

SAINT SIMON AND SAINT JUDE'S CHURCH

BOYS' CHOIR

Tignish, P.E.I.



A Short History of Gregorian Chant in the Church and a Selection of Carols, Hymns, Masses and Other Music sung by the Choristers during the Liturgical Year, digitised and restored from Tapes made circa 1954.

**The Choir was established and directed by
Fr. Denis Gallant**

SAINT SIMON AND SAINT JUDE'S CHURCH AND ITS MALE CHOIRS

Tignish was settled by a handful of Acadians in 1799 who were followed in 1811 by Irish immigrants. By 1860 the village began to form around the magnificent Gothic Revival church built on high ground where it could be seen for miles out at sea. This wonderful photo was probably taken in 1899 during the celebrations marking the centennial of the Parish.



The Gothic Revival movement influenced not only architecture but the arts and music. There was a great revival of interest in the mediaeval Gregorian chant. This brought a new solemnity and formality to church liturgy. By 1882 the parish raised enough money to buy a two-manual tracker action pipe organ from the Quebec maker, Louis Mitchell. It was a sophisticated instrument consisting of three organs

in one case – the Great Organ, the Swell and the Pedal Organ. For most of its existence this fine instrument was not used to its potential. Now, restored and carefully maintained, it has gained an international reputation.



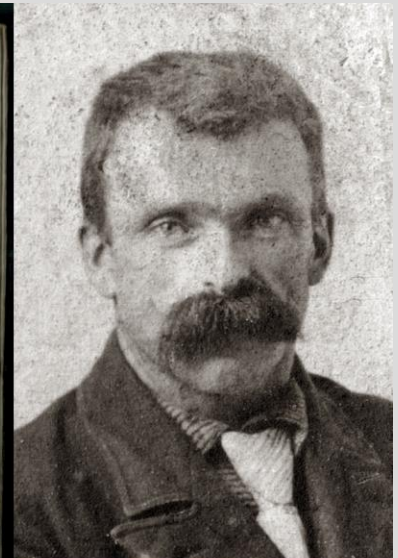
By the late 19th Century the clergy had embraced Gregorian chant for most liturgical activities and trained local men to sing in the choir. There was also a female choir for weddings and services such as the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. On the whole, they did not sing Gregorian chant.

About the same time as the organ was installed, the church bought a number of leather-bound books of the liturgy in Gregorian notation. These were the *Graduale Romanum*, for the Masses sung throughout the year, and the *Vesperale Romanum*, containing the music for evening devotions that were abolished in the early 1950s. These books were published in the 1870s and I have a copy of each. One of the

men in the male choir was my maternal great-grandfather, Joseph Isadore Gaudet (1860-1939) and his name is written in one of these books.



Graduale Romanum with Gregorian notation used by the choir at Saint Simon and Saint Jude church in Tignish from the 1880s to the early 1950s.



Joseph Isadore Gaudet (1860-1939). He was my maternal great-grandfather and a member of the choir. This was the Roman Missal he used to sing the Gregorian chant.

For many years the male choir was accompanied on the Mitchell organ by a local woman called Minnie Richard. Not an organist by training, she made limited use of the organ's capacities, using only a couple of stops in the Swell organ. This was a separate organ enclosed in a box with louvers in the front that could be opened and closed with a pedal to achieve emotional effects.



THE ARRIVAL OF FR. DENIS GALLANT

In 1951 a young man called Denis Gallant from la région Évangéline was ordained to the priesthood in the church of Saint Augustine at Rustico. This photograph, courtesy of Georges Arsenault, shows the moment of prostration when he dedicates his life to the service of God.



Fr. Gallant was soon appointed as Assistant Priest to the Parish of Tignish to cater to the needs of the Acadian part of the congregation and to assist the elderly and ailing Fr. John MacDonald.

During his training for the priesthood Fr. Gallant became deeply interested in Gregorian chant, especially the sound produced by a boys' choir. When he was posted to Tignish around 1952, he was determined to establish a boys' choir that would sing the Gregorian liturgy. To that end he trawled the primary school classes for suitable treble voices. He selected the majority of his choristers from this French-language primary class at the Dalton School, of which I was a member.



Soon, dressed in soutanes and surplices mostly made by my grandmother, Marie Blanche Gaudet, the choir made its appearance.



You can pick out most of the polished and starched choristers from among the ragamuffins in the contemporary class photo above.

By 1952 Fr. Gallant had assembled a choir of about a dozen boys, selected from the English and French primary grade classes. He was not a trained musician, learning as he went along, yet he was so successful that by 1954 his choir won first prize at the 12th Prince Edward Island Music Festival in Summerside. Leonard Gallant, a talented pianist not much older than the choirboys themselves was the accompanist for all the years the choir existed.

Some time, probably in 1954, Fr. Gallant borrowed a tape recorder and made a recording, accompanied by Leonard Gallant, in the church choir loft. About the same time, he made a tape in the practice room at the Dalton School where the boys sang *a capella*.

