



**SHAMROCKS IN  
THE LAURENTIANS**

by

Thomas Edward Kennedy

*(Likely written about 1970)*



*(Please note that this document is not complete. If you have a full version, please forward it to me so that I can fill in any missing areas. Thank You .... Fergus Keyes (f.keyes@netaxis.ca))*

During the early Thirties, while wandering through the country-side, I came upon “Shamrocks in the Laurentians” Upon returning many times, I have come to know and love the people of St. Columban.

The Irish founded the community of St. Columban, Quebec, lies in the foothills of the beautiful Laurentian Mountains, to the north of the once picturesque North River. Located approximately forty miles north of Montreal, the terrain is rocky and rugged.

The following pages are devoted to the history and progress of this community and the story of the Irish immigrants who founded it. Dates and names are accurate, but the story is spiced with humor and sadness to present a more vivid picture of the community that dates back to about 1816. An Irish warden by the name of John Ryan was elected at St. Scholastique Parish to represent the Irish settlers of St. Columban on November 22 1825. The records at St. Benoit show that an infant named Mary Purselle (Purcel) was baptized in 1820. These same records record the baptism of John Ryan in the year 1824. This would lead us to presume that an established group were in St. Columban for some time prior to this date. It is regrettable that little has been written on the early days of the Irish immigrants to Canada; their faith, courage and great sense of humor should no go unrecorded. In the old days families passed on to the young folk, first-hand stories of the past. The sadness, sickness and disappointments of those days may have tended to make young people forget, rather than record the past. If this assumption is correct, it is sad that thusly we also lose this recording of family and community achievements as well. *It is sad that we cannot mark the grave of the first settler, know the site of the original log home or just where the axe felled the first timber of the virgin forest. To really appreciate the present, we must first look back into our past.*

We first must go to the Emerald Isle to properly record the founding of St. Columban. Around 1823, many Irish farmers were ruined by the fall in prices of produce. This, in part, was caused by the slump that followed the Napoleonic Wars. The depression in the British Isles caused a return to pasture land, and forced eviction of many tenants-at-will. The partial failure of the potato crops in 1817, and again in 1822, set the Irish farmers back. As potatoes were the chief substance of the peasants, this was a serious set-back. Therefore in 1823 the Irish immigrants to Canada were mainly farmers. These people chose Canada because of its vastness and the opportunities it offered. They crossed the ocean in search of good farm land, security and independence. After having gone through a period of bad harvests, religious unrest, disease and high rents, they were in search of prosperity in a new land.

Crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the sailing ships of those days was real hardship. These ships were overcrowded, unclean and with little or no medical care. Many people died during the voyage and were buried at sea. These voyages took anywhere from six weeks to three months at sea. Few records were kept, and it is difficult to trace the names of the ships and the passengers aboard. Family Bibles, letters in old trunks in attics, newspaper clippings, land-grant documents, the memory of the aged, etc. are the only means of information on those days.

The relocating to a new land and a new life created untold hardships. The Irish immigrants met these difficulties with courage and good spirits, and laid the foundation of our community well. We should be proud of our Irish ancestors and the land that they literally fought and conquered. They arrived with little or nothing but by prayer and hard work provided the necessities to their families. A little was expected to go a long way, and was made to do just that. Hardships were expected and were usually met without complaint by these hardy Celts.

In 1817, a small group of Irish immigrants arrived in Montreal. These people attended Mass at Bonsecours Church, and were cared for by the Rev. Fr. Richard Jackson, who became their first parish priest. Father Jackson was born in 1787 at Alexandria, Virginia. He was Ordained in 1813 and died in 1847. In 1824, this priest opened a school for Irish children in the Recollect Convent; once an army barracks, and thus established the first Irish parish in Montreal. In 1829, Father Phelan, later to become a Bishop, was the first Irish pastor. To accommodate the increase in Irish immigrants, the Church was enlarged twice, once in 1829 and again in 1834. This building had once been the Recollect Convent on Notre Dame St., in the heart of old Montreal.

The Rev. Father Phelan was born in 1795 at Ballyragget, County Kilkenny, Ireland. Early in his youth, he immigrated to Boston and soon chose the priesthood as his life's vocation. Msgr. de Cheries, his Bishop sent him to the Grand Seminary in Montreal to study theology. In 1822, he entered the Society of the Gentlemen of St. Sulpice, in 1825, was the first priest ordained by Bishop Latrique.

Father Phelan's superior in Montreal received permission from Bishop de Cheveries of Boston to keep the newly ordained priest in Montreal as a Sulpician to minister to the Irish Catholics. In 1829, he became Pastor of the Church of Recollects, and remained there until 1843. Montreal's historic Notre Dame Church was the site of his consecration as a Bishop. Ottawa, called Bytown at the time, was under his jurisdiction from 1843 until 1847. He was then named Co-Adjutor to Bishop Gaulin of Kingston, Ontario, and in 1852 became Administrator. He was appointed Titular Bishop of Kingston in 1852, and it was during his administration that the Cathedral was built. He died in XXXX and is buried in the Cathedral.

