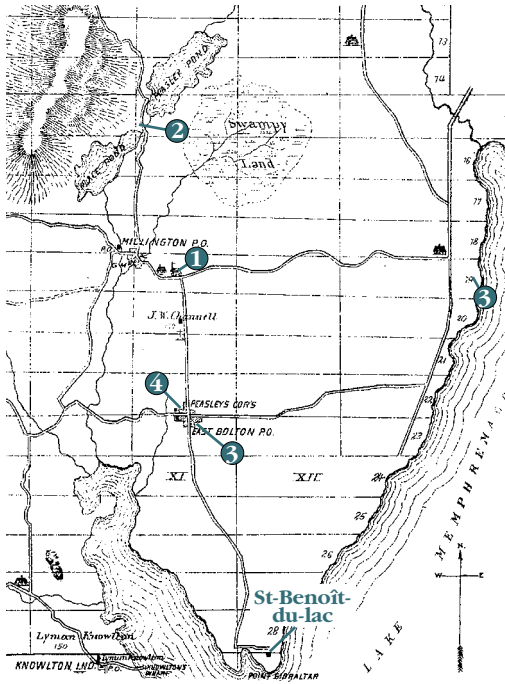


The history of the churches of Austin is also the story of those who settled in the area during the 19th and 20th centuries and reflects the religious currents that swirled around their communities. This brochure follows an earlier one that described the founding of the Saint-Benoît-du-Lac abbey. In addition to the abbey, the municipality of Austin has been home to four houses of worship.

1. *Wesleyan Methodist Church* (1825-1936), at *Thompson's Mills* on Millington Road.
2. *St-Luc-de-Millington Catholic Church* (1897-1920), at the intersection of North Road and the 10th Range (Galvin Road).
3. *New Connexion Methodist Church* (1865-1968), at Peasley's Corners, on Fisher Road near Nicholas Austin Road. The church was moved in 1974.
4. *The Anglican Church of the Atonement* (1865-1927), which later became the Roman Catholic church, Saint-Augustin de Cantorbéry, situated at the corner of Nicholas Austin and Millington Roads.



At Bishop Larocque's instigation, part of the township of Bolton and part of the township of Potton came together as one district under the leadership of Dom Vanier. After Dom Vanier died, Father Boitard took over and served the parish churches of Saint-Édouard-de-Bolton, Saint-Cajetan-de-Potton and Saint-Étienne-de-Bolton, as well as the church of Saint-Luc-de-Millington. The St-Benoît-du-Lac mission continued in the abbey until 1927. When the space became too small to hold the growing Catholic congregation, the monks bought the Anglican building which had housed *Church of the Atonement*. On March 17, 1927, before notary Olivier Tourigny in Magog, Father Brun acquired the property for the sum of two hundred and forty or fifty dollars, paid in cash, from the Reverend Isaac Strowbridge, who had been authorized by his bishop to proceed with the sale. Father Brun asked his own bishop for permission to accept the donation of a piece of nearby land from Ambroise Hamel of Magog to make a cemetery. Permission was granted on December 15, 1930, and the Catholic services which had been celebrated in the chapel of the abbey were then transferred to the former Anglican church, which took the new name of Fabrique Saint-Austin (the parish corporation). Thirteen months later, the Benedictines sold it to the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of the Diocese of Sherbrooke for the same price they had paid.

On January 16, 1940 the parish received its new name. Various options had been considered, including Dom Léonce Crenier's request to the bishop that the church be named Saint-Odilon, after the parish's patron saint and the suggestion by Dom Raoul Hamel that it be called Notre-Dame d'Austin. The bishop, however, proposed "Saint-Augustin de Cantorbéry," explaining: "As the saint is also known by his other name, Austin, we should call the parish Saint-Austin, just like the post office. Everyone will be happy, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and the good saint will take up his apostleship once again in the English community."

