

## St. Ann's Memorial Church

### Historical Background

The history of Penetanguishene's Roman Catholic churches began in 1833 with the construction of a small log church on the present site of the townhall. The first pastor of this small church was Father Lawrence Dempsey who arrived in 1833 and died 3 months later. Two priests succeeded Father Dempsey; Father Amable Charest and Father J. Paptiste Proulx, but it wasn't until 1861 that this small church was replaced by another Roman Catholic log church. This project was headed by the new Pastor, Father V. P. Kennedy. This church was outfitted with coloured windows and a bell which had been taken from the old church. The bell was believed to be from one of the warships, the Tigress or the Scorpion, and was dated 1799<sup>1</sup>. The church was built from lumber and was equipped with a large box stove for the winter months.

Father Kennedy met with his death in 1873 while attempting to rescue a young boy from the harbour after the boy had fallen overboard on a boating excursion.

In 1873, Father Theophilus Laboureau became the new pastor of the church. By 1875, Father Laboureau had brought about the construction of the brick presbytery which still remains today.

A new cemetery was needed 1879 and Father Laboureau received permission to establish a new cemetery which was blessed by Archbishop J. J. Lynch. Bodies were then removed from the old cemetery and placed in the new cemetery.

Father Laboureau, born in Dijon France, came to Canada in 1853 and was ordained in Montreal, 1866<sup>2</sup>. During his first ten years in

Penetanguishene Father Laboureau had gained the admiration and respect of his parishioners.

In 1884, this respect was shown when he proposed the erection of a monumental church to honor the Canadian Martyrs, Father Jean deBrebeouf and his companions.

Permission was received from Archbishop Lynch, so Father Laboureau began his search for fundings for this church. Father Laboureau made extensive research on the missionaries and gave lectures in different parts of the country. A year later he travelled to France to make an appeal for assistance and also to choose a style of architecture. Many distinguished people both from France and Canada made considerable donations to the growing funds.

The site chosen for the new church was positioned to overlook not only the bay but the town. It has proven to be one of the greatest landmarks which distinguishes Penetanguishene from other harbour towns. The church is quite visible upon approaching Penetanguishene by water.

Construction began in 1886 but progress was slow because of lack of funds. By 1890 the roof was <sup>raised</sup> /and the building was operational but not complete. Not until 1902 was the church officially opened and blessed by Reverend B. O'Conner of Toronto. At the time of its opening it did contain most of its memorial windows but it wasn't until 1904 that pews were installed.

In 1909, three new bells were installed into the bell tower of St. Ann's Memorial Church. These were cast in France the year before by the F. and G. Paccard Bell Foundry and were set among the

presence of the bell which adorned the first two log churches.

Each bell was named and dedicated. The first, the Brebeof Bell, dedicated to Father Jean de Brebeof. The second, the Lalement Bell, dedicated to Father Gabriel Lalement (martyr) and the third, the Laboureau Bell, dedicated to Rev. D. Th. Laboureau, "parish priests of Penetanguishene 1873-1906". Father Laboureau had been bestowed a great honor by his parishioners. Father Laboureau resigned his parish in 1906 because of failing health and he died in 1908.<sup>3</sup>

"A beautiful memorial window in the church and a chime of bells in the tower attests to the high esteem in which his memory was held by his people, while the edifice is his perpetual monument, to which circumstances and environment have conspired to impart<sup>4</sup> a character both historical and national."

Renovations to the church were made in 1960. A small wing was added and is in fair keeping with the style that the building represents. The monumental windows and paintings were also re-finished to keep its original look on its interior. This operation was headed by Father Jean Marie Castex who came to Penetanguishene in 1938. His successor was Father L. Dignard, the present pastor of St. Ann's.

St. Ann's Memorial Church, truly a monument to those in the past who were instrumental to the development of the Roman Catholic religion in Huronia. Historically, it represents the struggles of the early pioneers, the early missionaries, the recent past, and the present.

