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Partici-Paper

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St. Joseph's Church of Marble Mountain

a Catholic Church preserved in a Protestant Community

by Mary Anne Duchame

What ideas, memories, associations were in the mind of the builder of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Marble Mountain?

Who was he? Did he build other structures in the community? Why was the church built in that particular site? When? Who owned the land? How was the style determined? What was the nature of the community at the time it was constructed? How was it constructed? What kinds of materials were used? Where were they manufactured? Who were the people who attended services there? Where have their descendants gone?

None of these questions have clear answers at this time. Yet this church lies at the heart of a very tiny and close knit community which has gone to great lengths to preserve this structure.

St. Joseph's Catholic Church was built sometime early in the days when Marble Mountain was a bustling town of about 1,000 and the marble and limestone quarry provided work for about 750 men. These men spoke many different languages, represented many cultures from around the globe.

Yet looking at Marble Mountain now, it is hard to imagine this incredible history, and only a visit to the small museum convinces a visitor of its reality.

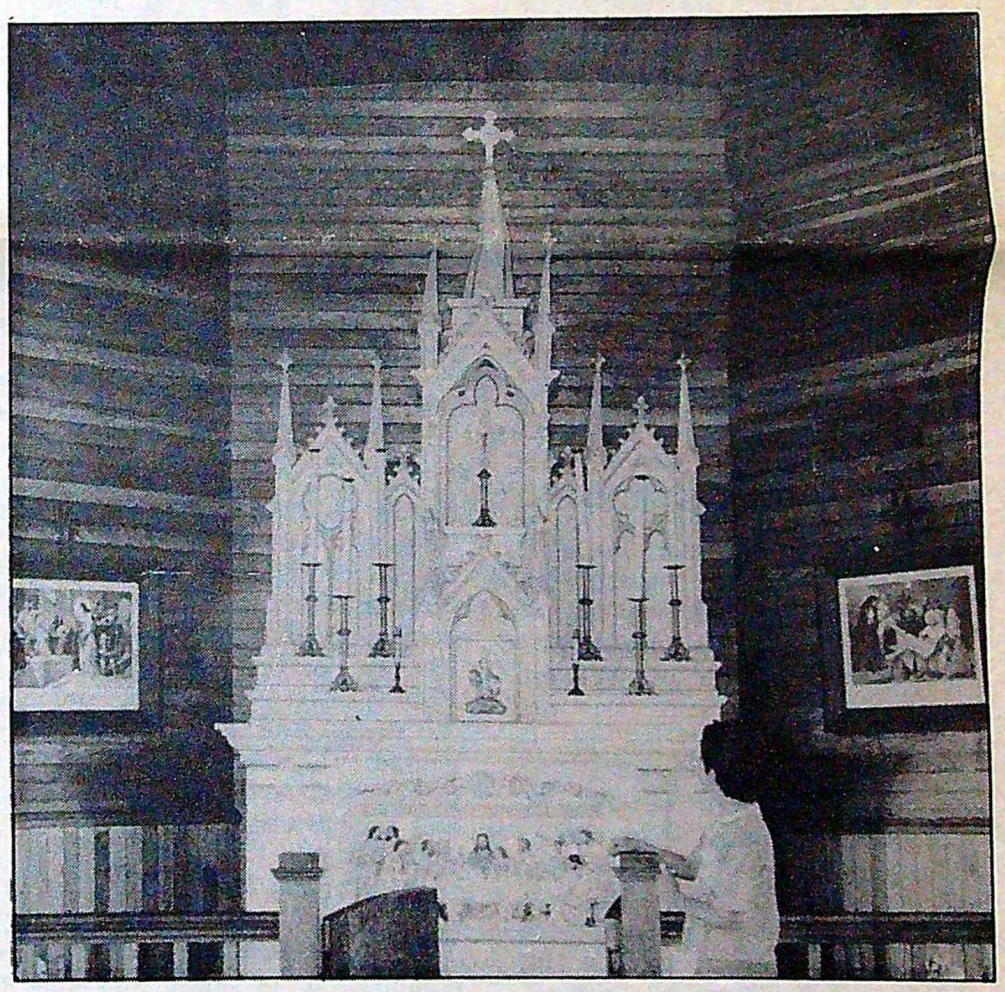
The church exterior is typical of many buildings in Marble Mountain, a spare, unadorned style. The interior was never quite finished, but it is also typical of several other interiors in the community in which the walls and ceilings are finished with beautiful wainscotting. This wainscotting is preserved in its original unpainted finish in the church.

When quarrying went bust after the early twenties, people moved away, leaving behind the tiny core of a Protestant community, the parents and grandparents of those now living in Marble Mountain. The Catholic Church was vacant for many years, the roof leaked, and other structural problems began to appear. The community began discussion about demolishing the structure rather than allowing it to become a derelict eyesore.

However, a few people expressed a desire to preserve it. A wonderful and surely unprecedented community effort resulted in funds being raised, and a new roof and other repairs being carried out, -- *by Protestants to preserve an unused Catholic church!*

Now Father Joe MacLean and Father Murphy conduct summer masses in this church, and last summer, it was graced by a wedding.

