Concernant les tables tournantes," 139.

⁴⁰ Turgeon, "Concernant les tables tournantes," 142.

the dead was of satanic inspiration and not divine, many tales clearly indicate that the main desire of the various ghosts was for their living contemporaries to help them obtain the comforts of the Catholic religion, such as saying a final prayer for them, or having a mass said for the repose of their troubled souls. More often than not, these messages came to people in dreams and contained religious content that reinforced the Church's teachings, although the ecclesiastical authorities must have had some trouble in reconciling them with Turgeon's pastoral letter that regarded communication from the beyond as emanating from Satan. At the very least, such pious activities would seem to have been inconsistent with Satan's reputedly evil objectives, even if one grants that the Devil does operate in unfathomably devious and mysterious ways. Someone might remember a promise to say the rosary for a departed relative by attributing a sudden neck pain as a warning not to postpone it, or that a mysteriously rocking chair in November could be the spirit of a dead mother.⁴¹

Images of death, and legends about it, are particularly marked in the Beauce and as Paul Jacob observed in 1995, "On ne saurait vivre longtemps avec le peuple beauceron sans être frappé des mystérieuses révélations qui habitent son âme et qui sourdrent parfois dans des récits plutôt terrifiants."⁴² While these popular beliefs may have appeared unsystematic and confusing to outsiders, their meaning becomes clearer if we apply Jean Séguy's argument that, "Tout chaos comporte son ordre signifiant."⁴³ The three days in autumn that include All Hallows Eve on 31 October, the Feast of All Saints on 1 November, and All Souls Day on 2 November are good examples of how popular folklore and Christian theology became blended together around the question of the respect that the living owed to the dead. The early Christian church had consciously substituted this triad of its own feast days for the older three-day pagan festivals honouring the dead and departed. As one of her informants told Monique Lachance-Fortin, the first two days of November were subdued, and celebrations were frowned upon. Perhaps as the year wound down with increasingly dark, gloomy, wet autumn days,

⁴¹ Lachance-Fortin, "Le vocabulaire des croyances populaires," 139-41.

⁴² Paul Jacob, *Les revenants de la Beauce* (Montréal, 1995), 15.

⁴³ Séguy, "Multiplicité et non-univocité," 45.

the cold rain and the early nightfall lent themselves to thoughts of death, decay and menacing spirits. These celebrations reflected the belief that this period in autumn belonged neither to the old year or to the new, but was a moment when the worlds of the living and the dead became intertwined, and the dead were thought to walk upon the earth. Recalling her youth in St-Joseph near the turn of the twentieth century, an elderly resident in 1975 said that people regarded that time of year with some apprehension. Many probably saw popular religious practices as means to mitigate their fears about the unknown, or to relieve the distress of the souls in Purgatory, or perhaps both. One resident later recalled that for his ancestors sociability was in temporary abeyance as people resorted to their rosary beads with more fervor than usual, “Le jour de la Toussaint, les ancêtres, là, [...], ils disaient le chapelet à la journée, tu sais, hen? Ils disaient que les morts étaient sur la terre.”⁴⁴ Elsewhere in Québec in the early 1950s, some of Soeur Marie-Ursule’s informants believed that they should not hold *veillées* on the eve of All Saints Day. They thought that “les défunts erraient sur la terre.” On 2 November, men did not work in the fields because “il coulerait du sang dans les sillons.”⁴⁵

Given the combination of ancient popular belief with Christian holidays, it is not surprising that ordinary Catholics had absorbed such ideas, or that outsiders might have found some of these beliefs unsettling. In the Beauce, however, Madeleine Doyon argues that even in the 1950s the awareness of death reflected a combination of two strongly related but different interests. One was “un goût morbide pour le spectacle à caractère funèbre,” and the other was the belief that the living needed to coexist with the dead.⁴⁶ Similarly, in nearby St-Michel de Bellechasse, as Benoît Lacroix recalls from his childhood, while his irreproachably Catholic father believed devoutly in God, the Virgin of Lourdes, the Devil, and the souls in Purgatory, he also believed just as firmly in “feux follets et beaucoup à son Bon Ange.”⁴⁷ In November, Lacroix *père*, born in the late

⁴⁴ Lachance-Fortin, “Le vocabulaire des croyances populaires,” 139.

⁴⁵ Soeur Marie-Ursule, *Civilization traditionnelle des Lavallois* (Québec, 1951), 89.

⁴⁶ Madeleine Doyon, “Rites de la mort dans la Beauce,” *Journal of American Folklore* 67: 264 (April-June, 1954), 146.

⁴⁷ Lacroix, *La religion de mon père*, 19.

nineteenth century, felt most keenly the spirits of the departed ancestors, commenting to his son that, “I’sont peut-être plus vivants que nous autres.”⁴⁸

Another popular belief was that people could be warned about an imminent death, often through intermediaries, such as other people, objects, or animals. In St-François (Beauceville), people believed that presages of an imminent death included thirteen people seated at table for a meal, a rooster crowing in the night, or a bird entering the house and crashing into a closed window. Furthermore, on the day of a funeral, another belief was that a death would occur in any house where the hearse stopped. And when a *curé* announced the first death of the year at Sunday mass, the age and gender of the deceased supposedly predicted the category of people expected to die during the year.⁴⁹ Another informant told Jacob that he saw what must have been a comet fall to earth one night in 1900. Two months later, his grandfather died, confirming a popular belief that it foretold a death: “I’ mourait que’qu’un sus l’terrain à qui appartenait ousque la boule de feu avait tombé.”⁵⁰ Madeleine Doyon found beliefs that shooting stars meant souls in purgatory were being released, while to die on a Saturday was an indication that one’s soul would go directly to Heaven. Just after death, the body was periodically sprinkled with holy water to chase away evil spirits. Another pan of water had an equally important function, “en sortant du corps, l’âme va directement s’y laver avant de paraître devant Dieu.”⁵¹

People interpreted unexplained sounds in different ways. In one case, an 82-year old informant in St-Joseph told the story he heard from his grandfather who had been courting a young woman in nearby St-Frédéric in the mid-nineteenth century but had decided to stay at home one evening because of a headache. That night, he was awakened three times by the sound of a sack of sugar falling. But the sack had not fallen. When he told his mother the next morning, she said “C’est pas drôle, ta *blonde* qui est

⁴⁸ Lacroix, *La religion de mon père*, 22.

⁴⁹ Doyon, “Rites de la mort, dans la Beauce,” 137-8. For some parallels with the French peasant beliefs in omens and presages in the nineteenth century, see Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind*, 92-98.

⁵⁰ AFEUL, Paul Jacob Collection, Recording 145, Napoléon Loubier (age 82) recounting his own experience to Paul Jacob, 16 June, 1975.

⁵¹ Doyon, “Rites de la mort dans la Beauce,” 138.

morte cette nuit.”⁵² If they heard them during the night, some interpreted them as the souls of the departed asking for a family to say more prayers on its behalf or to fulfill a promise made to the dying person, or that the souls of the dead were acting out a penance in the afterlife for sins they had committed while alive.⁵³ In the 1870s, a notorious wife-beater in Beauceville attributed the kicks from his horse to the spirit of his dead spouse whom he had married for her money and then had maltreated during their marriage.⁵⁴ In the early 1950s, Madeleine Doyon described a long-held popular belief in St-François that the unexplained noises late each night in an old, empty, and reputedly haunted house were the unshriven souls of unrepentant late-nineteenth or early-twentieth-century bootleggers. The Québec religious authorities must have found it difficult to object to the belief that these individuals had died without making their Easter communion, or that that they returned each night to the scene of their debauchery to atone for their sins.⁵⁵

Revenants and Other Apparitions

But some people reported having experiences that were far more unsettling than dreams or mysterious noises. They claimed to have encountered the dead when they were wide awake. Closely related to the belief that the dead made a particular effort to appear on the first two days of November, was the chance appearance of *revenants* or *survenants* - apparitions reputed to be the restless souls of the dead who had returned briefly to Earth from a place somewhere between Heaven and Hell, and whose earthly manifestation took human, animal or luminous form. They could appear individually at any time of the year, but particularly on the eve of All Saints' Day (Hallowe'en). Popular belief held that *revenants* appeared in order to ensure the fulfillment of a last earthly promise, to reprimand those who had not carried out final wishes, to be the bearers of bad

⁵² Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 63-64.

⁵³ Lachance-Fortin, “Le vocabulaire des croyances populaires,” 143.

⁵⁴ AFEUL, Paul Jacob Collection, Recording 1, Mme. Thomas Lessard (age 77) to Paul Jacob, 11 November 1974, attributed to her father.

⁵⁵ Madeleine Doyon, “Rites de la mort dans la Beauce,” *Journal of American Folklore* 67: 264 (April-June, 1954): 145. As she notes, however, the length of the penitence was really more in the order of “jusqu’à ce que la croyance populaire fut remplacée par l’incrédulité moderne.”

tidings, or simply to frighten people.⁵⁶ At the same time, as Jacob observes, the dead who appeared to people were not always frightening. Instead, they were usually familiar and beloved, or at least related, people from their own lives, “des revenants non fictifs.” When the dead did appear to their surviving relatives, it was in their human form, not as skeletons, and appeared to be attempting to communicate with them, though usually the communication was unsuccessful or the message was unclear.⁵⁷ The informants relating these encounters with the ghosts, and who participated in Jacob’s study conducted in the early 1970s, described their experiences of decades earlier as if they were speaking about the most natural thing in the world. In St-Joseph, stories of the *revenant* abounded well into the twentieth century.⁵⁸

Jacob found people in St-Joseph who believed that spirits of the dead often returned to remind the living of transgressions or unfulfilled promises. The spirit of the person who had died before acquitting an obligation might return to earth in order to ask a surviving relative or friend to ensure that it was carried out. These benevolent spirits also appeared in order to urge a change of conduct on the living, or to set the record straight, “ces revenants qui se préoccupent de la vie morale de ceux dont il sont séparés physiquement.”⁵⁹ In an example recorded in St-Joseph in 1974, but said to have occurred 175 years before, a young woman who had slept with her male companion at age seventeen, but had not confessed this transgression to the priest, entered the convent three years later and became a saintly and universally-respected nun. But, since her sin had remained unconfessed, it remained unpardoned, despite her prayers. After her death, a flaming hand had appeared on a wall in the convent before the amazed nuns who had gathered to pray for her soul. The nun’s spirit cried out, “Priez p’us pour moé, je suis damnée. C’est pour rien, vous pardez vot’ temps!”⁶⁰ In the 1870s, the spirit of a beggar

⁵⁶ Lachance-Fortin, “Le Vocabulaire des croyances populaires,” 142-44. For a concise definition of *revenant*, see also Benoît Lacroix, *La foi de ma mère* (Québec, 1999), 518. For more on this subject, see Boivin, *Les meilleurs contes fantastiques québécois du XIXe siècle*, 7-23.

⁵⁷ Doyon, “Rites de la mort dans la Beauce,” 145.

⁵⁸ Doyon, “Rites de la mort dans la Beauce,” 139.

⁵⁹ Jacob, *Les revenants de la Beauce*, 69.

⁶⁰ AFEUL, Paul Jacob Collection Recording 26. The quotation, from Léonce Vachon on 11 December, 1974, is in its original transcription. For the story in abbreviated form, see Jacob, *Les revenants de la Beauce*, 99.

returned and was credited with filling a farmer's home with the smell of death in order to remind him to honour his promise to pay for masses for his soul. When the family did so, the odour disappeared.⁶¹ Despite Turgeon's admonitions against inquiring about the afterlife, a common promise, either freely given or extracted, was that the dead person's spirit would return to give the living an idea of what to expect on the other side. A spirit might return to ask that prayers be said to ensure its safe passage to Paradise.⁶² If such a promise had not been kept, the motive of reprimand often occurs in the tales. The spirit had been prevented from entering Heaven, and had returned to confront the person who had been the cause. In 1975, Jacob found a story that is supposed to have occurred in St-Joseph around 1850. Two brothers agreed that the first one to die would come back as a spirit to let the other know what he saw. Jacob does not indicate if that promise was kept.⁶³ Another informant told the story of how he had caused a young man to take up swearing, following his own bad example. A week after the young man died, his spirit returned to accuse the informant, "C'est de ta faute si je suis damné."⁶⁴

Another story passed down in a family contained a message that no one gets into Heaven until all earthly obligations have been settled. As his informant, Léonce Vachon, told Jacob on 11 December 1974, approximately 150 years previously the ghost of a dead father-in-law appeared to Isaac Dulac three nights in a row as he was working at his sugar shack. The spirit asked him to return to a specific address in Québec City two pounds of iron the father-in-law had stolen. When he did so, there were no more ghostly visits.⁶⁵ Just over a month later, coincidentally, the same informant, recalled another story from his grandfather about a ghost asking his neighbour, who had also been working in his sugar shack, to repay a debt of \$25 that had been incurred thirty years earlier. When he

⁶¹ AFEUL, Paul Jacob Collection. Recording 11, Valère Roy (age 76) to Paul Jacob, 18 November 1974, also attributed to his father.

⁶² Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 61.

⁶³ AFEUL, Paul Jacob Collection, Recording 99, Jean-Thomas Giguère (age 69) to Paul Jacob, 13 March, 1975. He attributed the story to his grandfather who said he had experienced it. In another collection is a story of a spirit who asked that he not be required to keep such a promise. AFEUL, Louise Gosselin Collection, Ms 5, Charles Turcotte (age 77) to Louise Gosselin, 17 March 1972.

⁶⁴ Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 63.

⁶⁵ AFEUL, Paul Jacob Collection, Léonce Vachon (age 75) to Paul Jacob, attributed to his grandfather, Antoine Vachon. As the younger Vachon noted, "Savez qu'on a une compte à régler, des fois. Dés, une personne monte pas drette en haut..."

obliged, there were no subsequent visits. While we might very well wonder about the coincidental resemblance between many elements in the two stories, the obvious purpose was to convey to the young some aspects of the popular moral code that required honesty in human relations, and the payment of debts in commercial ones. Vachon's sincere belief in what he saw is unmistakable: "C'était une fantôme, tu sais!"⁶⁶ In a similar story, another informant pointed to the credibility that late-nineteenth-century people in St-Joseph gave it, though he did not indicate if he himself did: "Mon grand-père contient ça pour une vérité!"⁶⁷ Even though the Church did not approve of many of these beliefs, by making the dead part of the communion of the saints, Jacob argues, Catholicism had tamed and pacified them, and had turned them into more approachable beings that people did not need to fear.⁶⁸

Another product of the popular imagination was the *loup-garou*, or werewolf. People believed it to have the head of a wolf and the body of various animals. Individuals could be turned into werewolves for various reasons, mostly related to lax performance of their religious duties. A story originating in the nineteenth century and handed down in the Rodrigue family of St-Joseph tells of a man who had not attended mass, and had neglected to confess his sins for seven years. One evening he was turned into a *loup-garou*. Eventually, he decided to try to return to his human form. He knew that the small white spot on his wolf's forehead, signifying where he had been baptized, needed to bleed profusely in order to effect the change. He convinced someone to stab him there, and returned to his normal state.⁶⁹ A similar tale originating in the parish of Saints-Anges, part of St-Joseph until 1898, tells of a father who enjoyed going to *veillées* every evening and was turned into a *loup-garou*. When he was delivered from this condition, he sinned no more.⁷⁰ The clear moral lesson in each case is that failing to

⁶⁶ AFEUL, Paul Jacob Collection, Recording 41, Léonce Vachon to Paul Jacob, 23 January, 1975.

⁶⁷ AFEUL, Paul Jacob Collection, Recording 52, Eugène Poulin (age 72) to Paul Jacob, 21 January 1975, also attributed to his grandfather.

⁶⁸ Jacob, *Les revenants de la Beauce*, 16-18.

⁶⁹ AFEUL, Majella Dionne and Claude Bellavance Collection, Recording 138, "Portrait de loup-garous," Transcript of an interview with Omer Rodrigue, age 75, St-Joseph de Beauce, 21 February 1965.

⁷⁰ AFEUL, Jean-Claude Dupont Collection, Recording 256, "Le père tourné en loup-garou," David Labbé (age 78) of Saints-Anges, Beauce to Jean-Claude Dupont, June 1965.

observe one's religious obligations will not go unpunished, and no one is lost forever. By repenting and observing their Catholic obligations, people can be saved.

While these tales of popular beliefs on communication between the living and the dead do show a high degree of content that reinforced Catholic beliefs, they also indicate the presence of a blend of pre-Christian and Catholic beliefs and practices existing beyond the clergy's control. Far from being merely external impositions of clerical control, these beliefs were a direct contradiction of the spirit of Archbishop Turgeon's pastoral letter. However, if there was confusion in people's minds about where to draw the line between Catholicism and 'superstition' when dealing with popular beliefs concerning communication with the spirits of the dead, the Church itself had played no small part in fostering it by evading the question. If nothing else, this was an implicit clerical acknowledgement that the Church could pursue this question only so far with people let it undermine the credibility of its own spiritual realm. Turgeon's pastoral letter did not address the issue and neither he nor his successors made them a subject of enquiry in their annual questionnaires to the parish priests, or about the presence or influence of any other traditional popular religious or 'superstitious' practices.

Fascination with the Devil

While Msgr. Turgeon's Pastoral Letter of 1854 proclaimed that the dark force of Satan loomed menacingly in Catholic mythology as a counter to the divine light of Heaven, one could reasonably expect that popular representations of the Devil himself would have inspired even more terror in people. Compared to tales about mere earthly creatures that in Monseigneur Turgeon's analysis would have been considered minions of Satan, the Devil occupied a more ambivalent presence in the collective imagination of the people of the Beauce. Ironically, rather than portraying Satan as an omnipotent evil presence whose sole purpose was to lure the unwary to Hell or to turn good people into bad ones, many popular tales about Satan characterized him as the opposite: almost a benevolent figure, who reinforced the Church's own promotion of honesty, morality, the respect people owed to the clergy, and denounced drinking, dancing or swearing.

The folklore of St-Joseph is particularly rich in anecdotes about him, and there are several locations in the parish that he is said to have visited, in one place even leaving his imprint on a large rock.⁷¹ The most unexpected place for him to have appeared, however, was at the parish church. Three versions of an account from people in three neighbouring parishes relate that when the church of St-Joseph was under construction the *curé* called upon the Devil to lend his horse to haul the stone that was needed. One tale came one from St-Benjamin, Dorchester County, another originated in Saints-Anges in the northwest corner of St-Joseph, and a third from St-Frédéric, immediately to the southwest. The St-Frédéric account described the animal as a large black beast that, the *curé* warned, must never be unbridled or watered.⁷² When that inevitably happened, the horse disappeared, never to be seen again. In the slightly different version from St-Benjamin, the *curé* laid his ceremonial stole on the horse's neck while the stone was being hauled. When the work was completed, "le curé a enlevé l'étole, p'is ça ç'a disparu. I'ont jamais r'vu le cheval."⁷³ There are at least five other accounts in the Dupont Collection from informants in four separate parishes in the Beauce where the Devil's horse helped construct the church in Ste-Marie, two more for his work in St-Frédéric, and another in St-Martin.⁷⁴ Evidently Satan was in high demand as a contractor for religious buildings, although these tales provide absolutely no explanation of why the Devil would want to help build churches.⁷⁵ And he appeared to people in many forms. A tradition in one family in St-Frédéric is that he acted as a notary to facilitate the honest transfer of the family farm. In an account from St-Joseph, he appeared as small boy who turned a pile of earth into a living rat in field in order to frighten a farmer who had been

⁷¹ Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 94-6.

⁷² AFEUL, Jean-Claude Dupont Collection, Recording 307, Mme. Cléophas Vachon (age 74), July 1965. See also AFEUL, Jean-Claude Dupont Collection, Recording 247, June 1965, Alphonse Bisson (79), June 1965. These accounts can also be found in *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 103-4.

⁷³ AFEUL, Michel Boucher Collection, Reel 2, Recording 98, Albert Morin (age 70).

⁷⁴ AFEUL, Jean-Claude Dupont Collection, Recording 238, (Beauceville); Recordings 241 and 252 (Saints-Anges); Recording 315 (St-Elzéar); and Recording 328 (St-Sévérin). See also Dupont, *Le monde fantastique de la Beauce*, 122-7.

⁷⁵ Among the many other parishes in Québec that are also said to have taken advantage of his horse's availability are two tales on the famous shrine to the Virgin Mary at Cap-de-la-Madeleine, not far from Trois-Rivières. AFEUL, Ghislain Lapointe Collection, Recording 362; and AFEUL, Normand Lafleur and Lucien Ouellet Collection, Recording 107.

ploughing on Easter Sunday. He also is credited as taking on the forms of a wolf, a dog, and a firebird, usually as the precursor of retribution to people who deserved it by straying from the Church's code of conduct.⁷⁶

On the other hand, other popular morality tales, especially the well-known story of "le Diable, beau danseur," reinforced the message of his evil designs upon people. Jean-Claude Dupont notes that though it did not originate in the Beauce, and can be found elsewhere in Canada and in France, it was particularly well known in this corner of Québec.⁷⁷ In the usual version of the tale, the Devil appeared at the *veillée* held to celebrate a marriage. He was always portrayed as a dashing and elegant though slightly sinister stranger who was particularly fond of carrying off the beautiful young bride into the night after dancing with her all evening. She was never seen again. Certain traits, however, could easily have alerted a keen observer and must have been impossible even for the most obtuse reveler to ignore. In winter, the snow always melted around the hooves of the dark horse he rode. The Devil's eyes also flashed a sinister, flame-like glow when the name of Jesus was mentioned, or when he came into contact with people of undeniable goodness, such as *curés* or pious grandmothers who were usually found saying the rosary while everyone else was dancing. Another tell-tale clue was that the Devil always wore elegant gloves in order to hide his talons. Some legends, such as the well-known story of Rose Latulippe, whom the Devil had carried off to Hell after dancing with her all evening at her wedding, owed much of their popularity to clergymen, "les prédicateurs des retraites paroissiales qui la répétaient un peu partout du haut de la chaire."⁷⁸ Despite his dark powers, however, Satan was less omnipotent in these tales than in conventional Church teaching, and there were several religious means that people could employ to combat him. The presence of the *curé* or his wise counsel, if faithfully followed, always ensured that good would triumph over the the Devil.

These tales demonstrate a number of other themes. On the most obvious level, the clergy would have found comfort in the belief that, if the hope for Heaven did not

⁷⁶ Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 122-5.

⁷⁷ Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 102.

⁷⁸ Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 102.

motivate people to be good, then at least the threat of eternal damnation in Hell would keep them on the correct moral path. According to a story for which there is no corroborating evidence, one *curé* of St-Joseph appreciated that the Church could employ some of those beliefs to reinforce its own teachings. One fine autumn Sunday, sometime between 1899 and 1904, when Adalbert Blanchet was *curé*, Trefflé Boulet of St-Joseph recounted that he heard about a *veillée* to take place at the home of “David X.” Feeling that the feasting and the dancing had to be stopped, Boulet decided to play a trick on the revelers. Outside the house, he noticed a cauldron filled with boiling water, and a quantity of soot underneath. Removing all his clothes, so that he was “flambant nu,” he covered himself with the soot, touseled his hair, grabbed an iron bar, and, as he remembered: “J’arrive par en arrière et j’entre dans la maison. Je te dis que ça soupirait quand je suis entré là!”⁷⁹ No one recognized him, and everyone thought they had seen the Devil. The owner of the house immediately ended the party. When the Reverend Blanchet ascertained that Boulet really had frightened people so much that they had ended the *veillée*, his reaction surprised Boulet. Instead of a scolding him for taking the existence of God’s nemesis so lightly, Blanchet appears heartily to have approved of Boulet’s subterfuge: “Parle pas un mot, il dit. C’est le meilleur coup que t’as jamais fait dans ta vie; ils n’ont pas eu le temps de voir rien.”⁸⁰ Perhaps Blanchet felt the end justified the means since, at least for once, Sunday revelry and dancing came to an end.

