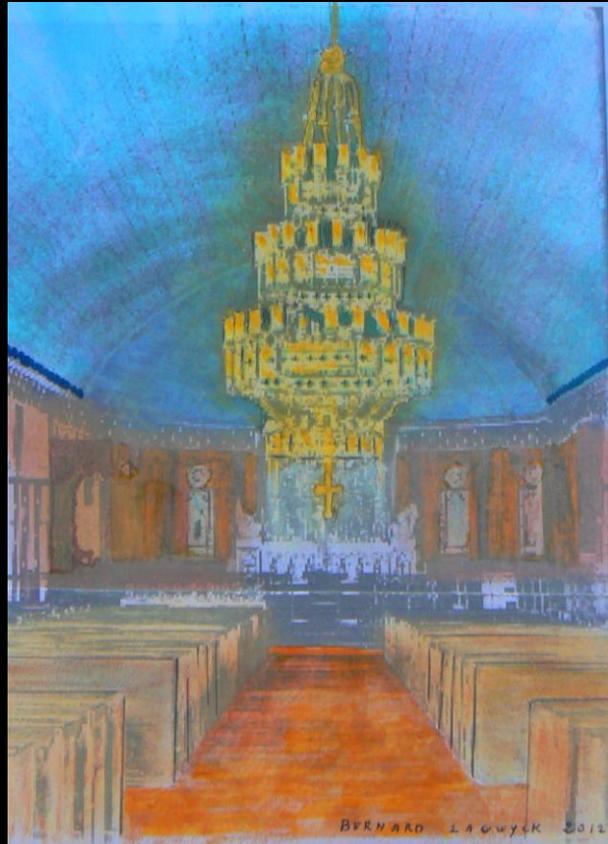


THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL: the 1905 sanctuary.

by Bernard Lauwyck

In the previous articles we explored light and colours in the Roseau Cathedral which were used to create “a glimpse from heaven” and symbolise the Heavenly Jerusalem. In the last article we discovered that the splendour and grandeur of the large chandeliers made quite an impression on locals and visitors alike.

I would the reader to take note of the blue ceiling on this artist impression I made, which had golden stars to symbolise the heavens.



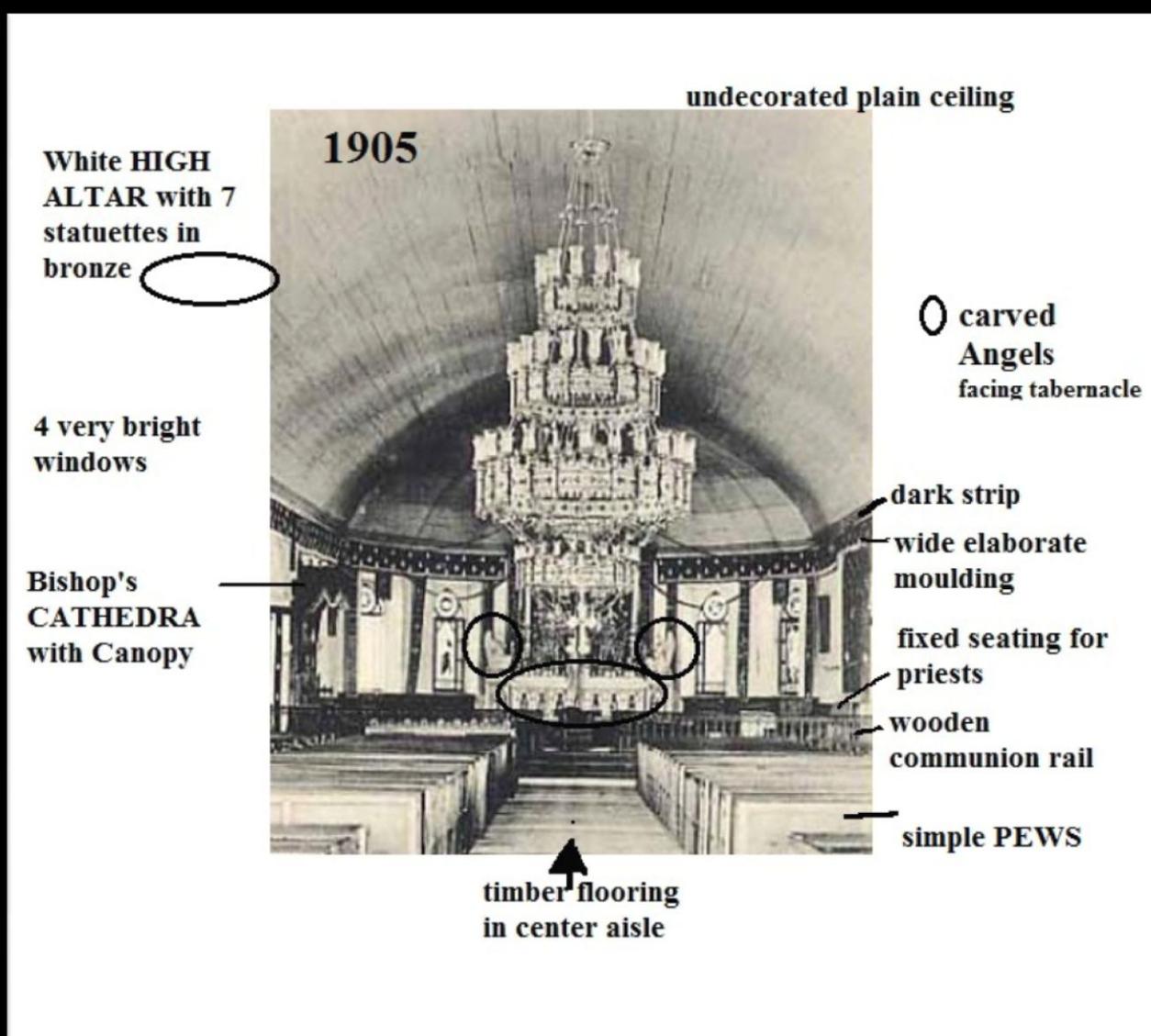
Artist's impression of chandelier in 1905

