



St. Columban - Irish 

Remembering St. Columban

Fergus V. Keyes
September 23, 2006

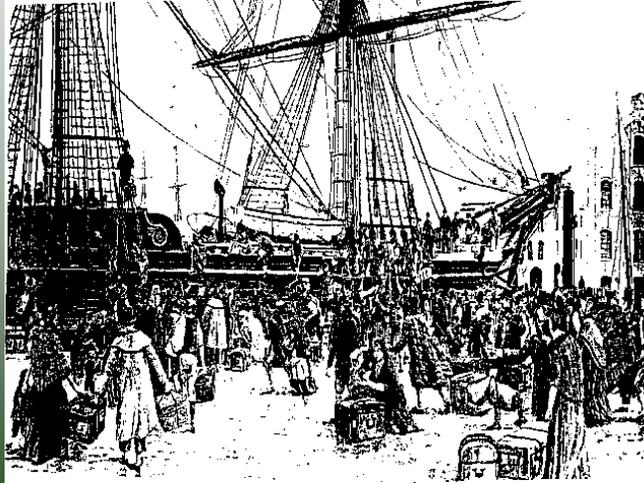


St. Columban - Irish 

The History of St. Columban



St. Columban - Irish Irish-Canadian Migration



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In the early 1800's a number of Irish families left Ireland to settle in Lower Canada. Later called Canada East and now, of course called Quebec. The majority of these immigrants ended up in either Quebec City or Montreal.

Most were escaping from the difficult economic times, and falling produce prices, in Ireland caused by the end of the Napoleonic wars.

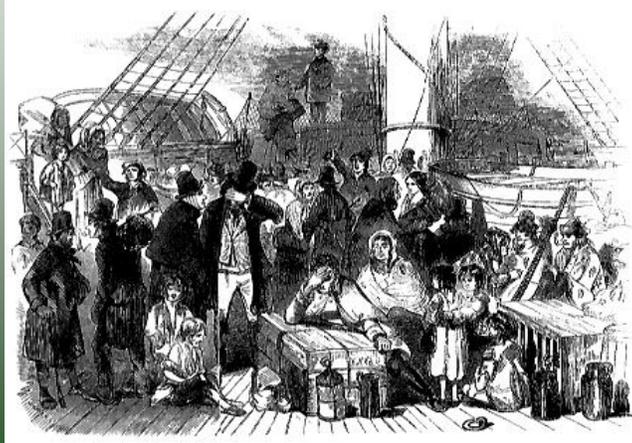
Most of these arrivals that eventually reached St. Columban and that we will refer to today, were farmers and Roman Catholics.

Although there were certainly a few Irish in Quebec as noted in 1710 and there was an Irish regiment in 1759 at the Plains of Abraham – some of who stayed in Quebec after the Conquest, this group that arrived in the early 1800's likely represented , if not the first, certainly one of the first large groups of Irish Immigrants to step foot on Canadian shores.

With the large families that they later produced, it is likely that many, many people who claim some Irish heritage in Quebec, Ontario and even Western Canada and parts of the U.S. are descendant of this original group of Irish pioneers.



St. Columban - Irish Irish-Canadian Migration



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It should also be noted that although certainly not wealthy, this group was likely better off than the Irish Famine victims that arrived a couple of decades later.



St. Columban - Irish Bonsecours Church - Montreal



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As early as 1817, a group of these Irish immigrants began to attend Catholic services at the Old Bonsecours Church in Montreal.

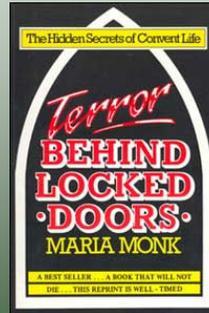
They were first cared for by Father Richard Jackson, born in Virginia. By 1830 there were so many Irish Catholics in Montreal that they moved their services to St. Helen's Church, which was the old Recollet Convent at the corner of St. Helene and Notre Dame Streets in Montreal. The Irish almost immediately started calling this new location "The Regglie"

and as their numbers grew, the Catholic diocese of Quebec decided that they should find an "Irish" priest to attend to these parishioners.



