



## A STONE BUILDING

Father Belcourt's main construction project during his years in Rustico was a large parish hall built of stone. The parish priest wanted this building to be large and solid, no doubt to demonstrate to the entire Island population that Acadians were capable of great things.

The project was launched in the spring of 1865. Rustico men volunteered to lift the red sandstone from a quarry in the Hope River area and to transport it to the site near the parish church. Parishioners also helped cut approximately 6,470 stones that were 36 inches wide, 12 inches high and 6 to 8 inches thick.

In a letter to Edme Rameau in Paris, Father Belcourt explained what this two-story hall would consist of:



Father Belcourt studying the plans ▲

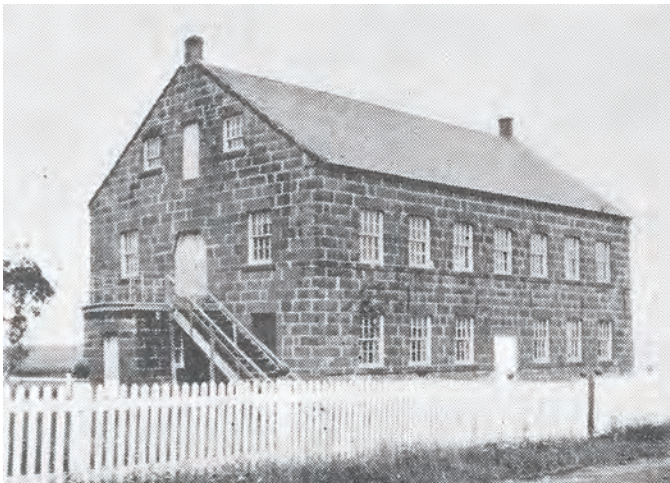
*We are building in Rustico, a two-story stone building [60] feet by 40 feet. The upper floor will be for the Institute. A room for the use of the Bank will be in the lower part as well as two other rooms for the use of men and women as waiting rooms before the [religious] services. (Translation)*

Father Belcourt stated in his correspondence that the parish would own the hall, but that a space would be rented out to the Farmers' Bank for an office. He explained that the Rustico Catholic Institute room would be used for concerts, lectures, and for conducting experiments in physics and chemistry. He also indicated that the Institute was contributing financially to the construction of the hall.

The work on the parish hall was completed at the end of the summer of 1867. This beautiful stone building was obviously a source of pride for Rustico.

## A MEETING PLACE

From the moment it was built, the parish hall was used for many community functions. In February 1871, it was the site of a public meeting to discuss the construction of an Island-wide railroad. A reporter from the Charlottetown newspaper, *The Examiner*, published an account of the meeting and described what he saw in the spacious room of the Institute where the meeting was held:



▲ Rustico Parish Hall. (Postcard, 1938)

In the large Hall above the Rustico Bank, which is used as a Catholic Institute, we found a large number of people, chiefly Acadians about seven o'clock. There is a library in the building containing several standard works and on a large table we observed copies of the *Examiner*, *Herald*, *Scientific American* and other papers. A number of the people in Rustico and vicinity meet in this room every Wednesday evening, and are making good progress in scientific and literary improvement.

## LANDMARK RECOGNITION

The Rustico Parish Hall, currently the Farmers' Bank of Rustico Museum, is the most tangible reminder of Father Belcourt's time in Rustico. Despite the threat of demolition in the 1940s, the hall was fortunately preserved. In 1972, a small museum on the history of Rustico and the Farmers' Bank was established in the building.

This museum remained open until 1995 when the building was condemned for safety reasons. From 1996 to 2000, the building underwent extensive restoration work. An attractive professional museum was installed to tell the story of the Bank and Father Belcourt's remarkable work.

In 1959, the building was recognized as a National Historic Site, and in 2011, it was designated a Prince Edward Island Heritage Site.



Restoration of the Rustico Parish Hall. ▲  
(Farmers' Bank Museum of Rustico).

◀ Farmers' Bank Museum of  
Rustico. (Photo - Carter Jeffery)

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. How do you think people were able to cut and transport the stones for the hall?
2. The hall has become an important meeting place for the community. Where does your community meet? And for what reason? Why is this important?
3. What do you think about the attitude of English-language newspapers towards the Acadian community?
4. Do you think it was a good decision to restore this building? Why or why not?

Farmers' Bank Museum  
of Rustico.  
(Photo - Carter Jeffery)

