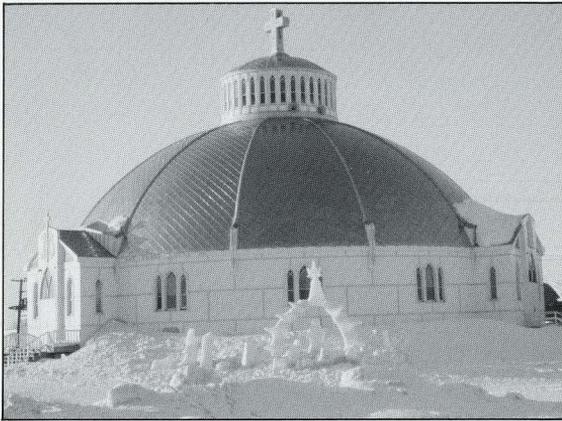


Inuvik
Grollier Hall
Bibliography
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Notre Dame OF THE NORTH



Our Lady of Victory Church
Inuvik, NWT

Souvenir Guide





hat have Inuvik, N.W.T. and Paris, France in common?

Most people would find it difficult to tell you what Inuvik has in common with Paris, France, but the answer greets every visitor to our Northern city and is probably one of the first things they notice. It is the Igloo Church which bears the same official name as the famous Notre Dame cathedral in Paris (Our Lady of Victory).

Also like its Parisien counterpart, the Igloo Church of Inuvik has a fascinating history, made even more remarkable by the fact that its unique construction was built without the use of architectural blueprints!

The architect and builder who accomplished this feat is Brother Maurice Larocque; an Oblate Missionary who has worked as a builder for his order all across the North.



Born in Quebec in 1908, Brother Larocque received formal education only up to Grade 5. In 1931 he joined the Oblate Fathers and was soon sent into Northern Canada, where he has remained ever since, designing and building workshops, mission houses, hospitals, schools and churches. Apart from the Igloo Church of Inuvik, probably his most well known design is the Tepee Church in Fort Franklin; (the original church, built by Bill Lawlor, was burnt down in 1975).

In 1958, Brother Larocque arrived in the brand new town of Inuvik. He came here to consult with the Parish Priest, Father Adam, on the design of a church which would reflect the special needs of the district.

The two men were well matched for the task. Father Adam was just one year older than Brother Larocque and had spent just about the same time in the North. As are many of the Oblates, he was fluent in Inuktitut (the Eskimo language) and knew the intimate details of Northern cultures and beliefs.



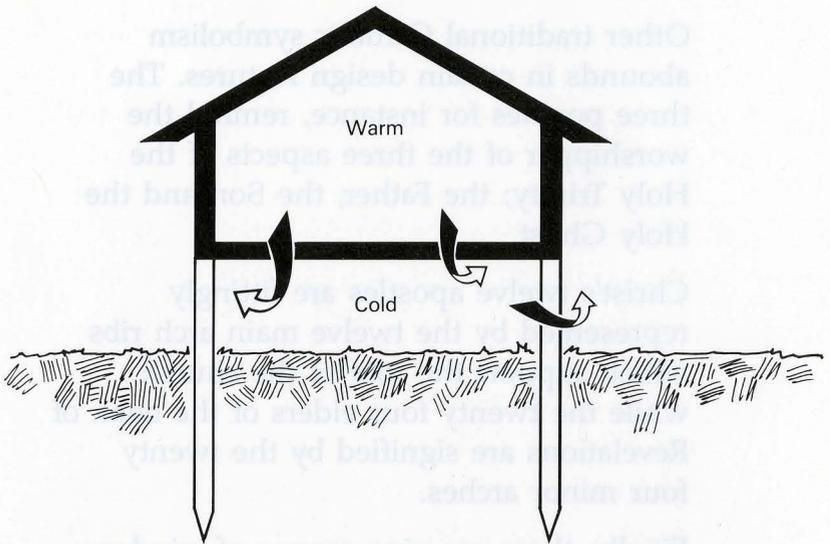
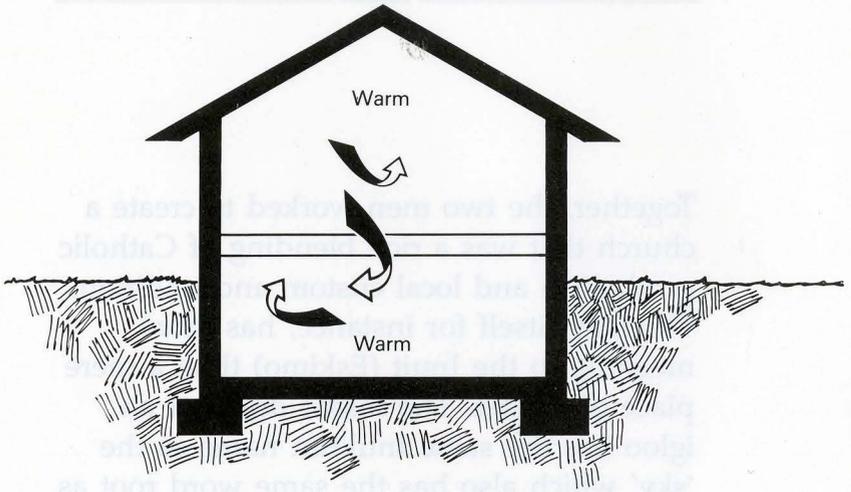
Together, the two men worked to create a church that was a rich blending of Catholic symbolism and local custom and tradition. The igloo itself for instance, has more meaning to the Inuit (Eskimo) than a mere place of shelter. The inside dome of an igloo has the same Inuktun name as the 'sky' which also has the same word root as 'spiritual aspiration'.