On January 13, 1956, Monsignor Georges Cabana issued the decree establishing the parish. From this decree emerged the Fabrique de Saint-Augustin de Cantorbéry (cf. the English *Canterbury*), which included a church, a manse,

Wesleyan Methodist Church 1825-1936

The history of *Wesleyan Methodist Church* goes back to 1784, when Alexander Thompson settled in the Eastern Townships. Born in Scotland in 1747, he was one of the first Scottish immigrants to settle in Barnet, Vermont. A few years later, he joined Nicholas Austin and emigrated to Canada. His name is one of some fifty listed in a survey carried out by the Canadian government of the time. Although he was a friend of Nicholas Austin, who was a Quaker, Thompson declared under oath that he was a Protestant. He obtained lots 18 and 19 on the Tenth Range, in Bolton Township, two kilometres from the present village of Austin. In 1796, he built a sawmill and a flour mill on 400 acres, which then became known as "Thompson's Mills." Because he was also interested in spiritual and religious matters, in 1825 he built the first church in Bolton Township, *Wesleyan Methodist Church*, on his farm. The following year, he built a school in the vicinity of the church. Unfortunately, nothing is left of the church, except for a commemorative cairn marking the spot where the church stood, bearing the following inscription: "In 1939, this memorial was erected to the glory of



Wesleyan Methodist Church

God and in honour of the pioneers who built on this site in 1825 a Wesleyan Methodist Church which was demolished in 1936."

Wesleyan Methodist Church was almost destroyed in 1831. During a service, lightning struck the steeple, causing it to fall through the roof. A witness to this catastrophe, seeing this as a sign, warned that God wanted the church rebuilt. Another interpreted it as a sign that God wanted it destroyed. In the end, repairs were made, and the church was used by the congregation for a further one hundred years.

Alexander Thompson died at Thompson's Mills on May 28, 1835. According to E.P. Conklin (*The Storied Province of Quebec*), the Methodist denomination gradually expanded into Brome County via Missisquoi Bay and spread along the American border to become established in the Eastern Townships.



The Reverends John Stark and E.M. Taylor in front of the commemorative stone cairn, 1939.

a cemetery and a resident priest. After the Benedictines' withdrawal in 1945, the parish was led by a succession of priests: Lorenzo Bouchard, 1945-1948; Florent Cabana, 1948-1952; Robert Tardif, 1952-1958; Edmond Dorand, 1958-1962; Nicolas Beaulieu, 1962-1966; Mathieu Ouellette, 1966-1969; Monseigneur Armand Malouin, 1969-1973; Serge Loubier, 1973-1978; Gaétan Leblond, 1978-1979; André Castonguay, 1979-1987; Alain Laroche, 1987-1991; Jean-Marc Michaud, 1991-1993; Yvan Lavigne, 1993-1997; and Charles Doyon, since 1997.

Of the original four places of worship associated with the history of the municipality, today only the Roman Catholic church of Austin remains to serve the faithful.

Here ends our historical tour of Austin's churches, a tour that also bears witness to the linguistic and cultural diversity of our community.

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www.municipalite.austin.qc.ca

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From 1825 to the present

A Historical Tour of Austin's Churches

Based on a text by
Françoise Hamel-Beaudoin



Saint-Luc-de-Millington Catholic Church 1897 until about 1920

The first Catholic mission, *Saint-Luc-de-Millington*, was established around 1890, on the spot where the present North Road meets Eastman's Tenth Range, a few arpents north of lake Gilbert near Peasley Pond. According to Father Lamontagne, Eastman parish priest toward the end of the 1980s, this mission was created almost at the same time as that of Eastman and the parish of Saint-Étienne, which had included the entire township of Bolton. It covered a territory approximating the present parish of Austin.

In addition to serving as a place of worship, this church was also the local school. It was erected on land belonging to Father Luc Napoléon Castonguay, who served there from 1897, when it was built, until 1907. When he was transferred to another parish, he sold the building on April 9, 1908 for the sum of one dollar to the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of the Diocese of Sherbrooke.

