

# Crisis years of the early church at Madawaska

by Guy F. Dubay

MADAWASKA — A quarter of a century elapsed and 10 pastors passed through the parish before the citizens of Madawaska settlement finally gathered the resources to raise their first large church at St. Basile, N.B.

Settlement came in 1785, yet the Church of St. Basile rose from the shattered dreams and aspirations of its pastors only in 1813. Monsignor J.O. Plessis, a member of the episcopal see in Quebec, was quick to praise the work of Pastor Louis Marcoux, for in that year the new pastor succeeded where

others failed.

The people of Madawaska were not unique in challenging church authority. In Kamouraska, there had been scandalous dissensions where even the pastor's life was threatened. There were questions in the matter of the payments in other regions of the diocese as well, but the reticence of Madawaska's settlers in providing adequate resources to maintain a pastor at St. Basile brought on several warnings to Madawaskans from the church authorities in Quebec.

Plessis, in a letter to Pastor Raby, put it most diplomatically when he said that the ill disposition of the settlers was the most likely fate of "most new parishes formed out of a body of people gathered from everywhere."

Perhaps it was the sparsity of the settlers or the poverty of the nascent colonies that prevented the people of Madawaska from housing and feeding a pastor at a level concurrent with standards of Quebec clergy. Certainly there exists documents evidencing struggles and difficulty of seeking out a living in the virgin forest. Few families cultivated crops beyond the needs of their own family, much less an amount to submit to roving or itinerant pastors.

Questions regarding the adequate support of pastors were brought up by the bishop of Quebec four times in pastoral letters to the Madawaska parish, and seven other references show

episcopal concern for the lack of settler response to the needs of the clergy.

Monsignor Plessis wrote pastoral letters to the people in 1806, 1807, 1808 and 1811. Bishop Plessis also addressed letters of concern to pastors Paquet, 1792; Ciquart, 1798; Vezina, 1802; Hott, 1806; Kelly, 1808 and 1809; and Raby, 1811.

Indeed, it may be possible to state that early pastors of St. Basile parish were able to sustain themselves in the St. John River area largely through the support of the New Brunswick authorities who allocated an annual pension of 50 Louis sterling to the pastors who served a dual function of ministering to the Malecite Indians at Tobique, Medoctec and Ecoupahaq, in addition to their pastorships at St. Basile.

Some of the pastors named to head the fledgling parish were young and new in the game of missionary work, yet even the most experience and dedicated men ran into difficulty with the intransigence of the settlers. Ciquart, a man of unquestioned faith and devotion, had a dossier of records still extant evidencing episcopal esteem for his labors, so the quality of leadership can

hardly be doubted.

The people of Madawaska today speak in terms of being unique if not a distinct people. There is evidence to show that their tendency to disassociate themselves from other peoples goes back to their origins.

The Rev. Bailly found the people of the lower St. John River, from whence the Madawaska's Acadian population is derived, difficult in attitude from the rest of the docile Acadians. Bailly warned the new missionary, the Rev. Mathurin Bourg, to be prepared to meet some resistance among the St. John River people, which he would not meet at Memrancook, Caraquet or Miramichi.

However, as those distinct attitudes developed, they appear to have brought consternation to the most ardent of churchmen.

Pastoral letters are clear in their warnings. Indeed, Bishop Plessis resorts to a censure of a kind when he effected the removal of the pastor from St. Basile in 1806 and set conditions for a new appointment or a resident priest to the parish. "Before sending another (priest), repairs to the rectory are said by bishop Plessis,

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## Crisis years

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will have to be made.

"Furthermore, you will have to find means of adequate sustenance for a missionary whom I intend to send, and you will have to show more zeal toward your religion." Hott, who was the second pastor to reside here, was, at this time, pulled back to the province of Quebec where he was assigned the pastorship at Rimouski.

