

Sainte Valérie de Boileau Parish

*W*here do we find the roots of Sainte Valérie parish?

Could the prophet Isaiah have foreseen the missionaries and priests when he penned, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace and salvation”? To have a deeper understanding of this tiny hamlet snuggled in the Laurentian Mountains, one must uncover the writings of the first missionaries, carefully read the entries in the pastors’ “Journals”, study the area’s history, listen attentively to stories told by the descendants of its pioneers, observe and truly live in the midst of the present day community.

Laws governing crown lands changed in 1843 putting a stop to commercial wood traders in this area in favour of settlers interested in farming. However, the diocese of Montreal, though in existence since 1836, could not properly govern this influx of new settlers. Therefore, Msgr. Bourget, bishop of Montreal, requested and received permission from Rome to subdivide the diocese. Msgr. Bruno Guiges, nominated July 30, 1847, took charge of the newly erected diocese, Bytown (Ottawa), with the mission of promoting French, catholic settlers north of the Outaouais River.

Msgr. Guiges approached Lord Elgin, governor general of Canada, in an effort to counter attack the forestry companies who monopolized the best wood supplies often at the expense of the farmers. As a result of this meeting, the Society for Colonization came into being with Msgr. Guiges at its head. At his death in 1868, he was replaced by the pastor, Joseph Thomas Duhamel. This nomination assured the continuity of colonization. The collaboration of the pastors, Thomas Duhamel and Antoine Labelle, had already brought into existence the birth of about twenty parishes (one of which was Ponsonby) in the region. During one of his visits in 1878, Rev. Antoine Labelle chose the site for the future church in Amherst, as well as Ponsonby and Arundel. (See, *Livre Centenaire d’Amherst*, page 108).

In his book, *Dictionnaire historique et géographique des paroisses, missions et municipalités de la Province du Québec*, Hormidas Magnan tells us that our first mass was celebrated in 1880. This information is confirmed by Msgr. Routhier in his Journal entry :

(1927) to your prayers the Most Rev. Routhier, deceased on May 22nd at the age of 90. He is the one who celebrated the first mass here, while he was pastor in Orignal.

Two excerpts from the book *Histoire de la Province Ecclésiastique d’Ottawa* by Alexis de Barbezieux (volume II):

Rev. M. Prudhomme named the parish Sainte-Valérie.

When Msgr. Duhamel made his first visit in August 1883, he found a tiny chapel erected on land bordering the Maskinonge River donated by Mr. Boileau. He approved the location and accepted the donation of land.

In September 1887, the parishioners wrote to Msgr. Duhamel asking permission to relocate the church in a more centralized location on a parcel of land donated by William Palardy. This request was signed by 36 “head of families”. One week later a counter request was presented by Mr. Boileau. No documentation has ever been located to confirm that the building was moved, destroyed or other. However, there are records to show that it is to Rev. Omer Ferron during the years 1904-1905 that we owe the honour of the construction of the present building. The devotion and energy of the parishioners over the next several years will also serve to build two more Catholic schools with an average of 35 students per school. With the archbishop’s approval, they also build a presbytery to accommodate a pastor. It is Rev. Guillaume, pastor of Cheneville, who transmitted the parishioners’ request for a resident priest to the diocese. The mission was granted the status of parish in 1945.

Missionaries from 1883 to 1915

Rev. Raynel, S.J., was the first to serve the mission of Sainte Valérie in 1882. He was succeeded by: Reverends D.J. Halde and G. Dacier in 1884; L.B. Sauv , 1885-1886; L.P. Montour, 1887-1894; O. Lemay, 1894-1901; O. Ferron, 1901-1911; O. Lavergne, 1911-1915.

Pastors

J. Hermas Laniel (1915-1917); Oscar B langer (1917-1921); L on Dubeau (1921-1923); Armand Rollin (1923-1928); Philorome Grignon (1928-1934); Josaphat Gauvreau (1934-1939); Albert Labelle (1939-1944); Ephrem Thivierge (1944-1948); Am d e Allard (1948-1949); Lucien Sabourin (1949-1952); G rard Charette (1952-1953); H.P. Descombes (1953-1957); George Laurin (1957-1961); Ernest Denis (1961-1964); J. Alex Laberge (1964-1966); Lionel Malette (1966-1969); Germain Vincent (1971-1972); Wilfred Racine (1972-1974); Philippe Lalonde (1974-1993); Euclide Charron (1993-1999); Pierre Marois (2000-2001); Pierre-Marc Turcotte (2002-2004); Andr  Gauvreau (April 2005-October 2005); from October 2005 the parish is served by Rev. Gaston Potvin.

The pastors faithful to their journals have left us with a beautiful legacy of our forefathers. It is thanks to these notes that we can get glimpses of their joys and sorrows which with time became our story.