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Father Patrick Phelan 1795



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Eventually a Father Patrick Phelan was located in Boston.

Father Phelan had been born in Kilkenny in 1795.

He came to Montreal to study theology at the Grand Seminaire and became a member of the Gentlemen of St. Sulpice in 1825 when he became the first priest ordained by Bishop Latrique.

Later on in his career, Father Phelan became a Bishop of Kingston and responsible for Bytown – Ottawa.

Father Phelan likely spoke English; French and Irish Gaelic which would have made him ideal for the position.

As a side note, he was also the priest accused by Marie Monk in her famous book “Behind Closed Doors” of being the father of her child. This book dealt with sexual abuse and the Catholic Church managed to have the book “de-bunked” and Marie Monk seen as a prostitute and a liar.

However, this accusation did not seem to hurt Father Phelan’s career since as noted he went on to be a Bishop and most documents note that he was both respected and very well liked.



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Now there was land in Northern Two Mountains, near St. Jerome, that had not been settled & Father Phelan convinced his Gentlemen of St. Sulpice to offer his area to his Irish parishioners for free (although they did have to pay taxes to the Seigneurie). However, it should be noted that even before Phelan's group arrived, there were already some Irish families living in the general area. Prior to the establishment of the Parish of St. Columban, the area was under the jurisdiction of Ste. Scholastique and as early as 1820, there is a baptism of Mary Purcell as well, as in 1825, the election of a John Ryan as a warden for the Church as Ste. Scholastique.

Although today only about a 45 minute drive, to reach St. Columban which is about 40 miles NW of Montreal in the early 1800's was a journey.....

There were many rivers to cross; horses had to be changed a couple of times during the trip and getting to the area of St. Columban moved along at the most in a speed of 5 or 6 miles an hour.

Once they arrived there was land to clear.



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Once they arrived there was land to clear. And there is a note that a few families lived in a cave like rock for the first winter under they could build some kind of other accommodation.



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Catholic Service



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Originally, the Irish of St. Columban had to walk about 8 miles to attend Catholic services in Ste. Scholastique. However, if the weather was bad, they would meet at the crossroads in St. Columban and said their prayers there at a wayside cross. However on October 14 1835, the Parish of St. Columban was officially founded. Since this Church served an almost 100% English speaking Irish community, St. Columban could be considered on of the earliest Irish churches in Canada. For example St. Patrick's Church of Montreal was only built in 1847 and although St. Patrick's in Quebec city opened in 1832-3, this Church remained a part of the Notre Dame du Quebec parish and only started keeping their own Parish records in 1856. It should also be noted that the Montreal Catholic Diocese was not crazy about having separate Irish & English speaking Churches. And the inhabitants of St. Columban spent a number of years driving the Bishop in Montreal crazy with letters demanding that they have their own Parish.

The opposition to English speaking Churches was the result of a whole lot of politics. There was some argument between the Sulpician order and the Jesuits; It was also quite simple in those days – if you spoke English – you were Protestant and if you spoke French you were Catholic – so how could these English speaking Irish be Catholic. There was also the argument that the services were in Latin anyway and that the Irish should just adapt. But the Catholics of St. Columban did manage to have their own English speaking parish and started keeping their own Parish records immediately - which as mentioned was certainly one of the first English parishes in Quebec.