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### Architectural Description

St. Ann's Memorial Church in Penetanguishene is a landmark to the town. Its position on the crest of the hill which is the make up of the Penetanguishene landscape enables the large Roman Catholic Church to be seen from both land and water for some distance around.

The construction of the church began in 1886 when the cornerstone was laid. However, it wasn't until 1904 that the official opening graced the interior of this magnificent Romanesque styled church.

An article by Marie Beausoleil in Pentanguishene 1875 - 1975 notes that Father Laboureau pastor of Penetanguishene 1873 - 1906, travelled to France to appeal for funds and also to choose a style of architecture to be used.

The style chosen was late Romanesque. The Romanesque style reached its peak in France and England through the 11th and 13th centuries. It also was popular again in a revival period of eclecticism in the 19th century.

St. Ann's has several features which reflects an image of the Romanesque Style.

Materials used in the construction of St. Ann's reflect the materials used in the Romanesque styles. St. Ann's has rough finished, cut field stone, rock faced granite, and trimed with red Credit Valley Stone and white Notawasaga sandstone. The original Romanesque style also had this rough textured finish provided by the stone work. The rough texture, enables the stone to cast shadows on the wall which enhances the richness of the stone.

Round headed windows, with column supports between each window in a successive row, show classical features which are found in Romanesque Styling. These windows are also adorned with stained glass. Memorial windows have been set in place since the grand opening of 1904. Some have been retouched since, but only back to these original state. This was alone in 1960.

Along both the East and West facades a blind arcading is visible. However the arch provided by the blind arcading is not in keeping with the Romanesque Style. These arches are segmental and not semi-circular. Also the blind arcading has Romanesque (semi-circular headed) windows cut from the wall.

Two wings on the East and West facades are covered with a gable roof, as is the length of the total building. The cornice of this gable end returns creating a pedimented top piece. The ends of these wings are adorned with a large round-headed window which has been arched around and trimmed with a smooth surround. These windows show some Scottish influence either in the construction (stone mason) or by the architect.

The architect or designer of St. Ann's tried to make this structure less massive than it could have been if it would have been styled to the true Romanesque Style. The use of an indented facade lightens the weight of this huge structure. If the facades had been left straight - a feature associated with Romanesque Styles giving the building a massive weighted appearance - the building would have appeared weighted even more heavily than it looks now.

Gothic influence in St. Ann's appearance is shown through its six chimney stacks - constructed of stone - which pierce the depth of the gable roof. The Romanesque Style in churches of the 11th century were free of any chimney stacks. Therefore we can conclude that these stacks were characteristics of the 19th century Romanesque Style. We may also assume that the architect may have wanted to convey the height, established by the front facade and towers, along the 140 foot depth of the building.

The interior of St. Ann's Church is decorated with memorial stained glass windows, religious wall and ceiling paintings and carved Stations of the Cross. The stained glass windows cast coloured shadows over the walls and floors producing a religious mood through out the church. The Stations of the Cross were carved in France and transported to St. Ann's in the early 20th century.

Pilasters also enhance the outer perimeter of the interior. These pilasters have corinthian capitals and we assume they support the massive weight of the building.

St. Ann's Memorial Church has proven itself to be the most impressive building of Penetanguishene. Craftsmanship and good planning were utilized to the fullest to obtain a monumental landmark which will remain for many years to come.

### End Notes

1. Penetanquishene 1875 - 1975. Marie Beausoleil, Pg. 19.
2. Osborne, A. C. Pioneer Papers. Barrie Publishing Co., 1908  
Pg. 160
3. Ibid. Pg. 161
4. Ibid. Pg. 161

### For Reference to Romanesque Style

#### - Pelican History of Art

- Romanesque Style, 11th - 13th century.
- Romanesque Style, France 19th century.

#### - Toronto, No Mean City

### St. Ann's Memorial Church

We found a photo/sketch of St. Ann's Church. This sketch is of "Memorial Church when completed".

Spires are shown on top<sup>of</sup> the two corner towers. Additional windows are evident on the east and west facades and stairs lead up to the two doorways of the side towers.

From Album Souvenir  
dedicated to Father Laboureau

"Black Binder."