

A JEWEL NEAR THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

THE CHAPEL AT FORT GOOD HOPE, N.W.T.

[Partial translation of notes by Gaston Carrière, o.m.i. on the construction of the Fort Good Hope Chapel.]

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Whatever latitude they have worked at, the building of adequate chapels was always a missionary's prime concern. It appears that the apostles of the Great Canadian North, particularly in the Mackenzie region, took special pride in turning their small chapels into veritable jewels. We can scarcely imagine today what patience and dedication they put to this task. While all about them was sorely lacking, without much care to their own comfort, they devoted great time and effort to the erection and then to the ornamentation of God's temple.

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Although the ornamentation of chapels is somewhat of a tradition in the Mackenzie, the best of these is certainly that of the chapel of Notre-Dame de Bonne Espérance (Our Lady of Good Hope) at Fort Good Hope.

The Founding of the Good Hope Mission

The Fort Good Hope mission came to be thanks to the zeal and courage of father Henri Grollier, o.m.i. (6). Having arrived in the Northern missions in 1852, he proved to be a bold and enterprising missionary. He takes on the evangelization of the various tribes of the Mackenzie River, also known as the Great River. Thus, he founded the missions of "Our Lady of the Seven Pains" at Fond du Lac Athabasca (1853), "St-Joseph" at Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake (1858), "Sacred Heart of Mary" at Grande Île (Big Island) at the western end of Great Slave Lake (1858), "Sacred Heart" at Fort Simpson (1858), "St-Michel" at Fort Rae (1859), "Ste-Thérèse" at Fort Norman (1859), and "Holy Name of Mary" at Peel's River (1859).

In answer to a long standing request, he is finally authorized to go to Fort Good Hope in 1859 to establish a 'pied-à-terre' for the Mackenzie region. Monseigneur Alexandre Taché, o.m.i., Bishop of Saint-Boniface and responsible for the Mackenzie region, met Sir George Simpson during a trip to England in April 1857. Sir George, Governor of the Hudson Bay Company in Canada, proved to be most accommodating: "Ask for what you need Monseigneur and we will be happy to grant it to you", he said (7). In addition to passage on Company ships, Sir George and Eden Colville assured him of their assistance in establishing a mission at Fort Good Hope (8).

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Father Grollier was destined to found the Fort Good Hope mission. If his zeal was appreciated, his ineptitude in temporal matters was nonetheless recognized. It should not come as a surprise if someone is soon despatched to assist him with these.

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On July 24th, Mgr Taché announced to Father Farraud that Father Grollier would be going to Good Hope. (18) On August 29, 1859, Father Grollier is at Fort du Milieu (Fort Norman) where he baptises 10 children and dedicates the mission to Ste-Thérèse (19). He must have left for Good Hope that same day as, according to Father Xavier-Georges Ducot, he celebrated 44 baptisms there on the 1st and 2nd of September (20). He started work on the mission which was now his 'pied-à-terre' and which he would not leave until his death on June 4, 1864.

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On the way from Norman to Good Hope he was made to travel on a barge with cattle and dogs. It was made plain that this was good enough for him, although another barge was lightly loaded.

This augured well for the future.

The Missionary's Lodgings

We cannot say how long he remained in the Company fort but his stay was not pleasant. He soon had to find alternate accommodation. He wrote to Mgr Taché on May 29, 1860:

"According to the Governor's letter, which I have sent to you, hospitality at the Fort only seems to have been available for the winter past, [...]" (22)

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Other than a few notes indicating that he first celebrated mass at Good Hope on September 2, 1859, that he occupied the room previously used by the Minister, and that this room served as both lodgings and church, no other information is available on Father Grollier's first winter at Good Hope. [...]

[...] In the first fall he baptised only children and, once the Indians had left, he took care of the fort's residents. In the Spring of 1860 he baptised children and a few boys between 12 and 14 years of age. He left on June 1st to go to Fort Norman (27).

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There is no doubt that Father Grollier did not appreciate his stay at the fort. This he stated very clearly to Mgr Taché in a letter dated July 20, 1860, written from the Ste-Thérèse mission in Fort Norman:

"... allow me to say that you are wrong if you believe that travelling is easy when we are lodged at the fort. On the contrary, we are bound there hand and foot ,

unable to move. Dogs are needed for winter travel but these gentlemen have none to give you. In summer we must use their barges but often the time is not appropriate for the missionary's travel and there is always the fee of five shillings per day. As I have already told you, the savages only begin to pray once the priest has a separate building. This they have already stated to me in Fort Good Hope. No sacrifice is too great when it comes to buildings in areas apt to being invaded by the Protestants [...]" (31)

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A Home for the Missionary

In that same letter he also announces that a house will be built for him:

"Mr. Ross is happy [...] as promised, he will build me a house in Fort Good Hope this year so that I should be independent from the fort by next summer. As per my request, the house will look like a beautiful one in Fort Good Hope, a single building divided into three. In the middle will be a large room which will serve as the church for the time being, the right side will be divided into two rooms, and the one on the left will serve as kitchen and refectory. His concessions stopped there but, not being shy, I pushed for more and, having told him that I was to have a Father and Brother with me as of next summer (1861), I obtained three free rations for one year, to save him the trouble of ensuring our survival during our first year. He was almost happy that we had no volunteers as these are feared in the missions" (32).

He writes to Father Végreville on September 3:

"Mr Ross is being friendly; he will build for me this winter. I hope that I will be in my home in Autumn. I will at least be able to have a Father and Brother with me." (33)

On February 24, 1861, Father Grollier complains to Fathers Henri Farraud, o.m.i., and Isidore Clut, o.m.i., that nothing has yet been done.

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A new letter from Father to Ross on July 9 requests a sheet of metal on which to roast fish and renews his request for a house:

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"Knowing your benevolence I restate my request for the house you have promised me. One that is 48 feet long and 18 wide, subdivided inside as per our needs" (37).

Mgr Grandin announces to Father Clut in August (38) that Father Séguin and Brother Kearney would be going to Fort Good Hope. (39) They actually arrived there on August 26. Father will no longer be alone and work will progress faster.

