

Notre Dame du Cap

SOUVENIR BUILDINGS IN QUEBEC POINT TO A MIRACULOUS HISTORY

By Bill Trainer, Nellysford, VA

The city of Cap de la Madeleine, with a population of some 33,000, is located midway between Montreal and Quebec City on the north side of the St. Lawrence River. Located about two-hours from the SBCS June Convention site, it could be worth a side trip with antiquing stops in between in the hope of picking up one of at least three metal replicas that owe their origins to Cap de la Madeleine. (None are available in the town's gift shops, however). On a per capita basis, three metal miniatures would rank high in any replica-by-city tabulation.

The Cap de la Madeleine area was settled by Jesuit missionaries in the 1630's a wooden parish church was completed there around 1660. It was replaced by a larger stone church that was completed in 1720. Today that is the oldest church in Canada that has retained its primitive state.

A replica of that stone parish church is shown to the right. The base is inscribed "Shrine N.D. du Cap 1714." The date apparently marks the year when it was decided to build. This is the crudest of the three castings discussed here, but is, nonetheless, a faithful rendition of that structure.

The years 1854, 1879, and 1888 were milestones in the history of the city and of the church. In 1854 a parishioner donated a statue of the Blessed Virgin to mark the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Originally placed in a side altar, the statue was subsequently named Notre Dame Du Cap (or in English, Our Lady of the Cape) and moved to the main altar

where it continues to draw thousands of visitors.

By the 1870's, the population of Cap de la Madeleine had risen to about 1300, making the original stone church inadequate. Thus, it was decided to build a new and larger church. Demolishing the original structure would provide some of the stones needed for construction. By the fall of 1878 the balance of the required stone had been stockpiled on the south side of the St. Lawrence. The plan was to transport the stone by horse-drawn sleighs over the ice during the winter.

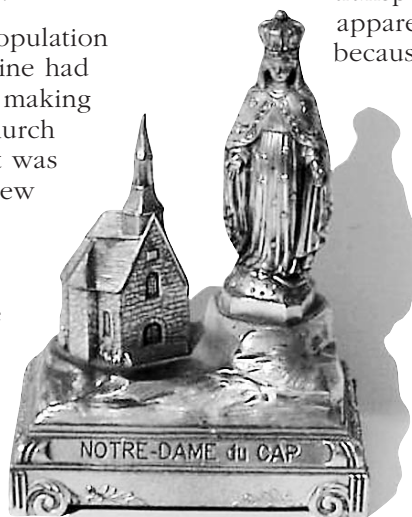
The weather was uncooperative, however; by early March 1879, the necessary ice had not formed. Organized prayer efforts (as well as a promise by the Vicar of the Diocese to the Blessed Mother to spare

the original church if the ice transport became possible) apparently were heeded because by mid-March the needed ice formation developed. It was named by the people as "The Bridge of the Rosaries." The new church, Notre Dame du Cap, was completed in 1880.

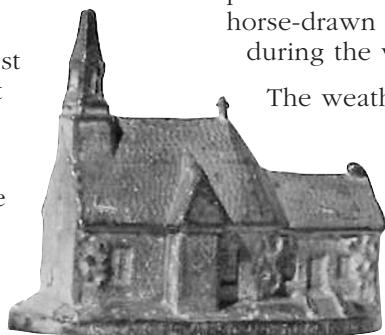
The older structure had been spared, and fulfilling the Vicar's promise, it was dedicated on June 22, 1888 as Notre Dame du Cap Shrine. On that same date, two priests and a handicapped person,

praying at the Shrine's communion rail, reportedly observed the eyes of the statue becoming momentarily animated, an event that has been called "The Prodigy of the Eyes."

With that as a background, the features incorporated in the replica shown in the photo above and become meaningful. The stone church is presented in forced perspective and the statue of Our Lady is a very accurate rendering of the original. This high quality piece made of pot metal with a silver



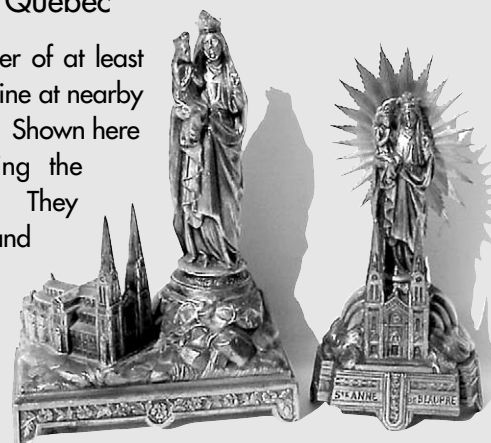
The stone church of Notre Dame du Cap with the statue of Our Lady.



The stone parish church, the Shrine of Notre Dame du Cap, completed in 1720.

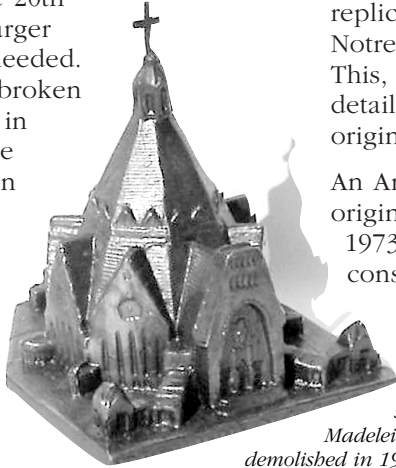
ST. ANNE DE BEAUPRE, Quebec

Interestingly, France was the supplier of at least two replicas of the more famous shrine at nearby Saint Anne de Beupre in Quebec. Shown here are two replicas commemorating the basilica of Saint Anne de Beupre. They each incorporate a music box and were produced in France. Given the similarity of details, they seem to have been made by the same manufacturer as the Notre Dame du Cap piece.



wash has excellent detail. Manufactured in France, it was made to accommodate a music box. The latches that would secure such a device have not been disturbed in this particular piece, so it apparently came sans music box when originally purchased.

News of the events described above led to the little shrine becoming a pilgrimage site, which continued to grow into the 20th century. A larger church was needed. Ground was broken for a basilica in 1955. A stone transported on the 1879 ice bridge was included in the center of the landmark, which was completed in 1964.



The Basilica of Notre Dame du Cap, which was completed in 1964. The Basilica and the 1720 church still stand in the city of Cap de la Madeleine. The church completed in 1880 was demolished in 1963.

The Basilica is octagonal—260 feet long by 167 feet wide and rising 258 feet from the ground to the tip of the cross. It has seating for 1660 people who have unobstructed views (no columns or pillars to cut sight lines). The photo at right depicts the pot metal, copper-wash replica of the Basilica of Notre Dame du Cap. This, too, is a well detailed model of the original.

An Annex, added to original stone structure in 1973, ironically was constructed using



In 1888, three people reported that the eyes of this statue of the Blessed Virgin became momentarily animated as they were praying. This report led to the church becoming a pilgrimage site.

stones from the church completed in 1880 and meant to replace the original. That replacement church was demolished in 1963, shortly before completion of the Basilica. No metal replica of that church has turned up.

On September 10, 1984, Pope John Paul II made a pilgrimage to Notre Dame du Cap Shrine, thus adding to its fame.