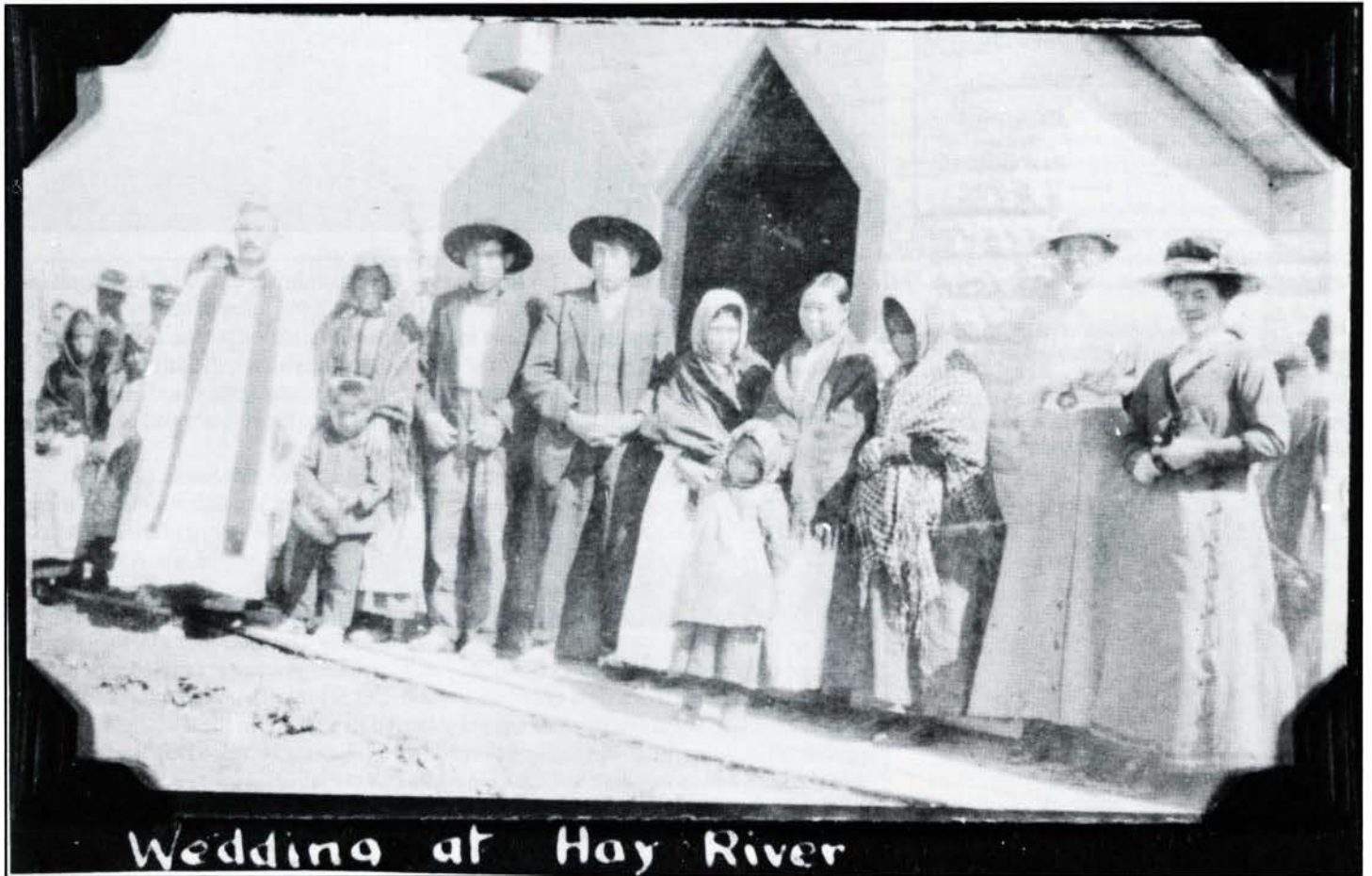


THE HAY RIVER MISSIONS: ST. PETER'S AND ST. ANNE'S



BY JOAN MATTIE

At Hay River, Northwest Territories (figure 1), two excellent examples of mission architecture remain from the period when Anglicans and Roman Catholics were most active in establishing their influence within the Mackenzie River district. St. Peter's Anglican Church, built 1900-09 (figure 2), dates from the middle part of that period, while St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church, built 1938-40 (figure 3), dates from near the end of it. The churches' influence was well in place after this time, though there was a shift in concentration, with the Anglicans consolidating their position farther north, above the Arctic Circle.