St. Columban - Irish

Barden ~ Barrett ~ Barry ~ Barsalov ~ Bergin ~ Bigras ~ Biroleau
~ Blanchfield ~ Blessings ~ Bracken ~ Bradsham ~ Bradshaw ~
Breen ~ Breenan ~ Brenan ~ Brislane ~ Brophy ~ Burk ~ Burke ~
Burns ~ Calahan ~ Campbell ~ Cantwell ~ Carrol ~ Carty ~ Casey
~ Cheni ~ Clermont ~ Cole ~ Connor ~ Contwell ~ Conway ~
Coughlan ~ Cowan ~ Cowley ~ Culfinan ~ Cullen ~ Cullin ~
Cullinan ~ Daly ~ Dempsey ~ Dobbie ~ Donaghy ~ Donnelen ~
Downie ~ Dubois ~ Dunn ~ Dwier ~ Dwyer ~ Elaith ~ Ennis ~
Evans ~ Evans ~ Fahey ~ Farrel ~ Farrell ~ Fenegan ~ Fieldhouse
~ Flaherty ~ Flower ~ Flynn ~ Forester ~ Franey ~ Galaher ~ Gaul
~ Gentill ~ Globensky ~ Godin ~ Gormley ~ Grace ~ Grady ~
Graham ~ Gray ~ Grenier ~ Grimes ~ Hagans ~ Hagen ~ Haley ~
Haley ~ Hall ~ Hanavan ~ Hanaven ~ Hannavan ~ Harrington ~
Hart ~ Healy ~ Heenan ~ Hendley ~ Higar ~ Hiro ~ Hoay ~ Horan ~
Horan ~ Hotte ~ Howard ~ Hughes ~ Hunter ~ Hurley ~ Kane ~
Kavan ~ Keenan ~ Kehoe ~ Kelley ~ Kelly ~ Kenna ~ Kennedy ~
Kenny ~ Keyes ~ Kinshala ~ Koudh ~ Kough ~ Lahy ~ Lamb ~
Lanigan ~

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Some of the most common names of the early settlers in St. Columban include....

The settlers also seemed to use a limited number of first names: For boys; Patrick, John and Michael and for girls; Bridget, Mary, Margaret. Since they also seemed to use the system of naming the first boys after the father's father; and the second after the mother's father etc. – You end up with a lot of Patrick Murphy's and Mary Kennedys etc.



St. Columban - Irish

Laurton ~ Laverty ~ Lawless ~ Lawrence ~ Leary ~ Leonard ~
Lowell ~ Lynch ~ Madden ~ Maddin ~ Madegar ~ Madigan ~
Magan ~ Magher ~ Marshall ~ Materson ~ McAlley, ~ McAvay ~
McCarthy ~ McConill ~ McCormick ~ McDonald ~ McDonnell ~
McGarr ~ McGeoy ~ McGill ~ McGinity ~ McGoey ~ McGran ~
McGran ~ McGrath ~ McGuire ~ McKenzie ~ McKeown ~
McLaughlin ~ McNab ~ McNaughton ~ Mccabe ~ Meegan ~
Meloche ~ Millar ~ Millen ~ Miron ~ Miron ~ Molloy ~ Molloy ~
Mooney ~ Morrissey ~ Murphey ~ Murphy ~ Murray ~ Nantel ~
O'Brian ~ O'Brien ~ O'Connor ~ O'Kane ~ O'Leary ~ O'Mara ~
O'Neil ~ Ouellette ~ Ouimet ~ Owen ~ Pearce ~ Pearse ~ Pearsy ~
Pennyfather ~ Phelan ~ Power ~ Pridgit ~ Prior ~ Purcell ~
Quinlan ~ Quinn ~ Reilly ~ Rely ~ Reynolds ~ Richies ~ Rielly ~
Riely ~ Rinnag ~ Roche ~ Ryan ~ Ryan ~ Saghnohy ~ Sexton ~
Shaughnessy ~ Shay ~ Shea ~ Sheahan ~ Sheehy ~ Sheffer ~
Shehan ~ Skelly ~ Slattery ~ Smith ~ Snowdon ~ Stack ~
Stapleton ~ Strong ~ Tahan ~ Tanen ~ Tracy ~ Twoney ~ Tywell ~
Vezeau ~ Wade ~ Walsh ~ Whalen ~ Whelan ~ While ~ Williams

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And, often if a child died young, the next child of the same gender would be given the same name of deceased child. In one case, we find one family named three sons the same name after the first two had died.

It can drive you crazy when trying to link the families together-



St. Columban - Irish 

About the Settlers

- ❖ Most were farmers
- ❖ Some worked in the lumber industry
- ❖ Others in potash & rock quarries
- ❖ And, of course some provided the service industries such as blacksmithing etc.

