

Marching and Memory in Early Twentieth-Century Quebec: La Fête-Dieu, la Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and le Monument Laval

Ronald Rudin

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Article abstract

During a three-day period in June 1908, 250,000 people attended a series of elaborate celebrations in Quebec City in honour of Mgr François de Laval, the first bishop of Quebec, upon the bicentenary of his death. A monument to Laval was unveiled on the middle day, in between the two most important summer festivals of the French-Canadian calendar. The Fête-Dieu (Corpus Christi) celebrations preceded the unveiling, while the Fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste followed. In planning the festivities, particular care was devoted to organising processions through the streets of Quebec City. These two processions, the former organised by clerics and the latter by laymen, sent somewhat contradictory messages to both spectators and participants. Nevertheless, they formed part of a collective effort by clerical and lay leaders to claim the streets of Quebec, in the process asserting their power at a time when French-Catholic society was being challenged from various quarters.

Marching and Memory in Early Twentieth-Century Quebec: La Fête-Dieu, la Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and le Monument Laval¹

RONALD RUDIN

During a three-day period in June 1908, an estimated 250,000 people attended a series of elaborate celebrations in Quebec City in honour of Mgr François de Laval, the first bishop of Quebec, upon the bicentenary of his death.² These celebrations would not have existed had it not been for the construction of a monument to Mgr de Laval, which was unveiled on the middle day of the festivities. The organisers were not content to unveil Laval's monument and send the masses home. Rather, they scheduled the day of the unveiling between the two most important summer festivals of the French-Canadian calendar: the Fête-Dieu (Corpus Christi) celebrations, which preceded the unveiling of the monument, and the Fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste, which followed. As Adjutor Rivard, a professor from Université Laval, put it, "Il convient que la fête de Laval soit célébrée entre la Fête-Dieu et la Saint-Jean, entre la fête de la Religion et la fête du Patriotisme." Rivard was pleased that "la grande figure de l'Évêque apparaisse entre ces deux anges tutélaires des nations

The author is grateful to SSHRC for its financial support of this project, to my colleague Shannon McSheffrey for helping me understand the Corpus Christi procession, and to H.V. Nelles, who allowed me to see parts of his manuscript dealing with the Champlain celebrations of 1908 prior to its publication as *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto, 1999).

- 1 This paper forms part of a larger project dealing with a series of commemorative events held in Quebec City between 1878 and 1908, each of which focused upon the memory of either Mgr François de Laval or Samuel de Champlain. Given that this is a small slice of a much larger project, some issues, not central to the focus of his paper, have been given relatively cursory attention.
- 2 Estimates of the number of people attending such mass events are obviously prone to error. The Quebec City newspaper *L'Événement* claimed that 100,000 people attended the procession on the first day, with another 100,000 returning for the unveiling of the Laval monument on Day 2 (22 June, 24 June 1908). The figure of 100,000 was also reported for the Mass at the Monument Laval at the close of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession on Day 3 (Archives des Ursulines de Québec, *Annales des Sœurs Ursulines*, IV, 74). Even if one accepts the somewhat more conservative figure of 50,000 offered for the unveiling ceremony by *Action sociale* (24 June 1908), the total would still be 250,000. Arguably, no other celebration in Canadian history had yet brought together so many people in such a short period of time.

fortes, l'amour de l'Eglise et l'amour de la Patrie."³ By organising the unveiling ceremonies as they did, the lay and clerical leaders responsible for the Laval festivities were adhering to a long-standing practice in Quebec City of celebrating moments from the past in a manner that drew attention to both the religious and secular components of French-Canadian identity. Accordingly, the monument to Mgr de Laval depicted him not only as a religious figure, but also as an "homme d'état." In a parallel manner, the day prior to the unveiling of the monument focused largely, although not exclusively, upon the religious roots of Quebecers, while the day that followed focused to a greater degree on Quebecers' secular heritage.

The three days of the Laval celebrations were designed to function as a unit in order to communicate a particular message to the larger population. In order to deliver that message, however, the organisers were very conscious of the need to provide a festival that would capture the imagination of a public that would not have seen the unveiling of a statue as a novelty. Indeed, by the early twentieth century the Western world had already been subjected to what Maurice Agulhon called a period of "statuomanie."⁴ Accordingly, sideshows such as the festivities surrounding the Fête-Dieu and the Fête de la Saint-Jean were crucial to the process. Even these holidays, however, had to be regularly infused with new life in order to attract a public that was constantly being exposed to various novel forms of popular culture.⁵ As a result, no effort was spared in planning the festivities, and particular care was devoted to organising the processions through the streets of Quebec City which formed the centre-piece of each holiday and which will provide the focus for this essay. As one long-time observer of these events observed: "Je compris, comme par révélation, combien les manifestations extérieures du culte, telles que celles de la Fête-Dieu ou celle de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste sont aptes à affirmer et consacrer les habitudes d'un peuple."⁶

Highly choreographed public events such as the processions were crucial to the commemorative process since they provided visible and readily understandable lessons about the way in which society should function, both for par-

3 *Le Vénérable François de Montmorency-Laval Premier Évêque de Québec; Souvenir des fêtes du deuxième centenaire célébrées les 21, 22 et 23 juin 1908* (Quebec, 1908), 124.

4 Maurice Agulhon, "La 'statuomanie' en l'histoire," *Ethnologie française*, 2-3 (1978): 145-72.

5 In this regard, *La semaine religieuse de Québec* remarked, in the context of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste festivities, that every year there was "...grand'messe avec sermon, procession, banquet et discours de circonstance. Malheureusement, les résultats pratiques sont à peu près nuls, ce qui n'empêche point la célébration de la fête nationale d'être une excellente chose. Le lendemain, les mêmes divisions reprennent leurs cours....Après avoir applaudi, la veille, le soir même on se rendort...." (17 June 1899, 677-78).

6 Henri Comte, *Les fêtes-dieu à Montréal, 1658-1933* (Montreal, 1943), 4. Comte's familiarity had come from his role as the long-time religion editor of *La Presse*.

ticipants and spectators. While the general public might have missed some of the nuances that troubled those responsible for the design of the statue to Mgr de Laval, it took relatively little sophistication to decipher the significance of the movement of thousands of people through the streets of Quebec City.⁷ On one level, a procession, by excluding normal activity from a given part of a town, allowed organisers to stake a territorial claim, asserting their own power in the process. As Mona Ozouf has pointed out, the processions designed to celebrate the French Revolution in the town of Caen were carefully routed so as to neglect the castle, “the seat of public power.” Moreover, holy places such as abbeys and churches were bypassed so that “on the whole, the festival erased the religious symbols from the city.”⁸ Closer to home, Peter Goheen, in commenting on the route chosen for the funeral procession of D’Arcy McGee in 1868, showed how it carefully stuck close to English-speaking areas of Montreal, so as not to try to stake a claim in predominantly francophone areas.⁹

In the case of Quebec City, whose thoroughfares were usually occupied by economic activities largely under the control of English-speakers, processions constituted only one of a wide array of early twentieth-century strategies designed to offer resistance to the growing control of “outsiders” during the heyday of monopoly capitalism. The first *caisse populaire* was created in 1900 to provide French-Catholics with a tool that might enhance their place in the economy, while the various nationalist organisations formed in the first decade of the 1900s sought to rally young men to the defence of their “nation,” defined along rather traditional religious and linguistic lines. In this context, the processions associated with the unveiling of the Monument Laval provided an opportunity for secular and lay leaders, each in their own way, to make visible claims to power by briefly monopolising public space.

Processions also raised questions of power by giving observers the opportunity to take note of who was (and who was not) included and where those fortunate enough to participate were situated in relation to one another. Susan Davis, in discussing the role of parades in nineteenth-century Philadelphia, has observed that just because “parades [had] large and often widely inclusive audiences does not mean that they [were] open to everyone’s influence and participation, or that all participation [was] equal.”¹⁰ Participants employed banners,

7 This is not to minimise the significance of the iconography of the Laval monument whose design was a matter of considerable concern to the lay and clerical authorities responsible for the project. However, given space limitations, issues pertinent to the design of the monument itself cannot be adequately addressed in this paper.

8 Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 144-45.