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Mgr Grandin finally arrives at the Good Hope mission on October 9, 1861. He describes what he saw:

"It was much farther from the fort than it is today, approximately three miles, near the mouth of the Hare River. Father Séguin and Brother Kearney succeeded in building a small house (41). With badly joined doors and windows, parchment for window panes and a square of glass in the center of the parchment, the house measured some 18 to 20 X 30. It was a veritable omnibus: chapel, kitchen, dormitory and refectory, carpentry workshops and reception hall for the savages."

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A New House, Better Situated and Better Suited

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Father Zéphirin Gascon arrives in 1863 to take over temporal matters from Father Séguin whose frequent travels have kept him from fulfilling these duties. In a letter dated May 2, addressed to Mgr Farraud, he states that the house is 22 feet wide by 18 deep, with a 9 square feet chapel and a fourteen square foot kitchen.

... on September 12, he (Father Séguin) sends this word to Mgr Taché:

"We have too much work. We have to build magnificent ceilings and floors with badly sawn boards. Luckily, Mr. Gaudet will assist us there by lending the services of Baptiste Lamalice whom you have probably heard of. It is said that he is a good worker but, as far as I am concerned, his best quality is that he does things well. Our house will be divided as follows: two rooms, a hall, another room, and a chapel. In the spring [1864], we will attempt to build a church as our house is now too small to hold the savages in spring and fall." (72)

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The Good Hope Chapel

It was a long time before they could even think of building a suitable chapel in this Northern solitude. But finally, we have overheard Father Séguin tell Mgr Taché that he would try to build one in 1864. He gave this same news to Mgr Farraud in a post scriptum dated September 13:

"I forgot to tell you earlier that, if you come to visit the Great North, it would please me greatly if you would purchase a glass cutter for me as I hope to start a chapel next year." (74).

Luckily, Mgr Grandin sent Father Émile Petitot, o.m.i., to Good Hope (75) in the fall of 1863. There he managed to dedicate time to the building especially to the decoration of the chapel proposed by Father Séguin. Father Séguin did not know what distress this endeavor, which took some 20 years to complete, would cost him in the end.

While waiting, he prepares the materials and starts slowly.

Building the Chapel

"Each year is marked by a slight increase in the amount of building materials", he writes to Mgr Taché on February 25, 1864. In the fall of 1863, the missionaries built a chapel adjoining the house. "It was panelled and roofed and measured 12 feet by 11", he continues. Father Émile Petitot, who worked at decorating the chapel, describes this in Fifteen Years Below the Arctic Circle:

"Our house was too small to hold 500 people. We suffocated in it. I drew the plans 2 months after my arrival at Fort Good Hope. I made it 70 English feet long by 25 wide, 30 feet high under the vault, with a 65 foot high steeple, copied on the one in Chartres, and with no transept. Enclosed in the facade was the steeple in which opened the arched Dutch doors which are topped by a rose window and flanked by two lancets of the same size and style as those in the nave.

A gallery was to have topped the porchway.

Mr. Gaudet, factor at Fort Good Hope, and Mr. W.L. Hardisty, chief of the Mackenzie District, provided assistance wherever they could and Manitou Island provided its beautiful fir trees freely. We only needed four men to cut and square them. Their labour would have cost us 6.50 francs per day, the equivalent of 676 francs per month. As this labour was donated by the Company, we can judge by that the value of the generosity shown by these two gentlemen.

[...] Plans are no sooner conceived and layed out that they are executed, without submission to a planning commission. Seven pairs of hands made up the entire budget. Four servants from the fort felled and squared the fir while Brother Kearney, a young Hare, and myself, dragged them from the island with dogsleds and transported them to the mission grounds.

I ruptured myself on one of these trips by trying to quickly lift a log which was too heavy for me. This injury kept me bedridden or confined to my room for many months. It also kept me from all work requiring physical exertion during a period of seven years. My role in the erection of this building was confined to that of architect. Only once the building had been framed was I able to contribute by building a monumental altar, a gothic railing, and also by painting the interior decoration of the walls and vault. This work demanded two years of constant labour.

My task, which I must admit was the most pleasant, the most artistic, and the least dangerous, was as such the easiest and least meritorious of all. The highest honours for this work are reserved for my two companions and their helpers from Fort Good Hope.

I had previously decorated our domestic chapel so as to make it the prettiest in all the Mackenzie. I had received the first harmonium to come to the Great North and the first artificial flowers, and was to receive the first plated church vessels. Although the most isolated, when we were done, we were not the worst off. Many a village in France had more to complain about than we did. Sunlight entered through the rose and lancets, mysterious and multi-coloured. It played on the oil paintings on the walls where I had depicted angels, birds, fruits, flowers, foliage,

frets and arabesques, all in the Italian style. Still missing however were the 10 large paintings which I had intended to paint in the chapel. I replaced them with large red areas bordered with gold florets. Finally, the harmonious but simple sounds of the organ accompanied and sustained the once nasal songs of our happy Indians.

Fine and noble friends from Paris, Marseille and Scotland had showered me with presents for Our Lady of Good Hope: a gleaming monstrance, chalice, cruets and episcopal font, censers, magnificent copes and robes, and many ornaments and sacred vessels which were admired by the Hare."

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We have layed the foundation for our chapel since my return from Peel River [July 28, 1864] (79). Its interior is 44 feet long by 20 feet wide.

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It should be noted that the missionaries in Good Hope needed at least two years to have an order filled. If, per chance, the mail was lost or if no follow up was made on their order, they could wait three to four years. When the only thing available locally was the lumber, such delays were not conducive to a timely construction.

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The year 1869 saw some encouraging progress. On July 25, Father (Séguin) wrote again to his bishop:

"The Brother and I are now installing windows in the chapel tower, after which we will do the roof. With just the two of us, I don't know if we will be able to finish before the barges arrive." [...]

On September 16, 1869, Father Séguin informs Mgr Farraud that the roof is finally finished:

"Throughout the summer, the Brother and I have layed the chapel's roof. We used 400 boards for the first roof, 600 angle boards for the second, and we still had some 100 boards left. The tower walls have been sided.

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Had we had the flooring we would have had time to install it. We are stopped again by a shortage of boards" (89).

In closing he tells him that a barrel of nails was left behind in Providence and that he could not continue without them.