However, as Barbara Leblanc has argued from an examination of French-Canadian popular songs of the period, the clerical discourse was only one element that influenced people. Since clerical injunction was an element largely of external imposition, it was not always as effective as popular morality tales that she calls a parallel popular discourse with a similar message to the clerical one that, “tout en utilisant des moyens différents, tend également à assurer une réglementation des comportements sociaux.”⁸¹ However, there was an important difference, as Leblanc points out. Unlike the monolithic and consistent institutional discourse that condemned dancing, the popular

⁷⁹ Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 109.

⁸⁰ Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 110.

⁸¹ Barbara Leblanc, “Les Interdictions sur la danse au Canada français,” *Canadian Journal for Traditional Music*, v. 9-14 (1985), 13.

folk idiom one, as expressed in many songs, had internal contradictions that were characteristic of the oral tradition and its thematic contents. If some folk songs took a negative attitude towards evening revelry or dancing, others did the exact opposite.⁸² Similarly, elements of such a contradictory discourse can be seen in the tales and legends that abounded in the Beauce linking the Devil and dancing. Some of them appear to support the strict morality that the clergy preached, but not all. Far from simply being examples of externally imposed clerical control, there are other, equally valid, ways to read the messages contained in several tales. One was that such stories also reinforced the community's own standards of acceptable behaviour. Finally, it is useful to keep in mind the likelihood that people's behaviour did not always conform to the expectations of popular religion any more than it did to the dictates of Catholicism.

And lest it be thought that the people of St-Joseph, or elsewhere in Québec, were so credulous that every immediately inexplicable sound sent them running for their rosary beads or to the confessional, it is useful to remember that credulity had its limits. There were people who also looked for rational explanations for physical phenomena, as well as those who enjoyed deliberately taking advantage of people's credulity by playing tricks on them in order to heighten their fears and increase their terror. As Doyon pointed out, some people covered themselves in large white sheets and went across the fields at night, letting out cries and sighs in order to frighten women and children. Others went to the barns of their credulous neighbours in order to frighten them as they went about their late evening chores.⁸³ There are also accounts that a few even enjoyed playing upon their neighbours' fears by pretending to be *loups-garous*. In one undated case in East Broughton, Beauce County, two young men stole an ox attached to the wagon of a farmer. While one of them hid the animal in the nearby forest, his accomplice attached himself to the wagon and told the farmer, who believed the subterfuge, that he had been turned into the ox for having chased a *loup-garou*, and was only now, after ten years in that condition, returned to his original human form.⁸⁴ Adélarde Drouin of St-Joseph, who

⁸² Leblanc, "Les Interdictions sur la danse," 14-15.

⁸³ Doyon, "Rites de la mort, dans la Beauce," 146.

⁸⁴ AFEUL, Jean-Claude Dupont Collection, recording. 470, Transcript of testimony of Alexandre Perrault, age 65, August 1965.

was eighty-two in 1978, told the story of his grandfather who had been boiling maple sap on Easter Sunday in his shack, when he heard cries from the chimney. Possibly fearing divine retribution for such an impious act on this holiest of Catholic holy days, he ran for safety to his house. The next day, he brought over a more skeptical neighbour, who merely started swearing and looked into the stove pipe. Instead of a ghostly apparition, or even an avenging angel, a large screech owl escaped.⁸⁵

Conclusion

The frontier between the contrasting yet complementary spiritual worlds of Catholicism and popular belief was rather porous, and it is sometimes difficult to determine where one belief system ended and the other began. As François Lebrun observed in the case of seventeenth-century France, “selon les temps et les lieux, religion populaire et religion officielle peuvent s’opposer, collaborer ou être complémentaires.”⁸⁶ Both rested on the intertwined assumptions that there were powerful metaphysical forces that had to be placated, and that the supernatural realm had the capacity to influence the physical world. The well-documented popular faith in supernatural phenomena, such as the belief in sorcerers, werewolves, and haunted locations, formed a distinctive part of the mental universe of the people of the Beauce region and reflected the belief in a metaphysical world that differed in many details from the one they had derived from the Church. Since they believed in the interdependence of the material and the spiritual worlds, they took it for granted that there was regular interaction between them. And, while the Church had clear expectations about where it drew the line between acceptable spirituality and ‘superstition,’ as Archbishop’s Turgeon’s response to the urban bourgeois fad of séances of the early 1850s shows, the Church’s silence on long-held popular beliefs about communication from the beyond must have allowed people to assume at the very least that these were not superstitious.

⁸⁵ Dupont, *Le légendaire de la Beauce*, 65.

⁸⁶ François Lebrun, “Histoire religieuse et histoire culturelle (XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles), Bilan et perspective de la recherche en France,” Actes des colloques de 1979 et 1980, *Société rurale dans la France de l’Ouest et au Québec (XVIIe - XXe siècles)* (Montréal, 1981), 252-3.

Consequently, the Church's relationship to popular metaphysical belief cannot simply be reduced only to questions of hegemony or repression, or even a contrast between orthodoxy and marginality. As Thérèse Beaudoin argues, the rites and rituals of the Church did have their place in relieving some of the uncertainties of the *habitant's* precarious existence. Aware of his own powerlessness in the face of such calamities as the periodic arrival of grasshoppers that devoured his crops, the *habitant* would turn to the power of religion to counter such natural threats.⁸⁷ For that reason, even in ordinary times of the year, Catholicism did, as Beaudoin points out, "contribue aussi à exercer un certain pouvoir sur le temps de l'habitant."⁸⁸ However, the important clerical distinction that the efficacy of religious processions and prayers to protect crops from grasshoppers or other insects was purely spiritual was probably lost on the *habitant* who was concerned with the more immediate object of saving his crops. By the late nineteenth century, belief in the power of metaphysical remedies for such earthly problems may have waned in the parish. In his sermon notes for 1878 and 1879, Louis-Antoine Martel recorded several pieces of practical advice to his parishioners about remedies against insect predators, especially grasshoppers and the "mouche à patates." On the feast of Corpus Christi, 1878, usually held in June, he left himself a note to warn his parishioners about preparing practical remedies against the potato fly.⁸⁹ Whether farmers followed his practical suggestions is not known, but several weeks later he noted that no one had come to a special mass held to seek divine protection against grasshoppers. Worse, many people had been out walking instead, and others had been drinking in the "auberges."⁹⁰ Not discouraged, the following year, several weeks after his sermon against "les Superstitions," the Reverend Martel advised his parishioners to attend two high masses and a procession in order to gain God's protection against the potato fly.⁹¹

In many other ways, popular religion in the Beauce actually helped to reinforce Catholicism's religious and ethical teachings. In Québec, as Louis Rousseau points out,

⁸⁷ Thérèse Beaudoin, *L'été dans la culture québécoise*, 34.

⁸⁸ Thérèse Beaudoin, *L'été dans la culture québécoise*, 20.

⁸⁹ ASPB, FFSJ, "Prônes 1878-[n.d.]," 97.

⁹⁰ ASPB, FFSJ, "Prônes 1878- [n.d.]," 105.

⁹¹ ASPB, FFSJ, "Prônes 1878-[n.d.]," 131, 155.

it is essential to keep in mind that, in the common culture of the period, priests and people shared a largely identical list of what constituted disorders and sins.⁹² In that sense, this popular culture was simultaneously an alternative set of values and representations of the world, and a parallel expression of the dominant ones. *Habitant* popular beliefs may have differed in detail from some of the Church's teachings, but they also reflected nearly identical moral and social values, such as respect for religion and its ministers, condemnation of swearing and blasphemy, fear of the dark forces of Satan, and mutual respect and aid. In many ways, the informal but equally powerful popular discourse reinforced the Church's teachings on subjects such as sexual morality and the rules of ethical conduct. But as dark a presence as Satan was usually reputed to be, even he had his good side and, somewhat ironically, came to the support of such good causes as church building, honesty in business affairs, proper Christian conduct, and respect for holy days.

Many of the tales about the appearance of the Devil at evening parties had a strong message that reinforced the belief that disobedience to the Church's strictures against dancing or revelry could lead to grave consequences for those foolhardy enough to do so. But people continued to dance, indicating that even the Devil did not deter them, and Chapter Seven will examine why they did so. And if dancing was the concern of the clergy, it was not just because the bride was dancing that she was carried off in the many versions of the legend of Rose Latulippe. In that case, the whole assembly should have found itself dancing in Hell with her. That she should have been dancing with her new husband instead of a gallant interloper is one of the more obvious moral lessons to be drawn from that tale. The insistence on marital fidelity would not have been solely a concern of the clergy (or even of the husband for that matter). Most people at this time and in this small rural community probably would have felt that female conduct had to be irreproachable, even if they did not apply the same rules to males, the usual double standard of the time. But the many cautionary tales linking dancing with the devil at forbidden evening parties reinforced the message of the *curés* of St-Joseph that their

⁹² Louis Rousseau and Frédéric Castel, "Les conduites qui désolent," in Rousseau and Remiggi, *Atlas historique des pratiques religieuses*, 189.

parishioners indulged in the practice of holding these sociable assemblies far too often, and that Satan was always present, if not necessarily visible. The Archives de folklore at Laval University contain dozens of stories from various parts of Québec, and a good number from the Beauce, whose central figure is the heroic *curé*, the powerful protector of those whose folly or carelessness had nearly brought them under the power of the Devil.

However, the presence of a number of moral themes in popular religion that reinforced the Church's prescriptions does not mean that people's beliefs automatically dictated their actual behaviour. Noting that popular religion can highlight the obvious differences that exist between "le vécu et le doctrinal," Fernand Dumont, also made a further useful distinction, between "l'expression et l'expérience." He argued that the lived experience ("le vécu") of religion is not always exactly the same as its expression. There usually cannot be a direct co-relation between the doctrinal elements of religion and the ways that people express their faith in their daily behaviour because doctrine does not fully encompass all of them; in some cases it might even contradict them.⁹³ The same can be said of the informal 'doctrines' of popular religion. Despite the support that popular beliefs gave to some of the Church's behavioural admonitions, particularly around sociability and swearing, people's own inclinations in these areas were not so easily controlled. As will be seen in the following chapter, all of this also suggests that whether the message was couched in the formal theological language of the Church or in the comfortably familiar *joual* of popular legend, people's passion for earthly gratification often overcame their fears of satanic possession and divine retribution.

⁹³ Fernand Dumont, "À propos du concept de 'religion populaire,'" in Lacroix and Boglioni, *Les religions populaires*, 26-7.

Chapter 6

Holy Water versus Fire Water: Habitant Sociability and the *Curés*

Québec's customary period of winter sociability, the *temps des fêtes* that lasted from Christmas to the start of Lent, represents an ideal period for examining the link that many parish priests drew between the traditional celebrations of their parishioners and the difficulties that the Church encountered in attempting to transform them into more submissive Catholics. While spring and summer in rural areas meant an endless cycle of farm work, autumn and especially winter were devoted to seemingly ceaseless rounds of eating, drinking and dancing. As Ollivier Hubert has observed, French-Canadian popular behaviour and "established custom" contained at least as many nuances as were to be found in the clerical world, unwritten codes of behaviour that exercised a great deal of power within small parish communities.¹ While the values of that universe can be fleetingly glimpsed during occasional incidents of open contestation with religious or civil authority, such as the charivari in Québec, its more usual expressions was the festive sociability of the *habitant* year, especially the *temps des fêtes*.² As Roger Levasseur notes, sociability encompasses those formal and informal intermediary social relations situated between those elementary necessities of existence for an individual, such as food, work, clothing and shelter, and institutional powers such as the Church or the state.³ Far from being simply frivolous, Raymond Montpetit argues, during this *temps fort*, Québec popular culture most clearly articulated its collective social and cultural values, that

¹ Ollivier Hubert, "Ritual Performance and Parish Sociability: French-Canadian Catholic Families at Mass from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century," in Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760-1969* (Montreal and Kingston, 2002) 37-76.

² On the charivari, see René Hardy, "Le charivari dans la sociabilité rurale québécoise au XIXe siècle," in Roger Levasseur, dir., *De la sociabilité: Spécificité et mutations* (Montréal, 1989), 59-72., and "Le charivari dans l'espace québécoise." In Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, dirs., *Espace et Culture/Space and Culture*. (Sainte-Foy, 1995), 175-86. See also Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellions of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto, 1993), 69-86; and J.I. Little, *State and Society in Transition. The Politics of Institutional Reform in the Eastern Townships, 1838-1852* (Montreal and Kingston, 1997), 92-101.

³ Levasseur, *De la sociabilité*, 11-12. For an extended discussion of the concept in the same volume, see also Maurice Agulhon, "Exposé de clôture" 327-45.

enabled individuals to feel a sense of membership in the larger whole.⁴ The “concentrated temporality” of the *temps des fêtes* can be read as a microcosm of the whole society because they brought the past, the present and the future together in a way that permits us to read “l’inscription d’une culture dans un rituel.”⁵ At such times people articulated their core values more clearly and consciously than in their daily lives, and revealed most clearly the degree of convergence with, and divergence from, the Church’s expectations. Examining the degree of cultural connections between food consumption, alcohol use, and the winter round of rural sociability in St-Joseph enables us to evaluate Montpetit’s arguments. Chapter Seven will address more contentious areas of sociability: dancing and sexuality, about which the *curés* of St-Joseph expressed great concern.

While St-Joseph’s popular culture was local, it also shared many characteristics with other regions of Québec. By the mid-nineteenth century, that culture which had first developed in the Saint Lawrence Valley during the French Régime had spread from there to the Beauce and the Saguenay River Valley and the Gaspé. However, a major difficulty is that much of what we think we know about the sociable side of *habitant* life comes from sources outside their world. But it is difficult to grasp the essentials of the popular culture of a largely illiterate people without having to rely to a large extent on the testimony of outsiders. In the case of St-Joseph, that means a heavy reliance on the annual reports of their parish priests. The *habitants*, themselves, probably would not have written down the commonly accepted details of their celebrations even if they could have, but factors which formed the popular culture of St-Joseph and which linked the people of this parish to other parts of what is now called Québec were ones of climate, work, religion, and celebration.⁶

Following a traditional schedule of celebrations inherited from France that mirrored the Church’s own liturgical calendar, the *habitants* reaffirmed community and

⁴ Raymond Montpetit, *Le temps des fêtes au Québec* (Montréal, 1978), 12.

⁵ Montpetit, *Le temps des fêtes*, 13.

⁶ See in particular Thérèse Beaudoin, *L’été dans la culture québécoise XVIIe - XIXe siècles* (Québec, 1987); René Bouchard, dir., *La vie quotidienne au Québec: Histoire, métiers, techniques et traditions* (Sillery, 1983); Hubert Charbonneau, *Vie et mort de nos ancêtres: étude démographique* (Montréal, 1975); Normand Lafleur, *La vie quotidienne des premiers colons en Abitibi-Témiscamingue* (Ottawa, 1976); Sophie-Laurence Lamontagne, *L’hiver dans la culture québécoise XVII-XIX siècles* (Québec, 1983); and Jean Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent* (Montréal, 1996).

family solidarity through evening social gatherings (*veillées*) with families and friends.⁷ The festivities of the winter period were traditionally the high points of a sociability that they repeated in countless smaller ways during the rest of the year after work parties (*corvées*), Church feast days, and marriage celebrations. The pleasures of the winter season soon became part of the nostalgic folklore of “le bon vieux temps,” whose descriptions partly reflect what people wanted to remember.⁸ But this was more than nostalgia: this popular culture placed a high value on family, community, and sociability. According to Jean Provencher, “jamais durant l’année on ne fêtera aussi intensivement.”⁹ In addition, as the *curés* were well aware, these activities constituted a counterpoise to the Church’s message of self-denial and restraint. Studying them will enable us to understand how the *habitants* implicitly asserted some of the important secular values of their traditional way of life in the face of explicit and repeated clerical disapproval.

Since the Church’s objective in instituting the annual parish reports in the early 1850s was to gather information about the Catholic faithful in order more effectively to control them, the first reports to Archbishop Turgeon about people’s tendencies to socialize in St-Joseph must have been far from encouraging, and successive archbishops found that the news got no better. The same complaints regularly appeared in the annual reports until the end of the nineteenth century, if not beyond, with particular attention to the unrestrained celebrations that parishioners enjoyed, seemingly on any pretext. In 1853, Antoine Racine, the first *curé* of St-Joseph to submit an annual report, deplored:

L’ivrognerie dans les voyages à la ville, les assemblées nocturnes, les veillées où l’on danse et où l’on fait des jeux indécents, et les longues fréquentations pour le mariage et les noces qui durent un temps trop considérable, jours de folie, de dépenses excessives et souvent de divertissements indignes des chrétiens.¹⁰

⁷ For the affirmative nature of the *fête* in popular culture and the Church’s traditional distrust of it, see Hubert, “Beaucoup de bruit pour quelques fêtes,” 105-07.

⁸ For some of the extensive literature on ‘le bon vieux temps,’ see Pamphile Lemay, *Fêtes et corvées* (Lévis, 1898); E.-Z. Massicotte, *Anecdotes canadiennes suivies de moeurs, coutumes et industries d’autrefois* (Montréal, 1913); *Moeurs coutumes et industries canadiennes françaises* (Montréal, 1913); “La guignolée, le jour de l’an, la bénédiction paternelle, les chansons, anecdotes,” *Bulletin des recherches historiques* 28 (1922): 364-372; “La mi-carême,” *Bulletin des recherches historiques* 32 (1926): 136-139. See also Adjutor Rivard, *Chez nous* (Québec, 1943) and *Chez nos gens* (Montréal, 1923). For modern studies, see Jeanne Pomerleau, *Corvées et quêtes - Un parcours au Canada français* (Montréal, 2002); and Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*.

⁹ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 452.

¹⁰ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, “Rapport de Mr. A. Racine de S. Joseph de la Beauce, 1853.”

Racine cited examples of wedding celebrations lasting from four to five days, as well as frequent *veillées* in which the immoderate use of strong drink made these assemblies resemble pagan celebrations more than anything else. He would have known that there were three different kinds of *veillées*, and although the most popular were for dancing, others were devoted to singing or to storytelling. As Provencher observes, there were songs for “toutes les circonstances, tous les sentiments et presque toutes les différentes nuances d’intensité de sentiments.”¹¹ But, whatever their purpose, alcohol had a place at all of them.¹² As Racine’s successor, David Martineau, wrote in November 1854, “L’ivrognerie est encore un des principaux désordres de la paroisse.”¹³ Perhaps because he wrote his report at the beginning of a six-month period of winter that severely curtailed most rural work activities and removed most of the restraints on eating, drinking and dancing, the degree of celebration would have been more intense.¹⁴

However, while his parishioners’ sociability and drinking habits concerned him as much as they did his successor, in the same 1853 report Racine identified the fundamental obstacle to any hopes the clergy might entertain to change the behaviour of the people of St-Joseph. He concluded that “l’orgueil est le vice dominant des habitants: ils se laissent difficilement conduire, et s’ils croient être molestés [...] ils se portent aisément à des excès.”¹⁵ Racine’s explicit link, and similar comments from his successors in St-Joseph, between the strong sense of pride of the people of his rural parish and his difficulties in controlling them, indicate that the clergy knew they faced a formidable challenge in attempting to curtail people’s sociability. Although traditional popular festive celebrations reflected the Church’s own calendar, they highlighted even more sharply the considerable divergence between the expectations of the priests and the inclinations of the people.¹⁶

What Racine and his clerical colleagues may not have recognized is that the challenge was at least partly of the Church’s own making. The two worlds of the Church

¹¹ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 554-61.

¹² Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 561-6.

¹³ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Martineau, “Rapport du Curé, 1854.”

¹⁴ For the same complaints in neighbouring Ste-Marie, see Honorius Provost, *Sainte-Marie de la Nouvelle-Beauce: Histoire religieuse* (Québec, 1967) 155.

¹⁵ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2, “Rapport de Mr. A. Racine, 1853.”

¹⁶ Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellions of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto, 1993), 52-6.

and of the *habitants* converged because the profane celebrations that the French colonists had brought with them from their homeland coincided with the festive religious framework of the Catholic liturgical calendar, many of whose feasts had been superimposed upon popular pre-Christian celebrations. The Church placed the start of the liturgical year, Advent (the four-week period leading up to Christmas and the celebration of Christ's birth), shortly before the beginning of winter, when most agricultural work had ceased. The moveable feast of Easter was set close to the spring equinox, just before the start of work for the next agricultural season. The quietest periods of the agricultural year during the late fall, the winter, and early spring that coincided with the major feasts and penitential periods of the Church were also the two most important popular festive times. The first was the twelve-day period between Christmas Day and January 6 ("Les Rois"). Two to three months later came the other, *carnaval*, the ten days of feasting and celebration of that ended at midnight on the eve of Ash Wednesday.¹⁷ In addition to accommodating its most important feasts to the rhythms of the agricultural year, the Church superimposed some of them on times of celebration that pre-dated Christianity, particularly the celebration of the births of John the Baptist and Christ, at the summer and winter solstices.¹⁸ Table 6.1 summarizes how the Church's major liturgical celebrations and the intensive periods of popular celebration also coincided with slow periods of the agricultural year. Despite some important differences of detail with celebrations in France, where many of Québec's popular customs originated, people celebrated *cyclical*, Christmas celebrations were family and domestic festivities, while the spring festivals of *Carnaval-Carême*, as well as the summer celebrations were collective ones when the whole community, especially young males and females, participated. Finally, people combined domestic and public celebrations in the feasts of the local patron saint, "car elles sont, en principe, autant qu'un baptême et un mariage ou des funérailles, une occasion de renforcer à des liens familiaux ou locaux, et, d'autre part, le saint patron est une propriété collective."¹⁹

¹⁷ François Lebrun, "Le calendrier agro-liturgique dans la société traditionnelle de la France de l'Ouest (XVII-XIXe siècles)," in François Lebrun and Normand Séguin, dirs., *Sociétés villageoises et rapports villes-campagnes au Québec et dans la France de l'Ouest XVIIe-XXe siècles* (Trois-Rivières, 1985), 347-51.

¹⁸ Lebrun, "Le calendrier agro-liturgique," 349.

¹⁹ Van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore*, 838-9.

Table 6.1: The Liturgical Year, the Agricultural Year, and Major Festive Occasions

Sources: *St-Joseph Catholic Missal*; Jean Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent*; Raymond Montpetit, *Le Temps des Fêtes au Québec*.

