

Ste. Jeanne de Chantal one of oldest

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The 1019 Report

As Île Perrot marks its 350th anniversary this summer, no celebration would be complete without acknowledging one of the oldest buildings on the island – Ste. Jeanne de Chantal Catholic church.

The history of the church stretches back to the mid-1750s. In fact, in the fall of 1760, a band of English soldiers who sought refuge at an inn on the southeast tip of Île Perrot on their way to take Montreal from the French held up at the area where the church would be built. At that time, the site for the church had already been selected. Plans to build the church began in 1753, but the Seven Years' War halted the project because of a shortage of materials and labour.

The church was finally completed in 1774, making it one of the 10 oldest surviving rural churches in North America. Built in a scenic location atop a bluff facing Beauharnois along the shores of the St. Lawrence River, the 248-year-old church is a true historical gem of the 1019 region.

The combination of heritage and beauty contributed to the church being declared a historic monument by the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1961 and was named one of the Seven Wonders of Vaudreuil-Soulanges in 2008.

But the church has a complicated history, having gone through a number of iterations over the centuries.

Lise Chartier, president of the Île Perrot 350th anniversary committee, has written two books on the history of the island, with another volume in the works. In her second

volume, she dedicates more than 70 pages to the history of the church.

“Île Perrot became an established seigneurie in 1672, and for several decades residents of the island often travelled to Ste. Anne de Bellevue by canoe to attend mass,” Chartier said. “A small presbytery was established close to Pointe du Moulin in 1743, but the chapel quickly became too small and residents complained that the church was not central enough. That’s when plans for Ste. Jeanne de Chantal began.”

Shortly after the church was constructed, a cemetery was established at the back of the church in 1791. A second cemetery was opened in front of the church on the bluff in the 1950s. This newer cemetery, laid out on multiple levels along the terraced waterfront site, has been recognized as a uniquely esthetic site and one of the only cemeteries of its kind in Quebec.

“I had heard that there was another (terraced) cemetery like it in Gaspésie, but I could never confirm it,” Chartier said. “The cemetery is very unique.”

The church underwent renovations in the 19th century, including an enlargement in 1812 and the addition of a bell tower in 1842. When the tower collapsed in a storm in 1901, it was rebuilt along with a new façade by Alcide Chaussé, the architect best known for the Egyptian-themed Empress theatre in N.D.G. in Montreal.

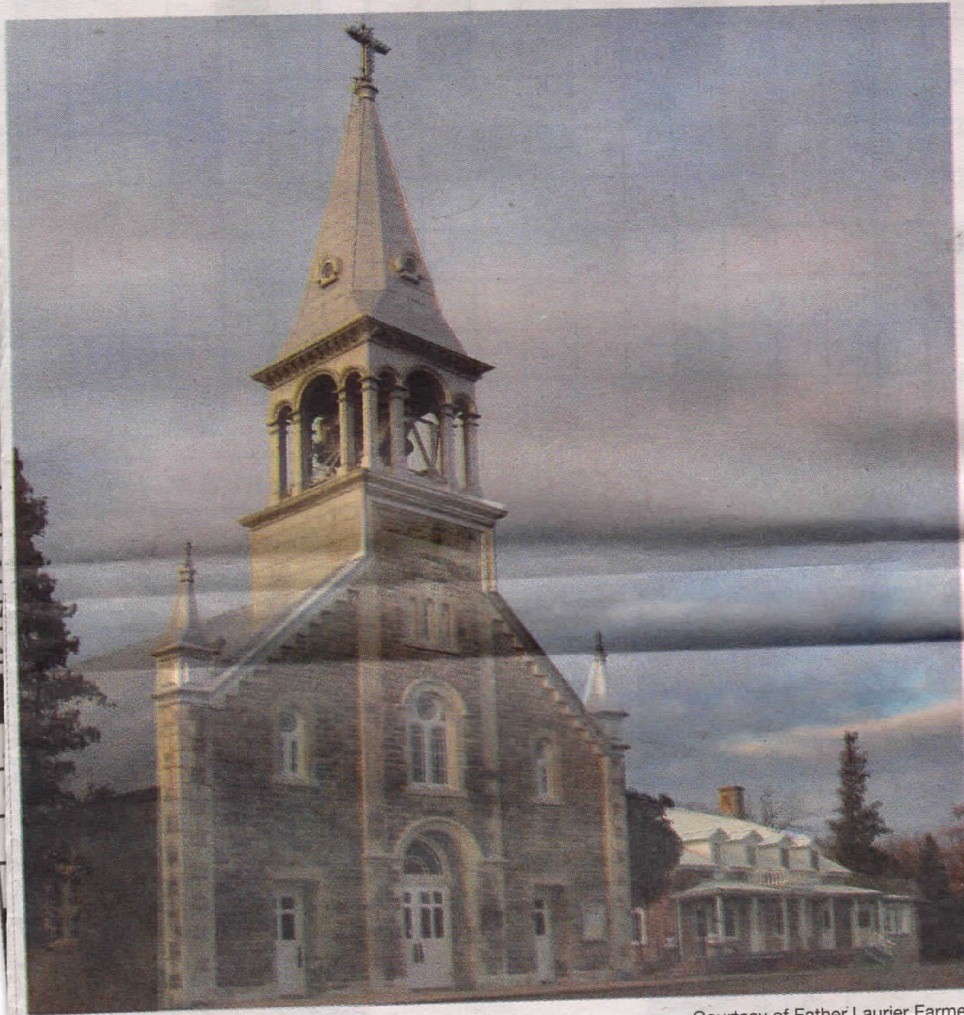
Ste. Jeanne de Chantal has already hosted several events during the 350th anniversary of Île Perrot this summer. The next event will be the inauguration of a 350th anniversary garden on Aug. 18 at 5 p.m.