After the roof came the steeple. Father Petitot informs Mgr Farraud of this on May 10, 1870:

While impatiently awaiting the arrival of Brother Alexis (91), Father Séguin is busy sawing the spire and lends us a hand. All responsibilities for the mission rest upon my shoulders; but this is what I chose in life (92).

He also states, at this time, that the new church is open for services. Father Séguin confirms this news to Mgr Farraud in June:

"I thought I could saw a few boards for our chapel but the savages arrived earlier than expected. Still, we managed to put up the steeple. It is a great relief as the steeple as I had long worried over it. Without the cross it is 24 feet high. Another frame is added to the tower's sill. The three sides receiving posts are cut into this one. The steeple has eight sides and the posts are 22 feet, tied at the top by a large, three foot long beam."

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Father Petitot confirms that he is the architect of this steeple.

"The steeple's spire was built and raised according to my plans. All work was done manually from within the tower, using only ladders for scaffolding. This spire rises 25 feet straight up from the steeple's stringers. It has eight sides and is already topped off by a six foot high cross which is covered in tin. From the spire will sprout four pinnacles which will be built in the summer. Brother Alexis is ardently and impatiently awaited." (94)

In July Father Séguin relates his exploits to Mgr Clut:

"He celebrates mass in the great chapel (95). Although it is open to the winds it has a good roof and rain does not bother him. In May, savages and people from the fort helped raise the steeple which is 23 or 24 feet high. I will roof it with the Brother once the Peel River barges have gone. Since my return, we have sawn angle boards for this purpose. Once the steeple is roofed we will have to mud the chapel. This is no small task as the earth is obtained far from the mission and we must climb a 40 or 50 foot hill with a bag of earth on our backs."

If we could have Brother Alexis, he adds, we could be finished in two years and have a bit of a rest."

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Father (Séguin) writes to his sister on August 1, 1870:

"We will (98) roof the steeple and, as we have no straw, mud the walls with a mixture of mud and straw. I have no idea when it will be finished. We can barely put in one month of work per year. If only I had a Brother, work could progress more quickly. But their numbers are decreasing instead of increasing as one drowned in Slave Lake last summer while checking his nets (99)."

The Brother he so dearly wishes for, will not come soon as it is still many years before Brother Julien Ancel will come to work.

In September Brother Kearney gives an idea of the work still to be done:

"...and so we will have more leisure to work at our Church; as there will be no trips to make (100) until Christmas. This summer we have succeeded in finishing our steeple which gives the Church a fine appearance. The latter has been mudded and whitewashed outside. All we want now is boards. If I had someone to saw with me we would soon get on with the work" (101). [Brother Kearney]

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He continues his letter in January 1871 and states that, after the retreat which ended on All Saints Day...

"we began our window sashes, we put together the lower posts, but as the days were too short we were obliged to leave the ogives until March or thereabouts." [Brother Kearney]

On January 1, 1871, Father Séguin tells Mgr Clut of his work the preceding summer.

"In July, with Brother Kearney, after the Peel River barges left, he roofed ... the steeple with boards and as we had no tin to cover it with, we covered it with a whitewash made from native glue. A few days after having finished, a shower demonstrated that our whitewash was not adequate as some two thirds of it was washed away. Last spring I had asked Mr. Hardisty if he could spare a few boxes of tin so that we could at least cover the ridges but he had none to give. The Minister had used them all to cover his chapel's steeple and it was now too late. It would have to stay as is. It took us three weeks to roof it as we could rarely work more than three days out of six because of the rain" (102).

Father Petitot's illness is now added to the miseries of the ministry and construction. It is a great worry to Father Séguin, right up to the time he can be sent out for the care that he needs (103).

He also tells of his work in a letter to his sister dated February 1, 1870 (104):

"As I said in my letter of last summer, the Brother and I roofed our steeple after my return from Peel River. It took us three weeks as neither of us was skilled at this kind of work. Even though it is not very tall, I was happy to come down for the last time.

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As we climbed we whitewashed it with white earth mixed with glue. All for nothing as a few days later a downpour washed the steeple from top to bottom. I will not go up to whitewash it again as it is too steep. If the glue had been a strong one, such as we make in France, the rain would not have affected it but that was all that we had. The one we use is made from parchment which is boiled for a few days. It is true that the boards are still white but that will probably be gone by next fall. Tin would have been perfect but here we must make do with what we have. The important thing is that it is finished. I don't care if it stays white or if it turns black" (105).

He enclosed a photo with this letter in which we can see his Church from the outside, with nothing done on the inside as yet.

It is no small endeavor to build a chapel in these regions where we must depend on the makeshift means devised by people who have nothing to inspire them.

Work is resumed in the spring of 1871. Brother Kearney writes to Brother Reynard on the day of Our Lady of Mercy:

"Since I came back from the Rapid we have been able to square and haul sufficient logs for the flooring of our Church, but when they will be sawed is another question. The windows are already made, four Ogives only are wanting; but there is glass for only two windows, and very likely we will have to wait for some years before anymore arrive" (106). [Brother Kearney]

The problem of windows for the chapel is a saga of its own and we will deal with it later on.

Father Séguin speaks again of his work to Mgr Farraud on May 29, 1871:

"Throughout the winter we worked as best we could on the window sashes of our chapel. During the Brother's absence (107) I made half the ogives (the others will be made when we have the wood). Through the Brother I had asked for the glass cutter from the Rapids

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but he did not bring it. I managed to fill two windows by using broken pieces. When will this poor chapel be finished? If you can, please send us a Brother who can saw as boards are the only thing we are missing. Once sawn, the Brother and I will manage to fit them. Mr. Gaudet was good enough to have 30 logs squared for us and the Brother squared another 20. This will give us enough beams for the lower floor. If only there was someone to help the Brother, these could be sawn this summer and we could lay the floor next spring (108)."

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As Brother Kearney tells Brother Reynard:

"We have been able to floor our Church this spring, and we expect to be able to begin the vault in the fall. F.R. [...] it will be a little cathedral in itself" (113). [Brother Kearney]

A few days later Father Séguin announces that the floor has been layed and speaks of

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the work to be done:

"This summer, after my return from Tsikatchig (114), we will try to cut enough boards for the chancel. The good weather prevented us from squaring as many logs as we would have liked. We only have 30" (115).