Month	Agricultural Year	Major Church Feast	Festive Occasion
December	.Routine chores .Baking and food preservation .Clothes made .Firewood cut .Crops to market	.8 December – Immaculate Conception .25 December - CHRISTMAS	“Le Temps des Fêtes:” - Réveillon after Christmas Mass .Quête de l’Enfant Jésus
January	.Routine chores	.6 January -Epiphany	- 1 January:-New Year’s Day (visiting) - 6 January: “Les Rois”
February	.Maple Sugaring and routine chores	.Ash Wednesday - moveable (in March)	- Carnival: 10 days - until ‘Mardi gras’
March	.Sugaring .Routine chores	. CARÊME (LENT) - Penitential period of 40 days. Abstinence from earthly pleasures.	<i>Mi-Carême</i> – 1 day only for relaxation of rules of abstinence
April	.Fields prepared .Soap made	EASTER – (or in March) 25 April – St. Mark- Blessing of fields	
May	.Fields prepared .Fences mended .Kitchen garden readied .Housecleaning started	.Pentecost .Trinity Sunday .Corpus Christi (“Fête-Dieu)	
June	.Livestock from barns .Barns cleaned .Ploughing and planting .Wool carded	. Pentecostal period – 25 weeks to November) .24 June- St. John	June 24: Fires of St. John
July	.Hay cut Oats, barley harvested		
August	.Buckwheat, rye harvested .Kitchen garden harvested, Peas, etc. preserved		
September	.Wheat harvested .Animals from common pastures	.29 September - St. Michel – year end: debts paid (Beauce) or 11 November (St. Martin)	
October	.Potatoes, flax harvested .Broyage (for linen) .Animals slaughtered. .Fields turned over		
November	.Livestock to barns .Grain threshed .Household linen washed .Wool spun, Linen and cloth woven, fulled	.1 November – All Saints’ Day; 2 November - All Souls’ Day	Penitential period – no marriages or festivities

In St-Joseph, the parish church became the locus both of the private celebrations of births, marriages and funerals for families, as well as for public celebrations such as the feast of its patron saint on 19 March. Even though the structure of *habitant* culture owed much to the traditional customs of rural France, it evolved in a more challenging environmental context. The North American winter played a determining role in the formation of Québec culture from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries because, as the early French settlers gradually became acclimatized to the North American winter, their descendants developed a new way of being.²⁰ While the landscape of the countryside from November until April might have been frigid and uninviting, in social terms that season became the most important one in Québec. Winter is the longest season in Québec, lasting from 120 to 160 days.²¹ By late October or early November, as autumn gradually gave way to the shorter and colder days of winter, cold temperatures and early snowfalls usually announced its arrival. By December water courses normally became frozen, and more long-lasting snow cover became the characteristic feature of the landscape. January and February brought an accentuation of winter with winds, storms and blowing snow, with temperatures averaging -13.5°C in the Beauce.²² The intense cold meant that most farming activity had to be suspended, so the season provided people with an ideal period to mix the spiritual celebrations of the Church with their own profane delights. In contrast to the frigid external environment, human social activity indoors was warm and cheerful, enlivened with eating, dancing and drinking. These combined elements, based around the celebration of a religious holiday, can be seen in Edmond-J. Massicotte's 1913 engraving "*Le Réveillon de Noël*" (Illustration 14) that depicts one of the most characteristic activities of the winter season of sociability, a sumptuous feast after midnight mass on Christmas Eve.

The French-Canadian writer, Pierre de Sales Laterrière, noted in 1830 that the people of Lower Canada "assemble not merely to see one another, but with the serious

²⁰ Lamontagne, *L'hiver dans la culture québécoise*, 13.

²¹ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 400.

²² Serge Courville, Pierre C. Poulin, Barry Rodrigue et al., *Histoire de Beauce-Etchemin-Amiante*. (Sainte-Foy, 2003), 64.

intention of enjoying themselves; and to this enjoyment they wisely deem eating to be an absolutely necessary adjunct.”²³ Compared to summer’s labourious tasks of ensuring continued existence, and where meals were simple, winter was the time to relax and celebrate; eating food in quantity was one of its major expressions. Anne-Marie Desdouits has also shown that while visits and dances characterized winter get togethers, the season was especially notable for the rich food that was normally absent from people’s tables in summer.²⁴ Since agriculture made such feasts possible, Jean-Claude Dupont’s *chaine alimentaire* provides a useful contextual model that links the physical demands of food production in rural Québec during the summer to the cultural practices of food consumption and sociability during the festivities of winter.²⁵



Illustration 14. E.-J. Massicotte, *Le Réveillon de Noel* (1913)

Source: MNBAQ no. 69.433

²³ Laterrière, *A Political and Historical Account of Lower Canada*, 133.

²⁴ Anne-Marie Desdouits, *La vie traditionnelle au pays de Caux et au Canada français: Le cycle des saisons* (Québec, 1987), 39. Québec and Acadia celebrate Christmas, and in the Caux people accord greater importance to January 6 (“les Rois”). All three have in common is “l’opulence du repas,” 40.

²⁵ Jean-Claude Dupont, “Traditions alimentaires et classes sociales,” in Gérard Bouchard and Serge Courville, *La construction d’une culture: Le Québec et l’Amérique française* (Sainte-Foy, 1993), 119-43. His examination of six rural parishes of the Lower St. Lawrence region in the period 1900-1960 also contends that the activities surrounding food production and consumption were the basis of the observable cultural differences between different socioeconomic groups.

He divides the *chaîne alimentaire* into four levels: acquisition, transformation, preparation and consumption.²⁶ The first level, “acquisition,” took place in late spring and during the summer. It comprised seeding and harvesting crops, and raising animals, and was a period of intense productivity in a short growing season averaging 120 days, the objective being to accumulate enough food for a family’s needs over the non-productive period of the year.²⁷ The *curés* of St-Joseph barely mentioned the subject in the annual reports to their superiors, but the occasional sermon note on processions to protect the crops is one indication that they were quite familiar with the parishioners’ need to labour intensely on their farms. However, summer provided little time for extended periods of celebration.

Dupont’s second stage, “transformation,” covers primary processing, and includes harvesting crops at the end of summer and threshing wheat and husking corn that extended into the winter. This stage, as will be seen, had occasions for brief socializing as there were several agricultural tasks during the winter when neighbours or friends helped each other during *corvées*, usually followed by evening parties. The third level, “preparation,” involved cooking and baking, largely a female responsibility, whose busiest period was in late fall and early winter when they preserved food for the winter. Lastly, “consumption” encompassed the customs surrounding people’s feasting, dancing and revelry, and where, more than at any other time of the year, consuming the products of the kitchen played a central role. For most of the year, according to J-Alphonse Richard, who wrote about nearby Saint-Sébastien de Beauce in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the regular diet consisted of soup, cold meat, and milk, rarely eggs, with some molasses or maple syrup for dessert. On the Church’s days of abstinence, the main meal would have been beans or potatoes and butter, and maybe fish during Lent. During the summer, there might also have been fresh meat that itinerant

²⁶ Dupont, “Traditions alimentaires et classes sociales,” 126-8. He suggests further that the manifestations of “la religion populaire” at these various stages can be divided into elements of “religiosité” and “magie.”

²⁷ Beaudoin, *L’été dans la culture québécoise*, 38.

butchers sold to supplement what farmers had salted.²⁸ Jean Provencher also notes that kitchen gardens provided people with vegetables and berries.²⁹

Starting in December, however, all restraint was put aside in preparation for the Christmas holidays. Men butchered excess animals; women preserved the meat or turned some of it into dishes for the holidays.³⁰ A practical reason for the abundance of food during winter was that the cold weather preserved meat and the many cooked dishes that were brought out during the festive season.³¹ But there was another good reason for such consumption that probably escaped most clerical observers. Ordinary people needed to make important adaptations because food took on a different meaning than in France, thanks to the severe Canadian winter. Such adaptation is reflected in distinctive North American popular belief about the necessity of eating large amounts of food: “En hiver, il fallait ‘manger fort’ (en quantité) des aliments soutenant et au goût prononcé pour ne pas être frileux.”³² If it were possible to distinguish between festive levels of food consumption, sociability, and celebration, it could be said that the *carnaval* season was even more intensive than the Christmas period. The *carnaval* period’s ten days of great sociability, the *jours gras*, was a period of evening parties, visits, and feasting before the forty-day Lenten period of fasting.³³ John Lambert’s oft-quoted remark in his account of his travels to Lower Canada between 1806 and 1808 aptly describes the *habitants’* seasonal relaxation just before Lent:

They (the country folk) are fond of dancing and entertainments at particular seasons and festivals, on which occasions they eat, drink, and dance in constant succession. When their long fast in Lent is concluded, they have their ‘jours gras’, or days of feasting. Then it is that every production of their farm is presented for the gratification of their appetites.³⁴

²⁸ J.-Alphonse Richard, *Historique de la Paroisse de Saint-Sébastien de Beauce (1869-1944)* (Joliette, 1944), 141-142.

²⁹ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 230-9.

³⁰ Lamontagne, *L’hiver dans la culture québécoise*, 86-88.

³¹ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 475; Pierre de Sales Laterrière, *A Political and Historical Account of Lower Canada, With Remarks on the Present Situation of the People*, by ‘A Canadian,’ Henry Labouchere Taunton, trans. (London, 1830), 127-8.

³² Dupont, “Traditions alimentaires et classes sociales,” 134.

³³ Lamontagne, *L’hiver dans la culture*, 106.

³⁴ John Lambert, *Travels Through Canada and the United States of America in the Years 1806, 1807 & 1808* (London, 1816) 173. See also Joseph Sansom, Esq., *Travels in Lower Canada with the Author’s Recollections of the Soil and Aspect; the Morals, Habits, and Religious Institutions of that Country* (London, 1820).

Several decades later Lemay recalled, “Les soupers du mardi gras surtout sont joyeux et longs. On voudrait voler quelque chose au carême.”³⁵ A final aspect of the period of *Carnaval-Carême* was the custom in both rural France and Québec for the young to go about in disguise on the eve of Ash Wednesday, *le mardi gras*. In France, people blackened their faces, men dressed as women and women as men, sometimes wearing skins for a more savage appearance, and went from house to house.³⁶ In rural Québec, the tradition of disguise was also the distinguishing feature of this celebration as men and women went from door to door drinking, eating, and dancing.³⁷

In addition to sociability and feasting during the holiday season, rural French Canadians had more tangible ways to reinforce the bonds of community, particularly for people whose means did not permit them much extravagance. The early nineteenth-century English traveler, Byron Nicholson, remarking on the generosity of the average French Canadian, noted that he was always ready to share his last glass of wine, his last piece of meat or bread with someone even less fortunate than himself.³⁸ The Church and rural communities harnessed that impulse by holding *quêtes*, or collections of money and/or goods in kind, in aid of the poor. The fact that such customs existed indicates that people did take this duty seriously enough to institutionalize it, and invest it with both a religious and a popular sanction. There were usually two such *quêtes* and one especially, the *Quête de l'Enfant Jésus*, is the best known. The folklorist Jeanne Pomerleau notes that this collection, also called a “quête des biens de la terre” was not a legal obligation for parishioners, as was the tithe, but all would have been expected to contribute the goods to be auctioned off in front of the church.³⁹ It was a charitable collection of food and money in the name of the child Jesus, during the week following Christmas. Normally, the *curé*, along with two or three churchwardens, visited each home in the parish following a previously-announced schedule, to conduct the collection, and to

³⁵ Lemay, “Les jours gras,” in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes et industries*, 35

³⁶ Van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore*, 883. For a similar custom in Newfoundland at Christmas, see Gerald M. Sider, “Christmas Mumming and the New Year in Out-Port Newfoundland,” *Past and Present*, May 1976, 102-125.

³⁷ Lemay, “Les jours gras,” in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes et industries*, 35. See also Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 475-477; Soeur Marie-Ursule, *Civilisation traditionnelle des Lavallois*, 75-77; Desdouits, *La vie traditionnelle au pays de Caux et au Canada français*, 152-162; and Lamontagne, *L'hiver dans la culture québécoise*, 104-108.

³⁸ Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes et industries*, 70-71.

³⁹ Pomerleau. *Corvées et quêtes*, 339-343

inform himself personally about each of his parishioners. The season's festive spirit might have been responsible for people's generosity, but the possibility that some social pressure may also have been involved cannot be discounted. The presence of the *curé*, accompanied by the lay officials of the parish, who were their neighbours, may have encouraged some people to give more than they might otherwise have intended.

The "Cahiers de prônes" periodically mention the *Quête de l'Enfant Jésus*, and Nadeau, the parish historian, indicates that the monetary value of the *Quête* varied between 5 to 10 percent of the parish's ordinary annual revenue.⁴⁰ Given the amount of building going on in St-Joseph to replace the church and rectory, and to erect a convent, the amounts collected for the *Quête de l'Enfant Jésus* testify to the generosity of the parishioners. However, it is not entirely clear how this money was used once it was collected. Even though the amounts from the *Quête de l'Enfant Jésus* were included as items of parish revenue during the period 1839-1901 (see Appendix B), there is no corresponding indication in the parish expenses that seem like outlays in aid of the poorer parishioners. In fact, on 2 March 1845, the *marguilliers* voted to devote the funds collected that year to "la peinture de la couverture de l'église et de la sacristie."⁴¹ However, the fact that this measure required a special resolution of the vestry council indicates that the decision to use a charitable collection for such purposes might have been unusual. The only other instance of diverting funds from this collection occurred in 1870 when the churchwardens voted to use them to help pay for new bells for the church.⁴² It might be that the churchwardens believed that few people needed charitable assistance. Another possible explanation is that the *curé* had more informal means of ensuring that less fortunate parishioners received assistance without publicly calling attention to their poverty. Since the collection was in kind as well as in money, he might have distributed food items. There are few indications of what he did collect for the *Quête*, but among the various food and other products listed for 1878, parishioners donated fifty sheep quarters, 313 pounds of pork, seventy-seven pounds of beef, and 210

⁴⁰ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 311-435. For details on sums collected in the last half of the nineteenth century, see Appendix C, "Parish Revenues, St-Joseph de Beauce, 1851-1901."

⁴¹ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint Joseph," 311.

⁴² Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 388.

minots of oats, along with a few knitted caps, ties and mittens.⁴³ In addition to this charitable collection, young people in rural Québec parishes traditionally organized another collection of produce in kind, *la Guignolée*, on New Year's Eve, although the *curés*' reports from St-Joseph make no reference to this custom.⁴⁴

Spontaneous Forms of Sociability

In addition to the many customary public religious and profane celebrations at traditionally predetermined times of the year, there were a number of other spontaneous and unscheduled ones, particularly during the winter. The *curés* reported time after time that their youthful parishioners liked to socialize, and during the winter there was ample time to do so. Relatively unscheduled occasions for parties included the *corvées*, the wedding or baptismal celebrations, the evening get-togethers (*veillées*), and the harvest parties. Figure 6.1, based on the *Registres d'état civil* of St-Joseph for the period 1850-95, indicates that the *curés* performed the largest proportion of the year's marriages between January and March. Until the 1890s, the most popular time of year for marriages to take place in St-Joseph was the first three months of the year, the "Temps des fêtes."⁴⁵ The registers also show that on numerous occasions, quite often early in the new year, several weddings might take place on the same day in the parish church. Since each one was normally the reason for festivities that could last for a few days, several nuptial celebrations held nearly at once probably provided the excuse for even more elaborate, or at least more extensive, festivities that would have involved the kin and social networks of several families.⁴⁶ Another almost equally popular time for marriage in St-Joseph was between July and September, unusual for an agricultural parish, while

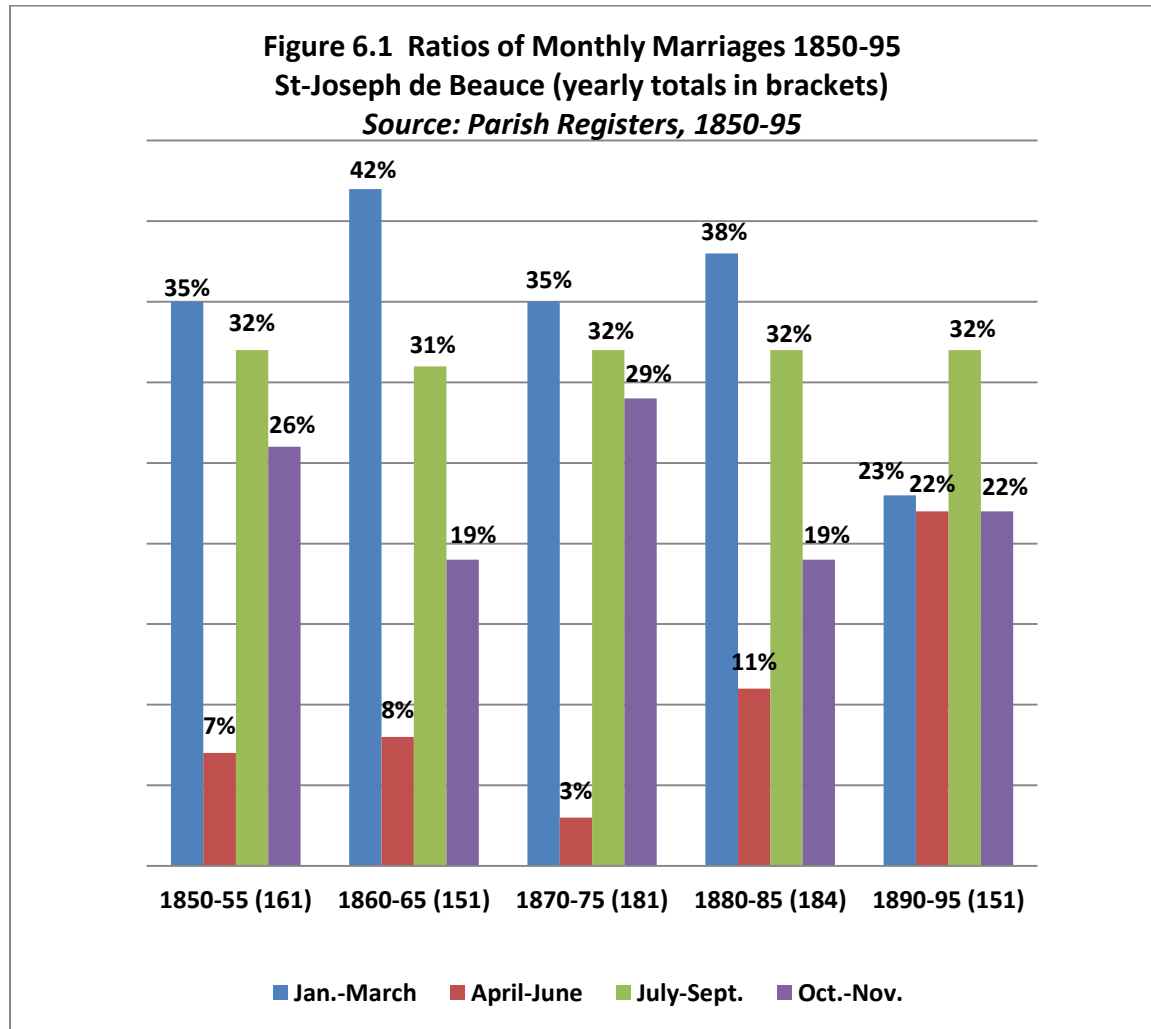
⁴³ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 445; and 467 for the only other enumeration of donations in kind (1882).

⁴⁴ Jeanne Pommerleau notes that such a *quête* in aid of the poor took place in St-Joseph as recently as 1970, though it is not entirely clear that the custom had continued uninterrupted since the nineteenth century. *Corvées et quêtes*, 335.

⁴⁵ These times were not unique to St-Joseph. For a similar monthly index of marriages in the Lower Richelieu in the period 1740-1840, see Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto, 1985), 48-9.

⁴⁶ Laterrière, *A Political and Historical Account*, 120-1, 134. See also Greer, *The Patriotes and the People*, 52-6.

the least likely time was from April to June, the planting season, at least until 1890-95.⁴⁷ A third period for a high number of marriages was in October and November when the harvest was in. The Church did not conduct marriages during the penitential period of



Advent in December. The change of patterns for marriages in the early 1890s, when they were more evenly distributed throughout the year, can be partially explained by the expansion of occupational groups in the parish who did not depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, so their connection to the agricultural cycle would have been less.

⁴⁷ On the low rural marriage rate in mid to late summer in New France, see Louise Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, Liana Vardi, trans., (Montreal and Kingston, 1992), 53-55. On three parishes in the Richelieu Valley, see Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 49. On Winslow in the Eastern Townships, see J.I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants. Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881* (Montreal, Kingston, 1991), 50-51.

During the sugaring season in early spring when, as will be seen in the next chapter, many of them spent extended periods of time in their sugar shanties, older men would have had the opportunity to transmit the informal lessons and codes of masculinity to younger ones. Also for several months during the winter, many males worked in logging camps away from their families, but they too would have had opportunities to socialize together during the long nights. Furthermore, the many occasions for a *corvée* brought neighbours together to help each other with tasks that required many hands in a concentrated period of time, such as harvesting crops, erecting farm buildings, or helping in the various steps of linen or wool production.⁴⁸ Another kind of *corvée* occurred when a farmer butchered animals in the fall. He would give the neighbours who helped the meat, and possibly a share of some of the dishes that the female members of the family had prepared.⁴⁹ The majority of the hundred or so of the most frequent kinds of *corvées* in the course of a year took place in September-October and April-May. As Pomerleau notes, the Beauce “a le renommé d’avoir été le pays des corvées,” so this custom would have been quite familiar to the parishioners to St-Joseph.⁵⁰ The combination of toil and sociability meant that the *corvée* “s’impose comme expression par excellence de la solidarité qui unit les colons.”⁵¹ It is also very likely, as Catharine Wilson found, for nineteenth-century rural Ontario working “bees,” that *corvées* not only brought people together out of a sense of selfless neighbourliness and mutual aid, they were also an integral part of the farm economy where labour was exchanged. On these occasions,

⁴⁸ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 340. A *corvée*, translated into English as “bee,” was, according to the journalist Raphaël Bellemare (1821-1906), “tout travail volontaire qu’on allait faire en commun pour assister un paroissien, soit pour l’érection d’une charpente de maison, de hangar, de grange [...] soit pour une boucherie d’automne, ou pour toute entreprise qui requérait pour un jour un nombre de bras exercés.” In Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes et industries*, 50.

⁴⁹ Soeur Marie-Ursule, *La civilisation traditionnelle des Lavallois*, 68-69. Provencher, on the other hand - and perhaps this is more a difference of a week or two in dating the end of autumn and the start of winter - places this work in winter, during the first week of December, when the cold temperatures helped preserve meat and kept the fat from becoming rancid. *Les Quatre Saisons*, 420-426. See also Desdouits, *La vie traditionnelle au pays de Caux et au Canada français*, 38-39.

⁵⁰ Pomerleau, *Corvées et quêtes*, 26; see also France Béanger, “Un art de vivre,” in France Bélanger, Sylvia Berberi, Jean-René Breton, Danile Carrier, and Renald Lessard. *La Beauce et les Beaucerons : Portraits d’une région, 1737-1987* (Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, 1990), 263-4.