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Some general information about the settlers:

- ❖ Most were farmers
- ❖ Some worked in the Lumber industry
- ❖ Others in Potash & rock Quarries
- ❖ And, of course some provided the service industries such as Blacksmithing etc.

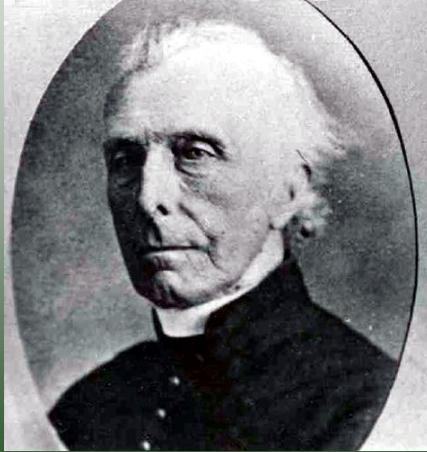
The records also show that they loved good house parties with the fiddles playing; a good argument and smoking clay pipes.

There was also plenty of game to hunt and fish in the waters around St. Columban. They also grew vegetables which they kept in root cellars and cut ice in the Winter which was then put in saw dust for summer re Fridgeration.



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Father John Falvey 1791-1885



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Of course, in those days the Catholic Church played a big role in the lives of the settlers. And in St. Columban, they were lucky to find as the 3rd Parish priest - Father Falvey.

This priest born in 1791, arrived in St. Columban in 1840 and stayed in the community until his death in 1885. A total of more than 45 years.

Father Falvey had been born in Limerick and knew and understood the hardships of all his parishioners.

Of course, in those days the Parish Priest was also likely the most educated, provided a lot of other services in addition to religious duties – They often wrote letters for the farmers; sat as the judge to settle arguments; recorded the villages information and in Father Falvey's case even set up a little library in his home for the use of his flock.

Like most immigrants to Canada, even today, parents wanted a better life for their children and the St. FColumban settlers knew that the best way was with education.

They soon built at least 3 school houses around the community and today the old schoolhouse # 1 has been converted into a local restaurant.



St. Columban - Irish Events of the Time



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It is always difficult to judge how the St. Columban settlers viewed certain events of the time, but we can guess a little.

For example, shortly after the start of the Parish, there was the 1837 Lower Canada Rebellion. In this case we can guess that many of the settlers simply tried to ignore the event. They were recent immigrants; might not have understood the cause of the rebellion and certainly did not know the strength in numbers and resources of the British forces in the 1800's. On the other hand, we do know that some individuals were sent to represent St. Columban at rebel meetings. Of course other Irish like O'Callaghan; Tracey etc. were certainly strong supporters of Papineau and his rebels. So it isn't too difficult to guess that the settlers likely sympathized with the Rebellion and there were likely a few hanging around St. Eustache at the last big battle of the Rebellion since St. Eustache is so close to St. Columban.

decade or so later as the victims of the Irish famine started to arrive, we can also guess that based on population growth that certainly some of these Famine refugees found their way to St. Columban. Some were also likely relatives of the original settlers who after 20 years or so had established their farms etc.

And of course there was the big event of July 1 1867 when the Canadas etc. joined to form our country. But unfortunately at this point I have not seen any records that indicate how the settlers felt about this union....

My own great-great grandfather died on July 22 1867 and so in effect, he was a Canadian as we describe the term today for about 3 weeks!



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The Honourable Mr. Justice Emmett Matthew Hall



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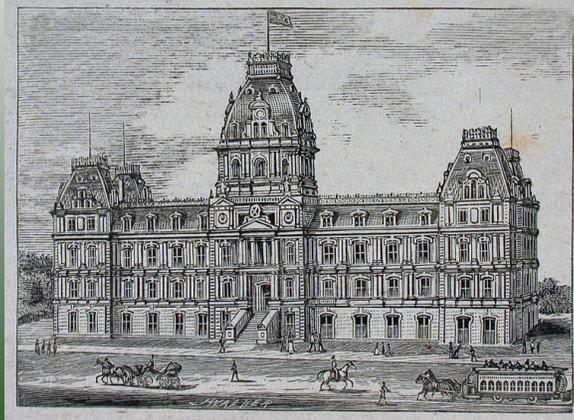
As the education and opportunities improved, St. Columban produced a number of interesting individuals that were well known in their time.