We now return to Bishop Phelan's part in the history of St. Columban, as he was its founder. The northern section of the County of Two Mountains was a seignieury of the Gentlemen of St. Sulpice, Father Phelan's order, and as yet, not settled. Therefore, he

chose to establish this area as his settlement. We must try to realize his vision and foresight in leading his people into a primitive section; his faith in the belief that the land would feed these people, and the elements would not conquer them; their faith in him and their courage and determination to establish a community in a new land.

The settlers were given the land free and had to pay taxes to the Seignieury. The original shanties, hastily erected, gradually gave way to log houses, a few of which still remain as a tribute to their builders. We shall deal with a few of these original houses and their history a little later on. With a little imagination, one can still hear the fiddler's tune, the Irish humor and the children's laughter that sounded through these log houses. The houses had fireplaces to burn logs for heat, and light was supplied by candles and lanterns. Farm tools were supplied by the Government; gardens were planted to supply food for the families. Those of us who know the area today admire the courage and fortitude of these settlers in clearing this rocky land. One cannot begin to realize the hardships which these people must have endured. The long hard winters surely took their toll. Births took place in the parent's homes and rarely did a doctor attend, nor was sterilizing carried out as it is now. The dead were waked at home, not at a funeral parlor as they are today. A white crepe for a child, or a black crepe for an adult was hung on the front door. The deceased were usually laid out on ordinary planks supported by carpenter sawhorses and covered by white sheets. Among the things that the undertaker brought to the home were clay pipes and a large box of tobacco. The male mourners took the pipes, filled them, and retired to the kitchen to sit and smoke and reminisce on the life of the deceased. The Celts were prone to look with favour upon the grape, and therefore, liquor had its place at wakes. The Irish were great people to attend wakes, and these sometimes lasted all night. Neighbours brought food and home baked goods to feed the mourners. Food on these occasions was plentiful as the Irish were hospitable people. The Rosary and prayers for the dead were recited by all. Many neighbours and relatives met only at these wakes, relieving some of the sorrow with their news and chatter. The casket was kept until just before the funeral procession, when the deceased was then placed in it for the journey to the Church. The horse drawn hearses were elaborately carved and the hoses had black tassels placed in their manes.

In the olden days, people looked after their livestock with loving care, and they often received more attention than the family. This is not noted as a criticism, but as a fact, since the animals represented a major investment. Children walked miles to school in snow storms and well below zero weather, when horse could not be taken out. It is a fact that people would toil by the hour, prying and shoving an object, rather than hitch up the team to pull it out and risk tiring or staining the horses. The story is told of a man whose horse was his prized possession, and therefore was treated with great care. Flour and feed were in one hundred pound sack, and this good man, upon purchasing a sack, hoisted it upon his own shoulders before mounting his horse, because he figured that this would keep the weight off the horse. He then proceeded to ride the six miles to his home, secure in the thought that the horse was suffering no heavier a load than usual.

As there was no chapel at first, the immigrants went to Mass at Ste. Scholastique. This entailed about an eight mile walk, and it was therefore made only in good weather.

A cross was erected near the crossroads of St. Columban, and in bad weather, the people came there to recite prayers. In 1835, a chapel was built near the wayside cross, and it contained a room for a school. Later on, when the chapel was repaired, the school became a Sacristy and a separate school was built. When the present parish hall was built, traces of the old school foundations were found. For many years, the people used the expression “to go to the Cross” instead of “To go to Church”, thus showing their devotion to the old wayside cross where so many had recited prayers.

On October 14 1835, The Parish of St. Columban was officially founded. The parish priest of Ste. Scholastique, Rev. Fr. Vallée and the parish priest of Recollect Church in Montréal called a meeting at the Chapel to elect the original trustees. A list of these men and the areas they represented appear on the next page. The unanimously elected warden-in-chiefs were John Phelan, Captain D. Phelan and John Ryan. Rev Father Etienne Blyth arrived a short time later and became the first Parish Priest. Father Blyth’s rectory burned to the ground in 1837, and he immediately started a new one. Though this was a rather rough home, he moved in it as soon as it was livable.

The Parish Priests of those days were both spiritual and temporal leaders of their flock. As well educated men, they were in a position to assist the farmers in many ways. The marriage documents of these days, written in long hand, covered every item owned by the contracting parties. These documents ran into many pages, with such common items as chairs, tables, pipes etc., painfully listed. With notaries and lawyers few and far between, the parishioners took their temporal problems to the priest for advice. One who did much for settlers was Rev. Father Falvey, the third parish priest. He was born in Limerick, Ireland. On December 11 1797. After immigrating to Canada and studying for the priesthood, he was ordained in Montreal in February 1839. Father Falvey arrived in St. Columban in the year 1840 to become the Parish Priest, and for 39 years he held this office. After he retired in 1879, he continued to reside at the parish rectory until his death on February 22 1885. By his own wish, he was buried in the parish cemetery with the people he loved and served so well.