From 1908 to 1912, Charles-Alfred Gariépy and Émile Genest from Eastman succeeded him as priests, ministering to the congregation once a month. In 1912, the building became simply a charge of the Saint-Benoît-du-Lac mission. Once a month, the founder of the abbey, Dom Vanier held services in the church, until in 1914 Dom Paul Brun took over for another six years.

In September 1924, Dom Paul Brun contacted the former parish priest of the Millington charge to inquire about the property titles. In a letter dated September 14, 1924, Father Castonguay replied, "The land attached to the building which had for a number of years



Saint-Luc-de-Millington Catholic Church

served as chapel and school was my own personal property until September 1907. As far as I can recall, I decided to transfer it to the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of the Diocese of Sherbrooke to avoid any problem in the event of my death. The Corporation, however, did not contribute anything to the building or to its furnishings. Given that the building is no longer there, the land ought to revert to its original owner, the Côté family." The Roman Catholic Church of Saint-Luc-de-Millington ceased to exist in 1920, after it was abandoned; it was demolished, and eventually the land did revert to the Côté family.

As a result, Roman Catholics in the community had to travel to Eastman or to the chapel at the St-Benoît-du-Lac abbey. By 1927, the abbey chapel had become too small, and the Benedictine monks therefore purchased the Anglican church to serve the parish, as we shall see.

New Connexion Methodist Church 1865-1968

At the time it was settled, the present village of Austin was known as Peasley's Corners, in honour of Silas Peasley, an immigrant from Vermont and one of the associates of Nicholas Austin. In 1870, the village was renamed East Bolton, after the post office of the region. It was not until November 21, 1938 that the municipality came to be called Austin, to commemorate its first settler.

In 1865, *New Connexion* Methodist Church was one of two churches built at the crossroads of Peasley's Corners. In the wake of dissension within the *Wesleyan* Methodist Church at Thompson's Mills, some members had decided to build their own church, rather than give in, on a matter of principle and called it *New Connexion Methodist Church*. Two benefactors, James Austin and James Davis, generously provided land and funds for the new church, which was built at the intersection of present-day Fisher and Nicholas Austin Roads.

It should be noted that the term "New Connexion" goes back to 1797, when the *Wesleyan Church of Canada* was experiencing difficulties. Certain members did not agree with the discipline or the way in which their church was administered. They broke away to follow a man called Alexander Kilham and adopted the name "*New Connexion Methodist Church*." Congregations were subsequently founded in East Dunham, East Farnham, West Shefford and, as mentioned, in Peasley's Corners.

A year after the New Connexion group broke away from the Wesleyans, the Peasley's Corners congregation had 113 members. Its minister was Ashur Smith, who was born on December 6, 1776 in Sandersfield, Massachusetts and emigrated to Canada in 1806. He led the mission from 1840 on and died the year the new church was built, on August 20, 1865.

In 1884, *Wesleyan Methodist Church* and *New Connexion Methodist Church* joined together as the *Methodist Church of Canada*. In 1925, Pastor Samuel Dwight Chown brought the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian denominations into a new union called the *United Church of Canada*. This is how *New Connexion Methodist Church* became the *East Bolton United Church*, and later the *Austin United Church*. Its last minister, the Reverend John Stark, died in 1968. Coinciding with a decline in congregational membership, Stark's death led to the closing of the church.

It was around this time that the Quebec roads department decided to widen the road not far from the church. Some of the faithful were in favour of demolishing the church, while others rejected the idea. A compromise was reached by offering the building to the



New Connexion Methodist Church

Cecil Butters Memorial Hospital. Two years went by, and the project had still not gotten off the ground. The reason for the delay was that the director, Lily Butters, had been hoping for government funding, which was slow to materialize. On February 4, 1970, she formed a committee to pressure the Quebec civil servants responsible for public buildings and equipment to take action. Nine months later, at the annual meeting of the board of directors, it was learned that the government had refused to allow the church building to be used as a classroom and had therefore declined to pay for the furnishings and teacher's salary. For Lily Butters, this marked the end of a project that had promised so much. She immediately informed the *Austin United Church* accordingly, so that they could look for another buyer.