One individual that might be remembered by this audience would be Emmett Matthew Hall. Judge Hall was born in St. Columban in 1886. He moved from the community when he was 12 years old. Judge Hall chaired the Royal Commission on health services in 1961 which took 4 years to complete and resulted in the Canadian Medicare system. Judge Hall is considered by some as the real Father of the Canadian Universal Medicare System.



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Alderman Thomas Kinsella



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There was also Thomas Kinsella born in St. Columban on December 22, 1848 who went on to be a very successful Alderman for the City of Montreal



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Dr. Cornelius Phelan b.1840



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Cornelius Phelan who was born in 1840, became a doctor and moved to Waterloo in the Quebec Townships. He also became very successful and was often consulted by other medical men when they had a difficult case.



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Madden Family



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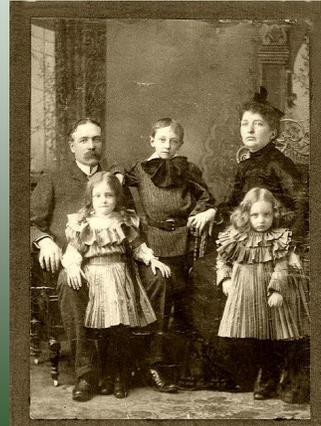
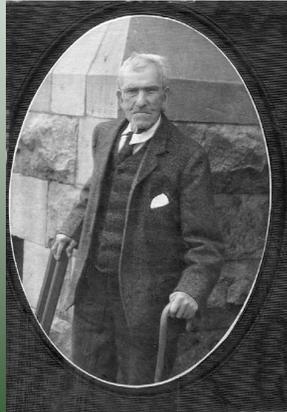
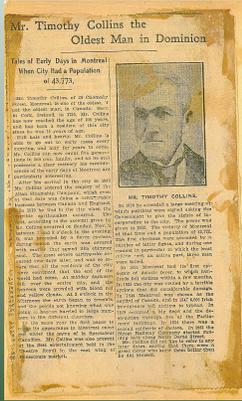
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There was also the interesting Madden Family . . .they first settled in St Columban and then later relocated to Rigaud - also in Quebec near the Ontario border. There was Mary Ann Madden a well known author in her days and a friend of Thomas D'Arcy McGee. In addition to her own historical and religious writing, she also published Mr. McGee's poetry. And there were her cousins who somehow became judges. One in New Mexico, and the other in Colorado. A bandit once tried to shoot James Madden who was the judge in New Mexico at point blank range, and was quickly subdued by the judge. It was noted that the Irish of St. Columban and in this case also Rigaud could be pretty tough guys. And a third brother Major Peter Madden served with General Kitchener in the Sudan.



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Timothy Collins



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And a final note about St. Columban personalities would be Timothy Collins. Mr. Collins was born in Cork, Ireland in 1795 and died in Montreal in 1906. So this Mr. Collins lived to 111 years old and at the time was considered the Oldest Man in the Dominion. Although unconfirmed, he is credited with being the first contractor to put outside spiral staircases on old residential buildings that you see in Montreal.

As a kid when I grew up in Montreal on the second floor of a triplex with this type of outside staircase, one of my jobs was to shovel off all the snow on one of these outside stairs in the Winter. At that point I often wondered what idiot designed these types of stairs only to discover some 40 years later that it was some long lost distant relative !!



St. Columban - Irish 

The Irish Leave



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Now back to the general history of St. Columban . . . From the late 1820's and for the next 60 or 70 years, St. Columban flourished as an exclusive Irish Catholic community. But in the late 1800's the Irish families started to leave the village and certainly by the early 1900's and before the First World War, the Irish were no longer the majority in St. Columban.

For example in 1858, the parish records indicate:-
41 births; 10 burials and 6 marriages

But by 1889, these same records show only 8 births; 8 burials and no weddings at all...