We return to Ireland once again to record a very sad time. The years 1846 – 1847 saw the great migration from Ireland to Canada and the United States. At this time, well over eighty thousand people left the Emerald Island forever. The failure of the potato crops and the epidemic that followed had all but ruined the people of Ireland. The hospitals were full and people were dying in the streets from starvation and disease. So great was the dreaded cholera epidemic that the authorities were practically helpless to cope with it. The poor emigrants carried the disease on board the ships leaving for Canada, and many died at sea, never to see the land of their dreams. As the sailing ships arrived on this side of the Atlantic, the disease was spread in this country. Hastily erected sheds were put up at Quebec and Montreal to house the sick and dying Irish immigrants. Local doctors and nurses were hard pressed to minister to the sick and priests and nuns hurried to their aid. One of these was Rev. Fr. Richard Jackson and he fell ill with the disease and died in 1847. These sheds were located in the Point St. Charles area, near Victoria Bridge, where a large stone bears the following inscription:-

*“To preserve from desecration the remains  
of 6000 immigrants who died from ship fever  
A.D. 1447-1848  
this stone is erected by the workmen of  
Messrs. Pots, Brassay and Betts, employed  
in the construction of the Victoria bridge  
A.D. 1859”*

This was a heartbreaking time in Ireland and had the country on its knees. Many of its people took to wandering the countryside in search of food. Homes were left just as they were, never to be returned to by their owners. Descendants of these people still travel in wagons and are called “Tinkers”. The government has tried to settle these families, but they prefer to live on the move.

During Father Flavey’s time, about the year 1870, the population grew to about two hundred and fifty families. Father Flavey held open house to all the community. He had a large library in the Rectory, and knowing the value of good reading, he encouraged his parishioners to read his books. Bishop Bourget of Montreal spent two winters in St. Columban with Father Flavey as his tutor. The Bishop desired to master the English language so that he might better serve his flock. The peace and tranquility of the country also provided relaxation from his many duties, and it was here that he wrote some of his Pastoral Letters. Father Flavey also offered his Irish hospitality to Msgr. Prince (?) the Vicar General. Father Flavey’s report of the parish in the year 1857 shows a total of 983 people in this community. The early Irish settlers dearly loved their priests, and were at home anywhere, as long as a priest was available to take their problems to.

At this time, there were two schools in the parish. One was located on the property which is now Bonniebrook Golf Club; another was four miles north on the Church road, on the Casey farm, near the road leading to Lake Grimes.

Besides farming, the people worked at lumbering, the potash industry, and stone cutting. During the crop season, many men hired out to established farmers, and in the winter, worked at logging down the Ottawa River.

In those days, the woods provided plenty of game to hunt and trap, and the streams abounded in fish. To this very day, many Montreal sportsmen know St. Columban well as a place to hunt. Wild berries, picked by the womenfolk were preserved for use in the winter months. The abundance of maple trees provided a good supply of syrup. Farm produce could be bartered in Ste. Scholastique for other necessities. Ice was cut from the lakes and rivers in winter and packed deep in sawdust, to be used in summer for refrigeration. Vegetables such as turnips, carrots, beets, potatoes, onions and cabbage were stored in root cellars for winter use. Clothing was strong and practical, to last as

long as possible. Women's shoes were laced and high-buttoned, while their dresses were ankle length, and the good ladies wore several petticoats. Spinning wheels and handlooms were a common sight in the settler's homes, with sheep providing the wool. Soap was also made by a process of using wood ashes and rain water, for detergents were as unknown then as life on the moon is today.

The Irish loved nothing better than a good heated argument. Get two of them together and you would be sure blows would surely follow. However, after the argument, they would shake hands, give a pat on the back, have one for the road, and part as the best of friends. Their witty remarks and dry humor are known the world over. Irish folklore and music are enjoyed by all that hear it, and on St. Patrick's Day you will find a bit of Irish in every nationality. The Irish settlers were a jovial and hard working people. By helping one another in taking in the crops, building homes and erecting barns, they survived. In 1825, there were about one hundred families in the settlement. The first general store was owned and operated by Michael J. Phelan, and was located at the crossroads of the village, opposite the present hotel St. Columban. This one-story, slant-roofed building housed flour, molasses, dried peas and beans, clothing etc., which were bartered for wood that was cut from the settler's land. Liquor could also be purchased by the glass, probably for five cents. Mr. Phelan donated the land behind the store to build a school. The original building still stands, now modernized as a summer camp belonging to Mr. Longtin of Ste. Scholastique.

