

APPENDIX D

The Choirs

THE CHOIRS

The first Catholic choir in Burlington was formed in 1834 by the French Canadians who attended St. Mary Church at the time Fr. Amable Petithomme boasted to his superior in France that he sang high Masses which pleased the people and brought them crowding to his chapel. The Canadians had brought their knowledge of Plain Chant with them from France to Canada and their descendants carried it to whatever area they settled. The French Canadians are credited with supplying the choir at St. Mary Church in Burlington in the years before they had their own parish.

When St. Joseph Parish was formed in 1850, Louis X. Fremeau, jeweler and watch maker, sang at the first Mass, celebrated at the Court House on April 28. This was Louis X. Fremeau, husband of Angelique Veronneau.

An old parish account book states that on November 21, 1862, the parish paid Thomas Johnson \$398.00 for a church organ. There are also records dating from 1863 to 1898 of payments to organ pumpers, beginning at \$4.00 and later at \$5.00, quarterly. The earliest organ pumpers were Louis and F. Chicoine, and Andrew and Fred Menard. After that no name was entered.

The first payment to an organist was made to Azilda Bissonette, who received \$25.00 for the three-month period ending December 1870 and \$25.00 for the following quarter. Louis X. Fremeau received \$75.00 for the last three quarters of 1871. It seems probable that this was Louis X., *pere*, rather than Louis X., *fils*, who figures prominently later in musical circles. The father would have been about 48 years old, and the son about 22 years of age at that time. Alphonse Rousseau was choir director at a time which cannot be dated precisely because of a lack of complete records. He is first listed in the Burlington City Directory in the year 1871-72 and he later served several terms as "marguiller" (trustee). A bit of local color has survived to us from his days as choir director. It seems that one of his relatives, Prosper Tranquille, was in the choir. He was anything but "tranquille;" (which means "quiet") being endowed with a strong voice which he happily used to drown out the other singers. Mr. Rousseau was obliged to admonish him "Passi fort, Prosper" (not so loud, Prosper). It was necessary to do this so frequently that, inevitably, Prosper became known as "Pussifor:'

A report on the performance of the choir was issued in 1883 on the occasion of Fr. Cloarec's 25th Anniversary of priesthood. It is likely that Mr. Rousseau was the director, as it was he who represented the parish on that occasion in

making the address (see Appendix 1-9) and presenting the gift. His two daughters, Emilie Rousseau Lanou and Josephine Rousseau Houde, were both in the choir; Emilie as organist and Josephine as singer.

On October 17, 1887, on the occasion of Fr. Cloarec's return from France, A.N. Duval was reported to be director of the choir.



George S. Hutchings 1893 Organ, in use over 90 years

The present organ in the choir loft of St. Joseph Church was installed in October 1897 and the previous one was stored for future use in the chapel. To introduce the new organ, a sacred concert was given by J. Frank Donahue, a prominent Boston organist. The organ was made in Boston in 1893 by the George S. Hutchings Co., and displayed that year at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. It was purchased from Hutchings by Fr. Cloarec and blessed by Bishop deGoesbriand in November 1897.

Louis X. Fremeau, son of Louis X. and husband of Anna Harrington, became director in 1897 and remained for some years. Fr. Cloarec, in his *Annales*, gives no hint of the reason for the resignation of the choir that year, merely stating that the choir resigned and that Fremeau was hired as director. It is possible that Fabien Beaupre began his long career as organist some years previously since he was reported to be the organist at a wedding on September 22, 1891.



Louis X. Fremeau, appointed Choir Director in 1897

The younger Louis Fremeau also directed the choirs of St. Francis Xavier Church in Winooski and of Cathedral in Burlington on certain occasions. He had charge of St. Mary's choir during the winter of 1896 starting in October. He was a versatile musician, skilled with many instruments, especially the bass viol. He has been pictured with Sherman's Military Band and was an important figure in musical productions in Burlington. He was also an inventor and in 1903 was engaged in developing a steam-driven automobile.

Fremeau's versatility is demonstrated by the still existing structure he built behind his home at 25 Crombie Street. It was his workshop in every sense. It is a two-story structure topped by a square observatory, the roof of which is pitched and was originally fitted with gliders. When Fremeau was ready to gratify his interest in astronomy, he operated the device to open the roof and let it slide down on the gliders. He could then observe the stars through the telescope he had made, which is still useful to his grandson, Charles. The ground floor of the workshop housed his fabricating equipment and the pipe organ which he had built stood in one corner. It was here that he gathered his musicians for rehearsals. Eventually the organ was disassembled and it has been reported that two of the pipes were incorporated in an archway in another house on Crombie Street.