⁵¹ Y. Beaugrand, *Bâtir un village au Québec: Saint-Eugène de Grantham* (Montréal, 1981), 60-3.

there was also drinking and fighting as tensions between individuals in the community came to the surface.⁵²

A good example of how a *corvée* that combined hard work, mutual aid, and celebration, reinforcing the bonds of solidarity in a community, is the work of *broyage*, an important step in preparing flax for linen production. Harvesting and working with it were time consuming and extremely labour intensive so that the help of neighbours was invaluable. Jean Provencher calculates that one person working by hand needed approximately ninety hours to harvest one *arpent*, or 3400 square meters (.99 English acres), work that was also highly dependent on having an extended period of favourable weather.⁵³ A group of people working together for the same purpose considerably shortened the harvest time and made the associated task of processing much more manageable. The harvested stalks needed to sit in the sun and rain for three or four weeks and had to be turned regularly in order to dry evenly so to dissipate the resin.⁵⁴ Female neighbours worked to untangle, beat and clean the long strands of flax before combing a fistful at a time in order to prepare it for the long and dusty process of spinning the fibres. No wonder people enjoyed the party that followed! The linen was transformed into sheets, shirts, hand towels and table cloths, work that occupied much of women's free time during the winter.⁵⁵ Mixing wool and linen in equal quantities produced "une toile souple" from which, as Richard observed in St-Sébastien de Beauce, they would have made "des tabliers tout à fait élégants et qui coulaient bien sur leur jupe."⁵⁶ *Corvées* for processing flax have also been described as "réunions fort gaies" despite the hot dusty nature of the work, and no doubt this was the case in St-Joseph.⁵⁷

An important labourious winter task for males was fulling homemade woolen cloth so that it could be used to make clothing. By the mid-nineteenth century, cloth

⁵² Catharine Wilson "Reciprocal Work Bees and the Meaning of Neighbourhood," *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (September 2001), 431-464.

⁵³ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 340.

⁵⁴ Raphael Bellemare, "Le Broyage du lin," in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes & industries*, 44-5. See also Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien*, 139; Beaugrand, *Bâtir un village au Québec*, 61-2.

⁵⁵ Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien*, 139. He notes that, "Chaque année, dans presque tous les foyers, un, deux, et parfois trois rouets tournaient une bonne partie de l'hiver."

⁵⁶ Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien*, 140.

⁵⁷ Bellemare, "Le broyage du lin," in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes & industries*, 44-45. For a detailed description of the steps involved in the process and the importance of just the right amount of heat, see L.-Pamphile Lemay, "La brairie," in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes & industries*, 45-47.

production was significant in St-Joseph's economy and it still remained important for the economy of Beauce County in 1901. Up to eight men would have worked around a shallow rectangular trough with sloping sides, approximately five meters long, half a meter wide, and a quarter meter high. Two men at each end with long poles and four others in the middle with shorter ones would move the wool that had been soaked in hot soapy water towards the centre, where the other four would beat it almost vertically with their poles. The process could take several hours. As J-Alphonse Richard recalled about such gatherings in the nearby parish of St-Sébastien, the men sometimes removed shoes and socks and worked barefoot in the trough.⁵⁸ Before starting this work, as he recalled, they sometimes had the foresight to down a few drinks to make the work more pleasant.⁵⁹ But, the work in hot water in the cold winter air was potentially unhealthy and by the age of fifty, their legs must have suffered. After fulling was over, the women would wash the cloth in clear water, leaving it to dry before pressing it with a hot iron.⁶⁰

At regular times over the course of the winter, farmers also needed to thresh their grain. Although Beauce County had 789 threshers in 1871 according to the Census of that year, the cost of this recently-invented machinery would have been beyond the reach of most farmers with small acreages; in those cases, neighbours helped each other and beat the grain by hand with flails.⁶¹ Another kind of *corvée* brought parishioners together to construct new religious buildings or to repair old ones. Customarily, the *curé* organized the delivery of supplies of stone and wood and divided the tasks among various parishioners as was the case in the period 1864-67 when St-Joseph's *curés* announced a *corvée* to collect and transport material for the new church, and again in the early 1880s for the new convent, and in the early 1890s for the new rectory.

⁵⁸ Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien*, 140.

⁵⁹ Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien*, 140. He notes that too much rum in the equation, however, meant that, "À la fin de ces corvées, tous voyaient double." See also J.-C. Saint Amant, "Le foulage de l'étoffe," in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes & industries*, 65-6.

⁶⁰ Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien*, 140.

⁶¹ *Census of Canada, 1871*, Vol. III: Table XXII, "Vehicles, Implements, Animals and Animal Products," 114-15. See also Raleigh Morgan, *The Regional French of County Beauce* (The Hague, Paris, 1975), 97. As Provencher notes, by the 1840s threshing mills and, later, mechanical threshers, were beginning to appear in the St. Lawrence Valley, reducing the repetitious nature of this work, for some people at least. 440-4.

Drink, the Church and the *Habitants*

While the *curés* knew there was a strong connection between the hard work they rarely acknowledged and the number and duration of sociable occasions they regularly deplored, they were far more concerned about the important role that alcohol played at almost all gatherings of their parishioners. The ruinous effect of spirits upon spirituality and productivity was one of the greatest preoccupations of the Québec clergy in the nineteenth century. For similar reasons, alcohol use and especially its abuse were also of great concern in the clerical circles of English-speaking Canada.⁶² While the temperance crusades of the century were influential in reducing consumption, clergymen of all denominations continued to demonize it to their congregations as an intractable social problem. Most troubling to the *curés* of St-Joseph, apart from people's evident enjoyment of mixing drink with sociability, was the apparent indifference of nearly everyone but themselves to the dangers of alcohol. Brian Harrison's examination of drinking in England in the nineteenth century, especially among the poor, offers several insights into the Church's difficulties in suppressing its use among the *habitants* of Lower Canada.⁶³ Beyond quenching thirst, Harrison argues, people attributed a number of positive physical, social, and psychic benefits to drinking alcoholic beverages. Harrison also notes that agricultural labourers in England had long believed that alcohol imparted physical stamina, dulled the fatigue of long hours of work, and helped to assert virility. And many people also believed that alcohol relieved physical and emotional pain, protected against indigestion and infection, psychological strain and physical isolation, and helped reduce inhibitions between courting couples. Additionally, it had the twin properties of relieving the gloom of the bereaved and their friends and acquaintances after a funeral, and in enhancing the festive aspects of social occasions. As Harrison

⁶² For the history of alcohol and temperance in English Canada that includes references to Québec, see in particular Jan Noel *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades Before Confederation* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 1995), 153-82; Darren Ferry, *Uniting in Measures of Common Good: The Construction of Liberal Identities in Central Canada* (Montreal and Kingston, 2008), especially 95-135; and Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto, 2003).

⁶³ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (London, 1971), especially 37-44.

notes, “the bonds between drink and every aspect of life in a predominantly agricultural society had hitherto made teetotalers as rare as atheists.”⁶⁴

Although brandy and wine had been imported into the New France, and the *habitants* had bought small amounts for celebration and ‘medicinal’ purposes, according to Allan Greer most people did not drink to excess in rural Québec until after the Conquest. The importation of cheap rum from the British West Indies gave local British merchants ways to penetrate the largely self-sufficient rural market with a “worthless or harmful habit of consumption as a means of initiating or increasing trade.”⁶⁵ Indeed, as noted in Chapter Four, two of St-Joseph’s own priests earned their parishioners’ ire in the eighteenth century by overindulging in alcohol. Suggestions from clergymen and reformers for solving the problem ranged from moral suasion and voluntary measures, such as the temperance and total abstinence campaigns, to government-sanctioned prohibition of alcohol. Thanks to the efforts of the Church and the charismatic preaching of Reverend Charles Chiniquy, temperance enthusiasm swept through Lower Canada in the 1840s.⁶⁶ In the Eastern Townships, the moral suasion of the temperance movement had a significant impact on alcohol consumption by 1852, and as Jan Noel argues, the long-term effects of the temperance movement were successful to a degree in sobering up Canadian society.⁶⁷

St-Joseph was no exception to the attraction of the movement. On 12 December 1848, a public assembly of unspecified size, presided over by the notary J.O.C. Arcand, decided unanimously that only businesses that did not sell strong drink should be encouraged, that the existing public houses should be replaced by “hôtels de tempérance,” and that merchants from other parishes should be discouraged from selling

⁶⁴ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 37-44.

⁶⁵ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 157-9.

⁶⁶ Noel, *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades*, 153-66.

⁶⁷ “‘A Moral Engine of Such Incalculable Power’: The Temperance Movement in the Eastern Townships, 1830-52,” in J.I. Little, *The Other Quebec: Microhistorical Essays on Nineteenth-Century Religion and Society* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2006), 129-60. Jan Noel, *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades Before Confederation*, (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 1995), 220-5. For an examination of the rural-urban differences in temperance in Canada, see Darren Ferry, “‘To the Interests and Conscience of the Great Mass of the Community:’ The Evolution of Temperance Societies in Nineteenth-Century Central Canada,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, New Series, 14:1 (2003), 137-63. For the decline of temperance, see Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* 70-71.

alcohol in the parish.⁶⁸ But, even if their parishioners subscribed only to some of the popular rural English beliefs about alcohol, the *curés* of St-Joseph indicated that drinking was too well established to be reduced, let alone eradicated completely. Subsequent *curés*' reports reflect a sense of their discouragement about losing the battle against the bottle. Consequently, the evil of combining alcohol and revelry continued to be staple themes for sermons in many parts of Québec during the nineteenth century.⁶⁹

In fact, the *curés*' annual reports over the last half of the nineteenth century indicate that the temperance society failed to sustain the enthusiasm of its early days, and, as the clergymen claimed, people continued to drink. Louis-Antoine Martel's report of 1869 to the Archbishop placed drink at the top of the list of the principal 'disorders' in St-Joseph. He noted that his parishioners observed the rules of the temperance movement more in the breach than in the observance, claiming that this was especially true "dans les voyages, les repas de famille, les noces & les visites."⁷⁰ Four years later he wrote that there was hardly a trace of the temperance society in the parish.⁷¹ Martel's reports for 1878-79 and 1880 claimed that every family may well have had the black cross of temperance hanging in the house, but that did not in the least mean that they had forsaken intoxicating drink or stopped using it on festive occasions.⁷² By 1886, the *curé*, François-Xavier Gosselin, reported that the society no longer existed and no one observed its rules.⁷³ But he also thought that it was not too late to revive it, or to make temperance more effective. This could only be done by returning to the old rules of total abstinence, permitting alcohol only for medicinal purposes.⁷⁴ While neither *curé* provided any evidence to support his assertions that alcohol consumption had not diminished, their agreement that there was too much liquor in St-Joseph indicates that they did not see their

⁶⁸ Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de Saint-Joseph," 322.

⁶⁹ Normand Séguin, *La Conquête du sol au XIXe siècle* (Sillery, 1970), 260-7.

⁷⁰ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 68, L.-A. Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph pour 1869 à Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Québec."

⁷¹ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 90, L.-A. Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour 1873-74."

⁷² AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II, L.-A. Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour 1878-79," 101; and AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 102a, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour 1879-80." For almost exactly the same observation from another Québec parish, see Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History*, 71.

⁷³ AAQ 61 CD, "Rapports des paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec," 1886, vol. 2 (I-Z) 186.

⁷⁴ AAQ 61 CD 3, "Rapports des paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec," 1886, vol. 2, 186-87.

flock living, in Noel's words, "the humble, abstemious rural lifestyle recommended by a conservative clergy."⁷⁵

But despite the parish temperance society's loss of momentum and clerical fulminations about people's easy access to alcohol, there is a great deal of evidence that municipal councillors were willing to restrict its availability. As early as 1858, the newly-constituted municipal council took note of the alcohol issue and went even further than the *curé* might have had reason to hope, by prohibiting alcohol sales in the parish altogether. The council passed a bylaw forbidding the sale of wine, spirituous liquor, ale, and beer in St-Joseph on pain of a fine of five louis (equivalent to twenty dollars), a bylaw that they adopted again almost exactly a year later.⁷⁶ In 1860, the councillors – in addition to adding rum, brandy and porter to the proscribed list of alcoholic beverages – also declared, seemingly redundantly, that the municipality would issue no licences for their sale. Furthermore, anyone contravening this bylaw would be fined twelve pounds and ten shillings.⁷⁷ Passing bylaws against the sale of alcohol became an annual rite of spring for the local council. In 1861, it endorsed the same prohibitions against the same alcoholic beverages and kept the penalty, the equivalent of fifty dollars, and did so again in subsequent years.⁷⁸ It reiterated the bylaw every year in the period 1862-88. Even so, Martel felt that the local authorities displayed a notable lack of enthusiasm in enforcing the laws against alcohol sales. He left a note for his sermon on the fourth Sunday of Lent in 1869 to congratulate the municipal council for renewing its bylaw forbidding the sale of alcohol, and to remind them to enforce it.⁷⁹ His sermon notes for the spring of 1870 warned against granting "licences d'auberge."⁸⁰ Despite feeling that he was the only public figure concerned about alcohol, by 1876 Martel thought he was able to report some progress. On the first Sunday of Lent that year, he noted a warning to the municipal councillors to pass a by-law prohibiting the sale of alcohol, and the following week he congratulated them for having done so.⁸¹ It is not difficult to imagine Martel's

⁷⁵ Noel, *Canada Dry*, 224.

⁷⁶ ASPB, "Livre des procès verbaux de la Municipalité de St-Joseph de Beauce, Août 1855 à juillet 1868," 'Séance du 19 avril 1858', and 'Séance du 19 avril 1858.'

⁷⁷ ASPB, "Procès verbaux de la Municipalité de St-Joseph de Beauce," 'Séance du 2 avril 1860.'

⁷⁸ ASPB, "Procès verbaux de la Municipalité de St-Joseph de Beauce," 'Séance du 29 avril 1861.'

⁷⁹ ASPB, FFSJ, "Livre de prênes, 1868-72," 17.

⁸⁰ ASPB, FFSJ, "Livre de prênes, 1868-72," 65.

⁸¹ ASPB, FFSJ, "Prônes 1878-[n.d.]," 11-12.

alacrity in fulfilling the obligation in the Civil Code to read out the text of the law on illegal sales of alcohol each year after the election of churchwardens and at their first general assembly, and having one of them read it to the parishioners after morning mass the first three Sundays of September.⁸²

Prohibiting the legal sale of alcohol had merely driven it underground, and thirsty parishioners resorted to bootleggers. In his 1869 report to the Archbishop, noting that an unidentified woman was running a “petite boutique où l’on vend de la boisson,” Martel took credit for having her imprisoned for two months.⁸³ However, immediately upon leaving prison, possibly because she had little alternative, she went back into business. Martel busied himself finding more proof for the authorities to incarcerate her again.⁸⁴ Moreover, his report of 1870-71, indicated, as did those of his successors, that there were always at least two places in the parish that sold alcohol, always illegally, and even openly if the owners thought they could do so without being fined.⁸⁵ The following year he noted that one establishment sold a considerable amount of alcohol illegally, even on Sundays.⁸⁶ In 1873, he reported that nobody but the *curé* was making any effort to stop the illicit sales of alcohol.⁸⁷

Like Martel, the municipal council must have eventually concluded that if bootlegging flourished, banning the legal sale of alcohol in St-Joseph was ineffective in stopping its consumption. Consequently, they probably hoped their tentative proposal in 1879 to licence an establishment might not meet with clerical disapproval. On 6 February 1879, the council decided to approach Archbishop Taschereau to see if he had any moral objections to councillors, in “good conscience,” approving a licensed establishment in St-Joseph. They also asked if the sacraments would be denied to a municipal councillor if his conscience permitted him to approve of such a measure for the

⁸² J.U. Baudry, *Code des curés, marguilliers et paroissiens accompagné de notes historiques et critiques* (Montréal, 1870), 275-6.

⁸³ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 68, Martel, “Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph pour 1869.”

⁸⁴ For women’s grog shops in Québec, see Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History*, 157.

⁸⁵ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 79, L.-A. Martel, “Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph, Beauce, pour l’année 1870-71.”

⁸⁶ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 79a, L.-A. Martel, “Mémoire sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph présenté à Monseigneur l’Archevêque de Québec à l’occasion de la Visite Episcopale en 1872.”

⁸⁷ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 79a, Martel, “Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph pour 1873-74.” He made the same observations on the indifference of anyone but himself to the unlicensed sales of alcohol, and its prominent place in elections in almost exactly the same words in his reports of the following four years.

spiritual and temporal good of the parish.⁸⁸ They did not have long to wait for a reply. Two days later, in a four-page handwritten letter, Taschereau addressed each of the Council's arguments, and was even more uncompromising than Martel. He said that anyone who used arguments about conscience in such a matter was deceiving himself, for "*une maison où l'on vend de la boisson est une porte de l'enfer,*" and no spiritual or temporal good would result from such a licence.⁸⁹ The archbishop added that a number of evils would afflict the parish. Increased alcohol use among those who might otherwise never have been interested in it was one of them, and their children would suffer as a result of seeing their parents drunk at home or on the roads of the parish. Young people would contract the bad habit of drunkenness, and money would flow out of the parish. Reminding them further that in 1875 the Fifth Council of the province's bishops decreed that "Il y a péché grave à accorder des licences là où elles ne sont pas nécessaires, là où elles peuvent augmenter ou introduire un désordre qui produit la ruine des âmes et des corps."⁹⁰ Taschereau's letter had the desired effect upon the council but, even without licenced establishments, as Martel reported to the Archbishop in July 1880, the illicit sale of alcohol continued. Martel identified "three or four" houses near the railway station that sold alcohol with impunity when its owners thought they could get away with it.⁹¹ Five years later, Martel observed that there were five unlicensed establishments and that "les gens favorisent tous ces vendeurs."⁹² Worse, he claimed, no efforts were being made to stop this business and he encountered many difficulties in finding adequate proof to have the sellers convicted.⁹³

⁸⁸ AAQ Registre de lettres, St. Joseph de B., II-96-97. "Si un conseiller municipal est d'opinion dans son âme et conscience et sous le serment d'office qu'il a dûment prêté qu'une licence de magasin de liqueur est nécessaire pour le bien spirituel et temporel de la paroisse, il puisse être privé des Sacrements de l'Église dans le cas où il votait en faveur d'une telle mesure?" See also "6 fév. 1879 - Le conseil municipal demande à l'Archev. S'il peut accorder une licence de magasin pour vendre de la boisson."

⁸⁹ ASPB, FFSJ, "Lettre de Elzéar-Alexandre Taschereau, Arch. de Québec à Joseph Doyon. Québec, 8 février 1879." Underlined in the original letter.

⁹⁰ ASPB, FFSJ, Taschereau to Doyon, 8 février 1879." In May 1888, Taschereau instructed his clergy to have their parishioner send petitions to the Québec government supporting a proposed law that would have limited the number of legal outlet for selling alcohol. He thoughtfully provided a sample petition. "Circulaire au clergé," in Mgr. H. Têtu and l'abbé C. O. Gagnon, *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires des Évêques de Québec* Volume 3 (Québec, 1888), 19-21.

⁹¹ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 102a, L.-A. Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour 1879-80."

⁹² AAQ 61 CD 2, "Rapports des paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec," 1885, col. 2 (I-Z), 175.

⁹³ AAQ 61 CD 2, "Rapports des paroisses," 1885, 175.

However, there was more than a slight whiff of exaggeration in some clerical claims. While the *curés* of St-Joseph were industriously fulminating from the pulpit against alcohol and its illicit sale, a few blocks away in the Palais de Justice, the justices of the peace were busily fining and imprisoning the illegal sellers. The records of the case loads of the local representatives of the law for the last few decades of the nineteenth century contain more convictions for illegal alcohol sales than anything else in the wide range of low-level anti-social behaviour. In 1876, the justices of the peace in Beauce County handed out forty convictions for bootlegging compared to fourteen for assault and four for larceny. And they convicted and fined more people from Ste-Marie and especially St-François for bootlegging than they did people from St-Joseph, suggesting that the authorities were more vigilant than the clergy thought. Perhaps the presence of the courthouse and sheriff in St-Joseph also had a discouraging effect on bootleggers.⁹⁴ Even so, in his 1886 report, Gosselin claimed that most people, with some exceptions, supported the unlicensed alcohol sellers, and so did the authorities: “Le Gouvernement actuel les favorise aussi, en remettant les amendes auxquelles quelques uns d’entre-eux sont condamnés.”⁹⁵ Still more scandalous, according to the Reverend Gosselin in 1888, was that people were able to buy alcohol illicitly on Sundays, even during the hours of divine service.⁹⁶ By 1892, however, he was able to report that this was no longer the case.⁹⁷ But to an ultramontane such as Gosselin, the issue of alcohol was merely a symptom of a larger malaise, one more disturbing expression of the many serious ills of the age.

An additional problem, as the *curés* reported each year, was that alcohol and politics seemed inseparable. In his report for 1886, François-Xavier Gosselin confirmed the observations of his predecessors by noting that elections were the occasions for

⁹⁴ BAnQ, Fonds Ministère de Justice, Dossiers de la Cour des Sessions de la Paix, Greffe de St-Joseph-de-Beauce, Matières criminelles en general, Dossiers 1862-1910, “Registre des enquêtes et convictions sommaires devant les Juges de Paix et les Magistrats à St-Joseph de la Beauce commencé le 2 janvier 1874 – 8 août 1900.”

⁹⁵ AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1887, 183.

⁹⁶ AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1888, 170; “Rapports des paroisses,” 1887, 183; “Rapports des paroisses,” 1886, 181. See also Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History*, 176.

⁹⁷ AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1892, 127-28.

“désordres surtout de boisson.”⁹⁸ Like Jeremiah crying in the wilderness, he continued to rail against an age that permitted too much drinking among the young, turned a blind eye to the lack of honesty in people’s financial behaviour, and was complacent about the decline in political morals. Furthermore the abdication of parental authority resulted in “éducation molle et jeunesse dissipée,” and promoted “envie de paraître plus qu’on n’est, vanité qui est la source de dépenses extravagantes et souvent de ruine.”⁹⁹ In the concluding remarks of his report to the archbishop for 1887, remarks that he repeated in the following years, Gosselin argued that there were several great calamities ravaging their people. These were intemperance, excess, corruption in political affairs from the top to the bottom of the social ladder, and, finally, liberalism “qui a pénétré si profondément dans les idées et les moeurs de notre Société.”¹⁰⁰ Thanks to the latter, certain religious truths about political morality had become dead letters, opening the door to abuses such as unscrupulous political manoeuvres during elections, and the buying of consciences. The only viable solution was to return to the older spiritual values, and to combat the false notion of the separation of religion and politics, “bien que ces vérités religieuses soient proclamées solennellement au retour de chaque élection par la première autorité religieuse du pays.”¹⁰¹ It was time to preach a general crusade against those abuses that menaced the religious life of the people by means of retreats in the Archdiocese. The only way to deal with alcohol was to re-establish the temperance society on its original foundation of total abstinence.¹⁰² On 28 September 1893, however, Gosselin again observed there was an “excès de boisson, chez les jeunes gens, dans leurs sorties et veillées, et chez un trop grand nombre dans les nocés”.¹⁰³ His Christmas Eve sermon of that year in St-Joseph could easily have been written twenty or thirty years earlier. He urged people not to come to the village merely to pass the evening enjoying

⁹⁸ AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1886, 185. In 1873, Martel had observed that alcohol and money played prominent parts in “des élections des députés.” AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 79a, Martel, “Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph pour 1873-74.” For more on election behaviour, see Sylvia Berberi, “Les Beaucerons et la politique,” in Bélanger, Berberi, et al., *La Beauce et les Beaucerons*, 144-6.

⁹⁹ AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1892, 127.

¹⁰⁰ AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1887, 188-9, F.-X. Gosselin, 20 August 1887.

¹⁰¹ AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1887, 189. See the same remarks in AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1888, 174-5; and AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1889, 157-8.

¹⁰² AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1887, 189.