A number of circumstances conspired to isolate the Hay River missions at an increasingly abandoned site, now part of the Dene Indian Reserve across and downstream from the modern town of Hay River (figure 4). Nevertheless, the missions are valued and well cared for by members of the reserve, who are working on plans to incorporate them into an interpretive scheme oriented to both tourists and their own nation.



Figure 1 (above). Northwestern Canada, showing the location of Hay River, Northwest Territories.

Figure 2 (right). St. Peter's Anglican Church, Hay River Indian Reserve, N.W.T., constructed 1900-09. (Hay River Dene Band, 1991)

Previous page: A wedding party at Hay River, n.d. (Runyard/N.W.T. Archives, N89-011/43)



THE HISTORY OF THE SITE

At the turn of the 20th century, Hay River was at the approximate centre of the longest inland water route on the North American continent, some 2,500 miles of connected river and lake from Athabasca Landing (about 100 miles north of Edmonton) to the Beaufort Sea. On the south shore of Great Slave Lake, at the mouth of the Hay River, the settlement by that name was a stopping place for travellers coming up the Athabasca, Slave and Mackenzie River systems. In addition, it had long been a gathering place for summer fishing among Dene tribes in the region, most notably the Slavey.

The advantages of the site made it attractive for the establishment of both a Hudson's Bay Company post and a Christian mission. However, the first attempts at these in the late 1860s were not successful, largely because of the seasonal nature of the native occupation. Yet the seeds of Euro-American culture and religion had been sown. A small group of Slaveys did begin to stay at Hay River, facilitated by their newly-acquired skills in agriculture.

In 1893, under leadership of Chief Chantla, the band petitioned for a resident missionary. The Anglican church responded by sending young Thomas Jabez Marsh, a recent graduate of Wycliffe College in Toronto. At first Marsh was primarily occupied with basic survival, but found time to set up a small school for five local boys. Two years later students from the mission at Fort Resolution were transferred to his care. In the late 1890s others came from as far north as Wrigley and Fort Norman (mid-way between Hay River and the Arctic coast), and as far south as Fort Chipewyan (now in Alberta).¹

Mission accommodations during these early years were crude. Some improvement came with the arrival of hundreds of gold-seekers on their way to the Klondike in 1898. Full of high spirits, they gave Marsh a hand with his tasks, including the construction of a new building. Perhaps more importantly, the Klondikers influenced the natives to learn English, countering a widely-held opinion that "in the outside world French was the accepted language of the white man and ... only the degraded and debased spoke English."²

This belief, introduced by Oblate missionaries, was one of many evidences of rivalry between the Roman Catholics and Anglicans in their struggle to gain influence among the native population in the North. In many locations they established missions in the same settlements, competing for converts among the same people. In fact, such competition had given rise to the first mission at Hay River. It was established by the Roman Catholics in response to stated intentions by the famous Anglican missionary William Carpenter Bompas. He had wanted to build an orphanage here, close to the newly-opened HBC post, but difficulties intervened and it failed to materialize. Intended to help children made destitute by the epidemics sweeping through the Mackenzie Valley in the mid-1860s, it would have matched the Roman Catholic school and orphanage built during 1863-64 at Fort Providence a relatively short distance away.³

The abandonment of the first Roman Catholic church at Hay River and Marsh's efforts in the 1890s represented a second chance for the Anglicans in this location. The success of those efforts was manifest in Slavey-initiated plans for a proper church building in 1901, with Marsh promising only to "help" construct it.⁴ St. Peter's, a church of considerable vernacular charm, was the result. It still stands, in good condition, on the Hay River Dene Reserve.

1 Alfred J. Vale, *Historical Sketch of the Origin and Work of the Hay River Mission, Great Slave Lake, N.W.T.* [Toronto: Women's Auxiliary, Anglican Church, c. 1956], 6. See also David A. Harrison, "Hay River, NWT, 1800-1950: A Geographical Study of Site and Situation," Ph.D. thesis, University of Alberta, 1984, 139-44.

2 Agnes Deans Cameron, *The New North: An Account of a Woman's 1908 Journey Through Canada to the Arctic*, rev. ed., ed. David R. Richeson (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1986), 39. See also Vale, 23-24.

3 See Raymond Huel, "Early Oblate Missions in the Canadian Northwest: The Evolution of a Missionary Strategy," *Vie Oblate Life* 48, no. 2 (August 1989): 244.