On May 28, 1872 he writes to Mgr Clut:

"At the beginning of this month we layed the chapel's floor and filled all the window sashes with parchment made from caribou skin. Many of them have

already split in the sun. We have also made the rose window but it is not yet installed as we have not had time to put in the stained glass. We will need all of our coloured glass for it and there will be none left for the ogives of our windows. It would please me greatly if you could send us another 50" (116).

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The ceiling was built in 1875. This is what Brother Kearney announced to Mgr Farraud on January 31, 1876:

"Our church will be ready for painting (125). Last summer we completed the ceiling, and most of the boards necessary for finishing the interior are ready (126)."

On February 3, 1876 Father Séguin told Mgr Clut that the ceiling was almost finished but a problem with the chapel required additional work:

"As the chapel threatened to split open, and as I did not feel like starting a new one, we placed a joist at the stringer joint so as to keep it from opening up. It is not pretty but, if Father Petitot comes, he will find a way to spruce it up and turn it into an ornament (127)."

In 1875 a new companion, Father Xavier Ducot, arrived who would also exercise his artistic talents.

Brother Kearney gives more news of the church to Mgr Farraud in August 1876:

"While alone I worked at the Church, and with the help of a little Indian to hold the boards I managed to finish one side of the church.

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The boards were ready since last summer, then had they been put we would scarcely have required a hammer, and they would have joined well. The weather has so worthled them that it was very difficult to make them join passably well. After R.F. Séguin return, we completed the other side. I am sure could your Lordship throw a glance at what we have done you would say it was not very workman like, and it would be only too true (128)." [Brother Kearney]

In 1876 we finally have a chapel which is completed both inside and out, God knows with what problems. We now continue its interior ornamentation. But, when all seems finished, we notice that the chapel is too small and the difficult labour is started anew.

Extension to the Chapel

On May 25, 1877 Father Séguin writes to Mgr Clut:

"I had some wood cut this spring in order to build a 20 foot extension, as the chapel is not big enough to hold all the savages ."

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In February 1878, he addresses Mgr Farraud once more:

"I now return to July, date of my last letter to your Lordship. Throughout the rest of the summer the Brother and I started an extension to our chapel which, as explained to you last spring, was too small. As we were only two, we were only able to build the walls up to the base of the window sills (133)."

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It is a beautiful chapel, Father Séguin admits, but, at the pace of the work, it will rot before it is finished. This is what he told his sister Jeanne on February 14:

"It is a shame that it is not built of stone or brick but these materials are unknown in this country. Because we started so long ago, I fear that when we finish the ornamentation, the wooden beams on the ground will have rotted. If we had oak like in Red River or in Canada it would last for many generations, but the wood we have here will last 35 years at most. It is a lot of effort for such a short time. We are not discouraged, however, as the Brother and I were building a 22 foot extension, because it was too small for the population, while Father Petitot was painting." (135)

Father Séguin suffered another hardship in the summer of 1878. Father Petitot, whose self-imposed mission was to decorate the chapel, was forced by illness to once again leave the North, never to return. Work continued in spite of this.

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Father Séguin gave similar news to Mgr Farraud on February 4 (1881).

"After sending my letter of August, we worked for approximately one month on our chapel. We installed window frames in the extension and painted all of the chapel's window frames in green. We then (blank) two thirds of the roof with a layer of sand underneath. It is something which should have been done 10 years ago, the boards would not have broken. During this time Father Ducot continued to paint the interior. There was much left to be done. Two savages were cutting boards. I believe that we have enough for the floor, ceiling, and panelling. If the Brother had an assistant during my absence all would be finished by next spring and we could knock down the dividing wall, but with just the two of us we will need another two or three years." (147)

On February 2, 1882, the day of Purification, Brother Kearney speaks of the past year's work in a letter to his bBishop:

"During R.F. Séguin's absence, I prepared nearly all the boards necessary. He came back towards the the middle of July, and shortly after, we set to work hand and heart in the hope of finishing the principal before the boats returned from the Portage. R.F. Séguin was not very sanguine, he

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thought we would not be able to finish the whole before the Indians came, and was of the opinion that the Altar would be left untouched until later (perhaps another year). I urged that we had time enough to do all, and so, when we had finished the ceiling, he consented to move the altar to its new position. This was

transported en masse, with the exception of the tabernacle, and without any great difficulty.

There are two pillars and two half ones when the new piece is connected with the old, between these there will be a design somewhat similar to the one between the pillars at the entrance which your Lordship no doubt remembers. This together with the mouldings and other ornamentation will require much time yet. B. Ancel will find plenty of work when he comes, we have already all the materials. I thought to be able to continue in the fall, but other occupations prevented me. I am at present making frames for the portraits that were on each side of the Altar. Thank God, the Indians will have room enough now, and even those from other posts as well." (151) [Brother Kearney]

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Decoration of the Chapel

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The paint received from McFarlane was put to good use as the Father writes to his parents on February 28, 1870:

"I have painted in oils the interior chapel of the residence at Good-Hope as well as the great hall of the savages which is adjoining. The Chapel's decoration is byzantine: rose background strewn with white flowers and golden crosses, flowered borders above and below as well as in the corners; the baseboards are in fake mahogany; the altar step simulates an excellent mosaic of five different types of marble. The Good-Hope mission is now the finest residence in all of the North. We have six religious paintings of respectable size." (202)

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In February, Father Séguin wrote to his sister:

"For two or three years we have had an Altar with cutouts from top to bottom. These cutouts are covered with paper of various colours and, by placing a few candles behind it, provides an illumination which greatly delights our savages. []" (208)

We speak here of the interior chapel as work on the main chapel's Altar was not started till 1872.

The Paintings

Father Petitot wants to commit his time to the chapel's ornamentation by adding paintings. To this effect he makes a number of requests to Mgr Farraud on April 6, 1874:

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"[...] linseed oil and putty.

To paint only a quarter of the chapel, that is all of the chancel and a small part of the nave, I believe that I would need at least

25 lbs of white paint

6 lbs chromium yellow

4 lbs vermilion

2 lbs red-brown

6 lbs Prussian blue or

2 lbs Ivory black

3 lbs plant green

2 lbs common

and linseed oil in proportion as well as a bit of varnish." (209)

Upon his return Father Petitot does woodwork and then returns to his painting. This is what Father Séguin tells Mgr Clut on May 25, 1877. While awaiting the Indians for Easter he says, [...]