A blacksmith shop was operated by Mr. Delaney. and was located right behind the present hotel. Two potash plants were in operation, one just north of the general store and the other on Casey's farm up the Church road. During the winter months, ashes were collected and sold to the potash plants to supplement incomes. The newspapers of the day were the Montreal Gazette, which was founded in 1778 by a French printer, and the True Witness, a Catholic paper.

Mr. M.J. Phelan, as the first postmaster, served in the capacity for some fifty-five years. He was written up in the True Witness as the oldest postmaster, in years of service, in the country. He met the Montreal-to-Ottawa stagecoach at "Snowdon", now known as Belle Riviere, to pick up the mail which he delivered on horseback. Mr. Phelan, an educated man, was often referred to as "The Boss".

A man by the name of Kelly ran the cooper mill and eventually became known as "Copper Kelly". The second postmaster was Patrick Phelan, son of the original postmaster. His sister, Julia, was the third in line to hold the office. The genial Gerald Phelan, present postmaster, is only the fourth person to hold that office in well over one hundred years.

In the early days, no stamps were printed, and therefore, the receiver of the mail paid the charges upon receiving it. Letters were written on any available type of paper, then folded over and addressed. The first postage stamp was issued in 1851. As there were no cadastral numbers, the sender described the area where the receiver lived. The currency used in those days was the English Pound.

The first settlers probably journeyed to St. Columban by stage coach from Montreal by way of Ste. Scholastique to “Snowdon”; then by foot to St. Columban. This was, in those days, an arduous and tiresome journey, and at least three changes of fresh horses were needed before the stage reached Snowdon. As far as can be ascertained, the rate of speed of the stage coach was about five to six miles per hour. As time progressed, the early settlers obtained their own wagons and teams, and in the early fall, would load their produce to journey to Montreal’s Bonsecours Market. As this was a long trip, several of them took lodgings at an Inn located at Park (Avenue) and Mount Royal (Street), and, though not its name, the place became known to the settlers as the “Halfway House”.

The Church Road in those days was just a trail made by the wagon wheels on the rocky surface, worn down by many trips. It was therefore difficult and at places, hard to maneuver. It said that often, when journeying the hills of the Church Road, the loads would become too heavy for the horses, and part of the load would be left beside the road. Should anyone following have room, he would pick up the load and deliver it; it was unthinkable for even one item, no matter how long it was left at the roadside, to be stolen.

A Dr. Murphy donated land near Pine Gardens to build the parish church, and though the land was never used for this purpose, it was always referred to as the church lot.

It might be mentioned here that the original Irish Protestant immigrants settled in Morin Heights.

Rev. Fr. Phelan, who had great devotion to the Irish monk, St. Columban, gave his settlement this name. St. Columban, the Irish Abbot of Luxeuil, was born in the year 540, and died in Bobbio, Italy, in the year 615. He was an Irish missionary to Europe and a great scholar of his time. St. Columban and his companions traveled to France, Switzerland and eventually to Italy to do missionary work. One who toiled with him in his efforts to eradicate impiety was St. Gall. St. Columban’s feast is celebrated November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The story is told that when Father Phelan was leaving the parish for the last time, upon reaching the North River, turned, and with sorrow filled eyes, blessed the area against epidemics. As later on, during the cholera epidemic of 1852, Ste. Scholastic was hard hit and many died daily of this dreaded disease. These people were buried at once with the clothing they died in, to try to stem the epidemic. A few years ago, when graves were exhumed to move the cemetery, clay pipes were found, to prove that the dead had been buried immediately. St. Columban was not hit by this epidemic, thanks to Father Phelan’s blessing. To date, no epidemic of any sort has visited the parish.

It is very unfortunate that the difficulties in farming the land and the small return on their produce made the young flock dissatisfied. By 1880 many left to take employment in Montreal, a city which had been growing rapidly. The city afforded better

working conditions and salaries to the young generation. Some also journeyed to Ontario, and then on to various parts of the United States in search of employment. We believe that, had the parents divided their land amongst their sons, many of the young men would have remained on the land to make their living. As it turned out, with the young folk gone, many farms had to be eventually sold and thus the Irish community dwindled. In a little over half a century, a community was founded, grew, and then began to decline. The parish records of 1858 give the following statistics:

|               |    |
|---------------|----|
| Births .....  | 41 |
| Burials ..... | 10 |
| Marriages ... | 6  |

and, in the year 1859, the same statistics show:

|               |    |
|---------------|----|
| Births.....   | 39 |
| Burials ..... | 10 |
| Marriages ... | 5  |

Some thirty years later, in 1881, the same statistics show the following:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Births .....  | 3 |
| Burials ..... | 9 |
| Marriages ..  | 1 |

and, for the year 1889:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Births .....  | 8 |
| Burials ..... | 8 |
| Marriages ..  | 0 |

In the year 1865, all parish records were forwarded to St. Jerome, as they still are today. Prior to that date, all recordings were sent to Montreal, as St. Columban come under that Diocese till the founding of the St. Jerome Diocese.