9 Peter Goheen, “Symbols in the Streets: Parades in Victorian Urban Canada,” *Urban History Review*, 18, no 3 (February 1990): 238-39. Goheen makes much the same point in *Historical Atlas of Canada* (Toronto, 1993), II, plate 58.

10 Susan Davis, *Parades and Power. Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia, 1986), 13.

distinctive wardrobes, and marching bands so as to make the audience aware that they were important enough to be in the procession and to draw attention to their marching order among those who had made the grade. There was nothing natural about the way in which people became part of a procession. Rather, this process reflected the power of those with the means to mount such a public event, limited only by the protests of those prepared to contest such power.

Moreover, both those who were in processions as well as those watching could not help but derive messages from the presence, or absence, of barriers that separated one from the other. In this regard, Roberto Da Matta has usefully drawn the distinction between religious processions and more secular parades. In the first instance, there was no real barrier between those who were marching and those on the sidelines. As he put it, "Here the streets are transformed and the frontiers between street and houses are weakened... We have the sacred entering and being received into the houses."¹¹ By contrast, in more secular parades, where the intent was to impress an audience with the power of those who had been allowed to march, it was important to construct barriers between participant and spectator. As Da Matta put it, "In this kind of event there are only two camps: those who are qualified to be inside the order and the rigid hierarchy of the event and those who are outside the isolating ropes and can only see what goes on in the street."¹²

Put in Da Matta's terms, there were certain crucial differences between the Fête-Dieu and Saint-Jean-Baptiste processions. As we will see throughout this essay, there were various aspects of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste festivities with roots in the much older celebration of the Fête-Dieu. This connection was evident, for instance, in the borrowing of the term "procession," which had a particular religious connotation, from the "procession de la Fête-Dieu" when the "procession de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste" first appeared in Quebec City in the 1840s. Over time, however, while the term "procession" continued to be commonly used in connection with "la Saint-Jean," the more secular terms "défilé" and "cortège" were also employed from time to time.¹³ This subtle linguistic shift, moving the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession towards Da Matta's parade

11 Roberto Da Matta, "Carnival in Multiple Planes," in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle*. John J. MacAloon, ed. (Philadelphia, 1984), 218.

12 *Ibid.*, 219.

13 The "procession de la Fête-Dieu" was alternatively referred to as the "procession du très St-Sacrement," but it never would have been connected with any of the terms occasionally associated with "la Saint-Jean." In 1908, Adjudant Rivard, referred to above, contrasted the "pieuse procession des fidèles à la suite de l'Hostie", with "l'enthousiaste défilé d'un cortège national." (*Le Vénérable François de Montmorency-Laval*, 124). For its part, the Quebec archdiocese distinguished between "le cortège de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste" and "la procession du St-Sacrement" (Archives de l'Archidiocèse de Québec, 4A, 4-4. "Procession du Très Saint Sacrement," nd). In spite of these distinctions, for the sake of simplicity, I will use the term "procession" generically throughout this essay for both events.

category, reflected some very real differences between the organisation of the “procession de la Fête-Dieu” which was designed to bring spectators and marchers together and that of the “défilé de la Saint-Jean” which sought to separate the two. Moreover, in the case of 1908, there were slightly different routes, and very different notions in each case regarding who was eligible to march and in what order.

The organisers of each event set out to send different messages to spectators and participants alike. Nevertheless, it would be an overstatement to view the two processions as if they were polar opposites of one another. There were secular concerns reflected in the celebration of the Fête-Dieu, just as there were religious ones evident in “la Saint-Jean.” For all of their differences, the two celebrations were brought together on the occasion of the unveiling of the Monument Laval by certain leaders in Quebec City, clerical and lay alike, who were searching for the means of reconciling the religious and secular components of French-Canadian identity. In the process, they hoped to stake a claim to power for a people who were trying to respond to the new economic order over which they had relatively little control.

Laval, Champlain, and the Construction of Memory

Never far from the minds of the organisers of the Laval celebrations were the even more lavish ones in honour of Samuel de Champlain that would be held only four weeks later to commemorate the tercentenary of his founding of Quebec.¹⁴ The Champlain celebrations were heavily financed by private subscriptions from across the British Empire, by several of the Canadian provinces, as well as by the federal government. By contrast, the Laval festivities had to depend upon the much more limited, although hardly negligible resources of the Archdiocese of Quebec City and such lay organisations as the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Québec. However, if the Laval organisers did not have large amounts of money at their disposal, they were careful to take advantage of two holidays that had deep roots in French-Canadian culture. The Champlain celebrations were obviously “invented,” the organisers making no particular effort to incorporate the date of Champlain’s landing at Quebec in 1608 into their schedule. By contrast, the Laval festivities, although far from being spontaneous, at least appeared to belong more naturally to Quebecers who had been celebrating the Fête-Dieu and the Fête de la Saint-Jean since the seventeenth century. Playing on the contrast between the two celebrations of the summer of 1908, one newspaper made clear which it preferred: “Laissons donc aux impérialisants de toutes nuances le cirque pseudo-patriotique de juil-

14 For a comprehensive analysis of the Champlain festivities of 1908, see Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*.

let et rallions-nous tous, Canadiens-français, aux fêtes essentiellement nationales du Monument Laval, en juin!"¹⁵

The competition between Champlain and Laval that was so visible in 1908 had roots, however, that stretched back to the late nineteenth century when the movement to construct monuments and to stage large-scale commemorative events was just beginning not only in Quebec, but across the Western world.¹⁶ By 1908, leaders, both lay and clerical, had had several decades of experience in trying to use public representations of the past in order to maintain their hold over the masses in the face of such challenges as urbanisation, industrialisation, immigration, and the extension of the franchise. By associating the messages that they were trying to communicate with images from the past, these French-Canadian leaders hoped to convince the public to remain true to certain values that were under attack, but which warranted ongoing support on the basis of their deep roots in French-Canadian culture.

As the two figures from the past whose legacies could be most easily presented to the public in Quebec City, Champlain and Laval provided the means of communicating various messages. Most residents of "la vieille capitale" would have fairly readily understood that Champlain had been "le fondateur de l'état civil" and Laval "le fondateur de l'état religieux."¹⁷ However, the lay and clerical leaders who organised most of the commemorative events in Quebec City in the late nineteenth century were always careful to avoid any splitting off of the secular message that was explicit in the commemoration of Champlain from the more religious one conveyed by Laval. Up until the late nineteenth century, there seemed to have been an understanding within Quebec City's elite, both lay and clerical, that commemorative activities should celebrate both the "French" roots of the population, as well as its Catholic side. This accord reflected neither the victory of ultramontane forces who wanted to see the unquestioned primacy of Catholic values, nor that of "liberal" forces who might have wanted to see Catholicism removed from all but the most explicitly religious moments in Quebec life. Rather, here was a "gentlemen's agreement" not to emphasise one aspect of French-Canadian culture over the other. In this spirit, a monument was erected in Quebec City in 1889 in honour of both Jacques Cartier, a representative of the French state, as well as a number of Jesuit martyrs, including Jean de Brébeuf. H.-J.-J.-B. Chouinard, a leader of the

15 *Le Pionnier*, 7 April 1908.

16 On the subject of turn-of-the-century commemoration, see such works as Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in *The Invention of Tradition*. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., (Cambridge, 1983), 263-307; or, Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-25.

17 Archives nationales du Québec à Québec (hereafter ANQQ), Fonds de la Société-Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Québec (hereafter SSJBQ), 412/2, dossier 16. Form letter sent to Chouinard by Albert Jobin (president of SSJBQ), 10 March 1904.

Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Québec as well as the organisation's chronicler, observed on this occasion that all "grands manifestations publics" needed to honour both "l'église et l'état."¹⁸

In the case of Champlain and Laval, there was a similar sense that one should not be honoured with a monument unless the other were to be fêted similarly. At the start of the 1890s, the Cartier-Brébeuf monument was clearly the model for proposals to construct statues to both "founders" in front of a proposed new City Hall in Quebec City.¹⁹ In the end, however, it was impossible to find sufficient funds within the French-speaking community to build statues to either hero. English-speakers soon filled the void, but they only showed interest in contributing to the construction of a monument to Champlain, who might be viewed by French and English-speakers alike as the founder of civil society and the first in a long line of governors that continued in the 1890s in the person of the Governor General.²⁰ Recognising that the traditional balance between Champlain and Laval was about to be upset, Charles Baillaigé, the engineer for the city of Quebec, wrote a flurry of letters in 1895 to various officials, both lay and clerical, in an effort to add Laval (and possibly a third figure from the past) to the planned monument to Champlain.²¹

Such pleas were to no avail, however, and in 1898 the Champlain monument was unveiled, much to the dismay of those who were disturbed not only because Laval was being ignored in the process, but also because Champlain was being remembered exclusively as a secular figure, shorn of any religious mission. If Laval were not to be given appropriate consideration, some felt that Champlain's own devotion to Catholicism might have come out in the unveiling ceremonies in order to retain something of the traditional balance between the secular and the sacred. Instead, there was a certain disenchantment in some quarters that the unveiling ceremonies presented an exclusively secular Champlain. The ultramontane journal, *La Vérité*, complained about both the apparent failure of the organisers to invite the Archbishop of Quebec, Mgr Louis-Nazaire Bégin, to speak and the general failure of the other invited speakers to point to Champlain's religious legacy.²² In Bégin's absence, his substitute, Mgr Marois, in a speech delivered earlier on the day of the unveiling (but outside the formal proceedings which had no official representative of the church), pointedly tried to bring Laval, and by extension Catholicism, back

18 Chouinard, *Fête nationale des Canadiens-français célébrée à Québec, 1881-1889*, vi.

19 Chouinard, *Annales de la SSJB de Québec, 1889-1901* (Quebec, 1903), 20.

20 While Champlain did not have the title of governor, he began exercising that function in 1612. See, Marcel Trudel, "Samuel de Champlain," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, I, 191.

21 Archives de la Ville de Québec, Baillaigé to Mayor S-N Parent, Mgr Laflamme, Mgr Bégin: 27 February 1895. QP1-4/73-8, VM 22-3-1-1.

22 *La Vérité*, 1 October 1898.

into the process by referring to the need for French Canadians to act “à l'exemple des François de Laval et des Samuel de Champlain.”²³

Those that felt left out in 1898 turned to the task of building a monument to Mgr de Laval at the start of the new century.²⁴ Once more finding it difficult to raise funds, this project made little progress until it was firmly taken up by the Archdiocese of Quebec in 1904. From the very start of their connection with the project, Mgr Bégin and his associates worked at bringing the sacred and the secular, separated from one another in 1898, back together. Accordingly, they tried to raise funds by referring to Laval as not only “un homme d'Eglise, mais aussi un homme d'Etat” who had been responsible for the founding of “le séminaire de Québec d'où est sortie l'Université qui porte son nom, une ferme modèle, une école des arts et métiers, et une école normale; puis le Conseil Souverain, tribunal qui peut être comparé, je crois, à la Cour suprême du Canada et aux Etats-Unis.”²⁵ When the Laval monument was unveiled in 1908, his twin vocation was chiselled into the inscription at its base.

The promoters of the Laval monument also saw the possibility of bringing the sacred and secular messages back together by associating themselves with the movement dedicated to the celebration of Champlain's founding of Quebec, which also first came to the public's attention in 1904. Before long, the Laval monument project became part of a larger commemorative celebration that would have reunited Champlain and Laval. So committed were the lay and clerical promoters of the Laval project to bringing together the two “fathers” of French Canada that they were prepared to work with the lay, and frequently English-speaking Protestant, promoters of the tercentenary, rather than have an event to call their own. Accordingly, plans were put in place for a celebration in late June and early July 1908 that would have included both the unveiling of the Laval monument and the commemoration of Champlain's founding of Quebec that had occurred on 3 July 1608.²⁶

In the final analysis, however, there were limits to how far the promoters of the Laval project were prepared to go in order to cooperate with the Champlain organisers. The latter continued to move their celebration from date to date, at one point announcing its delay until 1909 so that it might coincide with the opening of the Quebec Bridge. When the bridge collapsed during construction late in 1907, there was no longer any reason to delay the Champlain

23 *Inauguration du Monument Champlain*, (Quebec, 1902), 82.

24 ANQQ, SSJBQ, 412/8, Rapport du Comité générale de régie, 30 August 1901: “En effet, au début de cette année, n'a-t-on vu deux projets grandioses venir solliciter la faveur de notre attention. Le premier projet était d'élever un monument à Mgr de Laval...” This is the earliest concrete reference to the idea of building the Monument Laval.

25 National Archives of Canada (NA), Laurier Papers, Mgr H Têtu to Laurier, 20 February 1905, pp 94920-21.

26 Archives du Séminaire de Québec (ASQ), Université 170, no. 1, nd.

festivities; and so they were set for late July 1908, in part to accommodate the schedule of the Prince of Wales, who ended up being the star of the show. By contrast, the clerical leaders in the archévêché and the secular leaders in the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste were unprepared to remove their celebrations from dates that would have had some real meaning to the larger population. The members of the committee responsible for the ceremonies surrounding the unveiling of the Laval monument wanted to stick to the schedule that would have allowed some celebration of 3 July. They believed that “la Fête du dévoilement de la Statue Laval signalera opportunément la date précise de la fondation de Québec qu’il importe de ne pas laisser passer sans aucune démonstration quelconque.”²⁷

In spite of this apparent reverence for the precise date on which Champlain had come ashore at Quebec, once freed of the obligation of dealing with the tercentenary organisers, those responsible for the unveiling of the Laval monument pushed their festivities back by ten days so that it might fall between the two most important public festivals of the French-Canadian calendar. By associating the Fête-Dieu and Fête de la Saint-Jean festivities with the unveiling ceremonies, the organisers gave themselves the means of bringing hundreds of thousands of people together on the streets of Quebec City to celebrate certain aspects of the past and, in the process, to assert their own power in the early twentieth century.

Marching in a Circle: La procession de la Fête-Dieu

Of the two holidays that were incorporated into the ceremonies surrounding the unveiling of the Monument Laval, the Fête-Dieu had deeper roots in French-Canadian culture than the Fête de la Saint-Jean.²⁸ While both holidays were first observed in Quebec towards the middle of the seventeenth century, there

27 Archives de l’Archidiocèse de Québec (AAQ), 4A, Dossier 4, Comité général, 28 April 1907.

28 It would not be obvious that the Fête-Dieu had deep roots in French-Canadian culture from looking at the relatively little attention that has been paid to the subject by historians. For instance, in his *Contrôle social et mutation de la culture religieuse au Québec, 1830-1930* (Montreal, 1999), René Hardy paid scant attention to the Fête-Dieu holiday; the same could also be said in terms of the treatment of the holiday by Jacques Mathieu and Jacques Lacoursière in their *Les mémoires québécois* (Ste-Foy, 1991). Although their book constitutes a catalogue of symbols and rituals that were central to French-Canadian culture, Mathieu and Lacoursière did not even mention the holiday in their text, so that the only reference was in a sidebar, where they included a description, drawn from the folklore archives at Université Laval, of the holiday on one occasion in one locale (208). In the absence of any discussion in the text, the average reader could not possibly understand why a holiday was even being celebrated. As for the general reluctance of Quebec historians to handle issues touching upon Catholicism, I have dealt with this question at length in my *Making History in Twentieth Century Quebec* (Toronto, 1997).



Corpus Christi procession in Quebec City (postcard), [ca 1908-1920]. Archives de la Ville de Québec, Fonds de la famille Brousseau, John E. Walsh, libraire-éditeur, cote no 883.

was no regular, public celebration of the latter until the eve of the Rebellions of 1837. By contrast, the Fête-Dieu was celebrated each year, in each parish throughout the territory of what would eventually become Quebec. Participation was obligatory, according to church ritual that stretched back to the thirteenth century, when the Feast of Corpus Christi was added to the Catholic calendar on a date that could fall anytime from the end of May to the end of June, depending on the timing of Easter.²⁹

The Fête-Dieu emerged as part of a larger campaign within the medieval church to celebrate the Eucharist as constituting the body of Christ. Accordingly, Miri Rubin has observed that, unlike any other feast day, "Corpus Christi [was] the feast of a symbol, a concept, a world-view rather than [that] of a saint, or a commemoration of a particular historic event."³⁰ In the years

²⁹ The Fête-Dieu always fell on the Thursday following the eighth Sunday after Easter. In practice, however, in Quebec the Fête-Dieu festivities, including the procession, were always held on the subsequent Sunday (or nine weeks after Easter).