¹⁰³ AAQ 61 CD 2, “Rapports des paroisses,” 1893, 187.

themselves before mass. He told the young men of the parish to remain with their parents, unless they wanted to go to confession first. They were not to come to the village early, or to be unaccompanied because they would undoubtedly meet “mauvaises compagnies” and inevitably would want to drink.¹⁰⁴

Similarly, the Reverend Adalbert Blanchet told his St-Joseph parishioners from the pulpit in 1900 that there was more drunkenness in the parish than most of them had hitherto suspected, and total abstinence was the only solution. Misery in many homes, he said, accompanied the abuse of alcohol. Therefore, the way to find out one’s true friends during the festive season was by offering visitors coffee, pastry or candy, instead of alcohol. If they said that they would end up by not seeing anyone over the holidays unless they provided the customary variety of strong drink, so much the better, Blanchet argued: “Je serai bien insulté si quelqu’un me disait, ‘pas de boisson, pas de visite.’ J’en conclurai que c’est la bouteille de gin qui vous fait marcher, venir, ce n’est pas l’amitié; ni la considération pour moi.”¹⁰⁵

However, there is a big difference between occasionally consuming alcohol, even large amounts, in social settings or at festive times of the year, and drinking large amounts every day, something that even the *curés* most opposed to alcohol admitted, at least privately. While the clergymen reported that many people were in the first category and drank too much at too many *veillées*, inveterate alcoholics were relatively few in the period 1853-1900. In 1853, Antoine Racine wrote that there were about ten “ivrognes qui se livrent à leur mauvaise passion tous les jours qu’ils sont à la ville et quelquefois dans la paroisse.”¹⁰⁶ Likewise, in his 1870-71 report, Louis-Antoine Martel reported that there was no public drunkenness as such, although he knew of “several” people who drank to excess.¹⁰⁷ And, whatever he said from the pulpit, Adalbert Blanchet also indicated privately in his report to the archbishop that alcoholism was not as widespread as his public Sunday fulminations might have led his parishioners to believe, perhaps

¹⁰⁴ ASPB FFSJ, 3.22 : 65, “Prônes, 1 Octobre 1893 - 21 Avril 1901,” 22. In 1901, the *curé* gave parents the same advice that their sons stay at home until time for mass. SPB FFSJ 3.22: 66. “Livre de prônes, 28 avril 1901 - 28 Février 1906,” 22 December 1901, 53.

¹⁰⁵ ASPB FFSJ, 3.22; 65, “Prônes, 1 Octobre 1893-21 Avril 1901,” 468.

¹⁰⁶ AAQ, “Rapports des paroisses de l’Archidiocèse de Québec, 1900”, Vol. 2 (J-Z), 126. For Racine’s account, see “Rapport de Mr A. Racine, 1853.”

¹⁰⁷ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph (Beauce) II: 79, L.-A. Martel, “Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph, Beauce, pour l’année 1870-71.”

indicating that the temperance movement was more successful than it appeared. Blanchet estimated that there were around a dozen scandalous sinners or habitually heavy drinkers in the parish, not a high number in a community of a few thousand souls, and nowhere near the crisis that his public statements might have led people to believe.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Nostalgic descriptions of the winter festivities of rural Québec are so replete with images of trotting horses pulling sleighs over crunching snow, with harness bells jingling in the cold air as they carried people merrily from one house to another, that it is easy to overlook the long months of hard work and preparation that made these idyllic scenes possible.¹⁰⁹ Climate, custom, and inclination went hand in hand and were stronger than clerical disapproval. The clergy seem to have agreed that in the race between holy water and fire water for the loyalty of St-Joseph's parishioners (for the males, at least), the latter was more than holding its own in the last half of the nineteenth century. However, the reality was that they existed beside each other. The balm that alcohol and merrymaking provided was, for many, the secular equivalent of the spiritual solace that the *curés* dispensed. Each in its way helped to mitigate the difficulties of hard work, the uncertainties of agriculture, and of life itself. Eating and drinking at festive times were one of the means that the people of St-Joseph employed, consciously or unconsciously, to reinforce their collective identity and their bonds with each other. As the cultural historian Simon Gunn points out, paraphrasing Richard Jenkins, "Identities are a matter of doing, as well as thinking, of social practice as well as the social imaginary."¹¹⁰ Similarly, in 1898 Pamphile Lemay remarked that his fellow French Canadians revealed themselves in their public and private leisure activities. To understand a group or an individual, it is necessary to study him "dans ses pratiques et ses réjouissances intimes, comme dans ses coutumes et ses fêtes publiques."¹¹¹ What the traditional winter celebrations had in common was that people looked forward to them well in advance, knew the reason for each of the celebrations, made adequate and even elaborate

¹⁰⁸ AAQ 61 CD 17, "Rapports des paroisses, 1900," vol 2, J-Z, 117-32.

¹⁰⁹ L.-Pamphile Lemay, "Les jours gras," in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes & industries*, 33.

¹¹⁰ Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (London and New York, 2006), 132.

¹¹¹ Lemay, "La brairie," (1898), in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes & industries*, 45.

preparations for them, and expected they would unfold with a precise regard for past practices. The festive winter period that granted rural people respite thus needs to be understood in the larger context of a way of life that Fernand Harvey defines as “l’ensemble des solidarités au sein d’un groupe qui a des pratiques communes.”¹¹² Furthermore, during festive periods, or after collective tasks, people assembled to express their pleasure in each other’s company by means of a sociability that reinforced their ties of family, friendship and affection. These gave the *habitants* what J.-Alphonse Richard, in writing about the people of nearby St-Sébastien de Beauce termed a distinctive *esprit social* that he argued they had acquired thanks to “ces courants d’habitudes communes qui ont entouré les moindres détails de la vie quotidienne.”¹¹³ And while the clergy feared the problems that accompanied drinking copious amounts of alcohol on festive occasions, their five decades of reports indicated that there were few inveterate alcoholics in the parish. For most people, drinking was not an end in itself but one of the bridges to their festive world.

Their celebrations illustrated how much the *habitants’* outlook on the pleasures of the table, and especially the bottle, diverged from the restrained behaviour the clergy wanted them to practice. The proverbial *habitant* hospitality and sociability implicitly challenged clerical norms about what constituted acceptable social behaviour, although it is interesting to note that, given the abundance and variety of dishes during the *Temps des fêtes*, sermon topics in the notebooks of the *curés* of St-Joseph make no mention of excessive eating. One reason for this silence may have been that the hierarchy was much more absorbed with the social problems that they blamed on alcohol. Another may have been, as *curés* in parishes elsewhere found, that the hospitality they themselves received during their annual visit to the homes of their parishioner during the *Quête de l’Enfant Jésus* amply compensated for the arduousness of life in a rural parish. As the Reverend A.-C. Dugas reminisced fondly about such visits in the parish where he once served, “En effet, si je regard sur la table de chaque famille, j’y vois des plateaux avec des beignes et des carafes pleines de rhum ou d’étoffe du pays (whiskey blanc).”¹¹⁴ Dugas is rather

¹¹² Fernand Harvey, “Pour une approche différenciée de la religion populaire selon les genres de vie,” in Benoît Lacroix and Jean Simard, eds., *Religion populaire, religion des clercs* (Québec, 1984), 227.

¹¹³ Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien*, 126.

¹¹⁴ A.-C. Dugas, “La Quête de l’Enfant Jésus,” in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes & industries*, 52.

more informative on the state of the parishioners' tables than their souls. A line or two on the religious aspects of the visit fits between loving descriptions of meat dishes, pies, desserts and drink. Such an attitude likely would have endeared this exceptionally tolerant priest and similar clerics to their parishioners.

Finally, clerical complaints about the sociability of St-Joseph's parishioners leave the impression that there was no room in their lives for religion, let alone farm work. As in France, the Rabelaisian form of these traditional celebrations prevented the clergy (though not clerics like Dugas) from recognizing or admitting that their content was made up of some of the very values that the Church itself promoted. Beneath the apparent frivolity, these celebrations enunciated principles such as sharing with the less fortunate, the importance of the family, respect for one another, and mutual aid, to name the most important, and hence provide useful insights about ordinary people's important cultural values. *Habitant* sociability reinforced family and community ties and people's sense of their interdependence with each other. The apparently insouciant metaphysical balancing act wherein the *habitants* of St-Joseph reconciled their earthly love of celebration and their spiritual allegiance to Catholicism was central to their collective identity, and sense of self-worth. It is not surprising that the clergy targeted these social activities, important as they were in reaffirming the independent spirit of St-Joseph's *habitants*, a spirit that Racine identified as the major obstacle to the clergy's hope for greater control over them. But in this parish people were not inclined to give them up. And, as will be seen next, the clergy reported the same lack of success in banning dancing.

Chapter 7

Sociability and Sexuality: “On danse pour le plaisir de danser”

In their annual reports to their superiors in Québec City during the last half of the nineteenth century, the *curés* in St-Joseph continuously lamented their inability to reduce, let alone prohibit, what they felt were the large number of evening parties, drinking, and dancing in the parish. Thus, David Martineau noted in his 1854 report, “Les danses et les *veillées* sont encore trop fréquentes.”¹ His successor for the period 1856-68, James Nelligan, left no parish reports, and it is not possible to say whether such celebrations diminished, though it is unlikely. A week before Christmas in 1868, the Reverend Louis-Antoine Martel who succeeded him, left himself a note in his *Cahier de prônes* for the Fourth Sunday of Advent to advise parents to make sure that their sons and daughters avoided evening parties, dances, games and drink, and did not go celebrating in houses or drinking establishments near the church within six or seven hours before the year’s Christmas midnight mass.² Martel’s notes for the following week’s Christmas Day sermon indicate that his advice on suitable conduct for the season had not reached everyone. He repeated the advice that parents keep a closer eye on their young, especially warning them about parties and drinking during the Christmas season, with a note in his sermon notes to warn them about “les repas & veillés & danses”.³

Typical of his flock’s behaviour, according to the Reverend Martel’s report for 1869, were their frequent dancing parties and their long courtships. Too much familiarity between young males and females, and “paroles déshonnêtes,” completed the list of objectionable “disorders” that this priest found in his parish.⁴ On the Sunday before

¹ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, “Rapport fait par le curé de St Joseph de la Beauce à Monseigneur l’Archevêque de Québec pour l’année 1854.” *Veillées* is underlined in the original.

² ASPB, FFSJ 3.22: 56, St-Joseph de Beauce, “Cahier de prônes et annonces, 30 Novembre 1868-1872,” 4.

³ ASPB, FFSJ 3.22: 45-46, St-Joseph de Beauce, “Cahier de prônes et annonces, 30 Novembre 1868-1872,” 4.

⁴ AAQ 61 CD St-Joseph de Beauce 2 (II: 68), L.A. Martel, “Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph pour 1869 à Monseigneur l’Archevêque de Québec.”

Christmas of 1872, Martel's sermon notes contained another plea to parents not to let their young come early to the village before midnight mass merely to hang around in order to drink and attend parties before the service.⁵ His report to the archbishop for the year 1875-76 repeated this theme, as would his subsequent reports down to and including his last one in 1885. He noted that there were too many evening parties, long courtships, and too much drinking on trips to town and at "noces qui sont trop bruyantes, trop nombreuses & trop longues."⁶ Similarly, Martel's successor François-Xavier Gosselin reported in 1891 and again in 1893 that the "disorders" he had observed in the previous year among the young parishioners included evening parties and extended courtships.⁷ In addition, he used exactly the same terminology to deplore people's drinking on trips to town and at wedding receptions that were too frequent, too long, and too noisy.⁸ On 5 August 1898, François-Narcisse Fortier, Gosselin's successor, drafted a similar list.⁹ The beleaguered clergymen in St-Joseph were far from alone in their distress because such observations came from their ecclesiastical superior, the Archbishop himself, who lamented in 1895, as he had in 1879, that "Les longues fréquentations [...] sont une des plaies de notre pays."¹⁰ Since these activities were ones that prelates and *curés* alike identified as the main obstacles to moulding ideal Catholics, it is important to examine them more closely.

Behind their hand wringing about dancing, drinking and extended courtships lurked a more urgent preoccupation for the men of the cloth. The clergy had always deemed these activities to be dangerous outward expressions of youthful sexuality that needed strict supervision. Serge Gagnon notes that all cultures share a concern with the regulation of sexuality, although it is extremely difficult to distinguish clearly between

⁵ SPB, FFSJ. 3.22: 57, St-Joseph de Beauce, "Cahier de prônes et annonces, 30 Novembre 1868-1872," 138.

⁶ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Louis-Antoine Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse de St-Joseph de la Beauce pour 1875-76."

⁷ AAQ 64 CD 8, "Rapports des Paroisses de l'Archidiocèse," 1891, vol. 2 (I-Z) 231; AAQ 64 CD 10, "Rapports des Paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec," 1893, vol. 2 (I-Z), 187; In the same volume, 443-44, for similar observations from the *curé* of Ste-Marie de Beauce. For similar comments on the same subject, see Séguin, *La Conquête du sol*, 206.

⁸ AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2, Martel, "Rapport sur la Paroisse 1875-76."

⁹ AAQ 64 CD 15, "Rapports des Paroisses de l'Archidiocèse de Québec," 1898, vol. 2 (I-Z), 175.

¹⁰ *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec*, Second Edition (Québec, 1895), 123. See also *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec* (Québec, 1879), 104.

religious and social controls in regulating sexual mores in most pre-modern societies.¹¹ As Michel Foucault has observed, a society's "moral code" is made up of "a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies" such as the Church.¹² While not all historians of sexuality share Foucault's argument that it is a culturally constructed formation arising out of particular historical circumstances, it is incontestable that for many centuries the Christian Church played an influential role in formulating and articulating Western sexual discourse.¹³

By tracing the interplay between clerical discourse and popular sociability in St-Joseph, this chapter will show the extent to which the less inhibited traditions of the family and the community mitigated or even partially undermined some parts of the Church's message about sexuality, while reinforcing others. We will begin by examining clerical discourse and the state of our knowledge about sexuality in nineteenth-century Québec. Since the pessimistic comments of St-Joseph's *curés* make it clear that they did not think there was a satisfactory level of parental or clerical control over young people's sexuality in the parish, we need to examine if, or how, dancing and related practices of popular sociability of the young men and women of St-Joseph were manifestations of their power in the face of the Church's disapproval. The detailed annual reports from the parish make it possible to compare the *curés*' subjective comments on the morality of the young with statistics from government censuses and data in the parish registers on marriages and births. As will be seen, the low figures for premarital conceptions and illegitimate births contradict the *curés*' gloomy reports, suggesting that if people ignored clerical proscriptions against dancing, it did not mean that they ignored the Church's condemnation of premarital sex.

¹¹ Serge Gagnon, *Plaisir d'amour et crainte de Dieu, Sexualité et confession au Bas-Canada* (Sainte-Foy, 1990), 5.

¹² Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure* (New York, 1990), 25.

¹³ For more on the debates around the social construction of sexuality, see Jeffrey Weeks, "Sexuality and History Revisited," in Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay, eds., *Sexualities in History, A Reader* (New York and London, 2002), 27-41. See also David M. Halperin, "Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality," in Phillips and Reay, eds., *Sexualities in History*, 42-68.

The Québec Church and Sexuality

As the folklorist Barbara Leblanc argues, the traditional Christian distinction between the morally inferior body and the transcendent soul meant that the Church's fundamental concern was always to save the latter. According to the Church, the body reacts to sensual stimulations, while the soul controls the spiritual powers of intelligence and will. Endowed with divine reason and purpose, people must arrive at judgements of good and evil in order to save their immortal souls. They must master and even deny their morally dangerous physical nature, and not surrender to their passions, because the Devil – the incarnation of evil – inspires them.¹⁴ The Church conveyed that message to the faithful in a number of ways, but for most people perhaps the most detailed exposure to clerical discourse was through the sermons of their *curés* and their catechism classes.

Reflecting what Foucault has termed “the multiplication of discourse,” the mid-nineteenth century saw the production of a number of works on morality and sexuality directed at Catholics in the Québec Archdiocese, although they were worded with the greatest possible reserve and discretion.¹⁵ In the *Petit Catéchisme* that Bishop Signay approved in 1847, the brief explanation of the sixth commandment's condemnation of “impurity” said that it referred to “toute espèce d'impureté ou d'immodestie sur soi ou sur d'autres.”¹⁶ According to the Catechism, occasions for such temptations included “divertissements” that the good Christian was to avoid unless such diversions were absolutely necessary and innocent.¹⁷ The new edition of the archdiocesan catechism, the *Grand Catéchisme* of 1853, was more specific. In defining and giving advice on how to combat the seven deadly sins, the catechism made it clear that the sinful pleasures of the flesh included eating or drinking to excess or with “trop de sensualité,” too much familiarity with people of the opposite sex, finding pleasure in “paroles” or “chansons libres,” and in reading works on the subject of love.¹⁸ Since sensuality and sociability were intimately linked in the minds of the clergy and people alike, a good Christian was

¹⁴ Barbara Leblanc, “Les Interdictions sur la danse au Canada français,” *Canadian Journal for Traditional Music*, vol. 9-14 (1985), 15.

¹⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York, 1990), 17-19.

¹⁶ *Le Petit Catéchisme du Diocèse de Québec, Nouvelle Édition revue, corrigée et examinée par ordre de Monseigneur Joseph Signay, Archevêque de Québec* (Québec, 1847), 35.

¹⁷ *Le Petit Catéchisme du Diocèse de Québec* (1847), 46.

¹⁸ *Le Grand Catéchisme de Québec A l'usage de toute la Province ecclésiastique de Québec* (Lévis, 1853), 35.

to avoid any kind of familiarity with persons of the opposite sex, and even if they did not participate themselves, people should flee “les danses, les bals, les comédies, les assemblages dangereuses, comme des écueils de la pureté.”¹⁹ The catechism included the recommendation that small boys and girls not even play together. One *curé* in the Saguenay took this injunction further in 1877 when he decided to refuse the sacraments to mothers who allowed their children to sleep in their beds with them. Presumably he would have had the same objections if it had been the father, since both parents usually shared the same bed, although in winter, fathers were often away in the woods and the houses were cold.²⁰

There were several aspects of sexuality upon which clergy and community were agreed. While the popular custom of the *charivari* asserted that the community could and would make its own judgments even on the suitability of a duly consecrated Catholic marriage, an assertion that implicitly challenged the authority of the Church and the state, at the same time it upheld their norms. As J.I. Little notes, “the charivari played an ambiguous role between reinforcing conventional morality (commonly being deployed against wife beaters and those engaged in sexual cohabitation outside marriage) and challenging legal authority.”²¹ In addition to agreeing on the desirability of marital fidelity, the priests and the public concurred on condemning homosexuality, although it was a condemnation that usually dared not speak its name. The idea that people of the same sex could also form passionate attachments was not part of the public clerical discourse even if it was privately on the minds of clergymen. There is not the slightest trace of that anxiety in Mailloux’s advice to parents, nor is the subject even obliquely

¹⁹ *Grand Catéchisme de Québec* (1853), 35-6. The same concerns and advice appeared more briefly in *Le Catéchisme des Provinces ecclésiastiques de Québec*, Montréal, Ottawa, 96, 99-100, and 111.

²⁰ Normand Séguin, *La Conquête du sol au XIXe siècle* (Sillery, 1977), 207.

²¹ J.I. Little, *State and Society in Transition. The Politics of Institutional Reform in the Eastern Townships, 1838-1852* (Montreal and Kingston, 1997), 92. Allan Greer makes the same point regarding *charivari* in a more limited way when he argues that the marital ideal behind it “was not essentially contradictory to clerical views.” Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellions of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto, 1993, 74-5. See also René Hardy, “Le charivari dans la sociabilité rurale québécoise au XIXe siècle,” in R. Levasseur, ed., *De la sociabilité: Spécificité et mutations* (Montréal, 1989), 59-72. For the paradox between goals and outcome of the charivari, see Claude Karnoouh, “Le charivari ou l’hypothèse de la monogamie,” in Jacques LeGoff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le charivari: Actes de la table ronde organisée à Paris (25-27 avril 1977) par l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales et le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (Paris, TheHague, New York, 1981), 33-44.

alluded to in the sermon notes and annual reports of the *curés* of St-Joseph, although the silence is not surprising, given the reluctance of clergymen even to hint at the subject.²² A further reason for the silence about homosexual activity among historians of sexuality in Québec can be explained, as Jeffery Vacante points out, is that much of the focus is on “demographic evidence, which privileges the heterosexual experience.”²³ Vacante also observes that studies of female sexuality have suffered because the history of sexuality in Québec since the 1960s has been overwhelmed with “a set of spatial and conceptual boundaries derived from existing ‘national’ narratives.” One is that while heterosexual behaviour in New France was “normal” before the British Conquest, literary analysts have argued that the Church-controlled education system played a major role in “devirilizing” and “emasculating” boys by instilling “feminine” values into them. He argues that a major theme of Québec fiction is that men were incomplete and weak, dominated by women and priests who blocked their masculine aspirations, and by extension, Québec’s “national” ones.²⁴ Evidently, no study of a small rural parish by itself can hope to provide complete answers to these larger issues, although clerical complaints about the persistence of male behaviour in St-Joseph that they objected to, such as swearing and drinking, challenges the idea that the Church had “devirilized” them. In its own way, then, an examination of sexuality and sociability of St-Joseph sheds some light on at least a few of these important questions.

Perhaps the most potent tool at its disposal to combat moral lapses, as Serge Gagnon argues, was the fact that the Catholic Church had developed the confessional as a particularly original means of identifying how thoroughly its adherents had internalized

²² Christine Hudon, *Prêtres et fidèles dans le diocèse de Saint-Hyacinthe 1820-1875* (Sillery:1996). She details the Church’s concern over such ‘friendships,’ and any kind of intimate relationship, 170-72. See also Hudon and Louise Bienvenue, “Entre franche camaraderie et amours socratiques: L’espace troublé et ténu des amitiés masculines dans les collèges classiques (1840-1960),” *RHAF* 57:4 (printemps 2004), 481-507. For a very brief mention of homosexuality, see Gagnon, *Plaisir d’amour et crainte de Dieu*, 150.

²³ Jeffery Vacante, “Writing the History of Sexuality and ‘National’ History in Quebec,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 39:2 (Spring 2005), 33.

²⁴ Vacante, “Writing the History of Sexuality and ‘National’ History in Quebec,” 36-7. However, Vacante does not fully explore the implications of another important argument in Patricia Smart’s feminist interpretation of Québec literary history: one of patriarchal dominance that suffocated feminine voices, rather than being suffocated by them. Patricia Smart, *Writing in the Father’s House: The Emergence of the Feminine in Quebec Literary Tradition* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 1991).

its teachings.²⁵ The Church could verify the effectiveness of all three interdependent aspects of “le régime sexuel institué par le catholicisme:” the celibacy of the clergy, the abstinence of the unmarried, and the faithfulness and periodic continence of spouses.²⁶ As Foucault has pointed out, the confessional was a particularly powerful “ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but also the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile.”²⁷ Unlike the dance floor, where people could have collectively reinforced each other’s social behaviour to overcome clerical restrictions, the confessional offered no such solidarity. It was intimidating and dark; the earthly representative of divine justice confronted the isolated sinner who then had to make a full account of all his/her thoughts, words, and deeds in order to receive absolution. As Foucault notes, “the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing.”²⁸

On the other hand, and not only from the Protestant perspective, one has to wonder whether the confessional may sometimes have been self-defeating. How often could one have the same sins forgiven? Was it not equally possible that some people interpreted absolution from the priest as removing any guilt, giving them a clean slate and making it easier to repeat the same action in the knowledge it, too, would be forgiven? Unfortunately, while the confessional was an ideal place to inculcate the Church’s discourse to the individual, we are unable to evaluate its effectiveness because the confessor was forbidden to reveal to anyone, even his ecclesiastical superiors, what his penitents told him. It is impossible to determine, for instance, if most *curés* questioned penitents in language that was roundabout and vague, as the nineteenth-century ultramontane saint Alphonso de Ligouri recommended in 1854.²⁹ In addition, we must consider that strategies varied from priest to priest. Some clergymen promoted silence about sexuality in order to control people through ignorance or prudery; others did the

²⁵ Gagnon, *Plaisir d’amour et crainte de Dieu*, 5.