The Fremeaus were a family of jewelers and watch makers. In 1894, Louis Fremeau made the temporary reliquary for the link of St. Peter's Chains, at the request of Bishop deGoesbriand. As late as 1944-45 George Fremeau, his son, converted all the watches of the Daughters of the Holy Ghost to wrist watches.

The younger Louis X. Fremeau died in 1913 at age 64 and was buried in Old Mt. Calvary Cemetery. His son, Louis X., married Grace Hayes; both are now deceased.

Edward J. Beaupre, (son of Eugene Beaupre and Marie E. Beauchamps) accepted the director's position in 1905 and

continued until shortly before his death in 1945, after 40 years of service. The organist, Fabien Beaupre, unrelated to him, also served for the lengthy period of 34 years; he was awarded a trophy for his service at the end of 25 years. Fabien owned a drug store in Burlington (now Kelley's Pharmacy). He was the son of Olivier Beaupre and Louise Gaudet. He had one son, Raymond, who was also an organist and substituted for his father on occasion. Fabien died in 1928.

Edward Beaupre's tenure as choir director encompassed the hey-day of St. Joseph Choir. He was renowned in Burlington for his musical productions but he gave priority to St. Joseph Parish. There were no regulations, or at least few restrictions, on the type of music allowed. The choir included sopranos, many male and female soloists, and the High Masses on special feasts were operatic in nature. There was a Boys' Choir, trained by Mr. Beaupre with the assistance of Miss Tierney of The Ladies of Nazareth. Those pure young voices will long be remembered.

Edward Beaupre had a fine tenor voice and sang at many of the funerals. He directed music at St. Michael's College and the large Burlington Choral Society to which many members of the St. Joseph Choir belonged. This group presented a sacred concert, "The Seven Last Words of Christ" (Dubois), on Palm Sunday, March 24, 1929, in Memorial Auditorium, for the benefit of the new Nazareth School. Beaupre had previously directed a concert to raise funds for the construction of Holy Cross Chapel at Malletts Bay in 1915, a mission under the care of St. Joseph Church until 1920. He brought soloists from Montreal and New York for concerts with full orchestration at Strong Theatre. Through loyalty to St. Joseph Parish, he refused the post of director of the Cathedral Choir.

During this period, a noted singer in Burlington, Miss Marie Chaperon, soprano, was a member of St. Joseph Parish. She trained in Europe and returned to Burlington as an accomplished singer. She was in frequent demand for parish functions.

In 1908 and 1918, during the musical events connected with Msgr. Cloarec's Golden and Diamond Jubilees, E.J. Beaupre was director of the choir and Fabien Beaupre was the organist. The *Burlington Free Press* accounts of these events have provided the names of many of the choir members of the period (also, see Appendix 1-20).

Another well-known musician in Burlington was Arthur J. Dorey, Sr., director of St. Anthony Church Choir for 35 years. Bishop Robert F. Joyce presented him with the Bene-



Mr. & Mrs. Edward J. Beaupre



Edward J. Beaupre, Choir Director, 1905-1945



Fabien Beaupre, Organist at St. Joseph Church for 34 Years, from 1889 to 1923



St. Joseph Choral Society, 1915



St. Joseph Golden Jubilee Choir (for Msgr. Cloarec)



Minstrel Musical, directed by Arthur J. Dorey, Sr.

merenti Medal for his services. He had also been a parish-ioner of St. Joseph Church, a member of the choir, and had staged many musicals for the benefit of the parish. One such event was a Minstrel Show presented at Nazareth School in 1945 for the benefit of the parish and the Boy Scouts. Mr. Dorey belonged to the Confraternity of St. Joseph. He died on April 1, 1983, at the age of 87. His fu-neral was at St. Anthony Church and burial was in New Mount Calvary Cemetery.

A basic change was made in the choir in 1928 as was noted in the *Burlington Free Press* on October 4:

St. Joseph's Choir to be Reorganized
"St. Joseph's choir, in which women have sung since the parish was formed, will have no more female voices, E.J. Beaupre, the director,"said yesterday. This is in compliance with orders which came from the Right Rev. J.J. Rice, D.D., through the Rev. Norbert Proulx, pastor of the parish, to accord with uniformity of solely male choirs throughout the greater part of the Roman Catholic Church today.

Henceforth, liturgical music and Gregorian chant must be sung in St. Joseph's Church. Mr. Beaupre faces reorganization of the senior choir. In this connection, he said he would train the Boys' Choir to sing the soprano and alto parts, and the men, the tenor and bass. Solicitation of more male voices will be in progress today. A meeting will be held tomorrow night in the basement of the church, and it is urged that all men who wish to join be present at this time.