The year 1867 saw the founding of Confederation, with the Rt. Hon. Sir John A. Mc Donald as our first prime minister. This great event was as important to St. Columban as it was to the rest of the country.

At first, only a few French families settled in the area, but they increased gradually, filling the void as the original Irish settlers left. The greatest loss of population was between 1881 and 1891. Around the year 1911, the Irish lost their majority in the community. The year 1891, saw the Rev. Father Forget-Despatie become the parish priest. He was born July 28 1841 at St. Francois de Salle and ordained on November 4 1866. Around the year 1881, there were eighty four families in the area comprising of five hundred and fifty seven souls. St. Columban had four schools with a total attendance of

thirty five boys and twenty five girls. We find that in 1888, about thirty families left for the city or various parts of the United States. Also about a dozen more young men left for the States.

In 1822, the first brick rectory was built, and this building burned to the ground in 1914. This terrible fire had the entire community in great (???? Page missing).

... heating purposes. There were three church wardens that year, Michael Phelan, Theo Huot, and M. Kensilla to assist the pastor, Rev. Fr. Charles Descarrier in administrating the parish. At the time, the rectory was a sloped, shingled roofed building about twice the size of the present one. The first wooden bridge at St. Canut, across the North River was built by a Mr. McKenzie. He later sold it to a Mr. Boyd, who had a grinding mill for wheat. In 1903, the Cyr brothers bought the bridge and built an electric generator. They supplied the first electric power to St. Canut and Ste. Scholastique. Eventually these people sold out to the Gatineau Power Company, which is now owned by Hydro Quebec.

The Canada Steel company of Grenville started to build a plant at Black's place in 1915. From 1916 to 1921, they operated making wooden nail kegs. They bought the wood cutting rights around what is today Lac Chevreuil for their products. They had a siding on the Grand Nord to load and ship the nail kegs.

The year 1911 saw the first "Back to St. Columban" celebrations held in the fields behind the present Phelan home. All wore badges with "Back to St. Columban 1911" printed on, with long green ribbons attached. The main event was a huge picnic which was carried off with great success. A highlight of the event was the arrival of the first motor car in St. Columban. Rented in Montreal by Mr. Pat Elliot, and driven by a chauffeur, it caused great interest upon its arrival.

The True Witness of February 9 1905 carried a front page account of the life and death of Sister Mary St. Patrick. This good nun spent most of her life in the service of the Parish of St. Columban. Born in Kilkenny, Ireland, on August 5 1828, daughter of John and Mary Phelan who emigrated to Canada in 1830. They settled in St. Columban and here she lived until about twelve years of age. She then went to Montreal to become a novice in the Congregation of Notre Dame. Some time later, before taking her religious vows, she suffered a painful accident. The injury was a dislocated ankle which the physicians said was incurable. As this was very painful, she therefore returned to her parent's home in St. Columban. It is assumed that these good people were greatly saddened at this turn of events, as was their daughter. A short time later, her uncle, Bishop Phelan heard of her accident and, having compassion for his brother and his family, visited St. Columban. It was during his stay that her ankle miraculously returned to normal. Bishop Phelan then gave special permission for Sister Mary to take her vows under her father's roof, and to lead her religious life in her aged parents household. In this house, which still stands today, a few hundred feet from the Church, Sister Mary had her own chapel. For sixty years, Sister Mary St. Patrick served the people in many ways. Apart from her many hours of meditation and prayers in her private chapel, she had three

special tasks. The first was that of looking after the Alter and Sacristy of the parish church, which she performed with loving piety. She became an artist in her floral decorations of the main Alter. The second was the care of the sick in the settlement. Her wise counseling and tender sollicitation saved many of the sick, gaining for her the love and respect of all. Wherever and whatever time sickness befell one of the settlers, she was sure to be on hand ministering to their ills. Day and night, Sister St. Patrick was combination doctor, nurse and friend to the sick and lonely of the parish. The third and probably dearest to her heart, was the religious training of the children. She taught them from their catechism and prepared them for their first Holy Communion. This good woman wisely waylaid their childhood fears and patiently dealt with their candid questions. There are many who have gone out from her class into the world with integrity and sure of their faith.

Among Sister Mary St. Patrick's treasured possessions was a relic of the True Cross, given to her by Father Flavey. The relic remained in her chapel until after her death, whereupon it was then returned to the church by her relatives. Many years later Gerald Phelan and Peter Casey emptied her old medicine chest, destroying many bottles marked with the old skull and crossbones, the last physical reminder of her nursing days.