4 Vale, 39.

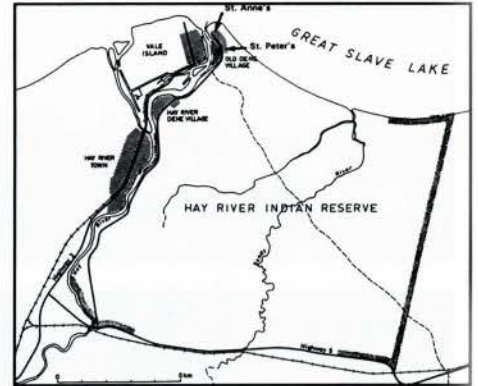


Figure 3 (top left). St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church, Hay River Indian Reserve, N.W.T., constructed 1938-40. (Hay River Dene Band, 1991)

Figure 4 (above). The Hay River Indian Reserve, showing the mission sites on either end of the "Old Dene Village," the newer Hay River Dene Village, and the current town of Hay River. (Nada Putnik, Maquette & Anuri Architects)

Figure 5 (bottom left). The Anglican mission at Hay River, about 1925. From left to right: the church, the residential school built in 1916, a log warehouse, and the isolation hospital built in 1917. (National Archives [NA], C-8942)



Seven years after it was completed in 1909, the church was joined by a large new residential school (figure 5), built under the direction of Reverend Alfred James Vale (later Canon Vale), Marsh's successor. Possibly the most imposing structure in the Northwest Territories at the time,⁵ and capable of accommodating over 50 students, it was designed by the Toronto firm of L.R. Jarvis.⁶ Since it was within the geographical limits of Treaty No. 8, signed locally in 1900, the school was eligible for federal government grants, which were applied both to its construction and to its operation.⁷

This funding was only one of a number of favourable factors that influenced the Anglican mission's development at Hay River as an educational centre for the Diocese of Mackenzie. Also important were the abundant fish stocks at the mouth of the Hay River and in Great Slave Lake, and the relatively good conditions for agriculture. Both enabled a fairly high degree of self-sufficiency. Hay River's location on the water route north from Athabasca Landing (reached by way of wagon trains out of Edmonton) further contributed to its success, ensuring reliable communication and supply links, and links with other northern communities as well—the latter important in drawing students from far-flung places.

During the heyday of the Anglican mission, roughly from 1900 to 1940, the community around St. Peter's church and residential school was a bustling, thriving place. Mission journals and archival photographs record a considerable amount of river traffic—scows, steamboats, tugs and barges, smaller boats, and, later, float planes (figure 5).⁸ The large garden was another centre of activity, as was the log warehouse for storing food throughout the long winter months.

The Roman Catholics re-established a mission in 1900 beyond the adjacent Dene village to the north, building first a mission house and then a *pièce-sur-pièce* squared log

5 Harrison, 164.

6 Blueprints of the plans are at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, MR200/70, 70a. Another set by Jarvis, though not followed in the actual building, is held at the Anglican Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, M71-4, Box 9. Still another set, by the Toronto firm of Gordon & Helliwell and dated April 1912, is in the private collection of David Harrison, at Hay River.

7 The geographic limits of the treaty extended from the south shore of Great Slave Lake into northwest Alberta and northeast British Columbia. Harrison, 140.

8 Air mail commenced on 25 January 1929. The regularly scheduled airplanes that served as carriers also brought orders from mail-order houses, as well as other freight, medical assistance, and passengers. David A. Harrison, *A History of the Anglican Church, Hay River, Northwest Territories* (n.p.: D.A. Harrison, c. 1988), 16.

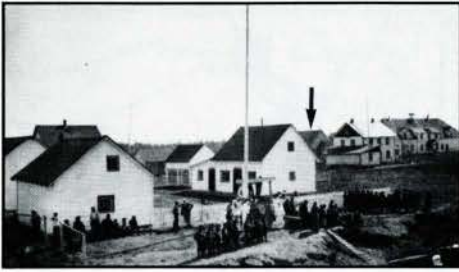


Figure 6 (right). The log St. Anne's Church, Hay River, constructed about 1900 and demolished about 1940. Photo taken in 1934. (Archives Deschâtelets, Ottawa)

Figure 7 (top). The Hay River Hudson's Bay Company compound, 1936. The arrow points to St. Peter's Church. (NA, C-38513)

Figure 8 (bottom). Grave houses and grave fences, Anglican cemetery, Hay River Indian Reserve. (Joan Mattie, 1991)



church (figure 6). In addition, the HBC returned to its property immediately north of St. Peter's in 1901. It had erected a small compound of buildings by 1914 (figure 7), at which time a post office was inaugurated.⁹ A small eight-bed isolation hospital came in 1917 (run by the Anglicans),¹⁰ and an RCMP station in 1925.