³⁰ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), 214.

leading up to the creation of the holiday, rules and regulations were put into place regarding the preparation and use of the host, particularly in the context of holy communion. Among the practices that became commonplace was the taking of the host to the ill, which soon resulted in the staging of “a veritable procession with followers and an audience ... People were taught to fall to their knees and recite prayers when they heard the ringing of the bells announcing the passage of the viaticum (the vessel that held the host in transit).”³¹ Based on this experience, when a feast day was proclaimed as the ultimate step in celebrating the presence of Christ’s body on earth, it was only logical that the procession take centre stage.

By the time that the Fête-Dieu procession made its way to New France, it had already had four centuries of European experience to give it a precise shape. The holiday traditionally began with a mass at which the host was blessed, following which it was taken to the streets, carried by a priest who marched beneath a canopy at the centre of the procession. No one from the community was denied the right to march, but all were arranged in a manner that privileged those closest to the host so as to reflect the distribution of power, both ecclesiastical and secular, within the community. It was no coincidence that the body of Christ was associated with the community assembled as a body. As Mervyn James has observed, “‘Body’ was the pre-eminent symbol in terms of which society was conceived ... [because] it suggested the intimacy and naturalness of the social bond ... The language of body provided an instrument by means of which social wholeness and social differentiation could be conceived and experienced at many different levels.” In the final analysis, the Corpus Christi procession was designed to show that it was possible for a divided body to function as a whole.³²

Despite all the efforts of lay and clerical leaders, there were still those within the community who refused to accept their assigned role with good grace.³³ Nevertheless, each year a procession did take place that at least gave the appearance that there was something natural about the way in which all were working together with each occupying a particular role. The sense that the Fête-Dieu procession was somehow natural was further reinforced by other elements of its organisation. As Claude Macherel has observed, the positioning of the host in the middle of the procession was designed to parallel the order of the universe with the various planets arranged around the centre. The sense of nature was also enhanced by placing trees along the route, casting flowers in front of the host as it passed through the streets, and using incense so that “la

31 *Ibid.*, 78-79.

32 Mervyn James, “Ritual Drama and Social Body in Late Medieval English Towns,” *Past and Present* 98 (February 1983): 6-9.

33 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 263; 266-7.

ville sentait la forêt et les fleurs.” The idea was to transform the route of the procession into a space “paré, habillé, déguisé en jardin d’Eden.”³⁴

Everything about the Fête-Dieu procession was designed to convey a message, and this was also true in terms of the route chosen for the marchers. There were those that linked one religious site with another so as to draw attention to the power of the church. More common, however, was the route that enclosed a space so as to lay claim to a territory.³⁵ In order to reinforce the Church’s efforts to lay claim to a certain route, it was common to erect “*répotoirs*” (street altars) along the way where marchers could stop and pray. The location of these *répotoirs* was a matter of significance as they were frequently placed before the houses of prominent citizens, thus further reflecting the hierarchy in civil society. Moreover, the route was frequently decorated with ornate “arcs de triomphe,” usually bearing religious messages, under which the marchers would pass. On a more symbolic level, these “arcs” were modeled after similar structures that had long been constructed over streets in Europe “pour célébrer l’entrée d’un souverain dans une ville conquise. L’arc de triomphe de la Fête-Dieu hérite de cette fonction historique. Le souverain est Dieu qui sous la forme de l’hostie est promené en triomphe dans les rues.”³⁶

Many of these elements of the Fête-Dieu procession would still have been in evidence in early twentieth-century Quebec, over two centuries after the export of the celebration of Corpus Christi to New France. This French colony had been settled in the midst of the Counter-Reformation, which saw an increased emphasis on the Eucharist as a symbol differentiating Catholics from Protestants.³⁷ Accordingly, from the mid-seventeenth century, the Fête-Dieu had provided a moment for the population of each parish to come together, to take to the streets, to claim the territory of the parish as holy, and to draw attention to the social order. In the mid-nineteenth century, as the hierarchy of the Quebec church tried to reinforce the role of Catholicism following the Rebellions of 1837-38, the Fête-Dieu procession took on particular significance. As Mgr Bourget, the Bishop of Montreal, proclaimed: “On la fera, en tous lieux, avec toute la pompe possible.”³⁸ Blurring once again the distinction between religious and secular messages, the Montreal processions of Bourget’s

34 Claude Macherel, “Corpus Christi: Cosmos et société,” in *Le corps de dieu en fêtes*. Antoinette Molonié, ed., (Paris, 1996), 56. Macherel compared this situating of the host at the centre of the procession to a royal procession in which the monarch would have been at the front of the line.

35 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 267; Macherel, “Corpus Christi,” 55.

36 Christine Sheito, “Une fête contestée: la procession de la Fête-Dieu à Montréal au XIXe siècle,” MA thesis, Université de Montréal, 1983, 127.

37 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 355-56.

38 Cited in Philippe Sylvain et Nive Voisine, *Recueil et consolidation: Histoire du catholicisme québécois* (Montreal, 1991) vol. 2, tome 2, 356.

era also had a nationalist dimension, symbolised by the marginalising of Irish Catholics so as to give pride of place to French-speakers. As Christine Sheito has observed, “La procession de la Fête-Dieu semble revêtir vers 1870 une allure nationaliste dont les termes catholique et canadien-français seront synonymes.”³⁹

As we will see, the Quebec City procession in 1908 shared both the pomp and the nationalism of Bourget’s era. However, what distinguished the Fête-Dieu procession staged in conjunction with the unveiling of the Monument Laval from “normal” ones was the abandonment of the parish as the territory to be consecrated by the marchers. For over two centuries, the parish had constituted the unit within which the Fête-Dieu procession had been organised, in the process reflecting the widely held view of lay and clerical leaders alike that the parish constituted the fundamental institution within which French-Catholic culture might survive. In the early twentieth century, as Quebecers were struggling to respond to the challenges posed by such forces as urbanisation, immigration, and imperialism, leaders such as Alphonse Desjardins viewed the parish as the natural unit of organisation for the creation of a financial institution that French-speakers might call their own, free of control by “outsiders.” As Desjardins put it, “La Caisse populaire est une organisation purement paroissiale, elle naît, elle grandit, elle se développe et prospère au milieu de la famille paroissiale.”⁴⁰ Over time, however, Desjardins recognised that the caisses could not compete with the banks for the business of French-Catholic Quebecers if they did not borrow some of the centralising business techniques of their competitors. Accordingly, by the 1910s he began proposing the movement of funds beyond the limits of the parish, in the process trying to save a parish-based culture by going against it.⁴¹

In a similar fashion, the leaders of the archdiocese of Quebec City came to the strategic decision in 1908 that this special Fête-Dieu procession had to transcend parish lines if it hoped to compete with the celebrations that were planned for the Champlain Tercentenary later in the summer. From the moment that it was decided to disassociate the Laval celebrations from those dedicated to

39 Sheito, “Une fête contestée,” 164. Sheito went on to describe the opposition from English-speaking Protestants who resented French-speaking Catholics claiming Montreal’s streets as their own. The provocative nature of claiming public space as holy was also evident in England at the turn of the century. In 1908, the same year as the Monument Laval was unveiled, there was much controversy against the holding of a massive Corpus Christi procession through the streets of London as part of the Eucharistic Congress which was being held in England. On this issue, see Carol Devlin, “The Eucharistic Procession of 1908: The Dilemma of the Liberal Government,” *Church History* 63 (1994): 407-25.

40 Testimony before special committee of Quebec legislative assembly, 1906-1907, reproduced in *Réflexions d’Alphonse Desjardins* (Lévis, 1986), 52.