Other traditional Catholic symbolism abounds in certain design features. The three porches for instance, remind the worshipper of the three aspects of the Holy Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Christ's twelve apostles are fittingly represented by the twelve main arch ribs which support the roof of the church, while the twenty four elders of the book of Revelations are signified by the twenty four minor arches.

Finally, there are nine groups of windows for the nine choirs of angels.

The practical difficulties facing the two men were considerable. Inuvik in 1958 was one vast construction site with all available



Northern problems need Northern answers. Heat transferred to the ground is a major construction problem as it melts the Permafrost and causes subsidence of foundations. Brother Larocque's ingenious solution is shown above.

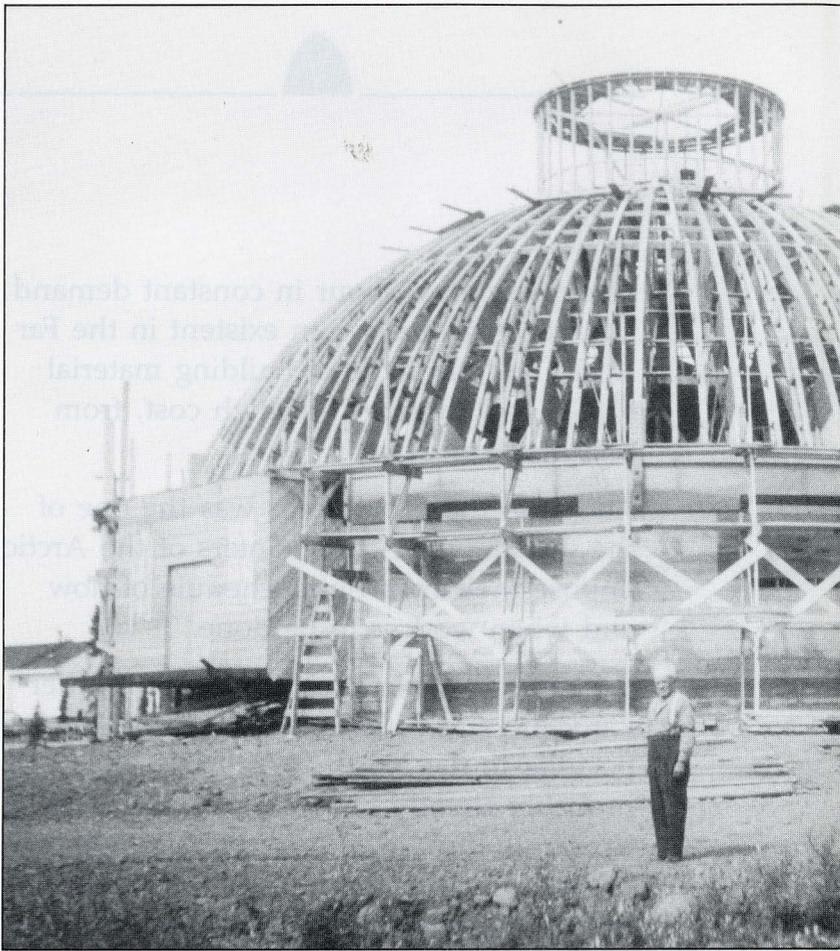


machinery and labour in constant demand. Lumber is virtually non-existent in the Far North and any type of building material has to be "imported" at high cost, from Southern centres.