"We painted most of the ceiling with water colours which had remained so long in Lac La Biche. We would have needed a few more pounds. If you paint the ceiling of the chapel in Providence, I recommend that you do so with powdered colours thinned with a medium strength glue. The colours stay the same while in the case of oils they darken with age, and it is also a faster method. Zinc stars, covered with a coat of yellow paint, were placed on the ceiling. The large joist in the middle, which keeps the walls from pulling apart, is painted the same colour and blends in with it. (212)

In June 1878, in a letter to the Superior General, Father Petitot gives a detailed account of the work done in the chapel and of his plans:

"In July [1877], I was back in Good-Hope and took to my brushes to work at the decoration of our small chapel, the ceiling of which was painted and starred last April by Father Séguin and I. Thanks to a stove which we received last fall and which we placed in the nave, I was able to paint until mid-November. The full decoration of this small wooden monument will take time as I plan, God willing, to do 10 large paintings for which I have provided blank panels. I am content to paint borders whose designs and arabesques I vary as much as possible, thanks to the excellent models I brought back from Paris. Lacking doves, which are unknown in this country, partridge, grouse, and snow buntings represent the Holy Ghost, and angels are given the ruddy and puffed up faces and the staring jet black eyes of our young savages. This pleases their parents much more than if I made them into young Scots with golden hair.

To date I have only painted half of these borders." (213)

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Father Alexis Robin, longtime missionary at Good Hope states that, in 1878, Father Petitot painted the borders of the paintings he planned on doing at a latter date.

"Very realistic birds and fruits could be seen", he adds. I have seen young children pretend to take fruit and bring them to their mouths." (214)

We also state that he used a fish oil base for his paints. (215)

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He had already written on this subject from Fort Norman on May 25 of the same year:

"I close as I began with more requests.

The paints, which are coming from England you say, are oil based. These will do for the walls which have been started with oils but the chapel's ceiling was started with glue and should not be continued with anything else. It should also be done before the walls as the blue sky will wash down and stain the walls. For this we need powdered ultramarine as I requested, with your approval, from Father Maisonneuve. While we wait our chapel looks like a half-shaven man and I must postpone painting the walls ()."

(P. 82)

If Father Petitot was unable to finish the work started, he at least gave direction to a decoration which is still the pride of the missionaries. Thankfully he is replaced by Father Xavier-Auguste Ducot who, although he had never touched a paintbrush, proved to be quite talented and who started work on the chapel in 1873.

(p. 83)

It is difficult to tell exactly what work was done by Father Ducot but when Father Séguin says that, in spite of his inexperience, he paints well, we can assume that he continued the work started by Father Petitot. Elsewhere we can see, in a photograph published by Mgr Grouard (229), Father Ducot painting in the Fort Norman church in the same style as Father Petitot used in Good Hope.

Work will progress quickly after the arrival of Brother Julien Ancel, in the fall of 1882. We have previously heard Father Séguin say how well and fast the Brother worked. As for Brother Kearney, he complimented Brother Ancel in a letter to Mgr Farraud on February 10, 1883:

"He is really a very clever workman, he leaves R.F. Petitot far in the shade, for he not only draws well, but he executes his design in a workmanlike style. He is also a painter, and in fact he can try a hand at anything (230)." [Brother Kearney]

This compliment is well earned as, at his time of departure, Brother Ancel leaves behind a much improved church.

(p. 84)

On February 9, 1884 Father Séguin sends these words to Mgr Clut. "Since the end of September, the Brother has had the time to paint one side of the Sanctuary. The other is still to be done and the Father does not know when it will be." (231)

In June Father Séguin thanks his sister for the three books of gold leaf she sent him. "As to the quality of the merchandise", he notes, "Brother Ancel, who is knowledgeable,

says that it is good." (232) More than likely the Brother used these to decorate the church.

It is a shame that the Brother left with the boats in 1885 as he could have continued work on the church. Instead, he had to divide his time between it and the building of a new home for the missionaries.

Still, we owe him much. Father Alexis Robin states that we owe him for the ornamentation of all of the chancel, the altar and the niche for the Holy Virgin (233), the two angels, the doors to the sacristy, as well as the paintings of the apostles Peter and Paul in the corners. In addition, on the epistle side, he did the painting of the fall of our parents, first hope of paradise with the promise of the woman who will crush the serpent's head, as well as a painting on the gospel side, representing the Nativity in Bethlehem with sheep herders and wise men, our second hope.

He painted, in front of the chancel and to hide two large beams, a Christ on the cross, flanked by the Holy Virgin and St Joseph. These three paintings were retouched somewhat in 1953. Finally, Father Robin states that the Brother had never touched a paint brush before coming to Good Hope. (234)

It seems that work on the paintings did not continue in the last century. In 1853, George Banksland and Frank Baptiste, two scouts from Aklavik, the latter an Indian whose mother resided in Good Hope, retouched some of Brother Ancel's paintings.

Father Jean Colas, o.m.i., painted an Annunciation, directly on wood, on the gospel side in the spring of 1941. The other paintings were done by scouts from Aklavik under the direction of Father Antoine Binamé, o.m.i., based on copies from the cathedral in Anvers.

(p. 85)

As for Father Bernard Brown, o.m.i., under the steeple he painted a young Indian girl and boy from Good Hope gazing at the apparition of the Holy Virgin in the Ramparts at Good Hope and a languishing Father Henri Grollier, watching the cross being raised on the shores of the Mackenzie. (235)

Mgr. Émile Grouard, who was knowledgeable in painting, wrote to Father Marc Sardou on August 25, 1890, following a visit to Good Hope:

"The chapel is a veritable jewel, of wood it is true, but to a surprising effect. A senator from Canada, Mr. Hardisty, inspector for the Company, accompanied by Mr. Camsell, District Chief, and Reverend Peeve, Anglican Minister, came to see it; they were filled with wonder. It must be said that such , elegant and varied decoration was not expected so close to the Arctic Circle. Father Petitot had devoted to it all of his considerable artistic talents and was followed by Brother Ancel who completed the chapel by building an extension, also embellished with panels and paintings and especially with a beautiful tabernacle and a nice canopy, where a beautiful statue of the Holy Virgin holding baby Jesus drew all eyes and hearts and well deserved the name of Notre-Dame de Bonne Espérance (Our Lady of Good Hope)". (237)

(p. 86 / 87) .