Though the community would go on to greater strength on the other shore of the Hay River in the late 1940s and after, the demise of the settlement on the east bank was predicted by 1931, when the residential school was relocated to Aklavik. Reasons for closing the school were several, not the least of which was its poor state of repair, apparently due to insufficient foundations. As early as 1923 its walls were buckling and its windows and doors fitting poorly. After sitting empty and abandoned from 1931 to about 1945 it was demolished. The church and hospital carried on in a small way, valiantly and solely staffed by Winifred Neville from 1943 to 1952, following her previous 14 years of service as a nurse.

Apparently prompted by the decline of the Anglican mission in the late 1930s, the Roman Catholics surged forward and built a new rectory in 1936 (visible in figure 3) near their since-demolished *pièce-sur-pièce* church, and a new clapboarded frame church in 1940. The latter is currently in near-original condition, due partly to its relatively short span of full usage, extending only to 1960.

By this time the main development at Hay River—now mostly non-native—had moved across the channel from the missions to Vale Island, where the Anglicans had already relocated in 1954. A disastrous flood in 1963 forced the relocation of this settlement farther upstream to the present site of the main town. This incarnation of Hay River was incorporated in 1964, the same year that a rail link from the south was extended, ensuring the town's growing role as a trans-shipment centre and the head of navigation for the increasing barge traffic on the Mackenzie River. Hay River is now the third-largest community in the Northwest Territories (after Yellowknife and Iqaluit),¹¹ and supports such amenities as a 16-storey apartment tower and a fine high school designed by well-known Alberta architect Douglas Cardinal.

The old missions across from Vale Island are now within the Hay River Dene Reserve, established in 1974 and the only reserve in the Northwest Territories. Within this land, the main Dene settlement was relocated a short distance upstream from the missions after the 1963 flood, leaving a near ghost-town surrounding the old missions. While a handful of new houses have been built here, and weathering has taken its toll, the site remains relatively undisturbed. Among other old structures still to be seen are fish-drying stages, smoke houses, food caches, and large pens and corrals for sled-pulling dogs—a few of them still in use. In addition, there are two outstanding cemeteries, with dozens of "spirit houses" (small rectangular house-like structures on short stilts) over graves (figure 8), an apparently acculturated form combining a westernized building type with native tradition.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CHURCHES

The legacy of not one but two interesting early churches at the site is a benefit of the Roman Catholic and Anglican rivalry at Hay River, the only Mackenzie district community that remains so-endowed of about ten that once existed. The churches' differences in architectural approach are marked, suggesting underlying differences in religious attitudes, in approaches to the materials of the physical world, and in native relations.

9 Harrison, "Hay River, NWT, 1800-1950," 149.

10 *Ibid.*, 144.

11 The 1990 populations were: Hay River, 2,885; Iqaluit, 3,126; Yellowknife, 13,568.

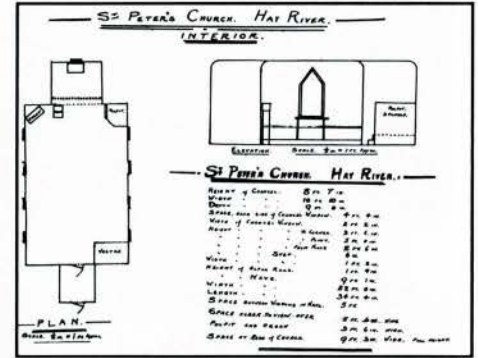


Figure 9 (above). Sketch plans of St. Peter's Anglican Church, Hay River, prepared by Rev. Marsh about 1901. (Provincial Archives of Alberta, MR.155/14)

Figure 10 (left). The interior of St. Peter's Church, about 1910. (NA, C-8944)

St. Peter's Anglican Church (1900-09)

Of the two Hay River churches, St. Peter's is the smaller (34' x 22') and more unassuming. Yet it is full of character evinced by cultural and historical signposts. The expediency of northern building technology, modified by the application of newly-available materials from southern Canada and the inclusion of lingering Ecclesiological practices, is perhaps its primary characteristic. Native aesthetics played a role in its furnishings.

Its design follows Reverend Marsh's rudimentary plans (figure 9), now in the Diocesan records at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. The only deviation from them was the location of the vestry, not in a corner of the nave, as shown, but just off the chancel on the right side. Marsh appears to have been totally untrained in architecture or drawing.¹² Besides religious instruction at Wycliffe College, Toronto, his post-secondary education consisted of a term at the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph.

The church is built of squared logs, keyed at the corners.¹³ Cut locally beginning in 1901, they apparently posed a challenge to the inexperienced builders (including Marsh) until some time later, when a small sawmill was set up on the site with power generated by the steam engine of the mission's boat.¹⁴ The form was, of course, an excellent one for northern conditions, making use of readily available materials and allowing for heaving and settling ground conditions as frost came and went. This was especially important at a silted site such as the mouth of the Hay River (illustrated by the structural failure of the residential school later on). Moreover, the log form enabled reasonably good heat retention because of the mass of its walls. Heat retention was additionally addressed in the low ceiling, the centrally placed wood stove with stove-pipe reaching across a good portion of the nave space, and the covering of metal sheets on all surfaces, both inside and out (figure 10).

