

Through the centuries there have been many parish churches in Montréal, all located inside the town (please refer to the “cultural guide mark leaflet”), but the collegiate church of Saint Vincent is undoubtedly the one which holds our attention. Its rich history, and the value of its artistry make it the brightest jewel in Montreal's crown.

In its majestic size and its perfect location on the top of the knoll on which the village has been built, the collegiate church of Saint Vincent expresses to perfection the grandiose purpose of those who built it. Its characteristic profile, which can be seen for miles around, guides visitors coming from the Bas Razes, or from the plain of Carcassonne.

Large scale works in the XIVth century transformed the ensemble of the collegiate church and gave it great homogeneity. The building was reinforced with strong buttresses, and the openings are all located on the south frontage. The north wall is totally blind.

From outside can be seen a small corbelled tower in the south west corner. On this same western frontage, in the north-west corner, the octagonal tower is believed to be the original belfry.

On the south-east side, the existing belfry, once again octagonal, and decorated with three arched levels, is more massive. This ancient fortified tower bears a gargoyle serving no purpose nowadays: it shows the height of the original roof.

Finally, the south porch is outstanding. Topped by a spectacular triangular pierced gable; at each side there is a pinnacle decorated by blind arcading, the capitals of which are sculpted with leaves and grotesque monsters.

Hôtel de ville : Rue de la Mairie 11290 Montréal
04 68 76 20 05 // mairie-montreal11@wanadoo.fr
www.montreal-aude.fr/

Association des Amis de l'Orgue et de la Collégiale de
Montréal de l'Aude
www.collegiale-montreal-aude.fr



réalisation-graphisme : contact@paleoscenes.fr

i

Historic

From the early church to the collegiate church

In its present shape, the church is in typical meridional gothic style which can be dated to the late XIIIth century and the beginning of the XIVth century.

Not much is known of the primitive church (though a 1235 text testifies to a transaction involving its sexton). But we do know one thing: that the church was dedicated to Saint Vincent, and that it was already standing on this site.

As a matter of fact, in 1273, King Philippe III granted the people of Montreal the right to enlarge the existing building, which was thought to be too narrow. To make that enlargement possible, he made some neighbouring houses over to them.

The modification and transformation of the church were to take more than a century and a half: 45 years after the royal decision, on February 22nd 1318, a papal bull of John XXII, the Avignon Pope, appointed a 15 canon chapter to the church of Saint Vincent. Thereby, the church became a collegiate church. From then on, the church was shared by its parishioners and the Chapter.

The Chapter installation

In 1319, Pope John XXII allowed the Chapter 10.000 francs, and in 1326 the work to be done was defined, as was the sharing of the costs: a barrier would be erected so that the entrance to the chancel would be reserved for the sole use of members of the Chapter.

The high altar would remain visible, but parish services would be celebrated at a secondary altar in a side chapel off the nave.

Lastly three chapels and a sacristy would be built behind the chancel for the exclusive use of the Chapter.



The cost of these works was shared out according to the use the parishioners and the Chapter would make of the different parts of the church.

The case of the belfry was treated differently for it was considered as useful for the parish as for the Chapter. Both parties agreed that the cost of its maintenance would be fairly divided between them.

90 years on, there were still problems. On a visit in 1415 the Carcassonne Bishop, Geraud du Puy, acknowledged that important works remained to be done on the new belfry, and that the turret and the clock needed to be repaired.

It is not known when that work was completed.



The fortification of the church

The final modifications were made much later: from 1583 to 1585, the Huguenots transformed the collegiate church into their citadel.

The tiled roof was covered over with stone, the west portal was closed off, rooms were built above the chancel chapels. For the most part this whole refit would be destroyed at the beginning of the XVIIth century. After 1588, a new bell, “Julienne”, was bought. The south-east tower – the new belfry - was raised by two levels to allow its housing.

From the XVIIIth century, on the embellishing works

In the first half of the XVIIIth century, stalls were fitted in the chancel: they blocked off the entrance to the apsidal-end chapels and made necessary the provision of a new entrance cut into the partition wall.