41 On this issue, see my *In Whose Interest: Quebec’s Caisses Populaires, 1900-1945* (Montreal, 1990).

Champlain, Archbishop Bégin and his colleagues in the archevêché resolved that “il n’y aura qu’une procession pour toutes les paroisses de la ville.”⁴² Recognising that the proprietary instincts of the parishes might be offended, a special committee, which included the relevant curés, was created to manage the affair, an action no doubt encouraged to make the curés feel better about the fact that each parish would have to pay \$500 to defray the costs of the procession. A further concession to parish loyalties was evident in the design of the ceremony to take place at the end of the procession. In order to celebrate the return of the host, the marchers were to be assembled on the square in front of the Basilica which “sera divisée en autant de rectangles qu’il y a de paroisses dans la ville, c’est-à-dire 8 rectangles, partant de la Basilique jusqu’à l’extrémité de la place. On assignera un rectangle à chaque paroisse et il ne sera occupé que par les représentants de cette paroisse.”⁴³

These concessions to parish loyalties cannot conceal the fact that while the 1908 procession played upon memories of “normal” Fête-Dieu celebrations, its grandeur required that it transcend the limits of the parish. This point was made particularly clearly in the process of designing the route. While an early version would have taken the marchers past each of the parish churches, where *réposoirs* would have been situated, the final version stuck to the main streets of Quebec City so as to maximise the number of spectators and participants.⁴⁴ While the route that was finally decided upon was in the form of a closed loop, thus adhering to the classic form of the parish procession, there was something disingenuous about the archevêché’s insistence that it was identical to that which would be followed two days later by the Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade. To be sure, the two marches passed along the same main streets, so that the same decorations could be used twice, in the process keeping down costs and creating “une double démonstration de religion et de patriotisme.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, there were parts of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade that went off the main streets to enter into neighbourhoods and to pass by parish churches that had been marginalised in the design of the Fête-Dieu procession. The latter had been conceived to present the church as something larger than, and not simply part of, daily parish life.⁴⁶

42 AAQ, 4A, 4-4. “Procession du Très Saint Sacrement,” nd, 1. This document, which presented the design for the 1908 procession, was written at roughly the same time (fall 1907) that the decision was made to stage the three-day extravaganza in June 1908, free of any ties to the Champlain celebrations.

43 AAQ, “Procession du Très Saint Sacrement,” 10.

44 *Ibid.*, 2.

45 *Ibid.*, 3.

46 In his book on the Champlain celebrations that were held later in the summer of 1908, H.V. Nelles provided a brief account of the Fête-Dieu procession noting that it “was a special kind of parade” in which the marchers came “to the people in their neighbourhoods and parishes.” In fact, the 1908 procession was distinguished by the way in which it was routed away from the parishes (*Art of Nation-Building*, 112).

The tracing of the route constituted only one element in the planning of the procession. Before 21 June came about, thought had been given to details ranging from the banners to be displayed along the route to the choice of music to be played by bands and sung by choirs. Care was even taken to situate young girls along the route “qui sèmeront de fleurs le chemin au moment où le T.S. Sacrement passera.”⁴⁷ However, the matter that probably absorbed the largest amount of attention was determining the precise order in which the marchers would be arranged.

In the earliest version of the “ordre de la procession” prepared by Mgr Bégin and his associates in the fall of 1907, the line began with various groups of laymen organised in ascending order of importance, starting with representatives of various associations of craftsmen and concluding with the members of the Privy Council. As we will see below, this hierarchical arrangement of the various elements of civil society was a common feature of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession, which the organisers of the Fête-Dieu hoped to appropriate on this occasion. Following the laymen came members of religious communities, the secular clergy, and finally the hierarchy of the church, which would accompany the host. The procession ended, in this version, with the participation of “les fidèles.”⁴⁸

Little of this order survived the negotiations that must have occurred prior to the day of the big event. Accordingly, when the procession finally took place, the various artisanal groups were no longer at the head of the procession; they would be seen two days later leading the Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade. Instead, the “procession du St-Sacrement” began with various groups of laymen who were organised along parish lines, in an effort to retain something of the traditional design of the event. Newspaper reports commented on the activity early on the morning of the celebration of the Fête-Dieu as representatives of the various parishes assembled at marshalling points before setting off, one parish after another.⁴⁹

Quite aside from the reorganisation of the front of the procession to give prominence to the parishes, the original version of the marching order was also transformed to give it the sort of symmetry typical of Fête-Dieu processions. By placing nearly all of the lay elements at the front of the line (albeit in ascending order) followed by the religious elements (once again in ascending order), the original conception missed one of the central goals of a Fête-Dieu procession: namely to present society as a single body whose various elements

47 AAQ, “Procession du Très Saint Sacrement,” 11. There is no space in this relatively short paper to discuss in any detail such matters as the decorations and the music along the route of the Fête-Dieu procession.

48 *Ibid.*, 14-15.

49 *L'Événement*, 22 June 1908.

were arranged in ascending order of importance prior to the appearance of the host. Similarly, the original conception failed to impose any order on the marchers who would have followed the host. Instead of marchers arranged in descending order of importance, there was only an indistinguishable mass of people, described as “les fidèles.”

The problem of symmetry was resolved in the final design of the procession as the parade of parishes was followed by the religious orders, then the secular priests, and the bishops who accompanied the host. Along the route various members of the hierarchy were given the honour of carrying the “ostensoir” (the receptacle holding the host), starting with Mgr Bégin and concluding with Mgr Sbarretti, the Papal Delegate to Canada. The civil dignitaries were then placed right behind the host, with Sir Wilfrid Laurier leading the way. Then followed other members of the lay elite in descending order of importance. Bringing up the rear, there was still an undifferentiated group of people usually described as “le peuple.”⁵⁰ It is impossible to know exactly who constituted the “people,” but it seems reasonable to assume that there were some individuals who were unaffiliated with any particular group and who wanted to take part and not simply watch the event. This certainly would have been in keeping with the inclusive spirit of the Fête-Dieu from its inception centuries earlier.

The sense that all were welcome was also evident in other ways. Several observers commented, for instance, on the participation of Protestants, who clearly were not made to feel excluded from this event. Mgr Alfred Paré, a professor of history at Université Laval, remarked that during the ceremonies before the Basilica at the end of the procession, there were both “catholiques et protestants. On a vu des protestants, à genoux, et pleurant d’émotion.”⁵¹ On a very different level, the commitment on the part of Fête-Dieu organisers to make this an inclusive event was reflected in the participation of several orders of cloistered nuns. Mgr Bégin invited both the Sœurs Augustines, responsible for nursing care at the Hôtel-Dieu de Québec, and the Sœurs Ursulines, a teaching order, to come out from behind their convent walls so as to reinforce the point that all members of the community had come together for this special moment. There was some reluctance on the part of the nuns to participate because of the physical exertion demanded by this roughly three-kilometre route that included a steep uphill climb towards the end. As the chronicler of the Ursulines noted, they feared such a long walk “sous les rayons brûlants d’un soleil de juin.”⁵²

50 *L’Événement*, 22 June 1908; *L’Action Sociale*, 22 June 1908.

51 ASQ, MS-754, *Journaux de Mgr Paré*, vol. IX, 21 June 1908.

52 Archives des Ursulines de Québec, *Annales des Sœurs Ursulines*, vol. 4, 65. I appreciate the help provided in these archives by Sœur Marchand. I also owe Viv Nelles a word of thanks for having led me to both the Ursuline and Augustine archives. He referred to their participation in the events of the summer of 1908 in his *Art of Nation-Building*.

The organisers at the archevêché were not prepared to take no for an answer as the presence of the nuns offered a dramatic element to the procession that was appreciated by nearly all who later commented upon the event. Accordingly, the nuns were encouraged to march only the first 600 metres of the route, where carriages would be waiting to take them back home. As a result, the time they spent in the outside world was rather brief. The Augustines' chronicler observed that their day had begun with a trip "au parloir du Séminaire; elles y ont rencontré les Mères Ursulines qu'elles ont été heureuses de revoir et avec lesquelles elles ont suivi la procession jusqu'au presbytère Saint-Jean-Baptiste; là elles ont repris les voitures qui nous les ont rammenés à 10 1/2 heures."⁵³ Nevertheless, even this brief appearance was significant as it indicated that the Fête-Dieu procession was open to all and that its route had no barriers to prevent the coming and going of those who wanted to join the celebration.

As we have seen, every detail of the Fête-Dieu procession was carefully considered in order to deliver a message. As one observer remarked in regard to the procession: "Tout est symbolique."⁵⁴ With an estimated 100,000 in attendance, there were undoubtedly various perspectives on the meaning of the events of 21 June, although some messages must have been more obvious than others. Nearly everyone in the audience would have recognised the procession as an event with deep roots in their culture, and they probably would have understood that taking the procession outside the limits of the parish indicated that this was a special occasion that reflected the power of French-Catholics to seize the main streets of the city, if only temporarily. Observers would also have understood that the participants who filed by had been arranged in a very careful order that reflected their status in a society where there were no clear lines between church and state. Otherwise, how could one explain the intermingling of the clerical and civil leaders in the same procession?