²⁶ Gagnon, *Plaisir d’amour et crainte de Dieu*, 29.

²⁷ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. I, 61-2.

²⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. I, 62.

²⁹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. I, 19.

opposite. Gagnon discovered that in the early decades of the nineteenth century some clergymen were far from inhibited about discussing sexual matters. He found that detailed clerical advice was available on the most intimate sexual details, including effective questions to employ in the confessional in order to ferret out details from penitents on the frequency of masturbation, or to give counsel on the proper positions for males and females to assume during intercourse, the strictures against spilling semen, and proper times for sexual intercourse.³⁰ Although there were references to “impurity” in the sermon notes and reports of the *curés* of St-Joseph, the topic may have been assigned by the archbishop in the larger context of his annual reminders to them to preach against the seven deadly sins. It is highly probable that the confessional provided the material for many of the *curés*’ observations on the moral and spiritual life of the parish they included in their detailed annual reports to the archbishop after 1852.

Despite René Hardy’s contention that after the mid-nineteenth century the clergy was operating “dans un nouvel environnement institutionnel plus propice à promouvoir la diffusion des codes moraux catholiques,” the persistence of clerical complaints suggests at the very least that the clergy’s rather restrictive view of what constituted proper sexual behaviour was not as influential over as many aspects of their young parishioners’ behaviour as they wanted it to be. And Hardy concedes that low rates of premarital conceptions and illegitimate births may just as likely have reflected people’s own sexual mores rather than their respect for the rules of the Church and its “normes sociales en matière de procréation.” Furthermore, as Hardy points out, the young and unmarried could easily have indulged in a variety of sexual activities short of the actual act of procreation, while still going beyond the clergy’s definition of acceptable behaviour.³¹ Concerning the effectiveness of the confessional as an agent of clerical control, then, one must question whether the power of intimidation that the priest may have exercised in the confessional automatically translated into power over a penitent’s behaviour outside of it. Or did the solidarity of the *fête*, the *veillée*, and the *corvée* serve to counterbalance or neutralize, at least in part, the priest’s power?

³⁰ Gagnon, *Plaisir d’amour et crainte de Dieu*, 87-91. For evidence, he refers to the anonymously written “Explication des cas réservés dans le diocèse de Québec,” (1810-30), 135-41.

³¹ René Hardy, “Les conceptions pré-nuptiales à Trois-Rivières comme indice de fidélité religieuse, 1850-1945,” *RHAF* 54:4 (2001), 552-3.

The Church, Courtship, and Dancing

Following his visit to the parish of Saint Irénée in the Saguenay in 1861, the French consul-general in New York, Charles-Henri-Philippe Gauldré-Boilleau observed that “Les Canadiens sont passionnés pour la danse.”³² Families liked to get together on Sunday evenings and during the pre-Lenten period for dancing and, as Gauldré-Boilleau was careful to stress, innocent games. Save for wedding celebrations, he asserted, the priests strove to control people’s dancing because, without such control, “ils passeraient des nuits entières à goûter ce divertissement.”³³ Gauldré-Boilleau did not specify what moral dangers the Church saw in dancing or what sensual pleasures the *habitants* derived from it, but Québec clergymen knew the two were related. As an amplification of doctrinal matters contained in the diocesan catechism, on 12 February 1851 Archbishop Turgeon approved the publication of a work by his former Vicar General, Abbé Alexis Mailloux. *Le Manuel des parents chrétiens* was a detailed work of 328 pages with thirty-four chapters, and it covered all the moral issues that children could face in the years between baptism and marriage.³⁴ It was meant to be a complete set of guidelines for Catholic parents to help their children navigate the morally dangerous currents of nineteenth-century life, in particular the four enemies that threatened the “bien spirituel et temporel des habitants de ce pays.” These enemies were “la mauvaise éducation de la jeunesse, l’insubordination, le luxe et l’intempérance.”³⁵

The issue of dancing was merely part of the general clerical concerns about people’s morality, but Mailloux specifically articulated the intimate connection between sexuality and popular culture, particularly the persistence of sociable customs such as the *veillée* in which dancing was the key element. He urged parents to keep their children away from evening “assemblées de danses” because darkness lent itself more easily to vice than did daylight. In the dim light, the sounds of “musique enivrante et lubrique font

³² Charles-Henri-Philippe Gauldré-Boilleau, “Paysan de Saint-Irénée de Charlevoix en 1861 et 1862,” in Pierre Savard, ed., *Paysans et ouvriers Québécois d’autrefois* (Québec, 1968), 39.

³³ Gauldré-Boilleau, “Paysan de Saint-Irénée,” 39. Indeed, the other great pleasure for the *habitants* in the pioneer Saguenay parish was in assisting at divine services in the parish church. Furthermore, “rien ne plaît aux fidèles comme la prédication; rien ne les intéresse comme le récit de quelque fait emprunté à la vie des Saints, ou à l’histoire de France.” (40)

³⁴ Abbé Alexis Mailloux, *Le Manuel des parents chrétiens*, (Québec 1851, reprinted Montréal, 1977). In 1909, *L’action sociale* issued another edition of the work.

³⁵ Mailloux, *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, Preface.

vibrer jusqu'à la corde les plus intimes des passions dépravées d'un jeune coeur déjà blessé et languissant d'amour."³⁶ In contrast to Gauldré-Boilleau's sanguine impressions of innocent pre-Lenten family gatherings, Mailloux made the connection between sociability and sexuality clearest in his remarks on wedding celebrations that he characterised as occasions for "de scandales épouvantables et de dépenses énormes." For three days or more people indulged in drinking, eating, singing, shouting, and dancing, returning home "fatigué, épuisé, et la conscience chargée de beaucoup de péchés qu'on se reprochait à peine."³⁷ Parents needed to be aware that their offspring were being exposed to such perils as "les mouvements licentieux de la danse," "des sons efféminés d'une musique voluptueuse," "des attouchements de mains," and "l'excitation du sang" because "la concupiscence s'embrâse comme le feu."³⁸ While Mailloux did make the occasional reference to the dangers facing young women at dances, his primary aim seems to have been to protect the young men from feminine wiles. Warning that "l'Esprit-Saint leur ordonne de détourner d'une femme parée," he admitted that even the most venerable saints had required superhuman strength to resist female temptations. Hence, he argued, if men of such irreproachable experience and virtue had difficulties in resisting women's alluring blandishments, there was an even more urgent need for constant parental vigilance, because children lacked the saints' formidable spiritual defenses.³⁹

Eight months after Mailloux's *Manuel* was published, Archbishop Turgeon's concerns about the moral danger of surrendering to the pleasures of the dance prompted him to issue his pastoral letter of 18 November 1851 specifically condemning balls and dances as ultimately profiting only Satan.⁴⁰ Turgeon argued, however, that it was

³⁶ Mailloux, *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, 176.

³⁷ Mailloux, *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, 323.

³⁸ Mailloux, *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, 177-79.

³⁹ Mailloux, *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, 184-85.

⁴⁰ P.-F. Turgeon, "Lettre pastorale au clergé et aux fidèles de la Cité de Québec, au sujet des danses", 18 novembre 1851, in H. Têtu, C. O. Gagnon, *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires des Évêques de Québec*, Volume IV (Québec, 1888), 34-38. His successors on the archiepiscopal throne considered Turgeon's strictures on dancing important enough to include them in the collections of official archdiocesan pronouncements until well into the twentieth century. The *Recueil d'ordonnances synodales et épiscopales du Diocèse de Québec* (Québec 1865) published the whole letter (54-57). Much of it also appeared in the second edition of Monseigneur E.-A. Taschereau's *Discipline du Diocèse de Québec* (Québec 1895), 76-77. He was still cited in the twentieth century, although in 1937, Archbishop Cardinal Rodrigue Villeneuve updated the list of dangerous dances, by declaring that the moral dangers associated with the waltz and the polka also included the fox trot and the tango. Rodrigue Cardinal Villeneuve, O.M.I., *Discipline diocésaine*, Third Edition (Québec 1937), 198.

precisely because of the potential for such familiarity and worse in the circumstances accompanying them, that dances were a source of scandal and moral danger. Not surprisingly, the prelate declared that as far as possible, “toute espèce de danse entre personnes de différent sexe” needed to be prevented, although he probably did not mean this interdiction to apply to married couples. Dancing in and of itself, Turgeon granted, was not the problem, provided that there was “aucune familiarité, aucune signe, aucune action contre la pudeur.” Emphasizing the moral dangers of dancing, Turgeon declared that those who were obstinate enough not to stop, or who encouraged others to engage in these sorts of dances, were unworthy to receive the sacraments. Some forms of dance, of course, were morally more dubious than others. Some were even positively immodest, “soit à raison des nudités, soit à raison du mode de danse, des paroles, des signes, des actions.” This latter group included such modern dances as the waltz, the polka, the gallop, the cancan, and perhaps others, depending on the circumstances:

nous reprovons et défendons absolument ces danses scandaleuses et que vous ne pouvez sans pêcher ni vous les permettre à vous-mêmes, ni les permettre à vos enfants, ni les souffrir dans vos maisons, ni enfin consentir à ce que vos enfants les apprennent, puisque ce serait les exposer à la tentation, et les mettre dans la voie du péché.⁴¹

Even though Turgeon recognized that people could still have observed the rules of good behaviour and decency while dancing, and that they might also have had valid reasons to attend dances, he still felt there were inherent moral dangers in “des circonstances, et des passions qui s’enflamment si facilement.”⁴² Rather than give grudging approval to some forms of dance, however, or furnishing further guidelines that the faithful might follow, the Archbishop took a more equivocal approach and declared, somewhat resignedly, “sans les approuver, nous croyons pouvoir les tolérer, et garder le silence.”⁴³ More than two decades later, religious authorities renewed their condemnation of dancing when, in January 1879, the Québec Archdiocese published two sermons that the Abbé Joseph Auclair, *curé* of Notre-Dame de Québec (1851-1886), delivered at the Québec Basilica

⁴¹ Turgeon, “Lettre pastorale au sujet des danses;” Auclair, *Les danses et les bals*, 7.

⁴² Turgeon, “Lettre pastorale au sujet des danses.”

⁴³ Cited in Auclair, *Les danses et les bals*, 6.

reiterating traditional Church teachings on the subject of dances and balls.⁴⁴ Abbé Auclair also chose the eve of the festive *carnaval* season, a time of year that he termed “si périlleux pour un trop grand nombre,” to remind the faithful of his parish of Notre Dame de Québec of the evils of dancing. Many of his arguments came from Turgeon’s pastoral letter of 1851.⁴⁵

Monseigneur Turgeon’s pastoral letter and Auclair’s sermon were quite clear on the kinds of dances that the Church could not countenance, but it would have been more difficult for *curés* and Catholics of the time to discern the ones that the religious authorities could, grudgingly at least, not have permitted. In the parishes, the *curés*’ sermons and annual retreats for men and women were meant to reinforce the Church’s moral teachings. Given the Church’s attitude, it is not surprising that *curés* were prepared to see only debauchery and unchristian behaviour when they observed the visible manifestations of their parishioners’ sociability. Professional preachers often came to the retreats and supplemented the *curés*’ efforts with their own fire-and-brimstone sermons.⁴⁶ As far as dancing went, the parish priests of St-Joseph seem to have felt much less burdened than the Archbishop or Auclair by the need to interpret theological nuances. The Reverend Adalbert Blanchet certainly could not have been accused of splitting fine doctrinal hairs on the issue of dancing. During the festive season of Christmas 1900, he left no doubt in his parishioners’ minds about his opinions on the usual forms of celebration, in particular the evening parties and the dancing that accompanied their holiday celebrations. In addition to noting the dangers of alcohol in his *Cahier de prênes*, he told his flock that dancing was a serious enough infraction in and of itself, but passively permitting it to occur was even worse. In the *Cahier*, he declared

⁴⁴ Joseph Auclair, *Les danses et les bals, Sermons, notes et documents par le Curé de N.-D. de Québec* (Québec, 1879).

⁴⁵ Auclair, *Les danses et les bals*, 22-25. Demonstrating that the Protestant clergy condemned dancing as much as the Catholic Church did, Auclair countered the arguments of some French Canadians who maintained that, since they were surrounded by Protestants who danced all the time, they were powerless to resist their influence. He quoted Montreal Methodist minister Hugh Johnston’s sermon of 18 November 1879 which claimed that New York’s Police Chief’s estimated “three-fourths of the abandoned women of that city have been ruined by the dance.”

⁴⁶ Gérard Bouchard, “La sexualité comme pratique et rapport social chez les couples paysans du Saguenay (1860-1930),” *RHAF* 54:2 (2000), 205-9.

flatly, “*Ceux qui laissent danser dans leur maison; ceux qui jouent musique pour faire danser, plus coupables que les danseurs.*”⁴⁷

However, dancing continued because there were compelling reasons for its appeal. Such social gatherings would have provided especially welcome opportunities for single males and females to mingle and to dance. As Pamphile Lemay’s sympathetic description of a *veillée* written near the start of the twentieth century indicates, when the obliging fiddler struck up a tune on a “stradivarius de fabrique canadienne [...] alors, galants et amoureux se cherchent et se trouvent. On danse pour le plaisir de danser.”⁴⁸ Simonne Voyer and Gynette Tremblay argue in their study of traditional dance and music in Québec that the sensual attraction of dance, essentially rhythmic body movement accompanied by music, lies in the fact that “tous cherchent à se défaire des soucis de la vie quotidienne. La tension nerveuse disparaît le moment où, inspirés par la musique, les danseurs évoluent dans une atmosphère d’entrain, de simplicité cordiale et de gaieté.” Probably more disturbing for the clergy was that many people would have found in dancing what Voyer and Tremblay describe as “une sorte d’ivresse qui va de la langueur au délire, d’une sorte d’abandon mystique à une sorte de fureur.”⁴⁹ In addition to the physical attraction, another factor was the music. An important personage at the *veillées* was the fiddler, *le violonneux*. Voyer and Tremblay argue that he was the “personnage central de toutes ces réjouissances [...] le moteur de l’activité artistique qu’est la danse populaire,” as can be seen from E.-J. Massicotte’s “*Une veillée d’autrefois*” (Illustration 15).⁵⁰ Some of these fiddlers would have been known well beyond their villages for their sense of rhythm, their clear and lively playing and their ability to get even the most reluctant people onto the dance floor.⁵¹ Those familiar with the genre acknowledge its charm and appreciate that the best Québec fiddle music has a dignity and complexity all

⁴⁷ St-Joseph de Beauce, “Cahier de prônes, 1 Octobre 1893 - 21 Avril 1901, , 468.

⁴⁸ Lemay, “Les jour gras,” in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes et industries*, 34-35.

⁴⁹ Simonne Voyer and Gynette Tremblay, *La danse traditionnelle québécoise et sa musique d’accompagnement* (Québec, 2001), 7.

⁵⁰ Voyer and Tremblay, *La danse traditionnelle québécoise*, 114.

⁵¹ Voyer and Tremblay, *La danse traditionnelle québécoise*, 116, 119.

its own.⁵² People's desire to socialize, combined with the vitality of the music, the dancing, and the festive atmosphere of the *veillée* provided many occasions for groups of young men and women mingle, often without supervision.



Illustration 15. E.-J. Massicotte, *Une veillée d'autrefois* (1915)

Source. MNBAQ, 37.45.

In addition, the youthful parishioners of St-Joseph would also have found reasons for socializing when neighbours gathered to work. As the folklorist Jeanne Pomerleau observed, practically all of the *corvées* involved “des divertissements où étaient associées à la manifestations de sentiments amoureux.”⁵³ A corn-husking *corvée* differed slightly from others in that those not taking part in the actual work of harvesting could still attend.

⁵² After having played with the renowned classical violinist Yehudi Menuhin, the well-known Québec fiddler, Jean Carignan (1916-1988), argued in 1978 that there was something in traditional fiddling music that even Menuhin, for all his skill and well-deserved renown, did not quite capture, “Je dois admettre que cet homme peut jouer à peu près tout, mais il n’y a qu’une petite chose dans ça (qui ne convient pas). Il ne jouait pas comme un violonneux. [...] Il y a quelque chose dans la musique traditionnelle pour violon [...] on m’a dit que c’était impossible de décrire ça.” Voyer and Tremblay, *La danse traditionnelle québécoise*, 119. In addition to the music, there were also many types of traditional dances from which to choose. For detailed examination of the *contredanses*, *quadrilles*, and step dances popular in rural Québec, see Voyer and Tremblay, *La danse traditionnelle québécoise*, 80-110.

⁵³ Pomerleau, *Corvées et quêtes*, 21-39.

Nineteenth-century writers described these occasions as celebrations of the young.⁵⁴ In 1852, the Québec politician P.-J.-O. Chauveau (1820-1890) described one typical corn husking *corvée* as a “joyeuse fête de famille” for old and young.⁵⁵ The priests of St-Joseph often expressed their unease over these work parties and gatherings because of the unsupervised opportunities for the young to mingle. E.-J. Massicotte’s engraving of *L’épluchette de blé d’Inde* (Illustration 8.2) shows a happy group of men and women at a *corvée* to husk corn, a sociable gathering associated with courtship.⁵⁶ The central drama is of a man playfully raising an ear of corn over the head of a shyly recoiling woman around whose waist his arm is encircled. One of the rituals of corn-husking parties was the belief that husking a rare ear of corn with red kernels entitled the finder to embrace whomever he or she might wish.⁵⁷



Illustration 16. E.-J. Massicotte, *Une épluchette de blé d’Inde* (1917)

Source. MNBAQ 69.401.

⁵⁴ Thérèse Beaudoin, *L’été dans la culture québécoise XVIIe-XIXe siècles* (Québec, 1987), 123. She also points out a large number of similarities, including the red ear of corn, between this celebration and an identical one which the native people practiced, and from which she speculates the early French colonists got the idea for this *corvée*. 124-125.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Jean Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent* (Montréal, 1996), See also Pamphile Lemay, “Épluchette de blé d’Inde,” in E.-Z. Massicotte, *Moeurs coutumes et industries canadiennes-françaises* (Montréal, 1913), 43.

⁵⁶ Lemay, “Épluchettes de blé d’Inde,” 41-43.

⁵⁷ Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 317. See also Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes & industries*, 43.

As well as these sorts of gatherings, other work activities, such as the spring maple sugar production, brought males together. The sugar shanty was usually a rough-and-ready construction at some distance from the comforts of home, though they were not necessarily lonely isolated places.⁵⁸ Because of the long narrow lots, the shanties could sometimes have been within hailing and visiting distance of each other. As in the logging *chantiers* where large groups of males spent the winter together, sugaring involved constant activity. The men might have mitigated the arduous work of tapping the trees and boiling the sap by occasionally getting together for cards, very likely also drinking, and perhaps telling stories of all types, even risqué anecdotes, all in the name of “une certaine vie sociale à laquelle il fait bon de participer pour passer le temps.”⁵⁹ These male social links, mediated as they often must have been by a drink or two of alcohol, would have made the clergy unhappy, given their opposition to drink in general. Monseigneur Mailloux had highlighted the moral dangers of the sugar cabins in his *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, and warned parents that they were exposing their innocent children to potential peril by permitting young men and women to mingle without parental supervision. Worse still was the parents’ carelessness in permitting “des filles ou même à des femmes d’y aller passer la nuit.”⁶⁰ But St-Joseph’s *curés* were far more concerned about what might happen when women visited the sugar shacks, which they seem to have done often enough for the priest to have noticed. Thus, on Palm Sunday 1868, Louis-Antoine Martel made a note to himself in his sermon book to warn his flock against allowing young women to visit the cabins.⁶¹ Six years later, when the sap was running in the spring of 1874, Martel again reminded himself to warn parents not to let young females spend nights in the sugar cabins. If they went there during the day, either their parents were to accompany them, or they were to make sure that the young women remained under their brothers’ care.⁶²

⁵⁸ J.-Alphonse Richard, *Historique de la paroisse de Saint-Sébastien de Beauce (1869-1944)* (Joliette, 1944), 131.

⁵⁹ Paul-André Leclerc, *La belle histoire des sucres* (La Pocatière, 1991), 62-3.

⁶⁰ Mailloux, *Manuel des parents chrétiens*, 165. For similar occasion in the shielings of the Highland Scots, see Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 198.

⁶¹ “Cahier de prônes et annonces, 30 Novembre 1868 – 1872,” ASPB FFSJ.

⁶² ASPB FFSJ, “Cahier de prônes, 1872, 14 Octobre à [n.d.],” ‘Dimanche des Rameaux’ (1874), 67.

Courtship and Marriage in a Youthful Parish

The concerns of the Québec clergy that the unsupervised assemblies of young people led to improper sexual behaviour and even extramarital pregnancies may not be surprising. But, just as parishioners often used their imaginations to supplement their lack of knowledge of their pastors' private lives, were the *curés*' concerns exaggerated, and based on more than imagination and apprehension? Studies on heterosexuality in Québec from the French Régime to the twentieth century indicate that the Church exercised a high degree of influence over people's sexual behaviour.⁶³ In their examination of New France before 1730, Lyne Paquette and Réal Bates found that close to "90% des épouses ont été fécondes uniquement à l'intérieur du cadre conjugale," representing "un assez large consensus social vis-à-vis du neuvième commandement," particularly in the countryside.⁶⁴ Greer, who examined the period 1740-1840, similarly argues that in his three parishes of the Lower Richelieu, "the family was not only the basic unit of habitant production and consumption; it was also the primary locus of erotic life and of procreation."⁶⁵ He found that unmarried couples were rare and that there were extremely low levels of premarital conceptions and illegitimate births. He argues that "the idea of confining sex to marriage seems to have been accepted by the community as a whole."⁶⁶ Important studies on sexuality in the nineteenth-century rural Québec have concluded

⁶³ For New France, see Séguin's *Vie libertine en Nouvelle-France*; Paquette and Bates. "Les naissances illégitimes sur les rives du Saint-Laurent avant 1730," Bates, "Les conceptions prénuptiales dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent avant 1725": 253-72; Jean Blain, "La moralité en Nouvelle-France: Les phases de la thèse et de l'antithèse," *RHAF* 27:3 (1973): 408-16; André Lachance, *Vivre, aimer et mourir en Nouvelle-France- La vie quotidienne aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Montréal, 2000); and Lorraine Gadoury, Yves Landry, and Hubert Charbonneau. "Démographie différentielle en Nouvelle-France: Villes et campagnes," *RHAF* 38:3 (1985), 357-78. For the twentieth century, see Gaston Desjardins, *L'amour en patience: La sexualité adolescente au Québec, 1940-1960* (Sainte Foy, 1995) and "La pédagogie du sexe: Un aspect du discours catholique sur la sexualité au Québec (1930-19600)," *RHAF* 43:3 (1990), 381-401.