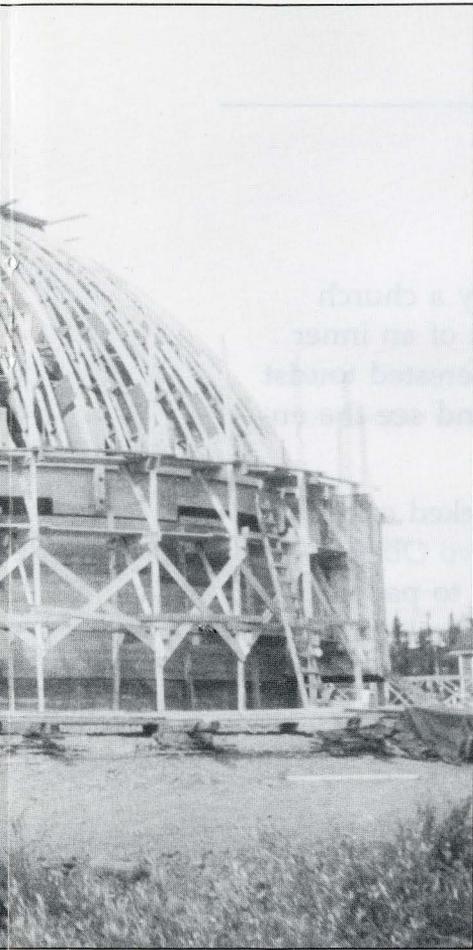
Added to these problems was the one of the weather. The long winters of the Arctic impose their own rigid schedule of how and when work is to be done.

Yet another major problem facing Brother Larocque and Father Adam, is one that is peculiar to the North; permafrost. You will probably already have noticed that all of the larger buildings in Inuvik are built on pilings which raise the floor several feet from the ground. Unlike buildings further South, this sub-floor area is open. The reason for this is to allow downward heat from the buildings to dissipate before it reaches the ground.

Most of the North is composed of Permafrost — an uneven mixture of earth and ice which often reaches a depth of several hundred feet. If heated by the warmth from a building, permafrost melts unevenly causing building foundations to crack and settle.



Foundations therefore were of considerable concern but, with the town of Inuvik literally in the process of being built, it was not possible for the Oblate Brothers to get use of the equipment for drilling the piling holes. Another way of dealing with the Permafrost had to be devised. And so a new technique — a raft foundation — was decided upon.



Our Lady of Victory Church is a major landmark of Inuvik, N.W.T. Built by volunteer labour, this church took just two years from start to completion. The diameter of the building is 75 feet. The cross is nine feet high and is 68 feet above the ground. The cupola on which the cross stands is 20 feet in diameter. Visitors may ascend into the cupola and see the unique construction methods used in the building of the Igloo Church.

The total cost of construction in 1958 was \$70,000 — less than \$30 per square foot.

The ceremony of Blessing the Church was performed by Bishop Piche and took place on August 5, 1960. The title of Our Lady of Victory is one of the many titles given to the mother of Jesus.

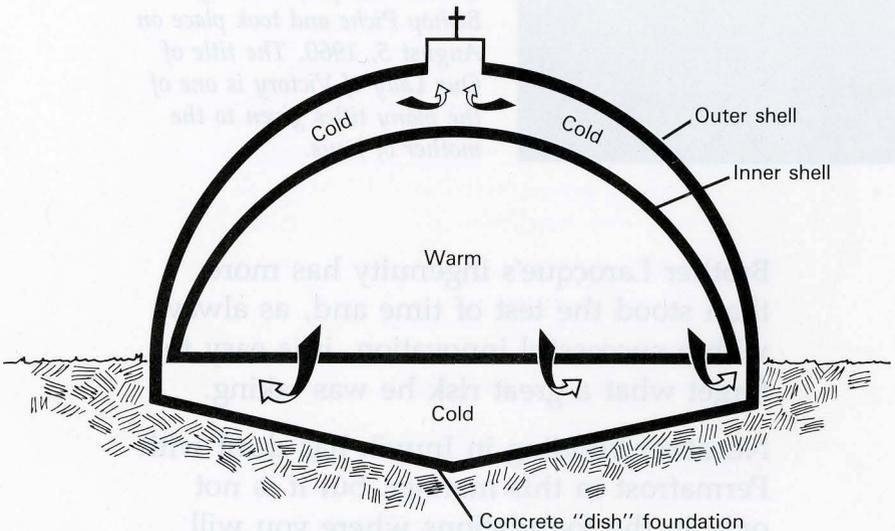
Brother Larocque's ingenuity has more than stood the test of time and, as always with a successful innovation, it is easy to forget what a great risk he was taking.