St. Columban - Irish

Why did they leave?

- ❖ Rocky soil that was difficult to cultivate
- ❖ Very large families with 10 or more children made it difficult to choose which son or daughter would take over the farm.
- ❖ The industrialization in Montreal and Ottawa etc. made these cities attractive to young men and women of St. Columban
- ❖ The railway was working and inviting settlers out to Western Canada by the end of the 1800's
- ❖ There were large and interesting projects going on in both Canada & the States

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There are any number of theories on why so many Irish started to leave and include:-

- Rocky soil that was difficult to cultivate
- Very large families with 10 or more children made it difficult to choose which son or daughter would take over the farm.
- The industrialization in Montreal and Ottawa etc. made these cities attractive to young men and women of St. Columban
- The railway was working and inviting settlers out to Western Canada by the end of the 1800's
- There were large and interesting projects going on in both Canada & the States

But for whatever the reason, the Irish of St. Columban did leave, although, of course, there were still some families of the original settlers in St. Columban right into the 1960's and a few even remain today.

There were "Back to St. Columban" events held in 1911 and again in 1937 that attracted a great many people back to the village to celebrate the Irish nature of St. Columban.

But, in general, unfortunately into the 60's and 70's, the Irish community was slowly forgotten except for a few old timers and some of us interested in it's history....



St. Columban - Irish 

Violet O'Connor



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However, in the last few years a number of us descendants started to form a cohesive group dedicated to bring back the memory of this very unique Irish Canadian village....

So, at this point, I would like to talk for few minutes about our group of descendants came about.

My mother, who was an O'Connor from here in Ottawa, had left me a great deal of documentation and at some point I had this information scattered in files all over the place. Eventually, I did input all this info. into a family history computer program. And then in early 2005, speaking with one of my sons, he suggested that we put it all in a web page. However, to set up a simple family web page about my own family would have been a little boring. My ancestors were all regular hard working individuals . . . farmers; shoemakers; beer delivery guys and longshoremen . . . but frankly a little boring! So we decided to make the page not just about my family but to St. Columban in general. We'll speak more about the web site at the end of this presentation but generally I thought at the most it might attract one or two fellow descendants of the original settlers. Instead it began to attract e-mails from all over the place. Eventually we had about 25 descendants communicating back and forth and then we decided to meet in St. Columban just about a year ago on October 1st 2005.



St. Columban - Irish Descendants Visit St. Columban 2005



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So on that bright October Saturday about 20 descendants and friend from St. Columban met in the Church Parking lot. Since there were so many inter-marriages between St. Columban families, most of us were are related on some level.



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Claude Bourguignon



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In addition to the descendants, Claude Bourguignon was also in attendance. And before going further I should take a moment to mention Claude. Mr. Bourguignon lives in St. Columban and for more than 20 years was a lonely voice trying to preserve the Irish history of the village. Although only slightly related to the St. Columban settlers, he wrote two books about the Irish of St. Columban – The first one was published in the 1980's and his revised and updated edition was printed this year. Much of the family history of these Irish families was preserved simply by the dedication of Mr. Bourguignon. We can never talk about the Irish history of the village without a proper thank you to Claude. If every community in Canada had someone as interested in history preservation as Claude then we would have great records and details about the lives of our ancestors!



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But, now back to our visit last October. As I mentioned it was a lot of fun just meeting fellow descendants but the unfortunate part of our visit was finding many broken tombstones broken and discarded behind the local Catholic Church. From this discovery, we move to the next part of the presentation that concerns our Cemetery restoration project.



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Many of us had heard rumours about these broken stones but we were certainly both upset and angry to see them thrown away in such a manner. At that moment we decided that something had to be done. And so our journey of trying to restore the Cemetery; the Tombstones and honour our ancestors began about a year ago.



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The first problem that we faced was that we had neither the time; resources or expertise to set up a non-profit group – So were we to raise funds? And of course, how would we be able to bring this activity to the attention of people who might be interested in supporting the effort?



