

Levasseur



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Which one of the Levasseur sculptors made the altarpiece of the Boucherville Church?

by: Jean-Marie Levasseur

The city of Boucherville was founded in 1667 by Pierre Boucher. The first Holy Family Church, built of stone, in the Boucherville parish, was built in 1712. The altarpiece of the church was made by a sculptor [by the name of Levasseur](#) from 1723 to 1724. And the current church, that replaces the one built in 1712, was built in 1801 and 1802.

In a church where the priest celebrated mass with his "back to the people", the altar was located next to the rear wall in the back of the building. The altarpiece was a decorative vertical construction, rising near the back and above the altar and frequently adorned with sculptures. In some places, the altarpiece has taken on striking proportions to the point of sometimes rising to the vault of the Church. In Boucherville¹, it was of more modest proportions, but important enough to necessitate that it be constructed on site or near the Church.

THE SCULPTOR OF THE ALTARPIECE

We find, however, in a more recent article by Jacquelin Rochette on the Casavant organ of the Holy Family church, an assertion that casts a doubt on the traditional position held: «In 1723 [Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel](#) carved... **an altarpiece**...» Then in 1729, the same sculptor is commissioned to make the balustrade². »

Which one of the Levasseur sculptors made the altarpiece of the Church of Boucherville? Was it Pierre-Noël Levasseur, or Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel? The answer should be on **the contract** signed with the parish council of the Holy family church of Boucherville. In the notarial data bank (Parchment), the contract is thus described:

«**18 07 1723 (1699-1730)** [Taihandier said LaBeaume, M.] (Mtl) construction contract for a stable [= error of copyist;]» It should read 'an altarpiece'] between **Pierre Levasseur, master carver**, and the parish council of Ste-Famille-de-Boucherville. »

The content of the contract does not fully answer the question, since the sculptor is identified only by the name of **Pierre Levasseur**. Therefore, let us refer to the historical context of the time.

PIERRE LEVASSEUR DIT CARMEL ?

On 18 July 1723, at the signing of the contract, Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel was only 19 years old: he was a minor according to the civil law of the time in New-France [you become an adult at the age of 25 years], which means that he could not legally enter into or sign a contractual agreement.

To perform a contract of the importance of the altarpiece of Boucherville, he would have had to work on site or near the Church; In 1723, however, Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel was still living in Quebec City, in the family home on the Mount Carmel Street.

And we can add that Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel was never recognized as sculptor. Upon his marriage in Boucherville in 1729, the priest and the notary identified him as a "master carpenter" ³. Subsequently, it was recognized also as a merchant, officer of militia and a bourgeois, but never as a sculptor.

It is therefore clear that **Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel** could not be the sculptor of the altarpiece of the Holy Family Church of Boucherville.

PIERRE-NOËL LEVASSEUR ?

To understand what follows, we must know that the life of Pierre-Noël Levasseur, son of Pierre II, and grandson of Pierre dit Lespérance, can relate to three periods in different places and with the use of different names:

1° **In the city of Québec** (1690-1721), « he was called **Noël**. He was baptized in 1690, », confirmed in 1701 and was married in 1719, still under the name of Noël (PRDH). His wife was Marie-Agnès Lajoue. Towards the end of that time, he wanted to be distinguished from his little cousin 'Noël', son of Noël, grandson of Jean, who, in addition to having the same name, was also master sculptor. He then decided to go to work as a sculptor in the Montreal area and at the same time he decided to change his name to Pierre and from now on he would be called "Pierre".

2° **In the Montreal area** (1721-1727), he presented himself as « **Pierre Levasseur** », master sculptor. He stayed first in Pointe-aux-Trembles (1721-1723). At the baptism of his son Charles (March 3, 1723) at Pointe-aux-Trembles, he was identified as «Pierre' Levasseur » and his wife was Marie Lajoue Agnès: the name of the wife confirms that the father was "Noël". He then lived in Boucherville

(1723-1727), where he settled in the summer 1723. He had two children who were baptized in Boucherville: René-Michel (October 12, 1724) and Antoine (November 16, 1725). In the parish register, he was always called Pierre and his wife, Marie-Françoise-Agnès Lajoue.

3° **Upon his return to the city of Québec** (1727-1770), he chose to present himself as « **Pierre-Noël** » Levasseur, master sculptor. He could not continue to be identified as 'Pierre' Levasseur: since there were too many 'Pierre' Levasseur in Quebec City at the time and he had previously been known as Noël. In everyday life, he probably continued to be called « Noël », but in business, he signed more often as "Pierre-Noël" or "P. Noël", even though several notaries were still writing « Noël ».

According to the contract, the altarpiece was to be built in Boucherville near the Church: "the churchwardens will provide, one half of his housing cost, enabling him to carry out the work in the church at the assigned location 4. However, at the signing of the contract, Pierre-Noël Levasseur - identified under the name of "Pierre Levasseur" - was 32 years old and he was still in Pointe-aux-Trembles, separated from Boucherville by the St. Lawrence River and the Boucherville Islands; but he came to settle at Boucherville, where he has remained, apparently, from the summer 1723 until the spring of 1727. It is possible that the first year, he rented a house for his family. What is certain is that, from July 6, 1724, he acquired "three locations of land and a house, located in the village of Boucherville, two of which sites are located between the the Chemin du Roy along the St-Lawrence River and the street of the Ste-Famille Church 5. According to the contract for the construction of the alterpiece signed on July 18, 1723, the work was to be completed in 14 months from the month of August 1723 to the end of September 1724.

