

Quebec site draws pilgrims by the thousands

By David Warner

Popular belief has it that devotion to St. Ann saved numerous shipwreck victims off Cape Tourmente in the province of Quebec. A chapel to the mother of the Virgin Mary and grandmother of Christ had been established in this village as early as 1658.

Many people since have maintained unflagging faith in the miracles of the Good St. Ann. More than 1.5 million pilgrims, about 250,000 of them from the United States, make their way each year to Sainte Anne de Beaupré. The number of pilgrims peaks annually on St. Ann's feast day, July 26.

The original wooden chapel, built close to the St. Lawrence River, was damaged by flood and rebuilt at the foot of a hill in 1661. In 1676, it was replaced by a stone church that was to be enlarged several times in the coming years. In 1876, a new church was erected and shortly thereafter was declared a basilica.

The present edifice, which replaced one destroyed by fire, was built in 1923 and is considered North America's oldest and most renowned pilgrimage site. The sanctuary, dedicated to prayer and meditation, overlooks the north shore of the St. Lawrence, approximately 20 miles down river from Quebec City. The devotional atmosphere is enhanced by the building's unique architecture, which combines both Roman and Gothic styles to create a gigantic monument that compares with the great European cathedrals.

The central nave is awesome, not only in size and shape, but also in the subtle lighting diffused by magnificent window panes. The interior houses numerous treasures, and daily Mass is celebrated at varying hours throughout the year.

There probably are as many memories of the basilica as there are visitors. I remember well my own first visit. While attending a summer session as a student of Laval University in Quebec City, I received an invitation from John McNamara, a devout Canadian Catholic and fellow student, on the eve of St. Ann's feast day.

"Will you join me in a visit to Sainte Anne de Beaupré?" he asked.

Curious about the famed site, I accepted.

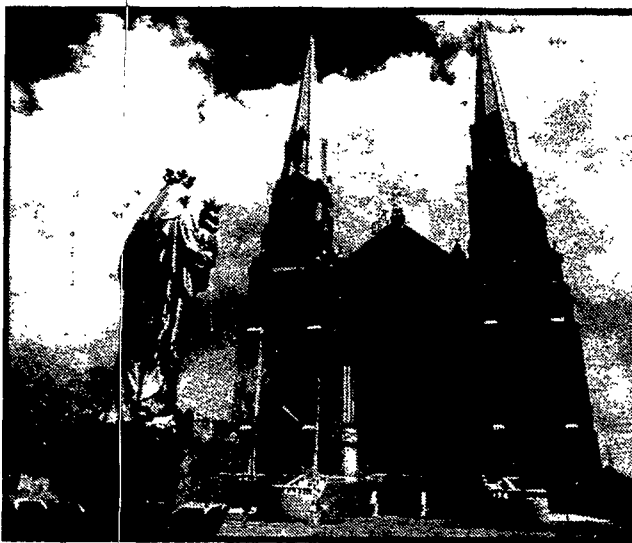
"Fine," he said. "We'll start walking shortly before dusk."

"WALK?" I exclaimed. "That's a distance of 20 miles."

"Right. That's the real meaning and sacrifice of the pilgrimage," he replied.

It was a perfect trap — no way to cop out. Off we went on foot on a beautiful, moonlit night through and past storybook French-Canadian villages and farms on narrow streets loaded with such pleasant surprises as a monastery, convent, boutique, bakery or small cafe. We arrived at Sainte Anne de Beaupré shortly after dawn.

The lasting memory is that of an unmistakable



look of devotion on the faces of pilgrims already starting to congregate. Numerous crutches, canes and other walking aids and wheelchairs lined the foot of the altar, presumably attesting to the response and miracles of St. Ann.

What makes a pilgrimage to Sainte Anne de Beaupré especially interesting is its location in the province of Quebec, a charming tourist destination of which Quebec City is a jewel.

Quebec City is the cradle of French civilization in North America, the only walled city north of Mexico. Walking inside the old part of town and through its winding streets transports the visitor into history.

Four out of five Quebec residents are bilingual, speaking with a Gallic accent one otherwise would hear only across the Atlantic Ocean. A walk around Quebec City provides the adventures and pleasures of *dépayement*, a state of "being abroad," without leaving North America.

It's a safe city in the low-crime-rate category, and a true gastronomic paradise, offering unexcelled French and continental cuisine and fine wines in an intimate, Old-World ambience. Depending on your preference, you can enjoy night life or a quiet reflective ride in a horse-drawn *calèche* over cobbled streets.

Interesting side trips would include visits to Ile d'Orleans, an authentic sanctuary of century-old homes, churches, mills and chapels; and Morency, whose waterfalls are considered the most impressive in North America — even more so than those of Niagara Falls.

If you decide to visit Quebec province, you should write for more detailed information on lodging, attractions, currency exchange and other matters. Write to: Basilique Sainte Anne de Beaupré, 10019 Avenue Royale, Sainte Anne de Beaupré, Quebec GOA 3C0 (phone 418-827-3781) or Quebec Government Ministry of Tourism, Bureau 260, 800 Place Victoria, C.P. 125, Montreal, P.Q. H4Z 1C3 (phone 514-873-7977).

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