The Altar

The altar is one of the notable pieces in the Good Hope chapel. Father Petitot worked at it during the 1870's but had already tried his hand at it by building an altar for the residence in 1868. On December 12, 1868 he said to Mgr. Farraud:

" [...] I am also making a long planned double (blank) altar. It is gothic, made of openworked wood, and is completely gilt, with some subjects in paint. The spaces, or openings, are backed with coloured paper so that we will have a magnificent illumination at Christmas and that the gilding will provide a similar effect during the day. I have finished it this very day. Father Séguin did most of the cutting and Brother Kearney assembled and joined the boards, such that my only credit in this endeavor is its conception and design."

(p. 88)

"If your Lordship could send me some turpentine and wine spirit in equal quantity, I would have in that an excellent varnish to protect these paintings for the future. If you have no wine spirits, turpentine alone would be acceptable as we have a bit of spirits left."

Thus Father practised his skills and in 1872 repeated his feat, this time in the main chapel.

(p. 89)

On August 30 (1872) it is Father Petitot himself who tells Mgr Farraud:

"I am now spending my summer as a cabinet-maker, sculptor and painter. I have started to build our new church's altar. It is half done. It will be Gothic in style, of a flamboyant type, in false marble, all cut out and sculpted.

(p. 90)

The tomb is already made and is supported by five sculpted and painted angels. The heads of winged angels.also finish off the steps and the tomb." (249)

Father Petitot also mentions this in a letter to the Superior General of February 6, 1873:

"Upon my return to Good Hope, from the end of February to the month of May, I gave myself to various manual labours: tinsplate making, painting, hydrography, and cabinetry. I began the construction of a monumental gothic altar, which at this time is not completely finished. Amongst other things, I made papier maché altar patterns with gilt frames and a six foot tall candle stick, of sculpted and painted wood, for the paschal candle. I also drew a rose window for our church." (251)

Correspondence no longer mentions Father Petitot's altar but he must have finished it because in 1876 he was working on other artistic projects.

The Communion Table

"Therefore, with the fall mission completed, I started woodworking and built our church's Communion table. It is Gothic and apparently looks good." (252)

This is what Father Petitot wrote to Mgr Farraud on January 8, 1877 and which is also confirmed to him by Brother Kearney in a letter dated February 2, 1877:

"When the Indians were all gone he began the Communion table for our Church, it is already cut and when finished will be very beautiful." (253) [Brother Kearney]

(p. 93)

Statues of the Holy Virgin

When Father Ducot arrived in Good Hope, Father Séguin found a small statue of the Holy Virgin in one of his suitcase. On February 11, 1876 he told his sister what he did with it:

"...we opened them and found in one a beautiful statue of the Holy Virgin, approximately 2 feet long . Leaving in in this suitcase until its arrival was much too long so I immediately built it a pedestal and set it up in our small chapel. It is just the decoration that it needed, our savages where quite dumbfounded and asked each other if this portrait was a gift from the Holy Virgin. It was the first statue they had ever seen. (260)"

(p. 94)

Father Maisoneuve did not delay in fulfilling this request as Father Marc Sardou, chief steward, replied to his letter on November 12 to his letter of October 13 (1884):

"Miss Séguin has already spoken to me about a statue of the Holy Virgin requested by her brother, the Reverend Father Séguin of Good Hope, and she was put in a difficult position by this request. Your letter has relieved her of this burden as I immediately wrote to her that I had received your order for a five foot tall wooden statue of the Holy Virgin. This statue has been ordered since last Monday and will only be ready next January. Here are the terms of that order: statue of the Holy Virgin (virgin mother offering baby Jesus which she holds in her arms, very nice model), height of 5 English feet or 1.5 meters (the English foot being only 30 centimeters), in wood, richly decorated and similar to the Munich style which is the most prized. The statue will cost approximately 450 francs, plus packing materials needed to ensure safe passage. (266)"

The chief steward adds that the cost of packing will be around 70 or 75 francs and that the 500 francs provided for this statue will be exceeded slightly.

(p. 96)

(Letter from Father Séguin to his sister on May 18, 1885)

" [...] We have here a large chapel measuring 67 feet in length by 20.5 in width. It can hold most of the savages who come to Good Hope and we celebrate mass here from the beginning of May to the beginning of October as that is when they are in greatest numbers and when it takes the least wood to heat. In winter though we have another chapel (...) Presently the statue of the Sacred Heart is in the main chapel but we would like to move it to the interior chapel, firstly because its alcove is much too large and then because it is on its own for a full seven months,

during which time it is only seen by the women who are devoted enough to visit it every Friday, which pilgrimage (267) was started by your sister. The alcove will be well proportioned for the statue of the Holy Virgin donated by Mr. Gaudet. When we arrive we will put it in place of the Sacred Heart and the statue of the Sacred Heart will be moved to the interior chapel. The the Holy Virgin will preside over her chapel, which is dedicated to Our Lady of Good Hope, and the Sacred Heart will preside over his. But, the son cannot remain without his guardians. When you will have sent a St-Joseph, he will still be missing his mother, which he will call for, if we should live that long. (268)"

Father finally has news of the statue in the fall or winter of 1885 and so informs his sister on February 10, 1886:

"I have learned from a Father at Red River that the statue of the Holy Virgin and your crate had left for Lac la Biche. The statue and its crate cost 484 francs and weigh 360 pounds, the height of the Holy Virgin is 1.5 meters and she holds baby Jesus in her arms. I don't know what Mgr. will think when he finds out what it weighs especially how he will have it accepted on a barge. Your crate, which weighs 140 pounds, is at least 40 pounds too heavy as a normal weight is from 80 to 100 pounds. It will probably be made into two, but this can't be done with the statue. Pray to God that it will arrive in Good Hope. (269)"

(p. 97)

Father Séguin mentioned it to his sister on February 10:

"Last summer Mgr. Farraud sent on from Lac la Biche the crate containing the statue of the Holy Virgin, donated by Mr. and Mrs. Gaudet, and purchased by Reverend Father Sardou, but it has yet to arrive. Mr. Gaudet saw the crate but his barges were too full to take it on.