On May 1, 1974, the church building was sold to Mr. and Mrs. William Rothwell McMaster for the sum of \$1,000 and, on July 19, 1974, chemin des Pères (the section now called Nicholas Austin Road) was closed for twelve hours so that the church could be moved to its new location. A little while later, the McMasters asked the Butters Centre board of directors to give them the steeple and bell, to which the board assented in July 1975. Today the building is visible on the McMaster-Matossian property from Nicholas Austin Road.



The Anglican Church of the Atonement

Anglican Church of the Atonement 1865-1927

In 1807, an Anglican missionary, the Reverend Charles James Stewart, arrived in the Eastern Townships and visited Sutton, Potton, Stanstead, Barnston, Compton, Hatley, Bolton and Brome. As he travelled, churches financed by money he received from family and friends in England sprang up wherever he went, earning him the title "Apostle of the Eastern Townships." Then in 1826, Stewart was named second bishop of Quebec. During this period, the Anglican Church, which he represented, was opening schools, hiring teachers and founding parish libraries. It also established a seminary in Chambly in 1828.

In 1865, while the Anglicans were raising *Church of the Atonement* in Peasley's Corners at the intersection of what are today Millington and Nicholas Austin Roads, the Methodists were building *New Connexion Methodist Church* diagonally across from it. The work on the Anglican church began on May 15 on lot 1434 in the Township of Bolton, purchased from David J. Randall, a resident of Bolton. The promoters of the project were J.W. Taylor, James Austin Jr. and Alexander Sargent, the latter two being descendants of village founder Nicholas Austin. Inaugurated on October 14, 1865, the church was served by the Reverend Elisha Joseph Fessenden, who one year later would christen his son, Reginald Aubrey Fessenden, in the sanctuary. It was this son who went on to invent wireless telephony in 1906.

In the 1855 report of the *Church Society of the Diocese of Montreal*, the Reverend John Godden wrote, "... and the Church was opened with Divine Service on the 15th October... and will, I hope, be a witness for Christ and his Church, amid all schisms which there abound. Mr. Fessenden is residing near the new Church and, no doubt, has plenty work around him." In 1867, the same source noted that Mr. Fessenden had become assistant to the Reverend Godden in the neighbouring parish of Bolton. A year later, it was announced that a bell had been purchased for the church at a cost of \$225.

Although Anglicanism was widely practised from 1760 on, its numbers, like many others, began to decline. In 1927, after sixty-two years of ministering to Anglicans, *Church of the Atonement* was sold to the Benedictine abbey of St-Benoît-du-Lac, and the Anglican congregation withdrew for good.

Saint-Augustin de Cantorbéry Catholic church (since 1927)

Chased out of France and forced into exile in Belgium, the Benedictines of Saint-Wandrille turned their thoughts to the possibility of settling in Canada. In 1912, one of their members, Dom Paul Vanier, was sent off to meet Monsignor Larocque, Bishop of Sherbrooke. The bishop, warned of the imminent visit of the monks, consulted the priest from Magog, François-Xavier Brassard. He then proposed to Dom Vanier, when he arrived, that he purchase a farm near Magog. Convinced of the merits of this suggestion, the Benedictine monk signed the contract to purchase the property. Although the bishop set no conditions, certain parishes did not have priests and the arrival of the Benedictines seemed a timely solution. Accordingly, the newcomers were given responsibility for preaching and conducting services in South Stukely, Bolton Centre and Millington. In the case of Peasley's Corners, it was agreed that services would be held in the chapel of St-Benoît-du-Lac, under the direction of the abbot.