No other building in Inuvik has dealt with Permafrost in this manner, but it is not only in the foundations where you will find innovative building techniques.



The Igloo Church is literally a church within a church. It consists of an inner and outer shell and the interested tourist can go up into the dome and see the entire construction details.

The entire concept was worked out and held in the minds of the two Oblates — very little being committed to paper. In fact, several years after the building was finished, the government required proper



Raft foundation of the Igloo Church



construction drawings for their files and a draftsman had to be commissioned to come in and put the completed project down on paper.

On a tour of the church, as you ascend inside the hollow roof, you can see at the turn of the stairs one of the few detailed sketches which Brother Larocque made of the truss system for the roof. It is done on a small piece of plywood which is nailed to the shell.

During the winter of '58-59 Brother Larocque built the main arches in the garage behind the church, and made things ready for the following Spring's work. Materials had to be organized and much ingenuity was used to keep costs down. The windows for the Cupola (on top of the dome) were taken from another church which was being demolished; the metal sheathing for the outside of the dome was a rejected order obtained at half price — even old hockey sticks were used for the grating in the false roof.

Other Oblate Brothers arrived to help in the construction — Delisle and Boucher from Aklavik.



Much of the lumber used in the construction was cut by the Oblate Brothers at the Mission sawmill in Fort Smith — 1,000 miles to the South.

It was then loaded on to the Mission barge, the Sant Anna, and towed down the Mackenzie River to Inuvik.

Parishioners also pitched in. Bill Lawlor and Joe Pinsonneault built the pews, altar and other furnishings.

As Spring drifted into Summer, Father Adam took on two widely diverse jobs; he cooked for the construction crew, and revitalized his earlier talent as a carver to produce the beautiful, metal embossed decorations of the altar rail and altar.



Another Oblate artist, Father Colas, painted the windows of the porch. Other windows were imported from France or painted by Father Adam.

Of special mention are the paintings of the Stations of the Cross. These were executed by a young Inuit woman, Mona Thrasher who, as the result of a tragic childhood accident, lost both her hearing and powers of speech.

Working long hours, Mona completed all fourteen paintings plus the three large paintings of the Good Shepherd located over each entrance in a little over two months. The success of these earliest endeavours lent the impetus to launch Mona on a career as a full time artist and at present she supports herself from the sale of her paintings to Northerners and tourists alike.

The Igloo Church therefore follows the tradition of many great churches around the world. Sparked by inspiration, and evolved through the volunteer labours of parishioners and the Oblate Brothers, it stands as a befitting symbol of the Catholic Mission to Canada's North.

A Brief History of the Oblate Fathers

In this pamphlet, you have read of one small segment in the lives of two men who epitomize the Oblate Fathers.

This Catholic Missionary group was established in France in 1816 by Father Eugene de Mazenod. The central theme of the work of the Oblate Fathers was summed up perfectly by Pope Pius XI when he called them: The Specialists of the Most Difficult Missions.

At present, there are 1,700 Oblates scattered throughout Canada carrying on the social and spiritual tasks which were started over 100 years ago.

Father Adam was Pastor of the Inuvik Church for 17 years until his retirement, due to failing health, in 1975. His replacement was Father Denis Croteau, now Bishop of the Diocese.



The Diocese of which Our Lady of Victory Church is a part, is the Mackenzie Fort Smith Diocese — The Largest Missionary Diocese in the world. This vast territory is under the spiritual care of the Oblate Fathers whose spiritual leader is His Excellency Bishop Denis Croteau o.m.i.