(p. 98)

It is in a fort between Athabasca and Slave Lake and it will only arrive this fall [1887]. Probably through humility, it did not want to arrive in Good Hope before St. Joseph, head of the Holy Family. Hopefully I will receive them at the same time. It would be doubly joyful. (272)"

To Father Séguin's joy, the statue finally arrives in the summer of 1887. He so informs his sister at the earliest opportunity:

"I have finally received the statue of the Holy Virgin. It is more damaged than anything else, thanks to the negligence of a clerk who left it outdoors all winter and part of the summer. The heads of the Holy Virgin and of baby Jesus are detached from the torsos. It is split in many places, pieces have almost fallen off, and the base is in many pieces. It will take time to fix but I hope that I will be able to. The statue is magnificently painted and gilt. Whites and savages (...), although not overly enthusiastic, could not hold back their cries of admiration. (273)"

He returns to it fondly in another letter to his sister on February 6, 1888:

"In my last letter I was saying that I had received the beautiful statue donated by the Gaudet family. It was quite damaged because it had spent all summer and winter exposed to the elements. Right after I sent your letter I went to work to repair the mess. With the help of our dear mother I was able to put it right and on

the eve of the Assumption, or rather the Sunday on which it is celebrated, I was able to place in its alcove above the main Altar. It is high enough that no defects can be seen, even from the chancel. It is magnificent and I do not believe that you have any prettier ones in Ennezat. (274) Her face is filled with a beautiful gentleness and baby Jesus, which she is holding in her arms, appears to want to escape her grasp in order to caress those who are at his feet. Her robe is crimson and its border is a light blue, lined with a straw yellow. Both are strewn with golden flowers. She wears a crown on her head.

(p. 99)

He speaks of it again on May 29, 1888, this time to Father Maisoneuve, to whom he says that the steamer (276) arrived last August 4, carrying the statue:

"It could not have been better packed but, thanks to the negligence of the clerk in Fort Smith, it is not in good condition. Can you imagine, he left it outside, open to the fury of the seasonal weather from August 1886 to the end of July 1887. Since the statue is made of fifteen or so pieces which are glued together, the humidity caused most of these to become fully or partially unglued, which pieces were rolling around in the crate. Luckily there was no portage and, save a

(p. 100)

few scratches, these were mostly intact. It took me over 10 days to patch up the statue because the detached pieces had warped and would not fit properly. I had to use glue, nails and screws. A few cracks are still visible here and there."

(p. 105)

Statue of St. Joseph

(p. 106)

To Father's great joy the statue finally arrived by steamer on August 4, 1887. It had brought him two crates which she [his sister] had graciously sent him. He continues:

"Many thanks for the pleasure it gave me. St. Joseph is finally here, as well kept as the day he was crated."

(p. 115)

Sacred Vessels, Etc.

(p. 120)

Luckily his demands are heard and he quickly notifies his sister on February 4, 1884, at the same time as he informs her of the arrival of the Sacred Heart statue:

"Mgr. Farraud having sent Mgr. Clut to the Sacred Heart chapel, his Lordship sent it to us by way of Mr. Gaudet, so that it arrived at the same time as the statue. It is of gilt silver and very pretty, without adornment other than a Sacred Heart engraved on the chalice, pyx, burettes

(p. 121)

and bells. In the chapel box was a magnificent veil for the pyx, decorated with a heart and gold embroidered rays, as well as a regular sized silver heart in which were enclosed the names of the donors. We still need the candlesticks to complete the contents of the crate, as it was sent, the artificial candles already having arrived. These should be received and to ensure this I am still asking Mgr. Farraud for them."

(p. 122)

Early on, the Good Hope mission also had its baby Jesus. Father Petitot, we will remember, had painted a cloth which served as a crib but on February 8, 1877, on his return to Good Hope, he brought with him a number of things of which one is a baby Jesus:

(p. 123)

"A baby Jesus which he had brought was admired by all. He seemed alive. The savages were not content to look at it, they wanted to know if he tasted as good as he looked so they scratched his toes with their teeth. We noticed this and replaced Him with the old one. A good thing too as he was missing two toes the next morning. We asked who did it, but to no avail as the guilty party did not step forward. They received an ear full but this did not bring back the toes. These people are capable of eating their father and mother, as well as themselves. Next year we will place it so high that they will need a ladder to bite him." (357)

This new baby Jesus contrasted with the old one which Father described as "all wrinkled and laying in a crib filled with hay". (358)

(p. 130)

A last improvement to be noted for the Good Hope church, although not the last chronologically, is the purchase of a suitable bell to call the faithful to services. On February 27, 1880, while speaking to his sister of Mgr. Farraud's visit of July 24, 1879, he writes:

"He (his Lordship) found our chapel very beautiful and promised us a few paintings to finish it and, as we only have a very very small bell to call our parishioners, he will send us a 100 pound one. But it will take three years to get here. Who says we will live till then. If we are not here, it will benefit others." (378)

(p. 131)

Father Séguin, through effort and patience, with help from Brother Kearney and Fathers Petitot and Ducot, succeeded in building a veritable monument under the Arctic Circle. He had reason to be proud and was happy to send his sister a photograph of it on June 7, 1899, barely two years before he left the North to be treated in France, never to return to his cherished mission of Good Hope. His description of it shows the chapel's interior as it was at the time of his departure, with exception of the sanctuary lamp:

"The second photograph shows the altar and the back of the church. It is not as well taken as the previous one. (381) Only the top appears as it should. The

Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus who has a hand raised in benediction is the statue your sister, Mrs. Gaudet, provided me with the gift of 20 louis, or 500 francs, which she had received from her father. Mr. Gaudet, not to be left behind, also gave me 10 louis, or 250 francs, for its transportation from Paris. The two adoring angels were painted by Brother Ancel for the statue of the Sacred Heart which, prior to the arrival of the statue of the Holy Virgin, was supposed to have been placed there but proved to be too small for the alcove. The thing hanging next to the Epistle angel is a sort of sanctuary lamp made with large beads." (382)