The Parish of St. Columban suffered a great loss in the death of Sister Mary St. Patrick. On the morning of Friday, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1905, she passed away peacefully from pneumonia, leaving a great void in the community. Her funeral was held on Monday, January 30<sup>th</sup> 1905 in the parish church. Father Forget, then pastor of St. Columban, sang Mass, assisted by Father Hétu, pastor of Ste. Scholastique. The combined choirs of St. Columban and of Ste. Scholastique sang the Mass for the dead. The community turned out to a man to pay a last tribute to this great lady. Many also came from St. Jérôme, Ste. Scholastique, St. Canut and even Montreal, where she had many friends. The funeral procession was the largest in the history of the community. The chief mourners were her two brothers, M.J. Phelan, postmaster, and Dr. C. Phelan of Waterloo, Quebec, and her sister Mrs. S. O'Rourke. The parish cemetery, in which she is buried, dates back to over one hundred and thirty years. It is now well kept and will eventually have The Way of The Cross in stone memorials. The mortal remains of ell over eight hundred of the Irish are laid to rest here.

The tenth Parish Priest in St. Columban was the Rev. Fr. B. Presseault. Born in Ste. Scholastique in 1896, he was ordained a priest on May 15<sup>th</sup> 1921 at Ste. Therese, Quebec. He was a professor in the Seminary of Ste. Therese until 1924. From 1924 until 1926, he was an assistant at St. Clement de Viauville Parish in Montreal. He served as priest from 1926 to 1935 at Sacre Coeur Parish and in 1935 was named parish priest of St. Columban, remaining there until 1940. Then, in the year 1940, he founded St. Martyr Canadienne Parish. Four years later, in 1944, he was transferred to St. Joseph de Bordeau Parish and remained there for six years. The 1950 saw him become the Curé of St. Amboise, Montreal, where he died in 1961. Father Presseault is buried in the cemetery of his birthplace, Ste. Scholastique. During his term at St. Columban, he did much to develop the area. The people took to Father Presseault at once, and rallied around him in his efforts to improve the parish and the community. During the early winters there, he

traveled by dog sled. His tow Great Dames were called Prince and Jack, and were trained by Mr. Paul Presseault of Ste. Scholastique. In 1930, Father Presseault had a Ford converted into a snowmobile. Father Robillard, in later years had a Bombardier snowmobile to travel the parish. Father Presseault was greatly responsible for widening and gravelling the Church road. Electric lights were introduced into the community during his time. His field days were always big events and well attended. People traveled from Montreal by train and bus to attend these events. The monies raised at these outings were of great assistance in financing the parish.

In 1925, the jail at Ste. Scholastique was closed. and the prisoners were moved to St. Jerome. About 1936, when the old jail was being demolished, Father Presseault obtained permission to get the hardwood flooring for the parish church of St. Columban.

On September 12<sup>th</sup> 1936, His Excellency Archbishop George Gauthier consecrated the private chapel of Mr. and Mrs. Perrin at Bonnibrooke. This beautiful log chapel with its stained glass windows and small organ loft is a pleasure to behold. The chapel is named St. Peter of Bonnibrooke, which is also the Christian name of Mr. Perrin. A reproduction of the official invitation is found on the next page, and you will note that it states "Evening Dress" ( **A copy of this invitation is unfortunately, not included in this document**) Mr. A. A. Gardiner, representing Mr. Hungerford, President of the Canadian National Railways, donated the chapel bell. That same day, Mr. & Mrs. Perrin held a garden party at their home in St. Columban. Mr. & Mrs. Roger Perrin now operate Bonnibrooke Golf Club, which was built in (????) by Mr. (?????). This is one of the most picturesque spots, with beautiful fairways, greens and a creek meandering through the property. Besides the clubhouse, chapel etc. there is also a large log house lodge. This building has a rustic lounge with a huge fireplace and an adjoining dining room, overlooking the brook. Bonnibrooke is well known to Montreal golfers and many large business firms have held their annual tournaments here.

It was during Father Presseault's pastorate that the Parish centennial took place. Due to the repair work underway on the church, only preliminary ceremonies were held in 1936. In 1937, the formal ceremonies were held to celebrate this important event in the community. His Excellency, the Most Rev. Georges Gauthier, D.D., Archbishop of Montreal, journeyed to St. Columban to celebrate the High Mass. Among the distinguished guests were Msgr. Chartier, Apostolic Vicar of Montreal; Rev. Fr. Hall, O.M.I. of Ottawa; Father Labelle, Parish Priest of St. Jerome; and Father Elliott, Parish Priest of St. Dominic's, Montreal. After Mass, a banquet was held on the church grounds, and in the afternoon, a special ceremony in the parish cemetery. That evening, all attended a fireworks display. A century of Irish Catholic history in the Laurentians had been completed and recorded for posterity. These celebrations, it must be noted, were joined, not by the Irish alone, but by Canadians of French, Polish and Ukrainian backgrounds. This, in itself, is a tribute to the brotherhood of these people.

We might point out here that Mr. Paul Presseault, brother of the late Father Presseault, still lives in Ste. Scholastique. Mr. and Mrs. Presseault are continuing

members of our community, as Mr. Presseault owns a summer camp located not too far from the parish church.