Best rural churches in North America



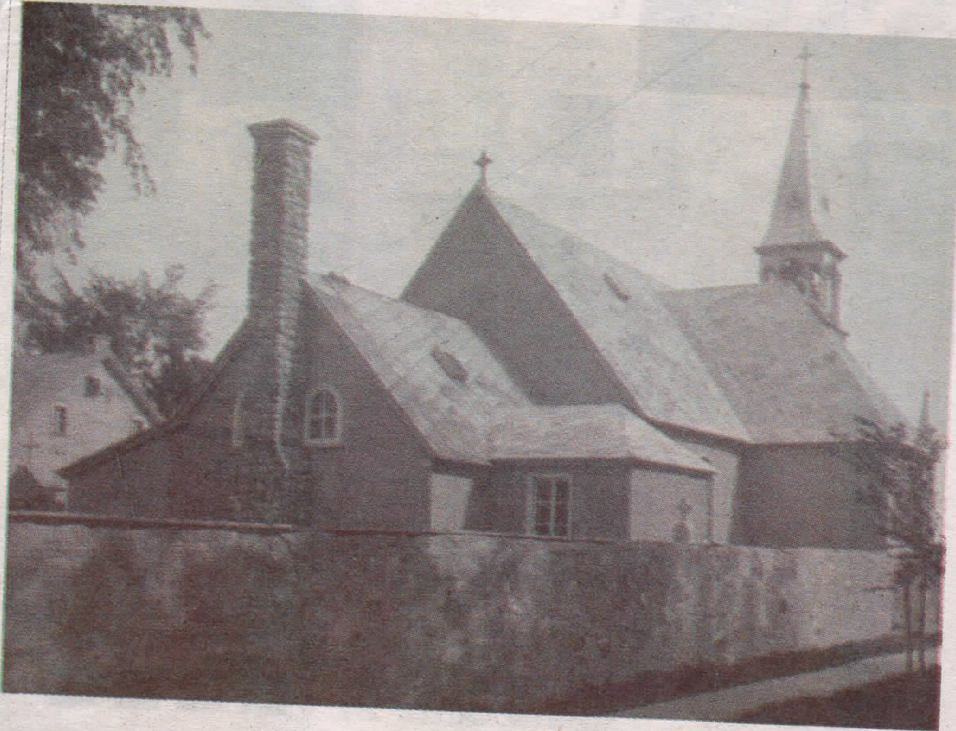
Christopher Forget, The 1019 Report

The terraced cemetery along the waterfront in front of the church offers a spectacular view.



Courtesy of Father Laurier Farmer

Ste. Jeanne de Chantal Church in Notre Dame de l'Île Perrot was completed in 1774, and is one of 10 oldest surviving rural churches in North America.



This photo of the church was taken in 1925.

Courtesy Gariépy Fonds (BANQ)