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Addenda 1

Good Hope Chapel

**1. Notes on Good Hope: Anthropology Centre film, series 5, film 9
NOTES FROM A GOOD HOPE JOURNAL**

- 17 Oct, 1868: ?? Crucifixion made by Father Petitot, nearby in the chapel
- 13 July, 1876: Siding on one side of the chapel: close off two windows of
- August, 1876: Siding on a chapel
- 1 October, 1876: Mass in the main chapel (not? first time)
- 25 March, 1877: Paint the chapel's ceiling
- 29 March, 1877: Petitot ends the sauce (the yellow) of the chapel (main chapel)
- 8 April, 1877: K. squares logs for the chapel's extension
- 15 April, 1877: K. finished cutting birch for the extension
- 11 July, 1877: Petitot starts to paint the chapel walls
- 21 July, 1877: Set the foundations for the extension
- 3 September, 1877: Walls of the extension up to the windows
- 23 November, 1877: Install the basement of the extension
- 30 April, 1878: K. and Maurel saw angle boards for the extension
- end July, 1878: Petitot paints two panels in the chapel
- August, 1878: Paints two small panels at the side of the door
- 10 October, 1878: Ducot makes the railing for the tribune
- 11 October, 1878: Install the railing. O. (?) painted it
- 11 March, 1879: Start the chapel's two small arches
- 17 March, 1879: Bella Gaudet started a Christ on canvas, finished on the 29th
- 23 April, 1879: Install the last arch next to the staircase
- 3 May, 1879: Finish painting the chapel's arches

- 24 July, 1879: Farraud arrives
- 11 August, 1879: Scaffolding to roof the extension
- 13 August, 1879: First boards on the roof
- 3 September, 1879: Finish roofing the extension
- 24 October, 1879: Finish installing the cap on the steeple's posts
- 12 November, 1879: Start painting the caps
- 15 June, 1880: K. finishes the drawers for the ornament cupboard. Finish the extension's four windows
- 2 August, 1880: Ducot starts to trace lines to paint the chapel's facade. Séguin cuts the ogives for the last four windows
- 13 August, 1880: K. puts pitch on the roof of the chapel
- 23 - 28 August, 1880: K. muds the church
- 1 September, 1880: Install window frames in the extension
- 2 September, 1880: Whitewash all of the main chapel
- 11 September, 1880: Polish the exterior windows of the chapel
- 5 October, 1880: Install the steeple on two posts in front of the door to the house
- 17 April, 1881: New tabernacle for the small chapel
- 20 May, 1881: K. starts the ground floor of the extension
- June: Three go to collect 300 bark to roof the main house
- 15 July, 1881: Arrival of S. / K. prepared all the boards for the extension's ceiling
- 28 July, 1881: Tear down the wall between the church and the extension
- 1 August, 1881: Install the ceiling arches in the extension
- 6 August, 1881: Start on the extension's ceiling
- 20 August, 1881: Finish the ceiling
- 22 August, 1881: Painting of the ceiling

- 27 August, 1881: Move the altar to its present location
- 25 July, 1882: Put siding on the front of the church
- 14 August, 1882: Install the small galleries in the sanctuary's cornices and the edge of the exterior rose window
- 29 September, 1882: K. fixes the doorway to the church
- 30 September, 1882: Arrival of Brother Ancel
- 18 October, 1882: Ducot begins tracings for painting above the entrance
- 25 December, 1882: First use of two candelabras made by Brother Ancel
- 23 April, 1883: Ancel starts a picture of the main chapel's tabernacle
- 16 May , 1883: Ancel installed cutout woodwork in front of the chancel
- 1 - 9 July, 1883: Ancel continues to decorate the chapel (left on the 10th to help Ducot)
- 26 September, 1883: K. fixes the new organ
- 26 October, 1883: K. traces his subjects in the chancel

Addenda 2

Good Hope Chapel

Good Hope Codex:

Volume I, 1907 - 1915 (Starts in September and is marked 3rd book)

- p. 28
Finished 4 May, 1908: The Fathers started siding the exterior of the chapel.
on the 7th
- p. 27 Start to prepare boards for siding 1908
- p. 4 12 October, 1907: Started making boards for the main chapel's
windows

Volume II: 1915 - 1935: film 9

- p. 114 24 July, 1930: Started to repair the ceiling
- p. 133 8 October, 1931: Chiona re-mudded the apse of the church
- p. 158 22 September, 1933: The church's sills have now been replaced
- 24 September, 1933: We worked on the steeple
- 24 December, 1933: Fire in the church's floor due to an overheated
furnace. No serious damages but unable to hold
Christmas services as planned.

i 10

Volume III: 1935 - 1949: film L)

- 6 May, 1940: Raise the chapel's ceiling
- 2 May, 1941: "Father Colas starts to paint 'The Annunciation' on the wall of the
church, thereby continuing Father Petitot's and Brother Ancel's
work
- 10 May, 1941: "The Reverend Father Colas has almost finished his painting of
'The Annunciation'."
- July: Colas receives obedience for R.R. Arctique

Volume IV: 1949 - 1960

- 20 June, 1955: Brother Tesniere looks after the church's foundations, raised the
steeple and slipped in some large beams which will support its
posts.

10 February, 1956: For the last few days, Foulomeau has reglued the various pieces of the church's rose window and cut out glass to correspond to the various designs.

12 August, 1957: The church's roof and carvings around the interior windows are repainted.

4 April, 1958: Fire at the house. "Most important at this time was saving the church. Naturally, the wind was strong and blowing in its direction. The nursing station's pump is finally working and three men in the steeple, through a (?) window - we open the steeple and the roof around it, the other changes them from time to time. Numerous sparks and pieces fall. The men open? up in order to protect themselves, spray the inside of the steeple and come down soaked..the paint on the inside of the church starts to burn because of the heat.

Michel: Seventy-Five Years of Apostleship at the Arctic Circle 1859 - 1954: typed

(garbled text)

Chapter IV: Buildings

Admired in 1910 by Mr Frank Oliver, Minister for Canada 's Interior and in 1925 by Marshall Byng, victor at Vimy, and then governor-General of Canada.

Father Séguin added the magnificent chandelier which supports the sanctuary lamp, Father Houssais the painting of Christ at the tomb, Father Robin the statue of Ste-Anne and the benches in the nave. The beautiful statue of Our Lady holding baby Jesus which overlooks the altar was graciously donated by the Gaudet family in 1887. (p. 24)

There is possibly something on page 23 but it is illegible. Then speaks of the house.