Two years later, the bishop announced the appointment of a new resident pastor while insisting that the rectory must be made "warm and habitable" and that a party of men be sent out of Riviere des Caps on the St. Lawrence "to guide him through the portage and help him carry his effects."

J.B. Kelly, the young priest, however, met with disappointment, finding inadequate provisions here to sustain him through the winter. While Kelly's appointment as pastor of St. Basile held to 1810, Plessis ordered the young pastor to a temporary post in Quebec so he could winter the cold season in a suitable fashion.

Plessis re-iterated his concern in his third pastoral letter on the same subject. In his letter of 1811, he "deplored their indifference and the lack of zeal shown in the practice of religion." Naming five of the six missionaries who preceded the current pastor, the bishop stated that they met

letters.

In response to Paquet's inquiry, Plessis (1792) stated that, "The entire tithes is due not only to a resident pastor but also to one who serves them on the missionary circuit. We can require the settlers to pay us the tithes to the chapel or mission in which no pastoral visit occurs. It isn't the bishop's intention to force the Indians to pay for this chapel."

To Vezina, Plessis wrote in 1802, "as the inhabitants of Madawaska have shown so little honesty towards you...they do not merit that you visit them this year."

In the letter ordering Dorval's reassignment from St. Andre in 1806, the itinerant missionary to St. Basile was told to inform his parishioners that they would have a replacement for their pastor, "but that if you continue to fight among yourselves he (the pastor) will be removed from them." This however, may apply more to the home parish of St. Andre than the missionary field of St. Basile, but the situation in one place had consequence on the other.

When a replacement was found for Dorval's mission, the new pastor, Hott, was to tell his parishioners that they would have to beef up their support since the bishop intended to send a pastor of "frail health and in need of good lodging and healthful nourishment."

The story must have sounded like an old song when in 1811 Monsignor Plessis wrote to Raby that the construction of the church at St. Basile caused him much worry (beaucoup de tracas) "since the people are ill-

The Rev. Marcoux, a native of Beauport, Quebec, apparently hit it off well with the settlers from the start. He succeeded where others met rebuffs. Although young, (he was 28 at the time of his appointment), Marcoux seems to have had the personality to deal with the traditional St. John Valley independence.

It was during his administration that the parish then received its first assistant pastor. Rev. Andre Toussaint Lagarde, also a young priest, (26) concerned himself largely with the education of youth and care of Indians.

The pair seemed to have worked well with Marcoux, that is, when we contemplate the fact the Marcoux was the first to maintain a pastorship lasting five years.

Lagarde, who established the first "Academie" here in 1817, succeeded Marcoux to the pastorship. Marcoux was called on to larger fields at St. Joseph de Maskingogne in the upper St. Lawrence and here the parish settled into its years permanence.

The 1820s and 30s were periods

of expansive growth for the Madawaska settlement. In Sirois' administration. St. Basile opened missions of its own with branch chapels at Van Buren and Frenchville. The former, St. Bruno, received its first pastor in 1838, and the latter, Ste. Luce, received its own pastor in 1843.

The diocese of Quebec ceased to administer the area directly as bishoprics were set up in New Brunswick in the 1840s and in Maine in 1855. To this day, however, the parishes are replete with pastors whose educational background if not their native background, reaches to Quebec.

It was 147 years after settlement that the mother parish of the St. John Valley finally came to be entrusted to one of the Valley's natives. Out of 25 pastors who have headed the mother parish in its nearly 200 years, only the last three have been Valley natives — the Rev. Benjamin Saindon, Monsignor Ernest Lang and the Rev. Rino Albert.