This last feature makes the church unique. St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church at Dawson (1901) did employ metal cladding on interior wall surfaces above a wooden wainscoting. And St. Paul's Anglican Church at Churchill (1892) was prefabricated of iron and shipped from England.¹⁵ But St. Peter's, Hay River, is the only church known to be completely covered with the type of galvanized metal sheets familiar on commercial architecture in southern Canada around the turn of the century.¹⁶ Outside, the sheets were embossed with a pattern simulating coursed stonework (see figure 2). Inside, four patterns were employed: a simple vertically-ridged type for the nave walls; a patterned cove bridging the angle between the walls and the ceiling; a circular and floral pattern on the ceiling; and a vine-and-grapes pattern on the chancel walls, which may have been marketed specifically for religious use, given its symbolism. The metal roofing on St. Peter's has been replaced with asphalt shingles.

While metal cladding was extremely effective for weather protection and gave a more prestigious appearance to a humble log structure, it blatantly contravened certain principles of ecclesiology. These tenets had been influential in Anglican building since the 1830s when they were first developed, and, in large part, were operative at most other Anglican missions of the West and North. Intended to correct what was perceived to be degenerate religious and architectural practices in the early 19th century, they relied heavily on precedents of the medieval age.¹⁷ In particular, obscuring the underlying log walls at St. Peter's went against the ecclesiological precept of honest structural expression. So, too, did the use

12 Marsh's only other architectural experience likely came in his first years at Hay River, when he supervised and helped build a log mission house (which included a dormitory wing for residential students) and probably a small barn and a few sheds. See Vale, 1. See also Harrison, *A History of the Anglican Church*, 10.

13 The log construction is visible in a photograph taken just before the metal plates were attached (photo collection of Mrs. S. Rusler, Bridge Lake, British Columbia; a photocopy of the photograph was given to the author by David Harrison). A general description of the log walls is also contained in Vale, 40. Mention of the metal roof covering is contained in Vale correspondence, 21 December 1909, Provincial Archives of Alberta.

14 David A. Harrison, "St. Peter's at Hay River," *Up Here*, May/June, 1990, 23.

15 Kelly Crossman, *A Study of Anglican Church Buildings in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, Historic Resources Branch, 1989), 35.

16 In Dawson, Yukon, the Canadian Bank of Commerce (1901) and the Carnegie Library (1904) are notable examples of northern metal-clad buildings. Both are national historic sites. A few churches, including St. Anne's at the Hay River Reserve, had metal-clad spires. One mission church in southern Canada, at Fort Babine, British Columbia, also has an embossed sheet iron covering; see John Veillette and Gary White, *Early Indian Village Churches: Wooden Frontier Architecture in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977), 164. Two metal-clad interiors are also mentioned in this source, p. 176. For more on the subject of metal coverings, see Ann H. Gillespie, "Decorative Sheet-Metal Building Components in Canada, 1870-1930," thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1985.

17 See "Ecclesiological Revival," in Leslie Maitland, "Significant Examples of the Gothic Revival Style in Canadian Architecture," Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada report, June 1989, 50-126.



Figure 11. The chancel window, St. Peter's Anglican Church, Hay River. (Joan Mattie)

of a low, flat metal-covered ceiling (9 feet high); preferred were the high, peaked, wooden ceilings with exposed ribs or trusswork found elsewhere among Anglican ecclesiological churches, even in northern latitudes, as at St. Paul's Anglican Church, Dawson (1902).

Such disregard for long-standing Anglican traditions suggests that Marsh placed more value on locally appropriate design—and perhaps that he was unaware of or unconcerned with the fine points of Anglican ecclesiology. Nevertheless, the general configuration of the church, with the linear sequence of porch, nave, and chancel, was brought forward from an ecclesiological source, whether as a folk-filtered memory or as a conscious philosophical choice. It was the most commonly used plan at missions all over the North, probably not so much for reasons of philosophy as practicality. It was simpler style to build than the more picturesque and asymmetrical High Victorian design that had supplanted it in the more settled parts of Canada. St. Peter's belfry, with exposed cross-bracing (put on in the 1920s), and its Gothic references—the pointed windows and the minimal bargeboards—were also in keeping with earlier ecclesiological directives.

