

The Bell of Batoche

Gabriel Dumont Institute

The St. Antoine de Padoue parish church was completed in 1884. The priest at the time was Father Julien Moulin. Bishop Vital-Justin Grandin of the diocese of St. Albert (part of present-day Edmonton, Alberta) was in charge of buying bells for all the Roman Catholic missions in the Northwest. St. Antoine's bell was small, silver and weighed approximately 9 kilograms.

It was 30 centimetres high and was cast in Spain in the early 1880s and cost \$25. The bell was baptized on September 2, 1884, by Bishop Grandin and called "Marie-Antoinette." Marie-Antoinette (1755-1793) was the wife of Louis XVI and Queen of France before she was executed during the French Revolution. Xavier Letendre dit Batoche and his sister Marie Letendre-Champagne served as its godparents because their family had founded Batoche. The bell was inscribed with the words, "Vital-Justin Grandin, Évêque de St. Albert," along with the bishop's coat of arms. During the Battle of Batoche, May 9-12, 1885, the bell was stolen by three soldiers from Millbrook, Ontario, a town about 100 kilometres northeast of Toronto. It was held at the Millbrook Legion Hall until October 1991, when it was taken away from there, but not before the Métis Society of Saskatchewan asked for its return to Saskatchewan. The bell had been rumoured to have been taken by Métis from Manitoba. Over the years, several attempts were made to repatriate the bell back to the Métis people, most notably in 2005. However, nothing came of them. In June 2013, the Union Nationale métisse de Saint-Joseph announced that they negotiated with the keeper of the Bell of Batoche to repatriate it to the Métis people of Canada. On July 20, 2013, during *Back to Batoche* days, the bell will be repatriated back to the Métis community and a special mass will be held.