### List of Pastors of St. Basile

Rev. Adrien Leclerc	1786-1790
Rev. Joseph Paquet	1791-1794
Rev. Francis Ciquart	1792-1798
Rev. Francis Vezina	1806-1802
Rev. Joseph Dorval	1803-1804
Rev. Charles Hott	1804-1807
Rev. Michel-Aug. Amyot	1807-1808
Rev. Jean-Bte. Kelly	1808-1810
Rev. Louis Raby	1810-1813
Rev. Louis Marcoux	1813-1818
Rev. Toussaint de la Garde	1818-1821
Rev. Michel Ringuette	1821-1826
Rev. Elie-Sylves. Sirois	1826-1831
Rev. Mercier	1831-1835
Rev. Antoine Langevin	1835-1857
Rev. McGuirk	1857-1869
Rev. Doucet csc	1869-1871
Rev. Dugal csc	1871-1875
Rev. Cordier	1875-1876
Mgr. Thomas Barry V.	1876-1880
Mgr. Ls. Napoleon Dugal V.G.	1880-1929
Rev. Joseph-Paul Levesque	1929-1932
Rev. Benjamin Saindon	1932-1948
Mgr. Ernest Lang	1948-1972
Rev. Rino Albert	1967-

## Madawaska Historical Society



**EDITOR'S NOTE** - The following history of Saint Luce was originally published in 1943, in the parish Centennial booklet. Translated here from the French for the Historical Society we endeavor to keep as close as possible to the original version. Each column will be followed by commentaries by the translator, Guy Dubay, society president.

### Part III - The Quebec-New Brunswick Border

The settlement of the international boundary gave rise to new claims and counter claims in the provinces of Quebec and New Brunswick over the part of Madawaska territory remaining under British control.

The Quebec claim held to part of the county of Victoria and Restigouche up to Dalhousie on the Baie des Chaleurs. Later, the ambitious province reduced its claims to Grand Falls and the Madawaska River basin.

New Brunswick on the other hand, claimed all territory south of the Notre Dame Mountains to the head of the Baie des Chaleurs, that is to say the whole of the Lac Temiscouata Valley and part of the county of Bonaventure.

To dampen emotional spirits, London sent Gladstone to arbitrate and settle the controversy. His ruling favored New Brunswick. Quebec formally protested, and another commission headed by Dr. Travers Twiss, represented New Brunswick and Thomas Falconner, a lawyer, represented Quebec.

London judge Stephen Lushington presided over the study committee and served as final arbitrator, Lushington noting Quebec's ill reception of the Gladstone ruling which deprived it of its ancient seigneurie of Madouesca, returned it to Quebec, demanding for the rival compensation of equal value.

This second arbitration fixed the border at 12 miles north of the St. John on the Madawaska river, thence to the St. Francis River.

Thus the quaint little colony of Madawaska was trisected by the three egotistical governments with little concern for the native population.

**Commentary:** The Madawaska Territory is by no means the first and last "nation" to be so taken up by her neighbors.

The classic example of the partitions of Poland of 1772-1793 and 1795 come to mind. There, Prussia, Russia, and Austria virtually wiped off the

map any trace of the former kingdom. We are reminded of the Machiavellian tenet that strong nations tend to swallow (or absorb, if you prefer) their weaker neighbors.

The history of Indian warfare in the Northeast ends to bring this concept to non-European environments as well. So it could be that the fantasy of Madawaska as a distinct territory was vulnerable to forces common in history.

Here in Madawaska, both church and state saw to the trisecting of a people that shared a common bond. It brings to mind the observation by the

late Rev. Henri Langlois OFM that national boundaries are not usually drawn with demographic principals in mind, but rather economic or political factors tend to predominate such negotiations.

"How else do you account for the modern division of a people that considers itself German?" he asked. Today the split nation seems to be in vogue: Vietnam, Korea, Ireland, Bangladesh, Germany, to name a few.

To the tender hearted with a penchant for causes, Madawaska and Biafra might indeed be said to share similar stories, but

I can't personally buy that thought.

As other parts of this history will show, the victim may at times be the cause of his own undoing. How else do you explain the internecine doings of

our ancestor of a hundred years ago which by pure habit we might now be unwittingly re-playing? Food for thought any one.

Next: The Ecclesiastical Division of Madawaska.