In the contract, the sculptor was identified as « Pierre Levasseur, master sculptor ». "However, among all the sculptors of the 18th century, Pierre-Noël Levasseur was the only one who worked under the name of Pierre Levasseur, master sculptor³" from 1721 to 1727 and he stayed in Boucherville, from 1723 to 1727.

*It is therefore clear that **Pierre-Noël Levasseur**, under the name of "Pierre Levasseur " was the sculptor of the alterpiece the Holy Family Church in Boucherville.*

THE CONTRACTOR OF THE BALUSTRADE

To completely clarify the affirmation about who is at the origin of this work it is necessary to identify the manufacturer of the balustrade. In the notarial 'parchment' data bank, the contract is thus described:

« 30 08 1729 (1699-1730) [Taihandier dit LaBeaume, M.] (Mtl) contract for the construction of a balustrade between the churchwardens of the parish of Ste-family-de-Boucherville and **Pierre Levasseur, master carpenter**, of the town of Boucherville.

Here, too, the content of the contract does not clearly address the question, since the manufacturer is identified only by the name of **Pierre Levasseur**. Therefore we appeal, once again, to the **historical context**.

The builder of the balustrade could not be Pierre-Noël Levasseur, who had returned permanently to Quebec in the spring of 1727. It could only be Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel who, at the time of the

signing of the contract in 1729, had already moved to Boucherville where he was to be getting married, on November 14, 1729. This is confirmed by the fact that the contract is not signed by Pierre Levasseur, master carver, but Pierre Levasseur, **master carpenter**.

CONCLUSION

Pierre-Noël Levasseur and Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel had a significant presence in the Boucherville region. **Pierre-Noël Levasseur** had opened the way to his three brothers, **Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel**, Barthélémy and Jean-Baptiste. He merited the admiration of many people with the sculpturing of the alterpiece, but he couldn't find enough orders to make a living as a sculptor in the area, he returned to Quebec City after having lived four years in Boucherville. **Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel** moved to Boucherville and settled there becoming very involved in the life of the city. He became known as a master carpenter, able to produce fine woodwork, like the **balustrade** of the church. He was also recognized as a merchant and as a militia officer. He was finally given the title of « bourgeois ».

¹ **Michel Cauchon et André Juneau**, « LEVASSEUR, PIERRE-NOËL », dans *Dictionnaire biographique du Canada*, vol. 3, Université Laval/ University of Toronto, 2003 — consulté le 24 février 2018 —, http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/levasseur_pierre_noel_3F.html.

² **Jacquelin Rochette**, « Église Sainte-Famille, Boucherville, Qué. », <http://www.musiqueorguequebec.ca./orgues/quebec/sfamilieb.html> — consulté le 14 mars 2018 —.

³ Pour le registre paroissial du mariage de Pierre Levasseur dit Carmel, voir le PRDH et, pour le contrat de mariage, voir : Greffe du notaire Marien Tailhandier dit Labeaume, acte du 13 novembre 1729, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal.

⁴ **Marché de construction d'un retable**, Greffe du notaire *Marien Taihandier dit Labeaume*, acte du 18 juillet 1723, BAnQM.

⁵ **Vente à constitution de rente de trois emplacements situés dans le bourg de Boucherville**, Greffe du notaire *Marien Tailhandier dit Labeaume*, acte du 6 juillet 1724, BAnQM.

L'ASSOCIATION DES LEVASSEUR



The Association, Levasseur d'Amérique Inc. is a non-profit organization, founded in 1988, in accordance to a federal charter. Its goals are:

- To join together and unite a large number of Levasseur and other descendants who have adopted the patronymic Borgia, Carmel, Carmell, Vasseur, Vassor, Vasser.
- To promote, develop and diffuse historical genealogical knowledge about the Levasseur families with Internet, an electronic Newsletter published three times per year also the publication of genealogical dictionaries.
- To maintain and update, on an ongoing basis, the genealogical data base available to members at all times on the Internet.
- To make available to members a family photo album and the Newsletters that the Association has published since 1988.
- To honor the memory of our forefathers and their descendants by way of monuments, plaques or symbolic gestures that commemorate historic events that are chronicle the Levasseur family.
- To gather all documents related to the Levasseur family for the purpose of constructing archives that will constitute the heritage of our Association and that will provide a source of information for historians and genealogists.

We would appreciate if you could send us family related documents that would add to our data base of archives and also enable us to continue the publication of the Levasseur Newsletter three times per year. The participation of the Levasseurs and members of their families is essential to allow us to pursue our mission. Send us your photos and texts for the next publication of the Newsletter. You can download them very easily with this new tool and by providing a brief description of the photo or text that is being sent. Following receipt of your documents, a copy of all information to be published in the Newsletter will be sent to you for approval prior to final publication.

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