St. Peter's metal cladding speaks of improved supply routes coming up from southern Canada around 1900. The stained glass windows have their own transportation story to tell as well, though the details are not fully known. What has been recorded is that they arrived by dogsled and that they came from Robert McCausland Ltd. in Toronto.¹⁸ Fitted into pointed openings which had been cut through the metal-covered logs, they consist of side windows with red and green squares and a pair with gold-coloured diamond-shaped panes. Quatrefoils incorporating religious motifs are inset into their centres. A single window with coloured bands, a figured medallion, and monogrammed diamonds gives focus to the rear wall of the chancel (figure 11).

Inside, walls painted a "robin's egg" blue, unadorned floor boards of a dark brown hue, and simple benches and ecclesiastical furnishings create an overall effect that is quite dark, richly coloured, and warm. Lighting was originally supplied by oil lamps, which are still in place, though retrofitted electric lights can now supplement them when needed.

Original furnishings were entirely crafted by the local Slaveys, not imported from a southern supplier or made by a southern-Canadian mission helper, as was the case with nearly every other known northern mission church that is still standing.¹⁹ Items include simple benches (some of which have had plain backs added at a later date), a lectern, matching communion rail, and tripartite pulpit with heavy-looking brackets pierced with quatrefoils (see figure 10). Inexpertly conceived by two lay women workers at the Hay River mission, but carefully executed by boys from the school,²⁰ they are excellent examples of ecclesiastical folk art. Most highly individualistic and artistic are the two chancel chairs with carved and incised decoration, and woven *babiche* (cured rawhide from moose or caribou), a gift of the "head man of the village and his wife," according to Canon Vale in his memoirs.²¹ At the rear of the church is a large framed panel about the same size and shape as the windows, on which is inscribed in Slavey language the Apostles' Creed. A few hanging religious prints—perhaps ones that were sent by Marsh's friends in Ontario—apparently have locally-made hand-carved frames.

The interior has suffered few losses from its initial period of use; most conspicuous is the loss of the fabric items, including the banners from the chancel, the altar cloth (made by girls of the residential school), and the aisle carpet. Non-original additions are also very few; they include another lectern and an altar, the latter replacing a simple communion table.

The general effect of the interior is one of great charm. Though unsophisticated, it speaks strongly of the people who built it for themselves under the paternalistic guidance of Marsh and his assistants. Marsh's pragmatism is also evident in his willingness to break with certain religious conventions and southern building forms in order to respond more directly to local conditions. Yet southern connections are still obvious, a portent of even greater non-native influences soon to come into the Slaveys' lives. Agnes Deans Cameron, likely the first woman to venture into this part of the North as a travel/adventure writer, wrote of it in 1908: "This was by far the most attractive English Church Mission in the whole north—although comparisons are odorous and yet illuminating."²²

St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church (1938-40)

In many ways, St. Anne's is everything that St. Peter's is not. It has high pretensions, follows the southern building norm in its balloon framing, and was built entirely by non-native labour, emulating European precedents of the grandest sort (figure 12). Yet, like St. Peter's, it is vernacular in its expression. The key to this apparent dichotomy can be found in its particularly talented but untrained designer, Maurice Larocque, a lay brother from Quebec.²³ A contributing factor was the free rein given him by Father François Moisan, missionary priest in charge at the time.²⁴

18 *On the Making of Stained Glass Windows* [promotional booklet published by Robert McCausland Ltd.] (Toronto, 1913), 13-14 (author's collection). Money for the windows and their sashes was donated by Miss E.M. Wilgress. See Vale, 42.

19 The local fabrication of the furniture is mentioned in Vale, 41-42. Only a few other mission churches are known to have locally-made furnishings, including St. David's Church at Fort Simpson (completed in 1930). It has furnishings made by the famous missionary William West Kirkby in the 1860s, salvaged when the previous church was torn down. See Sheila Michaelis, *St. David's Church, Fort Simpson, 1858-1983* [n.p.: the Church], 22.

20 Provincial Archives of Alberta, MR200/72, Vale correspondence, 21 December 1909.

21 Vale, 42.

22 Agnes Deans Cameron, 130.

23 Larocque was born in 1908 in Notre Dame, Quebec, near Montreal. Information on him was gathered at the Roman Catholic Mackenzie Diocese Archives, Yellowknife, including an unpublished list of his building projects in the North (on file). Still living in retirement at Falher, Alberta, Larocque also gave verbal, taped responses to questions put to him by mail.

24 Moisan (1880-1955) was originally from Belgium; he spent his entire working life in the Canadian North and died at Fort Simpson, where he is buried. See "François Moisan" in Gaston Carrière, *Dictionnaire biographique des Oblats de Marie-Immaculée au Canada* (Ottawa: Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1977), 2:396.

