



THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt felt that education was very important for the development of a community. He was interested not only in the education of children, but also in the education of youth and adults. He wanted to provide good French teachers for the Acadian schools in Rustico and for other communities on the Island.

Ten months after his arrival in Rustico, to fight against alcohol abuse he set up a temperance society, similar to those that had existed on the Island for twenty years. He named the society the Catholic Institute of Rustico. He chose St. John the Baptist as its patron saint, the patron saint of French-Canadians.

In a letter to his friend Msgr. Charles-Félix Cazeau of Quebec City, dated September 28, 1860, he explains what he wants to accomplish with this organization:

I am in the process of forming a Catholic Institute, to put an end to the endless parties and drunken disorders, which threaten to start again and to provide the French population with a means of education which they have had no chance of obtaining due to the complete lack of French books. As I want to make this Institute as attractive as possible, I have written its constitution which I read at a general meeting last Sunday. All are enthusiastic; they are eager for knowledge. (Translation)

In 1867, there were 250 members of the Catholic Institute of Rustico, all of whom were men. They met regularly to hear lectures by Father Belcourt and other speakers on topics as varied as education, economics, science and history. They also conducted physics and chemistry experiments. At the meetings, Father Belcourt discussed his projects such as the Farmers' Bank, emigration to the mainland, a high school, a parish picnic, a brass band, and other initiatives.

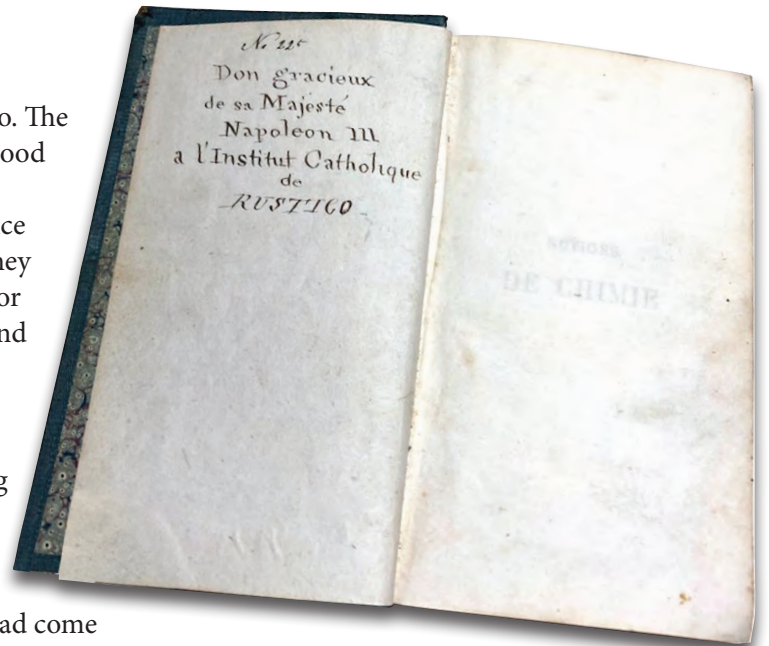
THE LIBRARY

There were very few books to be found in Rustico. The Institute took on the project of creating a library with a good selection of books and newspapers. It included books on history, science, technology, agriculture, religion, etc. Since books in French could not be purchased on the Island, they were ordered from Quebec and France. They were paid for with donations from Napoleon III, Emperor of France, and annual contributions from the members of the Institute.

THE BRASS BAND

To highlight the Institute and create pride among the members and parishioners, Father Belcourt created a brass band. He imported several musical instruments from Boston at a cost of \$200. The musicians were trained by the teacher and musician Israël Landry who had come from Quebec to teach at the high school founded by Father Belcourt.

The band became the pride and joy of the Rustico Acadians. It performed locally, but also in Charlottetown around 1865 when it was invited to a public event at Saint Dunstan's College. It left quite an impression on a reporter from the *Examiner*:



Book from the library of ▲
the Catholic Institute of
Rustico.

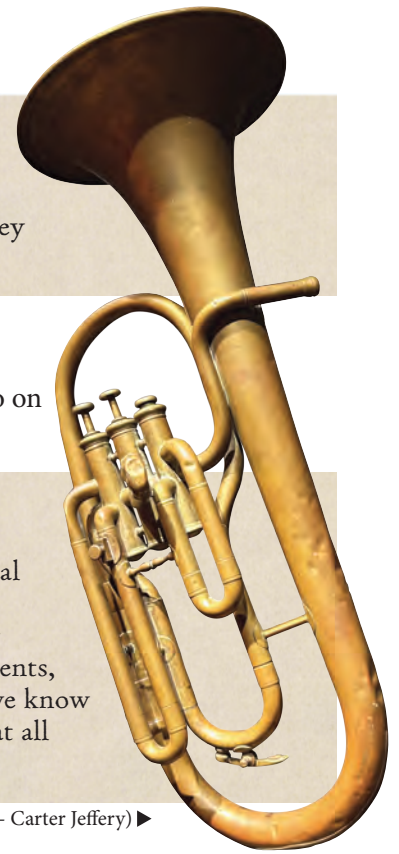
The Rustico Band, under the direction of Mr. Landry, was present, and added largely to the entertainment, by playing lively French airs whenever there was a pause in the examinations. The Band, all dressed in white, presented a most creditable appearance, and although many of them were the merest youngsters, they performed their parts with an ease and skill worthy of practised artists.

RUSTICO : A GREAT PLACE

Father Belcourt and the Catholic Institute of Rustico were quick to put Rustico on the map, as the *Examiner's* reporter so aptly states:

We hardly know what a great place Rustico has grown to be; a few years ago, the people of Charlottetown were accustomed to regard it as a scattered settlement of poor, uninformed, and too often much despised Frenchmen. Now, it has a National Library under the patronage of the Emperor of the French; a reading Room well supplied; a Bank whose credit is established on the soundest basis; and a Band, far more numerous than any we have in Charlottetown, with the most costly instruments, possessing all the latest improvements. These are a few of the institutions which we know Rustico to possess – that there are others of which we have no knowledge, is not at all unlikely.

Tuba from the brass band of Rustico. (Photo - Carter Jeffery) ▶



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Why do you think the Rustico Catholic Institute only recruited men? Are there any community organizations today that hold meetings like the ones held by the Rustico Catholic Institute? Describe the purpose and function of this organization.
2. Why do you think it was not possible to buy books in French on the Island?
3. What positive or remarkable events took place in Rustico?
4. What are Father Belcourt's most surprising or important contributions to the Rustico community and why?
5. Why do you think the French Emperor Napoleon III made donations to the library?
6. Are there any brass bands near you? Why do you think that is?