Further to the issue of church and state, many in the crowd would have also understood that this was not simply a celebration of Catholicism, although it was primarily a religious occasion, but that it was also an event with a nationalistic message. The organisers of the procession made no effort to marginalise Catholics who were not French Canadians, as Bourget had done in Montreal in the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, various observers came to the conclusion that this was a celebration of both a religion and a people. The Quebec City newspaper, *L'Événement*, viewed the event as a demonstration of faith on the part of "la nation Canadienne-française." In a similar fashion, the chronicler

53 Archives des Sœurs Augustines de la Miséricorde de Jésus, Hôtel-Dieu de Québec, Annales, 21 juin 1908, V, 193-94. My thanks to Sœur Marie-Paule Cauchon.

54 P. Courbon, "La grande procession de la Fête-Dieu," in *Le Vénérable François de Montmorency-Laval*, 111.

for the Sœurs Augustines remarked: “[La procession] restera dans la mémoire de ceux qui en ont été les heureux témoins ‘un jour inoubliable de douces et saintes joies autant que de fiertés nationales.’”⁵⁵ The twin forces of religion and nation would return to the streets of Quebec City two days later, albeit with the relative importance of those twins reversed.

Marching to the People: La procession de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste

While the Fête-Dieu celebration benefited in 1908 from the fact that it had long occupied a relatively stable place in French-Canadian culture, the same could not be said about the Saint-Jean-Baptiste holiday. While John the Baptist is normally referred to as the patron saint of French Canadians, he did not officially receive that status until the year of the Laval and Champlain celebrations.⁵⁶ Prior to 1908, St-Joseph held the formal status of patron saint, although his fate as a major figure in French-Canadian culture was probably sealed by the fact that the day for his celebration fell on 19 March, in the midst of both winter and Lent. By the late nineteenth century, “la St-Joseph” continued to occupy a place on the French-Canadian calendar, but solely as a religious holiday.⁵⁷ Accordingly, Benjamin Sulte could draw the distinction between “notre fête patronale, la St-Joseph, et notre fête nationale, la Saint-Jean-Baptiste.”⁵⁸

From its very inception, the religious dimension of “la Saint-Jean” had difficulty competing with its role as a “popular” holiday with pre-Christian origins in the celebration of the summer solstice. In New France, the burning of bonfires quickly became standard fare, at the same time causing consternation for priests who feared it would be “bien difficile de métamorphoser en solennité de l’Eglise une fête marquée depuis les siècles par les éblats bruyants et peu scrupuleux de la foule.”⁵⁹ In the end, however, the clergy chose to adapt to the less religious aspects of the holiday as they added religious ritual to the lighting of the bonfires.⁶⁰

Although “la Saint-Jean-Baptiste” fared better than “la St-Joseph” as a significant cultural event during the French regime, even the former was celebrated rather inconsistently, with its regular observance largely restricted to parishes which bore the name of the saint.⁶¹ This situation changed in the nineteenth cen-

55 *L’Événement*, 22 June 1908; Archives des Sœurs Augustines, Annales, 21 juin 1908, V, 193.

56 In fact, the declaration by the Vatican of Saint-Jean-Baptiste as French Canada’s patron saint was a coup for Mgr Bégin in the context of the commemorative politics of 1908.

57 Pamphile Lemay, *Fêtes et corvées* (Lévis, 1898), 24.

58 Sulte, “Les origines de la fête Saint-Jean-Baptiste,” in Chouinard, *Fête Nationale des Canadiens-Français célébrée à Québec en 1880* (Québec, 1881), 4.

59 Sulte, 3.

60 John R. Porter, “Processions et défilés,” in *Le grand héritage: l’Eglise catholique et des arts au Québec* (Québec, 1984), 261.

61 Lemay, “Fêtes et corvées,” 25-26.

ture with the creation of an organisation committed to promoting French Canada's "fête nationale" in order to send a political message. "La Saint-Jean" began to take on its modern form with the founding of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste (hereafter SSJB) de Montréal in 1834. In the years leading up to the Rebellions of 1837-38, the SSJB was formed to mobilise popular support for the Patriotes, a movement which was hardly viewed positively by the Catholic hierarchy. However, in the aftermath of the Rebellions, the SSJB, both in Montreal and in its new chapter in Quebec City, was led by individuals with closer ties to the church, which in its own right was more than willing to cooperate so as to impose itself more forcefully upon French-Canadian society.⁶² It was in this context that Saint-Jean-Baptiste processions became reasonably regular events, starting in Quebec City in 1842 and in Montreal the following year.⁶³

In its early years, the Quebec City Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession reflected certain aspects of the one staged in conjunction with the Fête-Dieu, which had already had two hundred years of tradition in French-Canadian culture. In the case of the 1842 procession, marchers stopped along the way for mass, much as Fête-Dieu participants stopped at "réposoirs".⁶⁴ In subsequent years, in both Quebec City and Montreal, most processions ended with a mass, still reflecting the Fête-Dieu tradition of having the people marching towards the church.⁶⁵ The decorations along the route of these early Saint-Jean-Baptiste processions were also reminiscent of those for the Fête-Dieu. Marchers would have commonly seen *arcs de triomphe* over the route, as well as small maple trees to line the course.⁶⁶ In addition, it became commonplace by the 1850s to see small children marching in the ranks of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade, clothed in sheepskin and accompanied by a young lamb. The child was supposed to represent "Saint-Jean-Baptiste dans son jeune âge, et l'on se plaisait à croire que sa protection était acquise à ceux qui avaient ainsi figuré sous son nom." This tradition, however, did not begin in Quebec, but rather in France where it had been a part of Fête-Dieu processions.⁶⁷ In this case, the French precedent, for

62 We saw above that the church had similar motives for promoting the Fête-Dieu celebrations after the rebellions.

63 Given the limits of this essay, there is no room to consider the Montreal processions, which have received more attention than those in Quebec City. See Michèle Guay, "La fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Montréal, 1834-1909," MA thesis, Université d'Ottawa, 1973; also, Alan Gordon, "Inventing Tradition: Montreal's Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day Re-Examined," Unpublished paper presented to Canadian Historical Association, 1996.

64 Chouinard, *Fête Nationale des Canadiens-français célébrée à Québec en 1880*, 570.

65 Guay, "La fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Montréal," 145-46. Guay more generally described the early Montreal festivities as having constituted "une fête religieuse" in which "on s'est rendu à l'église en procession. Le modèle de cette procession solennelle a pu être emprunté à celle de la Fête-Dieu, que l'on célébrait de cette façon."

66 Porter, "Processions et défilés," 262.

67 Chouinard, *Fête nationale des Canadiens-français célébrée à Québec, 1881-1889*, 265.

whatever reasons, found itself reborn in Quebec in the Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and not the Fête-Dieu, procession.

For all their similarities, however, some fundamental differences between the two processions were apparent from the 1840s. While the route of the Fête-Dieu procession invariably formed a loop to consecrate the territory that it encircled, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste event normally started at one point and ended at quite another, in the process asserting control over a public space but not making a strong claim over a territory that was being enclosed. On another level, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade was far less inclusive than the Fête-Dieu procession. The former did not include women during the period being studied here, and certainly had no category for "le peuple" who might join the procession at the end of the line.⁶⁸ In fact, the sense that this was an exclusive affair, carefully organised by the SSJB was evident in the way in which military-style constables made sure that only approved groups entered the procession.⁶⁹

As for the order of these groups, they were normally divided, once again along military lines, into different "divisions." In the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession, as in the "procession du St-Sacrement," marchers were organised hierarchically, but the manner of presenting the various classes in society varied from one event to the other. The marching order in the Fête-Dieu procession conveyed status in relation to one's distance from the host, so that the least powerful elements in society were present at both the start and the finish. In this fashion, attention was fixed upon the host, which was literally at the centre of the event. By contrast, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession was organised in a linear fashion, thus mirroring the linear nature of the route. While the ordering of groups was not nearly as precise as in the Fête-Dieu, working-class groups were invariably near the start of the line, and the French-Canadian professional classes were always at the end.⁷⁰ Without a symbol such as the host to anchor the event, the secular Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession resorted to the classic depiction of society, beginning with its lowest orders and concluding with the rulers.⁷¹

68 In the case of the Montreal parade, there were apparently demands for the inclusion of women, but I have seen no evidence of their participation prior to 1908 (Guay, "La fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Montréal," 291). In Quebec City in 1908, the leaders of the SSJB chose to include children, but made it clear that only "garçons" were welcome (ANQQ, SSJBQ, 412/1, Dossier 14, Comité de régie, 10 April 1908).