⁶⁴ Lyne Paquette and Réal Bates. "Les naissances illégitimes sur les rives du Saint-Laurent avant 1730," *RHAF* 40 :2 (1986), 239-52; and Réal Bates, "Les conceptions prénuptiales dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent avant 1725," *RHAF* 40:2 (1986), 272.

⁶⁵ Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto, 1985) 60.

⁶⁶ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 57-9.

that people's behaviour largely conformed to clerical dictate.⁶⁷ Little's study on Scottish and French-Canadian settlers in one township for the period 1848-81 found that the rate of premarital conceptions among the latter remained low compared to that of the Scots, and that it was rare for women in the parish to become pregnant out of wedlock. He argues that this was a clear indication that "powerful moral sanctions existed in the parish."⁶⁸ Hardy's study of Trois-Rivières concludes that the low numbers of premarital pregnancies between 1850 and 1900, combined with the gradual increase in the numbers of those receiving Easter communion in the same period, reflects people's fidelity to the prescriptions of the Church and submission to clerical control.⁶⁹ Many of these observations are applicable to the youthful parishioners of St-Joseph.

In demographic terms, St-Joseph was very stable between 1851 and 1901, and it continued to have a large marriageable male and female population. As Figure 7.1 indicates, the parish remained predominantly youthful, and age distribution was consistent in 1851, 1881, and 1901. Over 70 per cent of its people were under thirty years of age; nearly half were under the age of fifteen. On the other hand, the most striking figure as far as sociability is concerned is that over 25 per cent of the people of St-Joseph were young adults aged between the ages of 16 and 30. Such a high number of young people of marriageable age would have had no trouble in supplying the enthusiasm needed to enliven the many evening celebrations that their *curés* deplored. In addition, as Fig. 7.1 indicates, the ratio of males to females was roughly balanced, for the number of marriageable males in the sixteen-to-thirty-year-old group was only slightly greater than the number of females in that age cohort.

⁶⁷ Bouchard, "La sexualité comme pratique et rapport social," 183-217; Gagnon, *Plaisir d'amour et crainte de Dieu*, and his *Mariage et famille au temps de Papineau* (Sainte-Foy, 1993); Hardy, "Les conceptions prénuptiales à Trois-Rivières, 1850-1945;" Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 57-60; Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 213-17; and Wallot, "Religion and French-Canadian Mores in the Early Nineteenth Century."

⁶⁸ Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 214.

⁶⁹ Hardy, "Les conceptions prénuptiales à Trois-Rivières," 531-55. Hardy also contends that class and location were significant factors, particularly after 1900. The behaviour of the urban population of the diocese differed from that of rural areas where Hardy found a low rate of premarital pregnancies. By the mid twentieth century, however, the number of premarital conceptions had declined. But this was not evidence of a reform in people's moral conduct. Instead, the number of illegitimate births had risen.

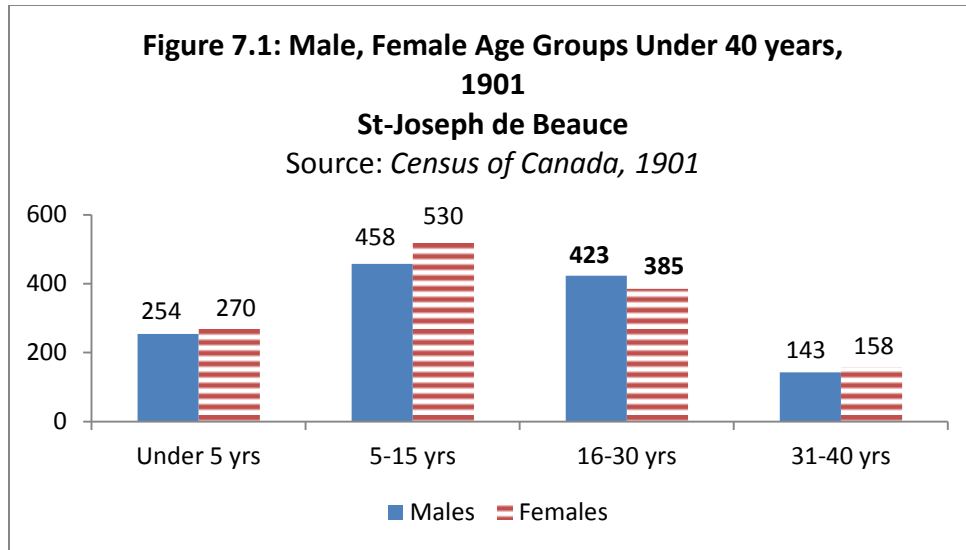
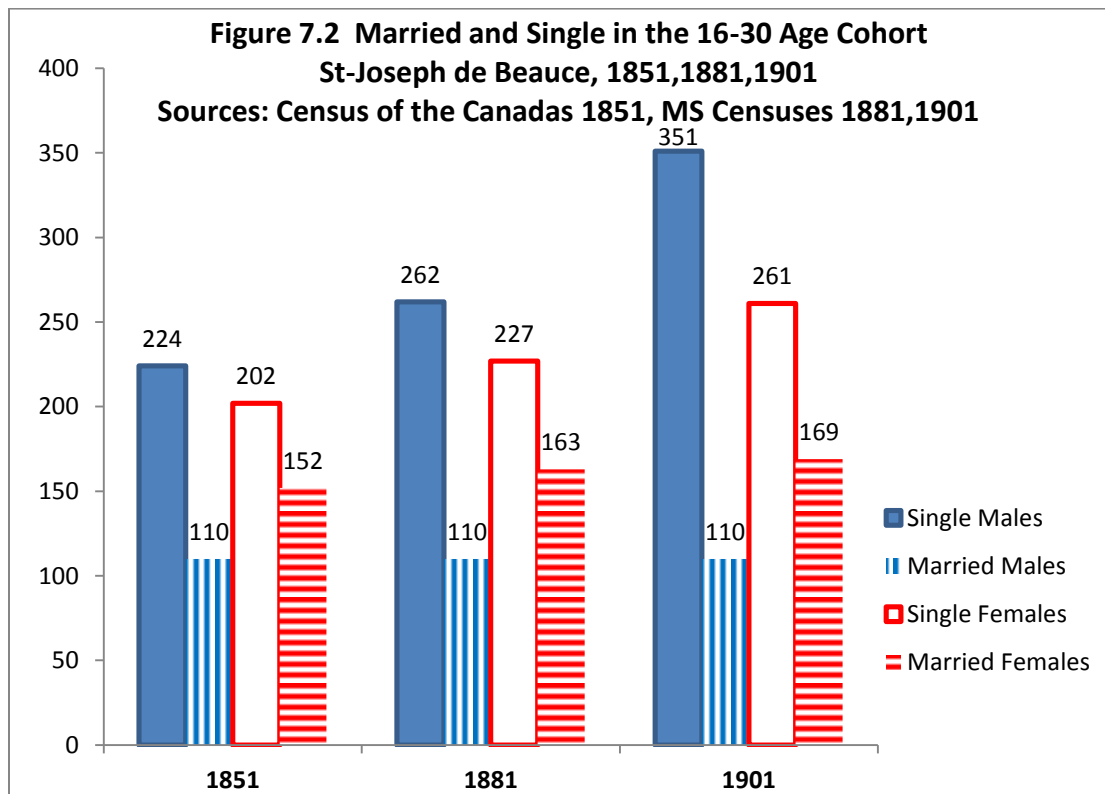


Figure 7.2 shows that a large and increasingly larger number of this youthful population in the sixteen-to-thirty age cohort was unmarried in 1851, 1881, and 1901. Not surprisingly, given that women were generally married at a younger age, there were consistently more married females than married males in this age cohort; still, single females consistently outnumbered their married counterparts. Again, the number of females in both categories was greater than the number of males. Those who were unattached were the most likely participants in social activities such as evening parties, if for no other reason than to become more closely acquainted with potential spouses. The clergy in St-Joseph have left us no precise details about popular customs concerning courtship practices, but evidence from nearby counties at a slightly later date offers some useful if limited glimpses into how young people in rural Québec behaved at the kinds of social gatherings available to them. In the early 1970s, Jean-Guy Morissette interviewed five elderly people in Nicolet, whose professions in life he did not identify, on their transition from adolescence into early adulthood. Morissette’s informants recalled from their experiences between 1920 and 1940 that, while young adolescent females were usually never permitted the freedom to go out by themselves, or even in company with each other, it was quite acceptable for groups of three or four young males to do so, “pour rencontrer des filles et pour jouer des tours.”⁷⁰ Morissette’s informants also said these

⁷⁰ AFEUL, N131, “Fréquentations,” and N37, “Veillées,” Jean-Guy Morissette Collection, MS no. 3, p. 1. Five informants from Gentilly, Nicolet County, April 1970.

adolescent male groups fragmented as soon as any of the young men met “le bon morceau” and became interested in courting her.



As Morissette’s informants remembered, probably the safest gatherings of young people from the clergy’s perspective were “les après-midis,” or Sunday afternoon get-togethers held at homes of eligible females. These assemblies were announced after high mass so that all the young men of the area could have considered themselves invited, even though there were usually no games or dancing. Rare was the Sunday afternoon when some family in the parish was not holding one of these rather constrained and formal occasions, probably at petit-bourgeois homes in villages or at the homes of prosperous farmers rather than less formal country gatherings, where males and females were supposed to get to know each other.⁷¹ The young females might have asked a very limited number of other female friends or neighbours of the same age to join them, but inviting too many more might have risked competition. Morissette’s Nicolet informants

⁷¹ AFEUL, Jean-Guy Morissette Collection, MS no. 3, p. 2.

recalled that the ratio would usually have been seven or eight females to twenty or twenty-five males. They noted that they played such innocent, and to modern eyes, extremely tame games such as *la chaise honteuse* where people took turns playfully enumerating one another's faults. Lemay says that in the game *Petit bonhomme vit encore*, people passed a lighted stick from hand to hand permitting those who wished to exchange "des sourires qui ne manquent pas de grâces et des regards qui ne manquent pas de feu."⁷²

On the other hand, Morissette's informants nostalgically recalled that *veillées*, also held in people's homes, were far livelier and also occasions most likely to promote marriage. *Veillées* were almost always on Sunday evenings, and, according to the *curés* of St-Joseph who mentioned them frequently in their reports, there was usually far too much dancing and drinking. However, some indirect, conflicting, and ultimately inconclusive evidence on courtship from people born in the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth centuries in the Beauce and nearby Frontenac and Nicolet counties does exist. It indicates, as was the case in many other cultures, that the couples themselves and their families regarded a steady relationship between two people over a period of a few months or years as constituting a form of premarital engagement and the indications of their intent to marry.⁷³

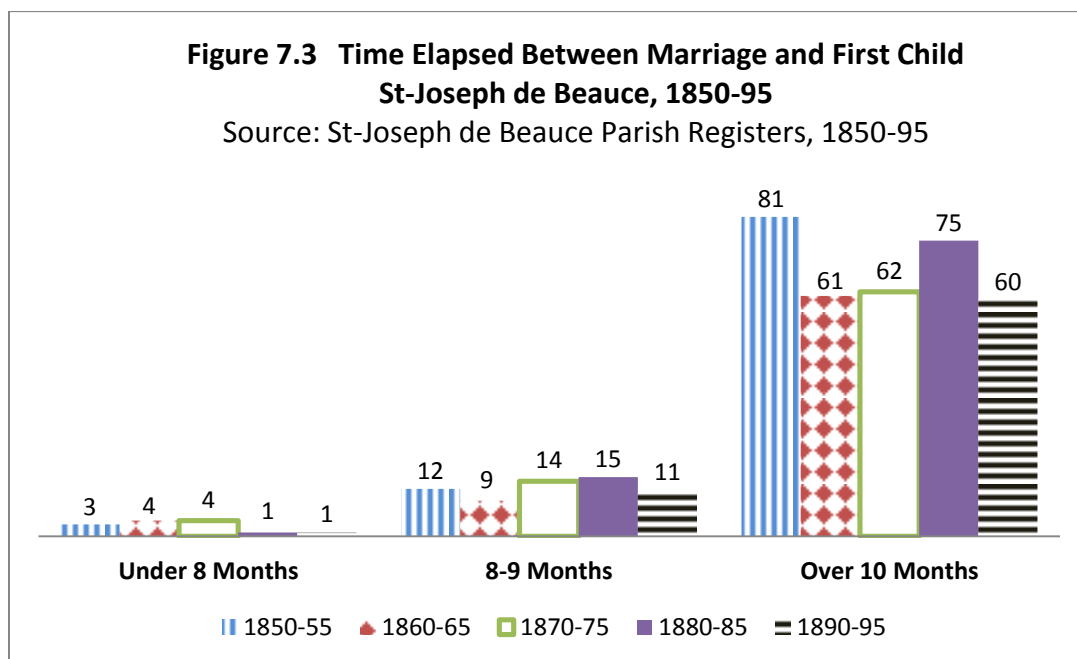
The current state of our understanding about the degree of sexual knowledge and behaviour of young people in nineteenth-century rural Québec makes it difficult to determine whether to accept clergymen's generalizations as evidence of actual sexual activity, or merely as reflections of (more or less) lurid fantasies. Whatever fears the *curés* of St-Joseph had, and despite the complaints they constantly articulated about the behaviour of their young parishioners when they were socializing – long courtships, dancing, too much drinking – the unintended consequences of such youthful high spirits did not bear out some of their worst fears: pregnancies outside of or before marriage. For

⁷² For descriptions of such a gathering, see Lemay, "La brairie," in Massicotte, *Moeurs, coutumes et industries*, 45-47; Provencher, *Les Quatre Saisons*, 340-346.

⁷³ AFEUL, Jean-Guy Morissette Collection, MS no. 3, p. 5. See also AFUL, Francine Garneau Collection, recording No. 9, N131 "Fréquentations," Mme. Mastai Garneau (Portneuf) to Francine Garneau, 14 May 1975; and AFEUL, Paulette Bernardand and Lola Bernard Collection, MS 766, N131, "Fréquentations," Alexandra Leblanc (Bonaventure) to Paulette and Lola Bernard, 25 November 1971. Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 214. For marriage banns, see Gagnon, *Mariage et famille*, 171-84.

one thing, the *curés*' notations in St-Joseph's parish registers for the period 1850-95 indicate that the number of births considered "illegitimate," meaning that the priest recorded it as such in the parish register or the father was not identified, was at the most two or three for the whole period.

As Allan Greer points out in his study of the Lower Richelieu in the period 1740-1840, drawing conclusions about sexuality from data on low rates of illegitimacy alone is a very rudimentary and unreliable way of measuring morality.⁷⁴ Slightly less rudimentary is calculating the time elapsed between a marriage and the birth of a couple's first child. As Figure 7.3 indicates, in St-Joseph during the period 1850-95 marriages that were the result of an unintended pregnancy were rare. It is based on the classic demographic method for estimating illegitimacy and is based on the dates recorded in the parish registers for all marriages and births in the parish for the first six years of each of these five decades, or 60 per cent of all the marriages and births for the period. Such a representative sample could be expected to catch any anomalies or changes in behavioural patterns, while indicating any inconsistencies in people's behaviour.⁷⁵



⁷⁴ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 267, notes 24 and 25.

⁷⁵ Bates, "Les conceptions préuptiales dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent avant 1725," 255.

In the thirty selected years there were 833 marriages and 4,362 births in the parish. From this data, it was possible to match the date of marriage of the parents with that of the birth of their first child in 413 cases. The vast majority, 90 per cent, of first conceptions after marriage, took place *at least* ten months after the ceremony, and in some cases up to two years afterwards. In comparison, a very much smaller number of births occurred within eight or nine months after marriage, times that could have been due to early births due to the pregnancy occurring just before or just after the marriage. In St-Joseph, the number of births occurring less than eight months after marriage were extremely low in the last half of the nineteenth century, a mere thirteen in thirty years. These are likely indicators of premarital conceptions, though some, at least, would have been premature births.⁷⁶ This would indicate that most people's sexual behaviour, at least in so far as unwanted pregnancies were concerned, stayed within the norms prescribed by the Church. But, when we take into consideration the repeated clerical complaints about the unsupervised assemblies of their young parishioners, or their long courtships, such figures tell us nothing about the variety of ways ways that people might have expressed their sexuality. In addition to the clergy's moral concerns, it is likely that families in the community had various practical reasons of their own for limiting sexual expression in their offspring. These included prevention of unwanted pregnancies, unsuitable marriages, and the potential unsuitability of an unwed mother in the local marriage pool.

Conclusion

Sexual behaviour in St-Joseph, or at least its recorded consequences, over the last five decades of the nineteenth century demonstrated considerable continuity with New France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and with Lower Canada in the early nineteenth century. Can we conclude that there was more clerical control over young people's sexuality than over their sociability in St-Joseph de Beauce? The limited available data suggest that this was so; after all, sex was a greater taboo than dancing even if the clergy thought they went hand in hand. Just as it sought to extend its control over the metaphysical aspects of the lives of St-Joseph's Catholics, the Church looked at

⁷⁶ Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 214; see also Hardy, "Les conceptions prénuptials à Trois-Rivières," 537.

regulating the inclinations of their bodies, particularly their sexuality, their dancing and their drinking, as key elements of its spiritual mandate. Certainly, as Gagnon points out in his study of sexual behaviour in the first part of the nineteenth century, to disassociate the sexual and the sacred in the “religious” societies of the past would be the equivalent of analyzing an ethical system by ignoring its roots.⁷⁷ We can see only glimpses of the interplay between the restrictive clerical discourse on sexual morality and people’s behaviour in St-Joseph. The Church was able to extend its influence and deliver its discourse to ordinary Catholics thanks to the *curé’s* Sunday sermons, his time in the confessional, and his visits to the homes of his parishioners. And, as we have also seen, while popular folklore competed with the Church’s moral teachings, it also reinforced many of them.

However, the extent of the Church’s control over expressions of sexuality has to be placed beside powerful factors present in a community such as St-Joseph that challenged some elements of clerical influence, particularly the clergy’s concerns about the connection between dancing and sexuality. The reiteration of the clerical position on morality, not to mention the repeated complaints of the clergy about people’s unsatisfactory behaviour, reflects the Church’s recognition that its message had to compete with equally influential but contrary ones emanating from other areas of people’s lives. As Foucault has argued, moral values are often transmitted in a diffuse manner so that, “far from constituting a systematic ensemble, they form a complex interplay of elements that counterbalance and correct one another.”⁷⁸ On certain points, the various prescriptive agencies such as the family, the church, or the educational institutions may even cancel each other’s messages out, or at least provide convenient loopholes for people to wiggle through. The lack of any apparent sense of guilt about sociability that the *curés* of St-Joseph reported from their parishioners imposed important limits on any attempts at complete clerical domination over such an important aspect of their lives. For many people, if there was competition between traditional sociability and clerical expectations, there was no contradiction between enjoying their immediate pleasures in this world and anticipating salvation in the next. As was the case elsewhere,

⁷⁷ Gagnon, *Plaisir d’amour et crainte de Dieu*, 39.

⁷⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Volume II, 25.

the youthful single males were the bane of the straight-laced Catholic clergy because they indulged in drinking and danced with their female counterparts. Even though the Church heartily approved of marriage, some *curés* of St-Joseph were not contented with the path many parishioners chose to reach it, especially “longues fréquentations” and “jeux trop familiers entre personnes de différente sexe.”⁷⁹

If the *curés* of St-Joseph felt they had achieved little control over the consequences of their young parishioners’ public behaviour, the low numbers of illegitimate births and pre-marital conceptions recorded in St-Joseph’s parish registers indicate they were more successful over their flock’s private behaviour. The steady numbers of married people in the sixteen-to-thirty-year age cohort in the period 1851-1901, suggests, as Little argues for St. Romain, that relatively early marriages tended to reduce the incidences of premarital sex, drinking, and related behaviour that the clergy deplored.⁸⁰ The significant lapses of time of over ten months between a couple’s marriage and the birth of their first child in more than 90 per cent of cases and suggests that the Church probably did continue to influence important aspects of sexuality, as did the practical pressure from the community. This ratio is similar to what Lyne Paquette and Réal Bates found for New France before 1730 and Allan Greer’s findings for the Lower Richelieu in the period 1740-1840, although it is important to remember that pre-marital pregnancies only reflect a minimum of pre-marital sexual intercourse, as not all women got pregnant the first few times. Many people enjoyed the pleasures of the flesh, but it is also undeniable, as Serge Gagnon points out, “qu’ils aient éprouvé un sentiment de culpabilité quand ils dérogeaient au savoir-vivre sexuel chrétien.”⁸¹ In that regard, then, the parishioners of St-Joseph had much in common with their fellow French Canadians, balancing the requirements of the soul with the inclinations of the body.

⁷⁹ Louis-Antoine Martel, “Rapport de la Paroisse de St-Joseph pour 1869 à Monseigneur l’Archevêque de Québec,” AAQ 61 CD, St-Joseph de Beauce 2 (II: 68).

⁸⁰ Little, *Crofters and Habitants*, 213-4.

⁸¹ Gagnon, *Plaisir d’amour et crainte de Dieu*, 183-189.

Conclusion

A “Priest-Ridden People?”

Body and soul constitute one of the original binary oppositions in Western culture. This dissertation has been concerned with the body and the soul in one small community in a particular period in time, St-Joseph de Beauce from the mid-eighteenth century to the twentieth, but along the way, we have encountered other binaries: religion versus superstition, local versus regional, consumer versus producer, progress versus backwardness, hegemony versus resistance, and clergy versus people. Such dichotomies are useful in shaping our understanding of human actions because each one comprises two aspects of the same phenomenon. At the same time, however, a microhistorical perspective reveals important limitations in our knowledge if we unwittingly permit ourselves to become intellectual captives to these dichotomies.

Examining the experience of St-Joseph de Beauce, particularly in the last five decades of the nineteenth century, indicates that the people of this rural parish maintained a high degree of autonomy from the Catholic Church in many aspects of their personal lives while simultaneously, if perhaps paradoxically, subscribing to its normative system. Current historical assumptions that people’s behaviour towards the Church in Québec after the mid-nineteenth century reflected their passive submission to clerical hegemony are contradicted by parish life in St-Joseph. If a gradual process of *encadrement clérical* over people in Québec during the last half of the nineteenth century really did occur, it did not do so in this parish. As they had done since the eighteenth century, the people of St-Joseph fulfilled the usual duties of good Catholics by attending mass, having their infants baptised, and receiving the other sacraments. But their *curés* did not report a sudden *réveil religieux* in the mid-nineteenth century that might have stirred their flock to participate more often or more fervently in their devotions than they had in the past. In fact, they were careful to point out that their parishioners’ piety remained disappointingly short of clerical expectations.

The *curés* reported that their flock easily reconciled the pursuit of their earthly pleasures, notably feasting, drinking, and dancing with their adherence to Catholicism. But these customs need to be considered in a much broader context than one of Rabelaisian hedonism. By the last half of the nineteenth century, the people of St-Joseph were heirs of a process of physical and cultural adaptation that had taken place over nearly two centuries. As Thérèse Beaudoin states, the *habitants* had learned to organize their way of living in accordance with “la mémoire et l’accumulation de connaissances transmises de génération en génération.”¹ Further, as they gradually developed their sense of time and space based on their agricultural activities, they also developed their own rhythms of life. Unlike the religious revivals of the 1840s or the temperance movements that were usually characterized by dramatic if short-lived moments of catharsis, their popular culture was made up of many small moments of hard work and celebration woven into the rhythms of daily life.