Of course, liturgically, these chandeliers were not important, except to provide lighting. In fact, I am rather disturbed that the large chandelier seems to be the focal point of the Cathedral on many old photographs, blocking out part of the marble High Altar. We all know that the Altar should be the focal point of any Catholic Liturgical space.

The present day liturgical guidelines state very clearly that a church or chapel should only have ONE altar. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states clearly in chapter 5: “*it is preferable for a single altar to be erected, one that in the gathering of the faithful will signify the one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church.*”

This is important as in the past, churches and especially cathedrals had a high altar and many side altars of professional guilds and special devotions. Our Lady of Fair Haven Cathedral actually has two side altars. These can no longer be used as altars for Mass since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which interestingly was attended by our own Bishop Arnold Boghaert.

Despite the dominating chandelier, we can, upon careful observation, still establish some interesting facts from the photograph dated 1905.



Notice especially the undecorated plain curved ceiling, the wooden flooring in the processional or centre aisle, the simple pews, the communion railing in timber and the two angels facing the tabernacle. The chair of the Bishop, the Cathedra, is located under a large canopy.

Remember that this is the interior of the cathedral shortly before the near collapse of the cathedral roof, which prompted large scale renovation works between 1907 and 1910 under the guidance of Bishop Phillip Schelfhaut, Redemptorist and Bishop of Roseau from 1902 -1921.

The Cathedral in 1905 looked very different from the Cathedral today. It was the result of many stop and go efforts since the early 1800's, as we have seen in a previous article. Remember that the center tower with spire was erected during the time of the first Bishop of Roseau, Michael Monaghan(1850-1855). Bishop Michel Vesque (1856-1858) only had two years as bishop and concentrated on education. A major push forward was made in the years under Bishop René Poirier, who was Bishop of Roseau for 19 years from 1859 to 1878.

Let me quote from Bishop Poirier's letter dated 25 November 1866, to Propagation of the Faith in Rome (see "Annales de la Propagation de la Foi") : *"Our cathedral is not ever close to finished. The two gable walls of the side aisles are closed off with dried stones up to a certain height, the gables with boards. The roofs of the two side roofs are still to be completed. The large nave alone was completely recovered last year. The wooden panelling and ceiling is still to be done. We are concentrating ourselves at this time to the ornamentation of the sanctuary : one of our priests is a painter, another priest a joiner and a woodcarver, one of the religious brothers is the director of works, the bishop designs, traces plans and "fait un peu l'office de la mouche du coche", make sure things get done on time.*



This gives us a nice insight how the cathedral was built. At the time, Bishop Poirier was living in community with 4 priests and 2 religious brothers.

We know already from another one of my articles that the ceiling was supplied and installed by the Kalinagos from the San Sauveur area. This must be the ceiling shown here on the 1905 photograph.

It was Bishop Poirier's desire to buy a baptismal font for each church in his large diocese and so in 1868 a beautiful marble one was installed in the Roseau Cathedral, donated by schoolteacher F.P. Simon. The mahogany pulpit arrived in June 1865 from Cayenne.

"Somewhat later, August 11th, 1866, arrived the two adoring angels, which are still to be seen on both sides of the High Altar. Though not artistically made, they yet inspire the onlooker with devotion."

(see two angels of the Ark of the Covenant)



"Then Bishop Poirier turned his attention to the Baptismal Font, the lighting of the Cathedral and the bells. The new Baptismal Font with its iron railings, its marble pillars and its statues of St John the Baptist and of the Guardian Angel is of exquisite beauty. To each of the pillars four brass brackets were fixed, and chandeliers suspended in the nave and aisles." (History of the Diocese).

As happens so often with hard workers, Bishop Poirier was not able to see the astonishing results of his ardent work on the Roseau Cathedral. He died exhausted on April 23rd, 1878 at the age of 75. Many of the significant fittings that are still with us today were specified, chosen and ordered by him, but were installed after his death in 1883 by his successor Michael Naughten: the Debierre Organ, many stained glass windows, the 14 Stations of the Cross. The Cathedra or Episcopal throne with the roof or canopy was also installed at that time.

In our next article we look at the Roseau Cathedral after the renovation and repair works done between 1907 and 1911 by Bishop Schelfhaut. Keep the picture above, so that you can compare and notice the many differences.

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