Of the great feasts celebrated each year by the Christian world, Christmas and Easter are the most joyous. The celebration of the birth of Christ seems to nourish and re-awaken more love and goodwill towards men of all faiths. Let us dwell on the old Midnight Masses as attended by the early settlers. It surely must have been a story book scene at the first Midnight Masses in St. Columban. Imagine, if you will, the tinkle of sleigh bells; the horse's breath like puffs of smoke on the crisp air; the warmth of the wood fire; the jovial greetings of neighbours, the lamp-lit church, the warmth of the wood fires, the swell of the organ music as the congregation sang the sacred hymns and the traditional carols; the freshly scrubbed altar boys; the priest in his brilliant robes; and, the simplicity and enduring faith of the Irish at their devotions. And, most important of all, as it still is today, the Holy Sacrament of the Mass. Afterwards, the seasonal greetings of the parishioners; the loading of the sleigh and the return in the early morning moonlight, or the light of falling snow, to the homes decorated with thistle and trees, the homemade gifts and the laughter and delight of children. It is not true that those of us who live in the hustle and bustle of the city, dream of attending Midnight Mass in the country? We associate the feast of the birth of Christ with a white Christmas in the beautiful countryside. Today, the people who worship each Sunday in the St. Columban parish church, and especially the Christmas Midnight Mass, are continuing the history of an old and honoured community. Now, the sheds for the horses and buggies are gone; replaced by a paved lot for cars. However, the spirit of friendship and goodwill continues, and is never more evident than during the Christmas season.

The parish now boasts a community hall with a stage and new kitchen. These are the results of the efforts and guiding hand of the Rev. Fr. B. Desjardins, the present parish priest.

One organization in the community that keeps very active and does an excellent job is the Catholic Women's League. In office, at the present time, is Miss Teresa Elliott of St. Columban and Montreal. These ladies are tireless in their efforts on behalf of the parish and the community. Among their activities besides their regular meetings, they hold card parties, corn roasts and the annual Children's Christmas Party. The latter has become the event of the year and is eagerly looked forward to by a large number of the children. Santa never fails to appear and each child under twelve years of age receives a present. Skits and songs liven the event and candy, soft drinks and chips add to the party. The laughter and expressions on the children's faces make the affair a success. The League was inaugurated in St. Columban in 1960 by Mrs. Harriet Grimes, who became its first president. It seems a shame that the membership is so small and more ladies of the community are unwilling to enter the organization. The ladies of the C.W.L. with their colourful costumes of one hundred years ago, put on a bake sale during the 1967 festival, and it turned out to be the hit of the weekend. Many residents and tourists are of the opinion that this should be an annual event.

Early in March 1967, a general public meeting was held in the parish hall to outline a summer festival. The meeting was presided over by Father Desjardins and a goodly crowd attended. The following committee was elected to carry out the festival activities:-

|                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| J. Simard & E. Kennedy - | Co-Presidents       |
| Father B. Desjardins -   | Honourary President |
| N. Zuck & F. Legault -   | Vice-Presidents     |
| Mrs. J. Walsh -          | Secretary-Treasurer |
| R. Gauthier -            | Publicity           |

It was decided to hold the festival in July over a three day period, with as many events as possible taking place. The main idea in celebrating Canada's Centennial Year was to have something of interest for everyone in the community. The Festival was supported by all the clubs and lodges in the area, and drew a large crowd. The newspapers of St. Jerome, Lachute; St. Eustache and Montreal gave the event good coverage and one paper called it a major success. Held in ideal weather conditions, the following events took place: a golf tournament, field day, home bake sale, gala bingo, fishing contest, amateur hour, costume ball, and crowning of the Festival Queen. A large group of ladies wore costumes of one hundred years ago, and were very elegant and colourful, with hoped skirts in abundance. From the opening tee off at Bonnibrook Golf Course to the closing Costume Ball at Colford's Lodge, an atmosphere of fun and goodwill prevailed. The following were among the special guests: Mayor & Mrs. G. Noel; Mr. & Mrs. R. Regimbald M.P. ; Mr. Frank Hanley M.N.A.; and Mr. J. Beliveau.

The late John Colford, whose property on the North River Road, comprising of some five hundred acres, served as Mayor from 1933 to 1941. Mr. Colford, a farmer, began taking in summer tourists in 1933 at the family home. In 1941, his son, Anthony, then a salesman in Montreal, built a place across from his Father's and went into the tourist trade. During the ensuing years, he built several additions to the original building, the first of these in 1944 and the last in 1955. Mr. Colford obtained a liquor license in 1948 and in 1953, added the lake to the property, plus his ski hill in 1961. The lodge has forty guest rooms, lounge, dining room, large cocktail bar and dance floor. Year round, summer and winter, there are two orchestras in attendance during the weekends. Pete McDonald and his Country Gentlemen are now in their fifth year and are a popular group. The lounge has a seating capacity of six hundred people, many of whom come up from Montreal to enjoy the music and dancing. For many years, Colford's has been a popular summer holiday spot for families from Montreal and Ottawa. Each year, since 1959, Mr. Colford has held a Bingo, in aid of the parish, and they have always been well attended. In the west end of the property, there is evidence of an old cemetery, probably dating back to the original settlers.