69 Chouinard, *Annales de la SSJB de Québec, 1889-1901*, xxii.

70 The Montreal Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession was apparently organised in a similarly hierarchical manner. See, Gordon, "Inventing Tradition," 15.

71 There were moments in the history of the Quebec City Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade when there were inklings of the presence of the host. In the mammoth 1880 procession, the "char allégorique" of the SSJB was located in the middle of the procession, occupying the position of the host in the Fête-Dieu. Otherwise, on that occasion, the marchers were organised in the normal, ascending manner of Saint-Jean-Baptiste processions.

The two processions also differed from one another in terms of their relative stability. As Benoit Lacroix has put it, unlike secular fêtes which often reflected a certain “improvisation ... la fête religieuse est signe de stabilité.”⁷² Even if Mgr Bégin and his associates changed certain aspects of the Fête-Dieu procession, there was still much in the 1908 event that would have been recognisable to the inhabitants of seventeenth-century New France. By contrast, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration was one that had little fixed form. While 24 June marked the day in the Catholic calendar for the celebration of John the Baptist, in fact the “fête nationale” was occasionally celebrated weeks, even months, later. The most dramatic shifting of the date came in 1898 when the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations in Quebec City were moved to 21 September so as to coincide with the unveiling of the monument to Samuel de Champlain. In 1908, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations took place on 23 June, largely because the Fête-Dieu had to be celebrated on 21 June and Mgr Bégin wanted the unveiling of the Monument Laval sandwiched between the two events. However, in an earlier version of the schedule for the 1908 ceremonies, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste holiday would have been celebrated on 2 July, a proposal that raised no eyebrows since this was truly a moveable feast.⁷³

The unsettled nature of Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations was further reflected in the competition in Quebec City between two different chapters of the SSJB. While the Fête-Dieu procession took place under the watchful eye of the Catholic hierarchy, there was no higher authority to impose any particular order on the organisation of “la Saint-Jean.” Accordingly, the SSJB de Québec which had been organising annual celebrations since the 1840s, came into conflict with the chapter representing the St-Sauveur district of the city, with each running its own celebrations by the close of the century. This situation only ended in 1900 with the signing of an agreement that guaranteed a single Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration, with control passing from year to year between the two chapters. However, the agreement still managed to perpetuate a certain instability by rotating the place at which the Saint-Jean-Baptiste mass would be celebrated among five different churches and by making no effort to regularise the route to be followed by the procession.⁷⁴

Moreover, while the agreement referred to both the procession and the celebration of mass as part of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration, it said nothing about the relationship between the two. In fact, over the years there had been a

72 Benoit Lacroix, “La fête religieuse au Québec,” in *Que la fête commence*. Diane Pinard, ed., (Montreal, 1982), 55.

73 ASQ, Université 170, no. 1, nd., p. 8. Of course, in the religious sense, a moveable feast (such as Corpus Christi) appeared on different dates, but in some fixed relationship to other elements of the Catholic calendar. By contrast, there were no rules governing when “la Saint-Jean” might be celebrated.

74 Chouinard, *Annales de la SSJB de Québec, 1889-1901*, 112-13.

significant shifting of the mass from the end of the procession to the start, perhaps to guarantee that the marchers would not disperse at the end before going on to other, more secular forms of celebrations. This separation of the secular and religious aspects of these festivities was particularly evident in both 1906 and 1907 when the mass was celebrated on 23 June, with the procession to be held on the 24th, immediately followed by an afternoon of outdoor entertainment. By the turn of the century, even when the mass and the procession were held on the same day, the mass invariably came first, followed by the procession, with the day closing with games and other forms of entertainment.

The incorporation of forms of popular culture into the Saint-Jean-Baptiste festivities reflected the willingness of the lay organisers to change the form of their event in ways that would have been unthinkable for those responsible for the Fête-Dieu. This same responsiveness to commercial pressures was also evident in the introduction of "chars allégoriques" into the Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade. In the early years of the procession, most of the floats were prepared by the various lay organisations that used the opportunity to provide tributes to the French-Canadian past. Accordingly, the floats typically were decorated with large-scale figures, usually of lay figures such as Champlain and less often with religious ones such as Saint-Jean-Baptiste.⁷⁵ They also frequently had various patriotic slogans such as "Nos institutions, notre langue et nos lois", but these were usually visible alongside the advertising of the group responsible for the float, in this case the "Peintres-Décorateurs."⁷⁶ Over time, commercialism took a different turn with the inclusion of "chars" that had no other goal but to promote products such as sewing machines. As early as 1880 a committee "des chars allégoriques et des personnages historiques" had been formed in Quebec City to assure "que rien dans la procession ne pût choquer l'oeil des connaisseurs et des juges en matière d'art et de bon goût."⁷⁷

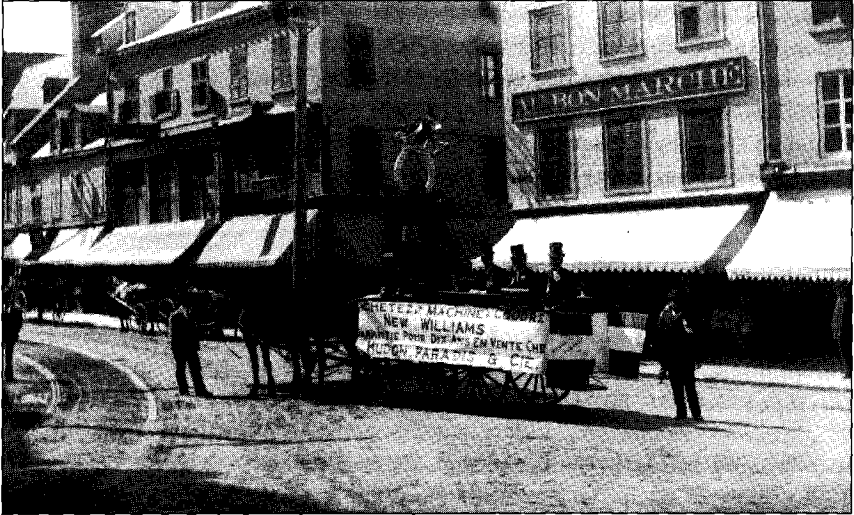
The Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations may have been more malleable than those surrounding the Fête-Dieu, but this did not prevent the organisers in the SSJB from communicating a message to the people who either participated in or observed the procession as it passed through the streets of Quebec City each year.⁷⁸ Here was an event that was organised by the lay leaders of the city, almost invariably professionals or owners of small businesses. Although these

75 John R. Porter notes that in the large Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade of 1880 in Quebec City, there were 22 "chars" only four of which bore religious figures. (Porter, "Processions et défilés," 262-6).

76 Chouinard, *Fête Nationale des Canadiens-français célébrée à Québec en 1880*, 487-88.

77 Ibid., 137. Regarding the same concern in Montreal, see Guay, "La fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Montréal," 210, 216, 222.

78 On the issue of the "invented" nature of the Montreal Saint-Jean-Baptiste festivities, see Gordon, "Inventing Tradition."