We can only generalize to a limited extent about the behaviour and attitudes of any community that, as John C. Walsh and Steven High note, is a complex entity composed of people with multiple identities of ethnicity (though not in the case of St-Joseph), gender, and class expressed in the practices of everyday life.² External behaviour is of course an indication of internal attitudes, but these can simultaneously contain multiple meanings. Deciphering and evaluating which of them are applicable in a given situation for an individual or a community should be the primary goal of the historian of culture. It is clear that St-Joseph’s *habitant* popular culture expressed the general agreement of the diverse voices in the community as a whole on specific values. Their repeated annual rituals were strong indications of a community that looked to itself to articulate the importance of the family, the interdependence of the community, and mutual aid. In St-Joseph, sociability affirmed the *habitants*’ right to enjoy the fruits of their intensive summer labour during winter when the climate dictated that most farm work was out of the question. That attitude and these concepts were most clearly on display in the formal and informal celebrations practiced since the French Regime; the *temps des fêtes* of winter was the important cultural reference point.

¹ Thérèse Beaudoin, *L’été dans la culture québécoise (XVIIe - XIXe siècles)* (Québec: 1987), 19.

² John C. Walsh and Steven High, “Rethinking the Concept of Community,” *Histoire sociale-Social History* 32: 64 (November 1999), 262.

By such affirmation, the *habitants* of this parish fully lived up to the image of the self-sufficient, daring, proud, and independent Beaucerons. In St-Joseph, the encounter between character and circumstance produced people, as Serge Courville and others point out, whose collective image of themselves as “insoumis” and “opposés à toute forme de contraintes venues de l’extérieur” was based on characteristics developed from survival in a challenging physical environment.³ These characteristics make it difficult to imagine that the clergy could realistically have hoped to exercise uncontested domination over the kind of people their reports described. These *gens solidaires* were more than products of folkloric romanticization. Their sense of independence in relation to the Church embodies Antonio Gramsci’s argument that there is a constant tension between hegemony and resistance as well as his recognition that the subordinate classes do not automatically submit to direction from above.⁴ In that regard, E.P. Thompson’s recognition of the affirmative nature of ordinary people’s experience could be applied to the people of St-Joseph. One of the clearest examples of that sense of independence witnessed by the representatives of Church and State was the sympathetic attitude of St-Joseph’s inhabitants towards the rebel army during the American invasion of 1775 and their unwillingness to permit the seigneur or the *curé* to lead them. That assertiveness reappeared in the mid-nineteenth century as the headstrong *curé*, Frédéric Caron, discovered when a sufficient number of his parishioners made their dissatisfaction known to the Bishop of Québec to have him removed from the parish.

However, as the Reverend Antoine Racine was composing his 1853 report on St-Joseph to Archbishop Turgeon, he confidently predicted that his parishioners’ traditional forms of exuberant celebration would gradually disappear from St-Joseph. He thought these ‘disorders,’ as he and his clerical colleagues regarded them, were already starting to do so. His greatest challenge, he informed his superiors, was the “ignorance presque proverbiale des habitants” who sought “amusements condamnés par la religion.” In order to curb their excessive enjoyment of earthly pleasures, the *habitants*’ independent character (that he dismissed as stubborn pride based on ignorance) would need to be

³ Serge Courville, Barry Rodrigue, Pierre Poulin and Claude Pronovost, “La Beauce québécoise au XIXe siècle”, *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies* 50, (2001), 63-86.

⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, ed. /trans. (New York, 1971), 198-200, 272-3,323-8, 396-7.

transformed through a gradual process of education. Racine hoped that schooling would be a successful means of transforming the *habitants*' customary social and behavioural practices by socializing their children along more submissive lines. Eventually, he prophesied, "Le temps et l'instruction les changeront peu à peu."⁵ Consciously or not, he echoed the words of Jean-Baptiste Meilleur, Lower Canada's First Superintendent of Public Instruction who wrote in the same year with the same faith in progress through education: "We can never expect to change a people in a day, each change must be the work of time, and of long continued and judicious efforts [...] we are as yet only at the entrance of the right path and (sic) that much ground is still to be travelled over, before we attain success."⁶

By 1901, however, the *curés* who succeeded Racine reported that their efforts to change people's behaviour by exposing them to the lessons of the catechism in the school room had been unavailing. In addition to their sometimes scathing comments about the lack of qualifications of many of the teachers or the rudimentary schools, the clerics pointed to the parents' indifference about sending their children to school on a regular basis. Finally, as the provincial school inspectors' reports indicate, even the best school in the parish lacked the resources needed to give the pupils anything beyond elementary literacy, knowledge of religion, and traditional conservative views of history and the world. The combined strength of the *habitants*' cultural practices and the realities of farming, perhaps mixed with a resistance to change, had given the *habitants* of St-Joseph a skeptical outlook on the usefulness of schooling to their children. Even if the *habitants* in this part of the Beauce accepted an elitist and condescending assessment of themselves, what did the lay and clerical promoters of "education" want these underfunded one-room schools to offer to parents and children? Perhaps we should critically question assumptions that an ability to read simple versions of clerical indoctrination or bourgeois propaganda would have improved their lives in any meaningful way.

On the other hand, in light of Louis Rousseau's challenge to historians to determine the historical place of Catholicism in Québec culture, as well as Jocelyn

⁵ AAQ 61 CD, St. Joseph de Beauce 2, "Rapport de Mr. A. Racine, 1853."

⁶ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada*, 1853, Volume 13, Part III, Appendix B, "Report on Public Instruction in Lower Canada for 1853."

Létourneau's call for a new narrative of Québec history to replace the one of victimization by the Church and the English, it would be far too simplistic to ignore the positive influences of religion, or to reduce the many-sided relationship between the people of St-Joseph and the Church simply to a question of hegemony and subordination. It is an artificial exercise to try to prise apart the secular and spiritual worlds of *habitant* culture, somewhat akin to separating the body from the soul, for the people of St-Joseph successfully balanced rather than separated earthly and spiritual concerns. It would be more accurate to say that their sociability and their Catholicism constituted the two complementary aspects of their identity. Church and people both shared a belief in the interconnectedness between the physical and metaphysical worlds, and in the power of the one to affect the other. Not unexpectedly, as good Catholics, the parishioners accorded due recognition to the jurisdiction of the Church and its ministers over matters that were clearly religious in Catholic doctrinal terms. Simultaneously, they gave themselves the latitude to observe a number of practices based on a combination of pre-Christian and Catholic beliefs that the Church regarded as superstitious. As they had in the late eighteenth century, the people of St-Joseph de Beauce built a suitably impressive new church in the 1860s, and then went on to raise a palatial rectory and a convent in the short space of a few decades. On the other hand, they continued to be fascinated with werewolves and ghosts despite clerical prohibitions. These tales and the importance of the oral tradition of the *contes* undoubtedly served the same purpose as today's movies, television, and novels, distractions from daily existence, but they were also transmitters of cultural messages. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that at the parish level, the relationship between Church and people was a human, not an institutional one, personified by the men the Church sent to administer to their spiritual needs. The character and disposition of the *curé* affected the way that the people related to the Church as an institution. Priests with vastly different personalities served in St-Joseph and elicited somewhat different responses from the parishioners: the imperious Frédéric Caron who was forced out, the ultramontane Blanchet who railed against liberalism and the evils of the day, the ailing but respected church builder James Nelligan, and the meticulous, sympathetic Louis-Antoine Martel. Furthermore, in St-Joseph, varying degrees of cooperation characterized the relationship between the people and the Church

over non-religious matters such as the improvement of road and rail transportation, economic development, and the development of the parish's schools.

When St-Joseph became more easily linked to the rest of Québec after the arrival of a railway line in the 1870s, a number of significant changes occurred in the parish that reinforced rather than weakened its traditional agricultural and economic orientation. St-Joseph became wealthier and more integrated into the province's economy, but there is no indication that the Church was able to increase its influence or that people rejected their established patterns of behaviour and sociability. William Westfall argues that cultural change occurs because people perceive that their old patterns of explaining and ordering the world cease to do so, and they search for new ones that they think will provide a more satisfactory explanation.⁷ However, despite some the growth and transformation of their village, the people of St-Joseph de Beauce did not experience the disruption in their world that might have undermined their popular culture. On the most visible level, St-Joseph became a wealthier place for many families, while past socioeconomic inequalities also persisted. In the mid nineteenth century, the village became the administrative centre for its region and saw the construction of a handsome *Palais de justice*. Economic developments permitted a greater variety of businessmen, professionals, artisan-entrepreneurs, and well-off farmers. Some of these men became involved in the local municipal government or the school commission, or both. However, despite their presumed common interest in curbing aspects of popular behaviour, in order to impose some form of social control over the various aspects of popular culture, local notables demonstrated a lack of interest almost amounting to indifference towards drinking (though not bootlegging).

Finally, even though it is limited to a restricted area, St-Joseph's historical experience is illuminating because, as Giovanni Levi points out, the small scale of a microhistorical analysis does not automatically imply that the problems it examines are inconsequential or that the study of a tiny community is merely anecdotal or only of local

⁷ William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston, 1989), 16. "The systems that attempt to explain the world do not necessarily perform this task effectively, or if they can explain the world at one moment in time, they may not maintain that ability over a longer period. In effect, it is the tension between what explains and what needs to be explained that shapes the process of cultural transformation. [...] It is not enough to explain the world at one moment in time, because the world must be ordered and explained over and over again, for every person at every moment."

interest. As he argues, “the particular dimensions of the object of analysis do not necessarily reflect the distinctive scale of the problem posed.”⁸ The social history of rural popular culture and its encounter with modernity in this small and relatively unimportant rural Québec parish over the course of the nineteenth century tells us a number of things about larger human issues such as the agency of ordinary people in the face of powerful institutions. As Walsh and High note, community is not simply an expression of larger themes writ small, for “the dynamics of community, as a social and spatial process, played a key role in how these larger processes unfolded and what impact they made on people and places.”⁹ St-Joseph’s experience was probably not unusual for the Beauce, and it is clear that arguments about the triumph of the Church by the end of the nineteenth century need to be situated in the larger context of the encounter between the changing discourse of the Church and the more consistent behavioural patterns of the people. But other studies are needed on other Québec parishes to determine how representative it was. Hopefully, however, the questions it raises may tempt others interested in the relations between Catholicism and popular culture to apply them constructively to other parts of Québec.

Some Québécois mistakenly averted their eyes in embarrassment from the image of their *habitant* ancestors as backward peasants. As it was for the clergy, the outward image of the allegedly primitive *habitant* was troubling to some sectors of Québec’s French-speaking elite. Gérard Bouchard has pointed out that their conflicting and uncertain relationship with their rural popular culture made them unsure whether to celebrate it as the deepest expression of the national soul or to hide their heads in shame from it.¹⁰ In their conclusion to a study of Quebec at the turn of the nineteenth century, Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot argue that ideology, referring to French-Canadian nationalism of the period, is for human beings what instinct is for animals, “le soubassement d’une communauté, une vision du monde qui constraint les choix

⁸ Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1992), 96. His paraphrase of Geertz sums up briefly, “Historians do not study villages, they study in villages.”

⁹ Walsh and High, “Rethinking the Concept of Community”, 273.

¹⁰ Gérard Bouchard, “Une nation, deux cultures: Continuités et ruptures dans la pensée québécoise traditionnelle (1840-1960)”, in Gérard Bouchard and Serge Courville, dirs., *La construction d’une culture: Le Québec et l’Amérique française* (Sainte-Foy, 1993), 32-42.

individuels mais aide à la survie d'une organisation."¹¹ But, as we have seen in St-Joseph, it could be argued that the *habitants* already had these elements in full and sufficient measure before middle class intellectuals thought they had, for the first time, discovered them in ethnic nationalism. On the other hand, the insouciant *habitant*, simultaneously portrayed as a simple, albeit happy creature under the thumb of his parish priest, has also been fodder for the romantic dreams of those hoping to escape the alienation of the modern industrial-age: for example, American tourists in search of the simple 'authenticity' (usually away from other American tourists) that Québec rural life appeared to embody.¹²

Too often, however, the distracting images of whiskey, *toques*, and steeples that artists, romantic novelists, and popular historians have perpetuated obscure the important role that the *habitants*' traditional cultural patterns played in sustaining their spirit of independence. Behind the stereotypes were real people who successfully struggled with the problems of survival and developed meaningful explanations of the world that served them well for generations. They were far from being the passive bumpkins outsiders condescendingly assumed that the clergy or others could easily manipulate. The *habitants* of St-Joseph de Beauce instinctively used their *fêtes* and celebrations to fulfill the most important task of a culture. Despite what others may have thought, it was the place where, as Jean Jacquot argues, "a society or a social group reaffirms its existence, and its desire to continue to be itself."¹³

¹¹ Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot, *Le Bas-Canada au tournant du 19^e siècle: Restructuration et modernisation* (Ottawa, 1988), 16.

¹² For a discussion of the role of tourist literature and the crafting of the modern image of the urban Québécois of the 1890s as a slightly citified version of the rural French Canadian farmer, see Frank Abbott, "Cold Cash and Ice Palaces: The Quebec Winter Carnival of 1894", *CHR*, LXIX, 2 (1988), 167-202.

¹³ J. Jacquot, *Les Fêtes de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1975), cited in Raymond Montpetit, *Le temps des fêtes au Québec* (Montréal, 1978), 13.

Appendices

Appendix A.

“Questions, Rapports des Paroisses”

Source: Mgr. Têtu and Abbé C.O. Gagnon, Mandements, lettres pastorals, et circulaires des évêques de Québec, Vol. IV. Québec: 1888, Côté: 85-89.

1. Quelle est la population de la paroisse?
2. Combien renferme-t-elle de familles?
3. Combien de communians?
4. Combien d'enfants qui n'ont pas encore communié?
5. Combien de familles d'origine étrangère?
6. Combien de protestants?
7. Combien s'y est-il fait de baptêmes?
8. Combien s'y est-il fait de mariages?
9. Combien s'y est-il fait de sépultures?
10. Est-il né quelque enfant illégitime, et combien?

N.B. – Les réponses aux dix questions ci-dessus doivent être données pour l'année finissant au 31 décembre. Quant aux réponses aux autres questions, elles doivent l'être pour l'année finissant vers le 15 août, si ces questions supposent une époque qu'il faille déterminer.

11. Combien de familles ont quitté la paroisse (mentionner les noms de celles qui sont allées aux États-Unis) dans l'année?
12. Combien de jeunes gens l'ont aussi laissée (mentionner aussi le nombre de ceux qui ont gagné les États-Unis) dans l'année?
13. Combien de nouvelles familles y sont arrivées, dans le même espace de temps?
14. Combien d'enfants y ont fait leur première communion dans l'année?
15. Quelle est l'étendue en front et en profondeur de la paroisse?
16. Combien y compte-t-on d'emplacements?
17. Combien d'écoles?
18. Combien d'enfants les fréquentent, distinguant le nombre de garçons de celui des filles?
19. Combien sont tenues par des maîtres et combien par des maîtresses?
20. Y a-t-il une école de fabrique?

21. Y a-t-il une école modèle?
22. Combien y-a-t-il d'écoles mixtes?
23. Parmi les maîtres qui sont à la tête de ces sortes d'écoles, combien sont mariés?
24. S'il y a des écoles tenues par les Soeurs de la Congrégation, ou par les Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, combien s'y trouve-t-il de pensionnaires, de demi-pensionnaires et d'externes?
25. Quelles sont les dimensions du bâtiment ou se tiennent les écoles mentionnées dans la question précédente?
26. Quel est le nombre des marguilliers anciens et nouveaux de la paroisse?
27. Les pariossiens, ou notables, assistant-ils aux assemblées de fabrique convoquées pour les élections de marguilliers et pour les redditions de comptes?
28. Assistant-ils aussi à d'autres assemblées de fabrique?
29. Quel était le montant des deniers de la fabrique à la dernière reddition de comptes?
30. Combien de marguilliers n'ont pas encore rendu leurs comptes?
31. Si la fabrique est endettée, quel est le montant de sa dette et pour quel objet l'a-t-elle contractée?
32. Quelle est l'étendue en front et en profondeur du terrain de l'église et de ses dépendances?
33. Si, outre ce terrain, la fabrique possède une autre terre ou morceau de terre, quelle en est l'étendue?
34. Cette terre ou morceau est-il à l'usage du curé?
35. Quel en est à peu près le revenu?
36. Existe-t-il des titres des dits terrain, terre ou morceau de terre, et quelles en sont les dates?
37. Ont-ils été enregistrés au greffe, conformément à l'ordonnance de la 2. Vic. ch. 26, s'ils sont postérieurs au 25 novembre 1743?
38. Quelles sont les dimensions de l'église, ou chapelle, en longueur, largeur et hauteur?
39. Est-elle en bois, ou en pierre?
40. A-t-elle des chapelles latérales et sous quelle invocation?
41. A-t-elle des tableaux de prix, et, le cas y échéant, quels en sont les sujets, et qui en sont les auteurs?
42. Y a-t-on érigé des fonts baptismaux?
43. Combien y trouve-t-on de confessionnaux?

44. En quelle année a-t-elle été construite?
45. Dans quel état se trouve-t-elle?
46. Quelles sont les dimensions de la sacristie?
47. Est-elle pourvue de tous les objets nécessaires au culte; sinon quels sont ceux qui lui manquent?
48. Est-elle en bois ou en pierre?
49. En quel état est-elle?
50. Quelles sont les dimensions du presbytère?
51. En quelle année a-t-il été bâti?
52. Est-il en bois ou en pierre?
53. Est-il tout à l'usage du curé, ou s'il en est réservé une partie pour les paroissiens?
54. Si une partie sert aux paroissiens, y a-t-il une salle séparée pour les femmes?
55. En quel état est l'édifice?
56. Quelle est l'étendue du cimetière?
57. Y a-t-il une grande croix au milieu?
58. Est-il entouré d'une clôture solide?
59. Y trouve-t-on une place convenable pour la sépulture des enfants morts sans baptême et autres qui n'ont pas droit à la sépulture ecclésiastique?
60. Les bancs de l'église sont-ils vendus au capital, ou à la rente annuelle?
61. Quel est le revenu annuel qu'en retire la fabrique?
62. Quel est le revenu annuel que retire la fabrique du casuel?
63. La paroisse possède-t-elle une bibliothèque?
64. Combien cette bibliothèque renferme-t-elle de volumes?
65. Quel est le nombre des lecteurs?
66. Quelles sont les confréries qui existent dans la paroisse?
67. Y a-t-il quelques documents qui constatent qu'elles y ont été établies, et dans ce cas, quelles en sont les dates?
68. Quel est le nombre des associés de chacune de ces confréries?
69. Quelles sont les indulgences plénières qui existent dans la paroisse?
70. Quelle est la date de leur établissement et par quel document?

71. La société de tempérance est-elle établie dans la paroisse?
72. Combien renferme-t-elle d'associés?
73. Y a-t-il des auberges dans la paroisse et combien?
74. S'y trouve-t-il quelque concubinaire, ou ivrogne public, ou quelque autre pécheur notoirement scandaleux?
75. Combien s'y est-il fait de communions paschales dans l'année?
76. Combien ont manqué à la confession annuelle aussi dans l'année?
77. Quels sont les principaux désordres de la paroisse?
78. La dîme est-elle payée fidèlement, ainsi que le supplément, s'il existe?
79. Quelle est la quantité des dîmes perçues dans l'année, en blé, seigle, orge, avoine, sarrasin et blé-d'inde?
80. S'il y a un supplément, en quoi consiste-t-il, et quelle quantité de chaque article de ce supplément a été payée dans l'année?
81. De quelle date sont les premiers actes de baptêmes, mariages et sépultures, faits dans la paroisse?
82. Depuis quelle année y a-t-il été placé un prêtre résident?
83. Quels sont les noms des curés, missionnaires, desservants et vicaires qui y ont exercé le saint ministère, avec l'époque, ou chacun d'eux y est arrivé et en est parti, ou y est décédé?

N.B. – A la suite des réponses aux questions ci-dessus, l'on pourra faire telles remarques que l'on jugera être utiles au supérieur ecclésiastique.

Si un prêtre est chargé de plusieurs paroisses ou missions, il est à désirer que ses réponses soient faites pour chaque localité, au moins si elle possède une église ou chapelle.

Appendix B.

Parish Revenues, St-Joseph de Beauce, 1851-1901

Source: Nadeau, "Histoire de la Paroisse de St-Joseph" 1£ = \$4

YEAR	Revenue	Carried forward	Q.E.J. ^a	YEAR	Revenue	Carried forward	Q.E.J.
1851	£252-9-7 (\$1115.00)	£95-3-1 (\$397.00)		1876	\$2445.91	-	\$218.38
1852	£202-6-4 (\$811.00)	-		1877	\$3701.12	\$343.33	\$190.40
1853	£319-4-7 (\$1277.00)	£79-10-8 (\$325.00)		1878	\$2160.11	\$800.00	\$195.24
1854	£222-6-11 (\$891.00)	£20-12-19 (\$85.00)		1879	\$3682.36	\$1700.00	\$167.62
1855	£139-5-11 (\$558.00)	-		1880	\$4507.72	\$2261.33	\$182.10
1856	£145-5-4 (\$582.00)			1882	\$3883.29	-	\$195.23
1857	£402-12-8 (\$407.00)	£227-10-0 (\$912.00)		1883	\$2404.71	\$574.49	\$243.33
1858	£174-18-2 (\$699.00)	-		1884	\$2473.95	\$522.58	
1859	£254-15-5 (\$1113.00)	£39-7-6 (\$163.00)	27-5-1.5 (\$111.00)	1885	\$2722.78	\$823.93	\$221.85
1860	£190-0-8 (\$762.00)	£8-15-1.5 (\$38.00)		1886	\$2950.01	-	\$244.02
1861	£272-3-5 (\$1090.00)	£55-6-9 (\$223.00)		1887	\$2644.21	\$1603.59	\$190.79
1862	£175-4-4.5 (\$703.00)	-		1888	\$2337.88	\$48.29	\$248.24
1863	£245-4-7.5 (\$984.00)	-		1889	\$2804.49	\$780.52	\$203.04
1864	£269-1-2 (\$1077.00)	£65-1-6 (\$261.00)	33-15-4.5 (\$136.00)	1890	\$2114.45	\$701.61	\$280.09
1865	£114-2-3.5 (\$458.00)	-		1891	\$2335.76	\$171.66	\$282.17
1866	£108-11-3 (\$435.00)	-		1892	\$2923.03	-	\$290.82
1867	-	-		1893	\$2841.22	-	\$288.14
1868	£1553-10-10 (\$3443.25)	£33-5-0 (\$134.00)		1894	\$3036.82	\$1396.36	\$281.79
				1895	\$2336.72	\$143.25	\$280.46
				1896	\$2680.79	-	\$278.14
1869	\$3126.82	\$228.29		1897	\$2594.57	-	\$198.96
1872	\$5446.17	\$3877.03	\$163.61	1898	\$3119.11	\$150.64	\$203.43
1874	\$2658.44	-		1899	\$2786.13	-	\$176.06 \$372.15
1875	\$5565.77	-	\$228.41	1900	\$2697.46	\$5.14	\$375.00
				1901	\$2963.48	\$10.00	\$335.00

^a (Quête de l'Enfant Jésus [Q.E.J]).

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Ghislain Lapointe Collection

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