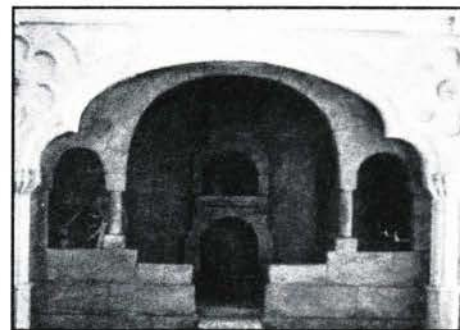


Figure 12 (left). Interior of St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church, Hay River, showing the altar, reredos, sunburst, ceiling decorations, and Stations of the Cross by Maurice Larocque. (Joan Mattie, 1991)

Figure 13 (above). The base of the altar in St. Anne's; missing are the statues of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph normally placed inside. (Hay River Dene Band)

The illiterate Larocque, who never progressed beyond the third grade in school and who received no prior training in carpentry, artwork or design, prepared plans and executed a painting of the proposed St. Anne's in 1937, a year before it was built.²⁵ Another Oblate lay worker, Brother Bruyère, dug the basement and did the balloon-framed structural carpentry, while Larocque carried out the finishing and decorative details.

Though ambitiously detailed, the church in its basic form follows the example of other Oblate mission churches, most of which follow simpler Quebec models and pre-date St. Anne's. Typical in this type of church are the rectangular nave with a vaulted ceiling, the attached porch with bell-tower and spire on the gable end, the spire's symbolic and decorative Latin cross, the round-headed windows, and the prominent interior altar. Within these norms, however, Larocque's individualistic expression has flowered. On the exterior, he endowed the facade with not one, but three matching spires, two smaller and secondary to a very large central spire (see figure 3). They are more open than is commonly seen in northern Canada, and therefore more vulnerable to the weather. Each spire rests on eight uneven-shaped columns that appear to simulate rough tree trunks. As a protective measure, and an enhancement to their appearance, sheets of zinc were hammered over their surfaces.

In the interior, the barrel-vaulted space is focused on a magnificent vernacular altar and reredos, hand made over many winter months by Larocque. Surmounted by a three-tiered reredos, it is not entirely unlike the general appearance of factory-made altars commonly used at other missions, but is larger, coarser in execution, and clearly reveals handwork and originality. Columns, arches, railings, and brackets were built up from many small pieces, creating an impressive sculptural effect despite the fact that almost no sculpture was involved and no sophisticated tools were used. Many surfaces were given a faux marbling treatment in shades of pink or white. The top of the reredos supports a large niche which holds a sizeable statue of St. Anne salvaged from the earlier *pièce-sur-pièce* church (figure 12).²⁶ A most unusual feature is the base of the altar, which was made to look like a three-dimensional diorama of Christ's boyhood home. It incorporates Romanesque arches, a "burning" fireplace, and walls painted to simulate stone blocks (figure 13).²⁷ The whole construction is well fitted into the curve of the apse at the front of the nave.

Certain elements in the altar/reredos link it to architectural treatments elsewhere. A dark-stained moulding, for example, is carried around the niche, down the sides of the console brackets that support it, and around the nave at the cornice level. Faux marbling has also been executed on partial mouldings incorporated into the ten Stations of the Cross on side walls. These Stations appear to be lithographs cut out to create silhouettes at their tops, then glued to a stiff backing. A number of custom-made wooden elements were attached as well. The finished products are somewhat three-dimensional and quite distinctive, even though the main images were mass-produced. Original treatments of Stations of the Cross are not common elsewhere in northern and western mission churches, making this instance a rare example.²⁸

25 The painting he did of St. Anne's is thought to still exist in Fort Resolution. This and other information on Larocque, as recorded by Father Robert Pelletier, OMI, in February 1992, was provided on an audio cassette by Larocque (cassette on file with author). The progress of Larocque's work during 1938-40 is documented in the mission journal "Codex Historicus—Mission St. Anne—1918-40," at the Oblate Archives, Province Grandin, St. Albert, Alberta.

26 The earlier use of the statue was mentioned in the Larocque audio cassette, February 1992.

27 The more usual motif (if a figural rather than architectural motif is used) is a depiction of the Last Supper, as illustrated in Veillette and White, 109.

28 Veillette and White, 109.

For the barrel-vaulted ceiling, Larocque ingeniously made use of inexpensive fibreboard, developed about ten years earlier and variously called “Beaver Board,” “Ten-Test,” and other trade names.²⁹ The result is a closer approximation of the smooth plaster work in Quebec Baroque churches that Larocque would have known than was possible with the narrow tongue-and groove boards used for barrel vaulting in almost all other western and northern Roman Catholic missions. The 4' x 8' pieces of this soft manufactured board were cut and bent to shape and their joints covered by battens, which also contribute to the overall aesthetic effect. Decoration was provided at the base of the vaulting by the repetition of swagged floral motifs formed by the arrangement of diamond-shaped wooden pieces, a folk adaptation of the fresco paintings one might expect to find in high style churches.