Commercialized float in St-Jean-Baptiste procession, Quebec City, ca 1900. Archives nationales de Québec à Québec, fonds Livernois, cote P560, S2, D73912, P1.

members of the petite bourgeoisie co-operated with clerical officials, they still saw the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration as an opportunity to draw attention to the existence of a people defined along “national” as much as religious lines. Nevertheless, just as the Fête-Dieu was a religious event with secular overtones, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession was a secular event that was still marked by a close connection with Catholicism. Accordingly, when Mgr Bégin asked that the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations be integrated into the Laval celebrations for 1908, the leaders of the SSJB immediately agreed to participate. Unfettered by any strong sense that there was a precise date on which their event had to take place and mobilised by the growing sense that the Champlain celebrations were going to deny the existence of a French-Canadian nation, they only asked when to show up.⁷⁹

Once they had agreed to celebrate “la Saint-Jean” on the day following the unveiling of the Monument Laval, the leaders of the SSJB entered into a series of negotiations with the clerical authorities regarding the form of this special Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession. While it had become customary by 1908 to celebrate mass before the procession, the archevêché wanted to return to the earlier tradition of having the marchers proceed towards the religious celebration, as was the case in the Fête-Dieu. The SSJB organisers agreed to this, but

⁷⁹ The growing antagonism in early 1908 towards the Champlain tercentenary was evident in ANQQ, SSJBQ, 412/1, Dossier 14, Comité de régie, 10 April 1908.

wanted mass to be celebrated on the Esplanade, a large (and secular) green space outside the old walls of the city, perhaps to facilitate the movement of the crowds to the games that were scheduled for later in the day. In the end, however, they complied with clerical demands that the procession lead to the Monument Laval.⁸⁰ When the marchers arrived at their destination, mass was celebrated by the Papal Delegate during which “l’hostie sainte s’éleva au-dessus de ce peuple à genoux.”⁸¹ As at the end of the Fête-Dieu procession, here were 100,000 people on their knees, at least for the moment detracting from the secular aspects of the day’s festivities.

There were similarly complicated negotiations with clerical authorities over the precise route to be followed. Certain members of the SSJB were concerned that they were being forced to choose one largely identical to that “qui suivra le procession du St-Sacrement, le 21 juin. Votre comité desire continuer son travail d’organisation de la procession et faire de celle-ci une véritable manifestaion nationale.”⁸² In the end, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession of 1908 followed much, but not all of the route that had been traversed by the Fête-Dieu marchers two days earlier, so that there still remained much that distinguished one event from the other. While the Fête-Dieu procession followed its classic “loop” form, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste participants started at one point and finished at quite another. More specifically, the latter began on a number of streets in the Saint-Roch section of the city before following a section of the Fête-Dieu route. It then passed through a number of side streets in the Saint-Sauveur section of town before once again taking part of the Fête-Dieu route back to the Monument Laval. The clerical organisers of the “procession du Saint-Sacrement” had consciously altered the “normal” parish-based route in order to build an event that spoke to the glory of the church. By actually taking their procession to several neighbourhoods, the SSJB organisers distinguished their event as one that came closer to the people.⁸³

On another level, however, the Fête-Dieu procession of 1908 distinguished itself as a much more “popular” event than that associated with “la Saint-Jean.” While no one, in theory at least, was excluded from participating in the former, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession was even more explicitly exclusionary than in previous years. As in the past, the 1908 procession was divided into military-style divisions. On this occasion, there were 25 divisions, the first nine of which included various groups of tradesmen and trade unions. These were followed

80 *Ibid.*, 6 and 14 February 1908.

81 *Le Vénérable François de Montmorency-Laval*, 173.

82 ANQQ, SSJBQ, 412/3, Dossier 31, Comité de la Procession, 20 March 1908.

83 As we saw earlier, in his *Art of Nation-Building* H.V. Nelles viewed the Fête-Dieu procession as one that took marchers to the neighbourhoods of Quebec City. In fact, it was the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession, ignored by Nelles, which had this quality.

by divisions that included groups of small businessmen, with the notaries, doctors, and lawyers, the sort of men who led the SSJB, only appearing in the final two divisions.⁸⁴ Women, of course, were not present, and while children had been specially included for the occasion, only boys “d’origine française paternelle ou maternelle ou de l’un et de l’autre côté” were allowed to participate.⁸⁵ Concerned that only authorised marchers should take part and that these should occupy their rightful place in the hierarchy, the organisers of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession provided appropriately prestigious uniforms to the constables who had watched over the event since its inception.⁸⁶ The exclusionary aspects of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations even continued after the procession was over, as the SSJB imposed rules that “les canadiens-français seuls avaient le droit de concourir pour les prix” at the games organised for the afternoon, following the mass at the Monument Laval.⁸⁷

Through such means as devising a police force of their own and invoking “laws” that disqualified outsiders, the SSJB de Québec created an event that allowed the lay leaders of Quebec society to take control of the city’s streets for a day, a weekday during which normal business activity came to a halt. The Catholic hierarchy had a certain legitimacy in its own right that was supported, in the case of the Fête-Dieu, by centuries of tradition. By contrast, the secular leaders of the SSJB had to work with an event which had had no fixed form and which the clerical leaders wanted to influence as much as possible so as to impose a certain unity on the celebrations surrounding the unveiling of Laval’s monument. Mgr Bégin and his colleagues succeeded to a degree in imposing their will, but there still remained significant aspects of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste procession that sent a message to both the participants and spectators: At least for a day, there were French-Canadian secular leaders capable of controlling the streets with their own army in order to facilitate the passage of their people in a hierarchical order that was of their choosing.

The Messages of the Marching

The two processions through the streets of Quebec City in June 1908 formed part of an event that only existed as a means of protesting against the anticipated excesses of the Champlain celebrations to come a few weeks later. Had the organisers of the Champlain celebrations agreed to earlier proposals for an all-encompassing spectacle that would have included the unveiling of the Monument Laval, then the events described in this essay would never have

84 *Le Soleil*, 20 June 1908.

85 ANQQ, SSJBQ, 412/1, Dossier 14, Comité de régie, 10 April 1908.

86 *Ibid.*, 412/3, Dossier 31, Comité de la Procession, 20 March 1908.

87 *Ibid.*, 412/5, Dossier 57, Report of Secretary General, 1907-1908.

taken place in the precise form that we have seen. In the end, however, it proved impossible to bring Laval and Champlain together in the summer of 1908, and so both the lay and clerical leaders of Quebec City set off to construct an event that would offer an alternative message to the one they feared might emerge later in the season.

In the end, many of the same people who were central to the Laval celebrations, from Mgr Bégin to the leaders of the SSJB, played some role in the Champlain tercentenary. They could hardly object to the celebration of Champlain, and so ended up participating in an event, one of whose highlights was the appearance of the Prince of Wales. Ultimately, some who had been suspicious about the Champlain tercentenary found it to have been less of a celebration of the empire than they had feared.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, such suspicions had been rampant earlier in 1908 and helped fuel enthusiasm for the construction of an alternative event around the unveiling of the Monument Laval. In the months leading up to the unveiling there was considerable sympathy for the view of one member of the SSJB's board of directors who commented upon "l'existence d'un malaise profond au sujet du caractère des fêtes du III^e centenaire de la fondation de Québec."⁸⁹

From the start, the clerical and lay leaders of Quebec City had wanted to celebrate Laval and Champlain together as representative of the twin forces that had shaped French-Canadian identity since the seventeenth century. In the end, with Champlain removed from the picture, they still managed to draw attention to these two forces by constructing a celebration that began with a religious procession and ended with a secular one. As we have seen, these two processions were hardly in opposition to one another. Indeed, there were secular elements evident in the Fête-Dieu procession and religious elements in the Saint-Jean-Baptiste one. Much like Champlain and Laval, these two processions formed part of a whole to most of those who invested so much energy to stage them. At the same time, however, without seeing the two events as polar opposites, they were still different from one another in terms of their origins, their form, and the messages that they hoped to communicate.

The leaders of the French-Catholic nation that was on display in the streets of Quebec City in June 1908 managed to put their differences largely behind them in order to take control of public space that normally was controlled by the "outsiders" who directed the economy. The significance of this assertion of power was magnified by the fact that the same streets would soon become the property, however briefly, of the agents of the federal and British governments who watched over the organisation of the Champlain celebrations. The governor-

88 Nelles, *Art of Nation-Building*, 139.

89 ANQQ, SSJBQ, 412/1, Dossier 14, Comité de régie, 10 April 1908.

general, Lord Grey, was untroubled by the staging of an event that made little effort to build upon the distinctive features of French-Canadian culture, going so far as to ignore the anniversary of the date upon which Champlain had arrived. What Grey had going for him were power and money, two commodities that the lay and clerical leaders of Quebec City had in smaller quantities. As a result, these leaders were careful to build the Laval event around two events with deep, albeit very different roots in French-Catholic society. In the process, they appealed to the past in order to bolster the claim to power that was explicit in the very staging of the processions.