These new works around the chancel were completed in 1763 by the building of a new sacristy, backing onto the apsidal end of the church.

Finally, in 1783, “in order to combat the cold, and to bestow beauty on this building”, a plaster vault was created. This plaster vault concealed the barrel vaulting and hid from view the clerestory windows above the stained glass of the nave, now visible only from the outside.

MONTRÉAL



Aude

The collegiate church of Saint-Vincent



More informations on the village of Montréal ?

The “Montréal, repères culturels” leaflet is freely available at the Townhall or at any tourist offices. You may also read works such as: “Montréal de l'Aude, sa collégiale St Vincent, XIII^e-XIV^e s.” – G.LATORRE, new 2010 re-issue, or : “La Collégiale St Vincent de Montréal et son porche sud” a SESA bulletin, volume XCVIII, 1998.

CITE DU PAYS CATHARE

Pays de Carcassonne, Terre de séjours

The layout and proportions of the collegiate church are typical of Meridional Gothic style: a single straight nave with neither aisles nor transepts and a chancel narrower than the nave. Both its height and its breadth measure 22 meters, and its inside length is 53 meters.

The retable and the altar, of white stone, date from the XIXth century, as do the wall paintings and the stained glass.

The balustrades are all made of pink Caunes-Minervois marble.

In the chancel are two facing rows of delicately carved choir stalls, 66 in all and dating from the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. Seven paintings made by Despax celebrate Saint Vincent's life and martyrdom.

At the west end of the church, the disquieting figure of a devil, clinging to the base with its claws, holds up the font.

The church floor is made of stone slabs covering the burial of more than a thousand past inhabitants of Montreal.

The collegiate church and the great organ are listed by the Historic Buildings Department, as are the XVIIIth century pulpit, the paintings by Gamelin and Despax (XVIIIth and XIXth centuries), and many items in the collegiate church treasury.



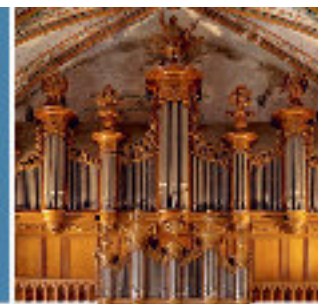
The font with the disquieting figure of a carved devil (XIXth century)

The Great Organ

The great organ is fittingly housed in an early XVIIIth century loft, built with stone from one of the town's ancient fortified gates.

In 1785 the organ was completely remodelled and fitted with several new stops, following a design by the organ maker Jean-Pierre CAVAILLE; in 1883 it was further "modernised" by Theodore PUGET, and was restored in 1962.

Every summer several concerts are held, given by well-known organists.



The iconography of the choir : life of saint Vincent

The remarkable group of carved stalls is overhung by seven paintings dating from 1753, the work of Despax.

All of them evoke Saint Vincent's life, the patron saint of our village and of vine growers. Vincent was born in Spain, in the third century.

A When he was very young, he became a deacon, then Archdeacon in Saragoza where **B** Bishop Valere charged him with preaching in his name. At that time Christians were persecuted in every part of the Roman Empire.

C Vincent is taken in chains from Saragoza to Valence where **D** he is brought before the Roman governor Dacianus who tries unsuccessfully to have him deny his faith.