After that, reports had to be made yearly to the bishop. One such report signed by Beaupre in 1940, lists 13 items to be answered, some requiring a fairly detailed reply. At that time there were 18 members in the choir, all male. The emphasis was on Gregorian music. Women returned to the Senior Choir gradually; in 1987, the Choir consists of six males and nine females.

Bernadette Lariviere, daughter of Joseph Lariviere and Parmelia Phaneuf, had replaced Fabien Beaupre as organist in 1923. She had started at age 16 under Beaupre's direction. Her training was received from Dr. Eugene Lapierre of Montreal, a noted professor of music. Miss Lariviere was organist on June 17, 1928, for the High Mass during the celebration of the [Union Jean Baptiste and again in 1929 for the "Seven Last Words of Christ:"



Bernadette Lariviere
 Organist, 1923 -1950

In September 1928, she married Charles Nichols, a pharmacist, and the choir sang the Mass of St. Louis at their wedding. In 1938 she was graduated by the Conservatory of Music of the University of Montreal. She was also a music teacher and received awards for proficiency in Gregorian music and in teaching. She continued as organist through the subsequent directorship of Raymond Shepard and retired after 27 years of service. She later played at the

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Mr. and Mrs. Nichols had three children; John, Raymond and Dorothy. Mrs. Nichols died September 7, 1981.

E.J. Beaupre, director, died on February 6, 1945, after a period of inactivity caused by illness. During his illness he was persuaded on one occasion to direct the choir by the members, who carried him up the stairway to the choir loft.

Raymond T. Shepard, a Burlington attorney, replaced Mr. Beaupre. His baritone voice had been heard in the choir for many years following his first solo in 1917. He had studied piano under Anna Dubuc Coutu, wife of Dr. George O. Coutu. During his tenure, Shepard composed an Agnus Dei and a Sanctus.

At this time Rev. Edward J. Sutfin, curate of the parish, directed the Boys' Choir in Gregorian Chant and served as chaplain for the Senior Choir. He strongly urged that choir to adopt Gregorian Chant for all the Masses. This did not appeal to the choir, a large number of whose members had served for many years under the old regime. The entire choir, with one exception, resigned two weeks prior to Easter that year.



Raymond T. Shepard, Senior Choir Director, 1945-1948



Rev. Edward J. Sutfin, Director of Boys' Choir and Curate at St. Joseph Parish

The choir member who remained was Paul Bonnette. He and Fr. Edmund Hamel, SSE, of St. Michael's College, sang the Gregorian "Angels' Mass" on Easter morning with Blanche St. Cyr at the organ. Bonnette was persuaded to accept the position of choir director and served for a year and a half during 1948-49.

Another person who served as organist in 1941 to relieve Mrs. Nichols, was Marguerite Meunier, a graduate of the University of Montreal and the choir director and organist at Holy Family Church in Essex Junction.



Paul E. Bonnette, Senior Choir Director, 1948-1949

Blanche St. Cyr's career as organist for St. Joseph Parish began with Midnight Mass 1946 and she has now served for over 41 years. Miss St. Cyr studied piano and violin under Miss Blanche Coonan, D.H.M., and organ under Professor Natalie Marston of the University of Vermont and Dr. Eugene Lapierre of Montreal. She became Mrs. Paul Bonnette in 1953.



Blanche (St. Cyr) Bonnette, Organist from 1946 to the present.

For a time there was no choir director, and in September 1950, Miss St. Cyr recruited 72 persons to form a choir for the Christmas Midnight Mass. Needing someone to serve as organist so that she could act as director, she considered Errol Slack, a fine musician and organist at the College Street Congregational Church in Burlington. That, however, presented a problem. Only a Catholic could serve as organist in a Catholic Church. Permission for Mr. Slack to play was finally granted by the bishop after a waiting period of some weeks.

When Easter came the situation was the same but this time Shirley Lanctot, a member of the parish, was available to play the organ and Miss St. Cyr directed the choir.

After Easter 1951, Fr. Pariseau was able to secure the services of Jerome Childs as director. Childs was a native son of the parish, born September 22, 1913, to Arthur and Leocadie (Deyette) Childs. He was an altar boy and choir member for many years and had established himself in business with a partner in the firm of Childs & Germain. He was a Fourth Degree Knight of Columbus, a member of the Holy Name Society and the League of the Sacred Heart. He gave St. Joseph Choir several years of devoted service which was cut short by his sudden death November 15, 1955. He was also a member of the Champlain Choristers and at his funeral the choir, composed of the Champlain Choristers and St. Joseph Choir, was directed by John Donoghue, Sr.