St. Columban - Irish



St. Patrick's Society of Montreal

FOUNDED IN 1834

The St. Patrick's Society of Montreal is a charitable organization dedicated to promoting the social, cultural and educational interests of Irish Canadians. Founded in 1834, it is one of the oldest and most respected national societies in Montreal.

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We started with a meeting of our own group and then contacted various Irish related organizations in the Montreal area. We were actually surprised to see how many of these groups were willing to help us. However, the one that came to the front was The St. Patrick's Society of Montreal. They soon agreed to receive donations on our behalf; audit the funds and were even able to offer charitable receipts. What a terrific help this was for us!



St. Columban - Irish 

St. Patrick's Day 2006



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The next part was to notify people about this work. Again, a Mr. Ned Eustach from the St. Patrick's Society wrote an article about us in their bulletin called the Naught. This article was seen by Janice Kennedy from the Ottawa Citizen who in turn wrote another terrific article about our group and project. By this time, it was around St. Patrick's Day of this year and this became an ideal time to promote our Restoration project. We marched in the St. Pat's Parade in Montreal with a Banner flying; we attended the St. Patrick's Day luncheon and we started to receive donations.



St. Columban - Irish

Donate to the Cemetery Restoration Fund

Our Progress as of
July 11th 2006



Are you willing & able to donate to our
Cemetery Restoration Fund?

Our objective is to raise approximately \$ 25,000
to repair to the tombstones, and restore the St.
Columban Cemetery

We are also very pleased to let you know that
we have the full support of The St. Patrick's
Society of Montreal for our project.

If you, (or your family or friends), would like to
donate to this fund, the process is simple.

Please send your check to:

St. Patrick's Society of Montreal
St. Patrick Square
6767 Cote St. Luc Road # 1
Montreal, Quebec H4V 2Z6
Canada

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Our objective is to raise about \$ 25,000 for this restoration and as of today we have received about \$ 8,000. – All private donations!



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Irish Extravaganza



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Now we are planning a big Irish Extravaganza as an additional fund-raiser this January with music and dance....



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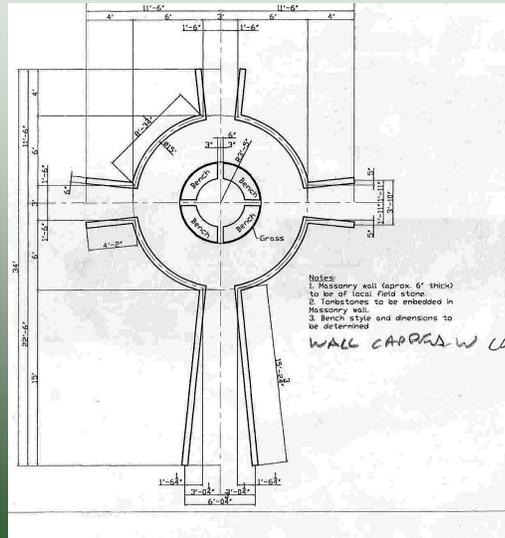
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We hope that by the Spring of 2007 to be in a position to perhaps start work on this restoration project....



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Originally we considered a Celtic Cross but costs; space and other difficulties made this not very practical .



St. Columban - Irish Huntington, Quebec



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So now we have settled on a brick wall – an idea that we expropriated from Huntington another Quebec community



St. Columban - Irish 

**St. Columban-Irish
Extravaganza Fundraising Event**

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September 10, 2006

 St. Columban - Irish 

Quebec, Canada

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This Web Site and the information is provided to you FREE as the result of many hours of work and research by a dedicated team of volunteers. Please consider sending a small donation to our St. Columban Cemetery Restoration Fund - Click HERE for details - Thank You

Welcome to St-Columban - Irish

This site is dedicated to all the Irish immigrants that came to Canada in the early 1820s and settled in the Village of St. Columban, Quebec.

St. Columban is located about 60 miles north-west of Montréal, Québec, Canada

If you have any information concerning St. Columban, that you would like to post on this site, or if you would like to add your e-mail address to be informed about page updates, please send details to info@stcolumban-irish.com



The Church in St. Columban about 1930



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St. Columban - Irish 

Thank You