Dec. 8, 1916: “As last year, ladies and young girls are invited to come and do the cleaning of the church tomorrow. I will provide lunch at the rectory. If possible, I would like to know how many I can expect.”

Feb.18, 1917: “to your prayers, Honor  Tass , soldier died in combat...illegible..., Sept. 15, 1916 – son of Francis Tass  of this parish”.

Feb.18, 1917: “One among you has recently been tested by God, as his stables and barn with animals have burnt. As in the past, I will assist in every effort made to help him. Remark: our help

given in a neighbour's time of need should be in proportion to his need and not to our degree of friendship. You must consider the unfortunate situation in which he finds himself and your capacity to help."

Fourth Sunday of Lent 1917: "Palm Sunday is in two weeks. I will do the blessing at the beginning of the mass. I won't have any palms to sell, so bring some fir branches."

Aug. 5, 1917: "From now on, the Angelus will ring daily, 6 o'clock in the morning, noon and 7 o'clock at night."

Oct. 13, 1918: "Rivière Rouge Railroad Project: "Petition on the agenda in favour of the project, Consideration of the advantages of this project, Development of the region."

Oct. 20, 1918: "reading of the rules on Public Health Control Measures for the Province of Quebec regarding the epidemic. Church is closed. (Spanish flu)"

Dec. 29, 1918: "Tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. at the village school, important meeting for school tax payers, all tax payers and in particular those from Brookdale, to discuss the important question of rebuilding school no. 3".

Feb 29, 1920: "After mass, meeting of the Farmers Circle".

Sept. 11, 1926: "The 25th, an excursion to St-Jerome. The train will leave from St-Remi at 8 o'clock. Once arrived at St-Jerome there will be a mass for the people on the train. The return fare is \$2.00-children \$1.00. The entrance fee for the show is \$2.00".

Jan. 6, 1928: "after mass today there will be the blessing of the children and a drawing for 4 little Jesus. For the families who already have a little Jesus...if their child wins another Jesus I will give them another prize instead so that we can spread these little Jesus into as many homes as possible." (Would there be any of these Jesus dolls still existing in Boileau today?).

While reading these excerpts, we clearly see the priest in his role of "shepherd". In this era he had an eye on all aspects of the life of his flock: cleaning of the church, their health and wellbeing as well as the development of the region. With his support and encouragement, we see schools opening. He supervises religious organisations: Ligue du Sacré Cœur, Dames de Sainte Anne, Croisade Eucharistique. He organizes the farmers and encourages the Cercle de Fermières. All these activities serve to develop a strong feeling of community within the parish.

1926 marks the jubilee of the Designation of Ponsonby (June 26, 1876). The parishioners celebrated the event with great pomp. Louis Charron, pioneer, has a cross erected on the property where the first chapel and cemetery were located. Under the direction of Rev. Rollin, the celebrations started with a week of a parish retreat starting on July 11th. The celebration unfolded as follows:

Sunday: Opening of the retreat by Rev. J.A. Lapointe, vicar from Rockland

Tonight at 7:30, a sermon

Monday: 9 o'clock, mass and retreat service

Tuesday morning: Anniversary Service as announced

Thursday night: hour of adoration

Sunday: Blessing of the cross and closing of the retreat

In 1982, to celebrate the centennial of the Municipality of Ponsonby, the cross is replaced by the son of the pioneer, Fernand Charron. This cross still stands today. (See the minutes of the fabrique for Sept. 23, 1982)

The following about Boileau around 1946: excerpt from LE DIOCESE D'OTTAWA, 1847-1948 by Hector Legros, ptre and Sister Paul-Émile s.g.c., page436

The parish of Boileau cannot expand unless a new industry installs itself here. Its sole natural resource, lumber, is quickly being depleted and the forestry workers are leaving the area.

Memorable dates registered at the diocese demonstrate that even with such a challenge, the faith of the people is constantly transforming itself into action:

1939: Petition against the departure of the pastor J. G. Gauvreau

1940: Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the foundation of Sainte Valérie.

Rev. Hermas Laniel, founding pastor, presides at the celebration of the mass.

1941: The fabrique buys all the electrical supplies for the church and presbytery.

1945: A request is sent to the Minister of Colonization to build a sacristy.

A grant of \$500.00 is received.

1952: The parishioners get Rev. Routhier from Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix to intercede in their favour for a resident priest.

1953: Construction of a new centralized school

During the sixties, the diocese witnessed a rapid decrease of 85% in attendance to Sunday worship to 5% at the present day. During this same period, the buildings were starting to show the normal signs of wear and tear. The reforms of the Vatican II Council and changes caused by the "Parent" report also affected the educational system. The catholic tradition in the province of Quebec was dealt a hard blow. Sainte-Valérie parish did not escape the changes and suffered the same consequence as its head, "the diocese".