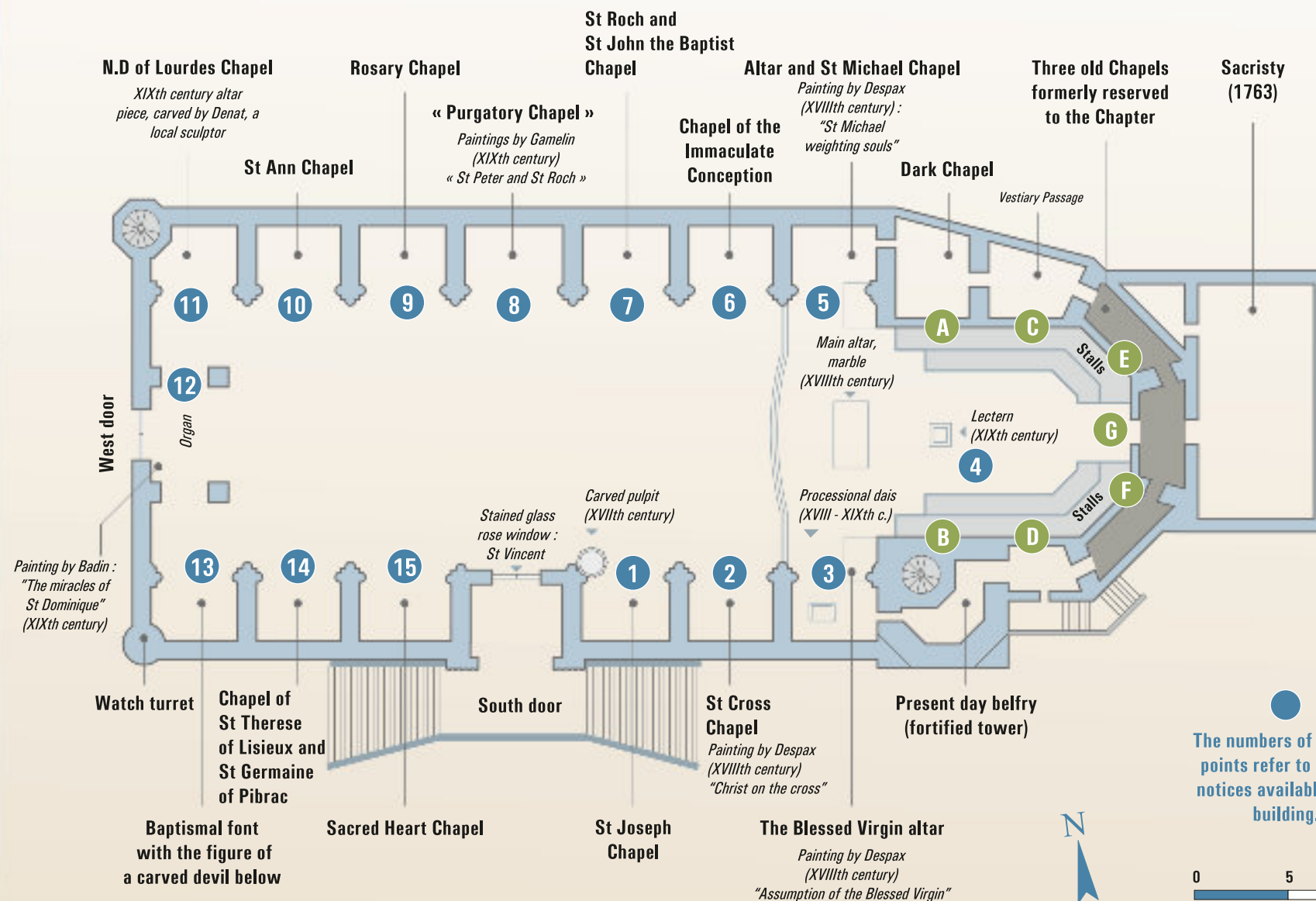
E Dacianus inflicts on him the worst tortures (burning on a grill, laceration, solitary confinement)

F Dying, Vincent is thrown in a dungeon.

G In the central painting, the artist has shown Saint Vincent in death and in glory (January 22nd, 304).

Four angels painted by Jacques Ourtal (XIXth century) above Despax's paintings show the four Evangelists and their attributes : a lion for Saint Mark, an eagle for Saint John. By mistake, Saint Luke's attribute, (an ox), and Saint Matthew's, (a man), have been inverted.

Photographs from left to right : the great organ, saint Dominique's three miracles painted by Badin, the carved choir stalls and Despax's painting showing saint Vincent as a prisoner of the Romans.



The numbers of the blue points refer to precise notices available in the building.

0 5 10 m