Lake Noel is situated 2.5 Miles north of the village on the Church road. This large development is owned by Mr. Gabriel Noel, who is now serving his second consecutive term as Mayor of St. Columban.

Lake Gauthier was built in??? by Mr. Gauthier, and has?? cottages on the property. Also situated on the Church Road, it is easily accessible, both summer and winter.

Springwater lake is on the Cote St.??? Road, about?? miles from the village. This development takes in part of the old McGarr farm, which dates back to about????

We have now dealt in some details with the lakes of the parish and should now turn to the village. Besides the church property and its buildings, there is a post office; Kavanagh's Service Station; Hotel St. Columban; Fortier's General Store; Couture's Restaurant; and Sevigny's Garage.

Mr. Felix Légaré bought land from Mr. Funchion, and in the spring of 1945, built his lake. Mr. & Mrs. F. Légaré had twelve children, and came to St. Columban from Lakefield. Lake Légaré has approximately one hundred and forty camps around the lake and fifteen are all year-round homes. Mr. Légaré was the Mayor of St. Columban during the years??? to? He eventually sold part of his lake to his son, Jean-Claude, who is a member of the Quebec Provincial Police. Mr. Felix Légaré built his home on the road into the lake in 1964. Lake Légaré has paved roads and is about one mile in circumference. In November 1967, the Manoir at the lake burned down, eliminating another landmark in the area.

Lake Capri was built by Reo and Richard Arbic in ??? and has about one hundred and fifty cottages. The Arbic brothers are building a Golf Course, seven holes of which are in operation. The Golf professional is Leo Laforce, and the club has over sixty members. The log lodge is unique in its shape and construction, having as its main support, a twenty-eight inch diameter log set in seven feet of concrete. Liquor and meals are served in a rustic lounge, whose floor is made of various sizes of cut logs.

L'Hereux is approximately three quarters of a mile long, and well kept. It is very beautiful in appearance. It is by far the most natural looking of all the local artificial lakes. Carefully planned, and with twenty-four homes built and occupied, Lake L'Hereux is a beauty spot of St. Columban. Owned by Mr. & Mrs. Julian L'Hereux, it is being developed at a rate of three new homes a year. This development covers six farms, which years ago belonged to Mr. Mulloy. Mr. L'Hereux is a present member of the Town Council and a Church Warden.

We come now to Pine Gardens, on Cote St. Paul Road, and its history in the community. Mr. Kotliroff came to Canada in 1923 from Russia and in 1935 bought the one hundred and thirty five acres which comprise Pine Gardens. Mr. Kotliroff and his wife, first built a camp as a hunting lodge for themselves. As time passed, he built twenty one summer camps and a restaurant on the main road. In the early years, his tenants mostly had no ??? thus the reason for building the restaurant. Over the years, the Kotliroffs have sold forty building lots and continue to sell lots on the property. In the early days, Pine Gardens was a cleared forest with ??? of pheasants (fifteen different varieties), peacocks, rabbits, ducks etc. spaced through the grounds and was a pretty spot

to stroll though on a summer day. Our times remember the beautiful peacocks with tails as high as four feet and their intriguing colours. Mr. Kotliroff has sold his prize peacocks to the zoo at Granby and also at Sherbrooke. At the time, Father Desjardins was building the parish hall, the Kotliroffs held a bingo on their grounds and raised the goodly sum of over four hundred dollars in aid of the building. They also held one to fix the schoolyard and supply playing equipment for the school children.

### **ST. COLUMBAN PARISH PRIESTS**

|            |                        |
|------------|------------------------|
| 1836-1838  | Rev. Fr. Etienne Blyth |
| 1838-1840  | Dolan                  |
| 1840-1880  | Falvey                 |
| 1880-1889  | Pierre Boissant        |
| 1889- 1891 | Charles Codot          |
| 1891- 1905 | Forget-Despatie        |
| 1905-1909  | Charles Descarriers    |
| 1909- 1935 | Luger Desjardins       |
| 1935- 1940 | B. Pressault           |
| 1940- 1942 | René Pelletier         |
| 1942- 1946 | Michael Jodin          |
| 1946- 1950 | Adrien Robillard       |
| 1950-      | Bernard Desjardins     |

## MAYORS OF ST. COLUMBAN

James Murray

John Hall

John Power

Michael Grimes

Martin Dwyer ((?)

James Hall

Frank Keyes

John McAndrew

John Colford

William Wood

Frank Keyes

Joseph Carroll

Charlemagne Huot

Peter J. Perron

Felix Légaré

Joseph Carroll

Gabriel Noel