In 1971, the General Accident Insurance Co. cancelled its policy on the building. Major repairs to ensure the safety of the churchgoers were required. Msgr. Chaloux recommended the closing of the church. Rev. G. M. Vincent held a general assembly after a Sunday mass to discuss this dilemma with his parishioners. All in attendance opted to raise funds for the necessary repairs, and time lets us know that they succeeded in their endeavour.

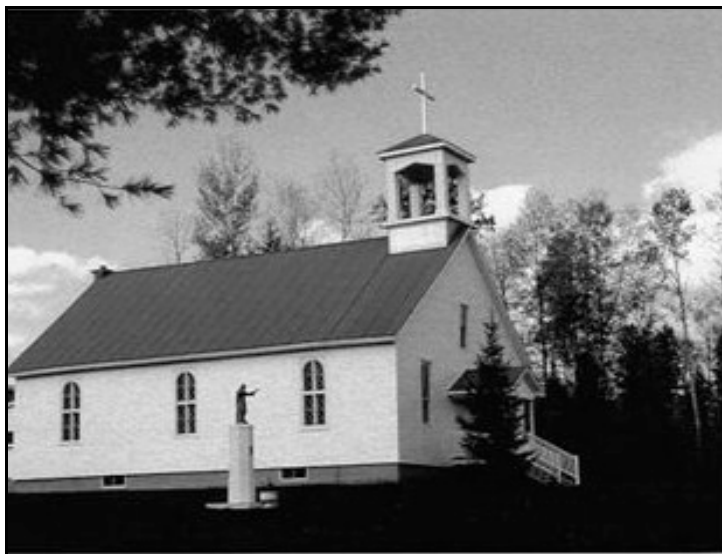
An estate at Lac au Loup (renamed Lac Champagneur) is purchased by the Clercs de St-Viateur of Bourget College in Rigaud to serve as a rest haven for its members. The purchase becomes a blessing for the little parish when Rev. Philippe Lalonde, c.s.v. is named pastor on June 1st, 1974. Shortly afterwards, on June 25th, he had his first meeting with the churchwardens. Quickly, life

regained vigour in the parish. The presbytery was sold, necessary repairs and renovations were done to the church, and improvements were done to the cemetery.

In 1991, the diocese unveiled a document called, “Église en Transit”. The document proposed a new approach to Christian life: that of mission. Boileau, in keeping with its neighbouring parishes, formed a Parish Pastoral Committee to study this new approach. But with the death of their pastor, Euclide Charron, the lack of available priests quickly became a new reality. Living at the extremity of the diocese and having a very small population, the parish was slowly but steadily left to itself. In 2004, a second request to close the parish was done by the bishop. The request served only as a spark to ignite the dormant parish life. The people, with no available pastor, gathered to discuss the closure. After much discussion, they came to the conclusion that the little church building stood as the only tangible sign of Catholic faith in their midst. A coalition between established parishioners and new arrivals formed to take a serious look at this new proposal of parish life. Fabrique and pastoral committees were formed in 2005. The Pastoral Committee’s role was to organize liturgical activities and promote visibility of the parish in the diocese. The fabrique’s role was to manage the financial aspect of the parish. The words of Rev. A. Labelle to his superior in 1884 becomes a paradox for some committee members. (Now we must encourage them to be as self sufficient as possible. Our resources here are very limited and there are times I must divide myself in quarters to accommodate them all. Antoine Labelle, ptre 1884)...ref. Un diocèse dans les cantons du Nord by Luc Coursol, page 127.

With the approval of Archbishop Roger Ébächer, strong support from the North Sector and volunteers full of hope and interest, religious life gets a new boost in the little hamlet. People are active not only on the “parish” level but also on “sector” and “zone” levels. The choir is reorganized and adds pleasure and solemnity to the liturgical services. Thanks to training from the diocesan level, the Pastoral Committee is transformed to a Pastoral Team which now carried the name “Équipe Pastorale de Sainte-Valérie”. The five seats are administered by lay volunteers. Their function is to analyze the needs of the parish and accompany the parishioners in their religious undertakings. Always under the umbrella of the diocese, the team is guided by a Pastoral Agent in promoting a life in communion with others. For when we live in communion with each other, we live in a compassionate society where all are equal. We accept our weaknesses and our strengths, and acknowledge that every individual has something to offer.

Today, the parish of Sainte-Valérie lives the words of Msgr Ébächer drawn from his document entitled *Un Leadership qui Éduque à la Vie en Communion...* page 4, “By our prayers and actions we must develop the belief that God has sown in each community what it requires to live and live abundantly” as it propels itself into the future with confidence.



Église Sainte-Valérie en 2005

photo prise par Peter et Barb Gilbert

By Hectarine Roy