Other folk adaptations of the Baroque are evident as well. Both the shape and the blue colour of the ceiling suggest an atmospheric sky, while the central decoration of it—a spectacular sunburst (again, created with fibreboard and small pieces of wood)—gives a dramatic and symbolic focus, second only to that of the altar development. Not surprisingly, no practical stove and lengthy stovepipe disturb this illusionistic space, as in the Anglican church with its low ceiling and underlying ecclesiological principles. As one observer has commented, it was Roman Catholic policy to help native worshippers “understand and to have a taste for the things of God.”³⁰

Losses of architectural fabric or furnishings in this building have been minimal since its completion in the summer of 1940. Unlike at many Roman Catholic churches, its altar was not dismantled or reoriented after Vatican II. It was left intact and a small portable altar was put in front of it. Like St. Peter's, preservation of the church's original form was ensured because community development shifted elsewhere, thus decreasing the pressure for adaptive changes.

CONCLUSION

Of about ten communities in the Mackenzie district which had both Anglican and Roman Catholic missions, Hay River alone retains both its early churches. These churches and the remains of surrounding historical development constitute an important cultural resource which illustrates a crucial stage in Dene/Euro-American relations, as well as approaches to architecture.

St. Peter's Anglican, the older of the two mission churches, illustrates a pragmatic approach to church design. It incorporates certain traditions of its denomination, but also utilizes northern building technology and native aesthetics, all modified by an application of new materials made available by recently-improved transportation links to the south. Though well-preserved and attractive as an architectural type, its greater value is associated with the native people whose culture was influenced by the church's religious and educational programmes and those of the adjacent residential school. The church is also important as the oldest building in Hay River, marking its beginnings as a modern, largely non-native community, now the third-largest in the Northwest Territories.

St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church stands as a testament to the vision of one man, its designer and decorator, Maurice Larocque.³¹ He ingeniously overcame a lack of training in traditional church decoration (figural and decorative painting, carving, and plasterwork), by relying on an imaginative technique of assemblage. In addition, his good sense of colour, scale, and proportion, and a personal interpretation of Baroque principles, allowed him to transform simple, inexpensive materials into high architectural drama. Such exuberant expression was, to a lesser degree, typical of the Roman Catholic attitude to mission architecture in the North, though no doubt a culturally overpowering one to its native converts.

²⁹ Fibreboard's origin and first use have not been documented, but it seems to have been particularly popular in the 1930s and 1940s, according to Ken Elder, restoration architect, Public Works Canada, in a telephone conversation, 28 February 1992. Elder also pointed out a reference in the Sears Roebuck Catalogue of 1927, which illustrated the product and advertised: “Wood Fiber Wall Board, as its name implies is made of wood fiber. This material, under another name, sells at a much higher price, and is in great demand for new buildings and the remodeling of old ones. It is clean, dry, sanitary and durable. Can be painted or tinted any color desired and is especially treated for waterproof quality. Any handy person can apply it with satisfactory results. Can be sawed and solidly nailed without danger of splitting. Rooms are ready for occupancy as soon as applied.” Elder also observed that this material was particularly well-suited to northern building conditions on permafrost or muskeg (as at Dawson, where it was used as a later renovation material) because it did not crack as would plaster when walls inevitably contorted to some degree. The trade names by which fibreboard was known were “Beaver Board” and “Ten-Test.” Elder says that the former seems to have been the product name used west of Winnipeg, whereas the latter was used in eastern Canada.

At Hay River, in December 1937, Père Moisan ordered materials for the church from Ashdown's in Edmonton, specifying “Can. Wallboard” (“pour murs et voûte de l'Eglise, peinte couleur bleu ciel si possible”). In 1936 he had called for “Beaver Board” for the rectory. His written specifications for both are on file at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Mackenzie Archives, Yellowknife.

³⁰ This phrase was used in John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 170. Grant applied it in a similar context, in that Anglican mission churches tended to be plainer, and Roman Catholic ones more decorative and architecturally impressive, more suggestive of “the things of God.”

³¹ Incidentally, Larocque went on to design another landmark of note: the so-called “Igloo Church,” or Our Lady of Victory, Inuvik. It was designed and built by him in 1958. See “World's Only Igloo Church Built by Brother, Carpenter,” *The Canadian Register*, 11 March 1972, 7.