This church building, made even more special by the efforts of the people of Marble Mountain, deserves to be well researched and



documented, and thanks to them, it is still there to be studied!

Architecture reveals memories of other places and the ability to adapt. It reveals the changes through time in values and economic conditions. It reveals spirit, soul and imagination. It reveals the ability to solve complex technical problems and use technology. It reveals ideas of beauty or function, or the ideal marriage of both.

Myriad older structures still occupied contain these revelations about the people who once lived in Inverness County. However, other buildings have vanished from the landscape without any survival of knowledge about them, their builders, or their significance. Derelict buildings, grey and sagging, remain like ghosts of people on the edge of living memory.

continued page two

Federation of Nova Scotia Heritage

-resolution passed to inaugurate procedures in order to bring about a museum policy for the province of Nova Scotia

The Federation of Nova Scotian Heritage passed a resolution at its 1991 Annual General Meeting to "proceed with all due haste to inaugurate procedures in order to bring about a museum policy for the province of Nova Scotia." The motion, submitted by James St.Clair, stemmed from the perception that the lack of formal policy has resulted in funding difficulties by all museums and a subsequent deterioration of these museums. This motion was made as a specific action to be taken, not a motion for further study. It was seen as a responsibility of the Federation as the only inclusive organization in Nova Scotia. A paper regarding this was previously submitted to the Federation, the Minister of Tourism and Culture and the Director of the Nova Scotia Museum Complex.

David Stevenson requests more support for heritage

Excerpts from the Annual Report of the President of the Federation of Nova Scotia Heritage, David Stevenson:

Members of the Federation have expressed over the years the desire to have an organization which is more responsive to their needs and interests, more assertive in promoting heritage issues in the province, and more financially responsible in managing its own affairs.

A staff of two, limited numbers of professionals, and many volunteers

Several years ago the Federation, through its Board and Executive, began a concerted effort to address these interests and concerns. In doing so, it recognized its place in the life of the province. The Federation is able to draw upon the strengths of its staff of two, a limited number of heritage professionals in this small province, and a large number of volunteers who identify with their local heritage organizations.

The Federation has recognized the combination of these strengths. First, it sees its Executive Director and Secretary as the organizational heart of its activities.

Second, the limited professional staff within the province, which is beginning to speak out on heritage matters, needs more attention and support. It is critical, both to the Federation and the soul of this province, that heritage be strongly defended by curators and directors who have professional standing. The Federation has cooperated in the organization of the group and encourages the enhancement of its status and the interests it pursues.

Third, the large number of interested and hard-working volunteers across our province must receive more attention for the contribution they give to young and old alike, be they residents or visitors. Largely because of the interest and efforts of these people, there has been the collection of countless stories and artifacts which are available for study and enjoyment. The collections require considerably more recognition, as do the many local museums. This a topic which should be high on the agenda for the coming year.

The Federation can only benefit from the regional strength of its members

The Board and the Executive have been delighted by the development of heritage gatherings in the regions of the province. Hosted by members of the Board, the regional meetings are moving from an inaugural stage into the planning of future events. The Federation can only benefit from the regional strength of its members.

Sorrowful lack of attention to heritage collections

To our many members and supporters may I make a request. Heritage has to gain in public attention and understanding. This province is rich in collections which represent our past. But there has been a sorrowful lack of discussion or attention to these riches. It is no longer enough that we have made collections which we care for in our localities. Museums have to gather together to preserve the best and most representative artifacts we have, and volunteers cannot undertake the task alone or with overworked professionals. We are in need of more knowledge, leadership and public will if your advertised and outstanding museums are to pass their wealth of memories to succeeding generations. If our museums are to continue, they need more support from government, business, the academic community, and the general public. If we are to gather such support, we will have to ask for it.

continued page four

St. Joseph's

continued

Churches, barns, homes, fishing sheds -- of course, these all decay in time or no longer suit the practical needs of the present.

What should be preserved? Why? What should be demolished? How should buildings be studied and documented? Who is responsible? The answers to these questions too are unclear at this time.

If anyone can contribute information about the history of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Marble Mountain, the information will be printed in *Partici-Paper* to be shared with readers, and passed on to appropriate archives for further study. There are perhaps many significant buildings in other communities that also deserve to be fully documented, or preserved, or both.

Thanks to Lawrence Campbell, Jeanne McNichol, Father John Angus Rankin and Jim St. Clair for helpful information for this article.

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NOTE ON PHOTOS PAGE THREE

Can you identify these pictures?

On the facing page are nine photos of buildings, past and present, found in Inverness County. There are, of course, dozens of others equally significant, but they couldn't all be printed in this issue!

How many of them can you identify? Where are they located? How much of their significance to our local history do you know? See the July issue of Partici-Paper for identification of these photos.

Next deadline:
June 24

Partici-Paper

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We welcome contributions of articles, photos, letters dealing with issues and opinions, information and promotion about community events.

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