To date, with the help of Edward FitzGerald, my old friend and fellow chorister, this is the list of singers we have been able to reconstruct from memory and the photo. Not all the boys could be identified, no doubt some names have been left out. If more names are found, they will be added to this list.

Aubrey DesRoches
Albin DesRoches
Lloyd DesRoches
Ivan Doucette
Edward FitzGerald
Joe Gallant
Johnny Gallant
Leonard Hogan
Billy Perry
Stanley Perry
Reggie Porter
Reggie Richard
Vincent Richard

Before his death Fr. Gallant allowed Reg Porter to copy his two tapes so they could be shared with former members of the choir and to be placed in various archives on the Island. My friend Shane Bryanton kindly digitised and remastered the tapes to improve the sound as much as possible and separated the selections to make a playing list for this CD. This was an enormous task and a labour of love – as well

as an act of great generosity. This is how he describes the task of rescuing these performances from a very poor copy.

The original tapes Reg gave me were copies made on a consumer reel to reel machine of a recording made on an even older 1950s consumer recorder using a microphone of similar quality. The tapes contained a great deal of broadband noise and A.C. hum as well as many, many, ticks, clicks, thumps and distortions. I transferred these tapes using a STUDER A810 at 24bits/96kHz and then processed the audio using our CEDAR Cambridge audio restoration system. I then edited the various bits and pieces together into a listenable whole using a Pyramix DAW and dithered it down to 16bits for CD.

Twenty copies of these recordings were made for the surviving members of the choir, various Island archives and interested persons.



Here is the playing list of the 30 selections rescued from Fr. Gallant's tapes. There is still work to be done in identifying precisely some of the pieces and when all the selections have been identified, this essay will be amended to show the corrections.

- 1 Silent Night
- 2 *Adeste Fideles*
- 3 Angels We Have Heard
- 4 *Ça Bergers*
5. O Little Town of Bethlehem
- 6 *Nouvelle Agréable*
- 7 *Il est né*
- 8 Kyrie (which Mass?)
- 9 *Sanctus* (which Mass?)
- 10 *Agnus Dei* (which Mass?)
- 11 *Vidi Aquam*
- 12 *Ave Verum Corpus*
- 13 *Adoro te Devote*
- 14 *Tantum Ergo*
- 15 Kyrie (which Mass?)
- 16 *Agnus Dei* (which Mass?)
- 17 Kyrie (which Mass?)
- 18 *Victimae Paschali laudes* – Sequence for Easter Sunday
- 19 *Rorate Coeli* – Advent hymn
- 20 *Attende, Domine* – chant for Lent
- 21 *Veni, Creator Spiritus*
- 22 *Magnificat*
- 23 *Oremus ...?*
- 24 *Tantum Ergo*
- 25 *Ave Maria*
- 26 Oh Queen of the Holy Rosary
- 27 The Litany of the Blessed Virgin
- 28 *Magnificat*
- 29 *Ave Verum Corpus*
- 30 *Tantum Ergo*, responses and *Ave Maria*

To help make this music available to readers of this blog Shane Bryanton provided this link to his Google Drive. Click on the link and when it opens double click on the number of the selection you want to hear.

https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fdrive.google.com%2Fdrive%2Ffolders%2F0B4RgadpJSMgmeFdMWEJERGU1UTQ%3Fusp%3Dsharing%26fbclid%3DIwAR1y-DTiqaiRvF22GPxkyYIB_CQWz15AIxhBViKLGmp0U4W9veZDTMdYDM&h=AT0gBuARSRaKiaLqK9yZpCTLM7Tu2B6ktnOIgDZLJAe0d06-0jSPF-sUIHIFgTEf_05p9AoKTsPs9j9XhdIghbkV0U5PVBO3J_QrKaesodSSG4_66nQa4OHRFkbdQIACrQ

It was with particular pride that I undertook his project. The preservation and distribution of something unique to the Parish, and of which I was a part, was a major reason, but there was also the fact that I continued a family tradition of singing Gregorian chant in the church choir. I followed in my great-grandfather's footsteps and this brought great joy to his family.

This little essay is dedicated to all those boys, living and dead, who gave Tignish its first and only boys' choir, whose fame spread throughout the Diocese of Charlottetown. By the time the boys had reached puberty the choir failed to grow because Fr. Gallant had been transferred to another parish. Several years later, the dictates of the Vatican II Council abolished Latin in the Roman Catholic Liturgy. Both the Latin liturgy and the Gregorian chant choir became obsolete.

Reg Porter
January 2020

SPECIAL THANKS

I wish to thank Shane Bryanton for offering to process my copies of Fr. Gallant's tapes and to separate the selections into numbered items. I am also grateful for his making it possible for readers of this blog to listen to the music through the link he has provided to his Google Drive.

Also, I want to thank Edward FitzGerald for providing most of the names of the choristers that I have listed above.

The generosity of the late Fr. Denis Gallant twenty-five years ago when he allowed me to copy his tapes is obviously greatly appreciated and made this long overdue project come to fruition.