Jerome Childs, Senior Choir Director, 1951-1955

During Msgr. Pariseau's pastorate it was the responsibility of the organist, Miss St. Cyr, to find singers for the High Mass each morning. If none arrived, she knocked on doors in the neighborhood to acquire singers, while Msgr. Pariseau delayed Mass. The stipend was \$10 and he believed that those who had made this offering were entitled to have a sung Mass. One morning she found three young men who were far from being gifted singers. Regardless, they started, but it was poor. It was so poor that Msgr.

Pariseau instructed the altar boy to ring the sanctuary bell to get their attention and stop the singing. No one heard the bell above the playing of the organ. The altar boy then took it upon himself to bellow at the top of his voice "Stop the music!" That particular Mass was sung the following day.

Msgr. Pariseau invited John Donoghue, Sr. to replace Jerome Childs. It was to be an interim appointment awaiting the time when a member of the parish would have had more preparation for the position. Msgr. Pariseau was considering Maurice Villemaire. Donoghue, already very busy, graciously agreed to be the first "Irlandais" to direct St. Joseph Choir, a most appro-



John Donoghue, Sr., Senior Choir Director, 1955-1958

priate thank-you for the services of the French Canadians of Old St. Mary Church in the early years of that parish. Donoghue received his first vocal lessons from Edward Beaupre. He had worked during World War II with the famed Robert Shaw and had been cantor at St. Patrick Cathedral in New York City for two years. He gained much experience in concert work and at the time was choir and glee club director at St. Michael's College, and music critic for the *Burlington Free Press*.

The veterans of the old choir rallied around John Donoghue, who also enjoyed the assistance of the organist, Blanche (St. Cyr) Bonnette, and her bass soloist husband, Paul. Sometimes it was difficult to get a balanced choir for regular Sunday Masses, but on great feast days, such as Christmas and Easter, the choir always delivered.

When Msgr. Marcoux became pastor in February 1956, he retained Donoghue as choir director and the latter remained in the position until Maurice Villemaire obtained his Bachelor's Degree. The genial director enjoyed his work in the parish and his affiliation with the parishioners, an association that he renewed later as Editor of the *Vermont Catholic Tribune*. He always appreciated the historical importance of the parish. Characteristically, he had the tact and ability to use occasional French phrases and to pronounce them correctly.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Bonnette continued as organist. Donoghue was known to remark that anyone who could produce music from an organ in such poor condition deserved a medal. She directed and played many times for the May Crowning of the statue of the Blessed Virgin, a ceremony that was a yearly highlight. During those years the Sociality of the Blessed Virgin was a strong, active organization with a large membership which sponsored many events.

In regard to the condition of the organ, Mrs. Bonnette recalls that at one time during her tenure, it underwent exten-

sive repairs. That was over thirty years ago. When the workmen were not there, the choir loft was kept locked. In spite of this, \$800 worth of organ pipes disappeared. Msgr. Pariseau asked from the pulpit for their return but to no avail.

It took approximately four months to repair the organ. During that time, the parish rented a Hammond organ from Abernethy's Department Store. It was located in the sanctuary and the Senior Choir occupied the front pews of the church.

At this time, there was an episode that Mrs. Bonnette will never forget. It was a warm Sunday afternoon, with Benediction scheduled as usual. Two choir members arrived in good time to sing. Singer number one took charge, telling Mrs. Bonnette which *Tantum Ergo* he was taking, but when he told the other singer, he mistakenly named a different one. In the meantime, he distractedly opened his own book to a third one, but neglected to tell the organist. Hence, everyone started, all on different notes, soon to be joined by the priest who attempted to rectify an already impossible situation. The result was a catastrophe of mixed tones, everyone persevering to the very end. In the pews along the middle aisle, many of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit had given up their desperate attempt at self-control and were laughing out loud. It was indeed an unforgettable Sunday afternoon.

Another recollection is an event which occurred when lightning struck the church steeple. Fire resulted and the firemen could not reach into the steeple with their hoses.

The sexton's son, Edward Bernard, was a sailor, home on leave. Thanks to him, the day was saved. He went up to the steeple by way of the choir loft and extinguished the fire. Mrs. Bonnette also recalls the Chancel Choir (Boys' Choir)

founded by E.J. Beaupre. It was composed of boys from Nazareth School who sang every Sunday and on special occasions. This choir was trained in part by Miss Elizabeth Buckley, a noted disciplinarian and one of The Ladies of Nazareth. Under the supervision of Miss Buckley and her sister in religion, Miss Tierney, the Chancel Choir developed a remarkable military precision and polish to go along with their singing expertise.

Later, when the Daughters of the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit) succeeded The Ladies of Nazareth, the vested Chancel Choir sang only on special occasions, such as Midnight Mass. Under the direction of Sister Joseph Marcel the choir of approximately 50 boys also sang from the choir loft for all funerals.

The Daughters of the Holy Spirit continued the tradition of overseeing the children, a student body of about 900, while they sang at the 9:00 AM Sunday Mass. Faithfully, Mrs. Bonnette provided the organ music for all of the above events.

More recently, one Christmas Eve, the organ broke down at 10:00 PM. Fr. Bernard Messier announced to the

people assembled for the Midnight Mass that the organ had suffered a heart attack. So the brass ensemble, choir, director and organist, moved downstairs and faced the congregation, where they were accompanied by the strains of the Hammond organ. That year Lloyd Goodrow was the organist, replacing Blanche Bonnette, who was ill. Soon Mrs. Bonnette was receiving phone calls from parishioners concerning her alleged "heart attack:"

During 1973-74 Mrs. Bonnette took a one year leave and was replaced by Mark St.Germain as organist.



Mark St. Germain, Organist Pro-tem, 1973 -1974



Maurice Villemaire, Senior Choir Director, from 1958 to the present

The present director of St. Joseph Choir is Maurice Villemaire of Winooski, son of Omer and Rose Alma (Soutiere) Villemaire. He became a parishioner of St. Joseph Parish in 1940 when his parents moved to Burlington. He sang in the choir under the direction of Raymond Shepard, Blanche Bonnette, Jerome Childs and John Donoghue; he became choir director in 1958 during the pastorate of Msgr. Marcoux. He was only 11 years old when he began singing weekday Masses. His voice had already settled into its lyric tenor range. He received his B.S. in Music Education in June 1958 and was then able to accept the position of choir director at St. Joseph Church. In 1967, he received his M.S. in Music from the University of Vermont. Presently Mr. Villemaire is Director of Music at Rice Memorial High School, where he has taught vocal and instrumental music for almost 30 years. He is a professional singer with many musical organizations in New England. Maurice, his wife Nancy, and their two children, Denise and Daren, are Winooski residents.

Mr. Villemaire has been director of St. Joseph Choir for almost 30 years and looks forward to many more. He credits his thorough knowledge of Church music in large part to the training he received under past choir directors. With Maurice Villemaire as director and Mrs. Blanche Bonnette as organist, St. Joseph Choir has enjoyed a long period of stability and excellence.



St. Joseph Senior Choir, Easter Sunday, 1980

THE FOLK CHOIRS

With the documents of Vatican Council II and particularly the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, new forms of liturgical music emerged. The psalmody of Lucien Deiss was a popularly used repertoire for a time because it allowed easy participation by the congregation. Joseph Wise and Ray Repp, folk musicians, picked up on this participation by the congregation and gave workshops and wrote music that fostered participation of the congregation using the idiom of folk music. A number of other musicians became involved and additional folk music emerged ... some good, some acceptable and some very bad! It was against this background that folk music was introduced at St. Joseph Church in 1973.

Fr. Philip Boisvert coordinated the first Sunday Morning Folk Group, using much of the music composed and published by the Benedictine Monks at Weston Priory. The initial group consisted of William Noel, John Nichols, Kathy Blow, Nancy Boucher, Jeannie Brassard, Lynn Brassard, Tom Boucher, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Ken Hebert and Holly Spear. A second group was formed under the direction of



First Sunday Morning Folk Group, 1975

George Charron, known as the Saturday Night Folk Group. The membership of this group was quite fluid but a number of "old faithfuls" continued as members for about five years, including Dick Savage, Carleen and Mike Lehouiller, Dorothy Boucher, Carol Parker, Kenn Boyd and Rick Billups.

The Sunday Morning Folk Group went through its own period of change for a number of years after 1978, until the fall of 1984, when essentially both groups merged to form a renewed Sunday Morning Folk Group. The membership included Denise Brault, George Charron, Mary Gover, Dawn Gilbert, Carol Parker, Dorothy Boucher, Norman

Smith and Louise Bouchard. This group has since dissolved.

The repertoire proceeded from a focus on Weston Priory music to the more scriptural music of the St. Louis Jesuits, and then to the present variety of more sophisticated folk music with a higher intensity of quality liturgical music in the folk idiom.

One of the Saturday Night Folk Group members, Rick Billups, has continued to lead the congregation as a folk cantor-musician. George Charron, who was Director, presently leads the congregation at the Sunday 11:00 AM Mass.