

From Saint-Colomban to Saint-Canut The Story of Samuel O'Rourke and Catherine Phelan

One Irish family. Two neighbouring parishes. A shared heritage.



Catherine Phelan's 1853 School Sampler – Donated to Histoire et Archives Laurentides Museum by the Kelley O'Rourke who received it from Colleen Pearce.



Catherine Phelan's 1853 (closeup). Histoire et Archives Laurentides

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges when researching Quebec's early Irish families is understanding where to look for their records. Before the Parish of Saint-Colomban and Saint-Canut were officially established, the Irish settlers who had already made their homes there travelled to neighbouring parishes such as Sainte-Scholastique and Saint-Benoît for baptisms, marriages and burials. As a result, many of the earliest Saint-Colomban and Saint-Canut families appeared in the registers of these neighbouring communities. Saint-Colomban established their parish in 1836 and Saint-Canut in 1887.

The story of Samuel O'Rourke III and Catherine Phelan illustrates this perfectly.

The Family Story

Samuel O'Rourke III was born on 14 August 1833 and baptized in Sainte-Scholastique, while Catherine Phelan was born on 29 September 1836 after Saint-Colomban parish had been established, and she was baptized there. The Phelan family would become one of the Saint-Colomban parish's well-known Irish pioneer families. Among the treasured reminders of Catherine's childhood is an exquisite school sampler she embroidered in 1853 while attending school in Saint-Colomban. Carefully stitched by hand, it survives today as a remarkable reminder of the education, faith and perseverance of one of the parish's young Irish daughters.

Samuel and Catherine married on 21 April 1857. Although married in Saint-Colomban, Samuel and Catherine eventually made their home in neighbouring Saint-Canut. According to the 1881 Census, the O'Rourke's lived among other Irish pioneer families including James Kenna and Margaret Blanchfield, Patrick Callahan and Mary Murphy, Mary and Catherine Keogh, John MacKeereth and Mary Ranson, and James Hoey and his francophone wife, Marguerite Lafantaisie.

St Canut 44

Locataires abrités de la Seigneurie du Lac des Deux Montagnes

Noms des Locataires	Front		Profondeur		Superficie	
	Arpents	Pieds	Arpents	Pieds	Arpents	Pieds
<i>Régime du Nord - Antérieure Concession</i>						
1062. Jos. Bourke	1		5		5	
" Agnès Bourke	2		5		10	
1063. John Proulx	4		23		72	
" S. L. Proulx, fils	4		5		20	
1064. Simon Leclerc	2		22	5	47	
" Jean Robson	2		23	5	47	
1065. Patrick Fitzgerald	4		23	9	91	60
1066. J. L. Proulx	2		23	8	47	70
" George Gosselin	2		23	8	47	70
1067. Pierre Piquet	4		23	9	91	10
" B. Ranson					3	
" Agnès Leclerc					1	50
1068. John MacKeereth	4		24	5	98	
" Leclerc, d'Esco					50	
1069. Michael Grace	2	3	6	25	5	58
" E. Ranson	1	8	22	25	5	60
1070. do	1	7	9	27		
" Michael Grace	2	9	27		37	8
1071. John Bourke	3	1	39	2	9	91
1072. Samuel	3		32		76	
1073. do	1	5	34		57	
" Matthew Hoey	1	5	34		57	
1074. do	1	5	34	8	52	
" Michael Proulx	1	5	34	8	52	
1075. Tho. Keogh	3		36		108	
1076. Alex. McKeen	3		27		81	
1077. do	3		38		114	
1078. do	3		38		114	
1079. Patrick McKeen	3		38	6	114	88
" E. Ranson					1	
1080. Ed. Proulx	8		39		117	
1081. John Proulx	3		38		114	
1082. Gabriel Ducloux	1		20		20	
" Saml. Langlois					2	
" Jos. "	1		17		17	
" Jos. "					1	
" Wm. Proulx	1		36		36	
" Michel Proulx					1	
" Le. Proulx					25	

Saint-Canut cadaster : Samuel John O'Rourke



The O'Rourke's held cadaster numbers 1071 and 1072 – BAnQ

Supplement to the Official Cadastral Plan of the Parish of Saint-Canut (Surveyed 1879; Certified 1882). Prepared by Provincial Land Surveyor J. H. Leclaire and certified by E. E. Taché, Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands.

They represented the rich tapestry of nineteenth-century rural Quebec—Irish-born settlers, Canadian-born children of Irish immigrants, English-speaking Protestants and Catholics, French Canadians, and Irish-French families whose marriages reflected the gradual blending of cultures. Their farms formed a close-knit neighbourhood where family, faith, and agriculture shaped daily life.

Together they raised nine children, whose lives reflect the experiences of many Irish farming families in the Laurentians. Their eldest son, Michael Samuel, later settled in Montreal after marrying Ann Keyes. Daughter Annie (Ann Judith) also made her home in Montreal after marrying Michael Stapleton. Another daughter, Mary Jane, married Edward Phelan and likewise became part of Montreal's growing Irish community. Sons John Joseph and James Patrick remained closely connected to Saint-Canut, while daughter Paulina Margaret eventually settled in Montreal. Their family also knew the hardships common to nineteenth-century pioneer

life. Little Mary died at only eighteen months of age, Rose Emelia lived just a few weeks, and daughter Catherine passed away at the age of twenty.

Community of Neighbours

The history of Saint-Canut itself reflects the determination of its early settlers and was not without controversy. Residents first petitioned for a parish in 1856–1857, but disagreement among local landowners delayed the construction of a church for nearly thirty years. Some supported establishing the parish, while others argued the community was too small to sustain one. Despite the controversy, the church was finally built in 1886/7 on land donated decades earlier by Alexander Mackenzie, becoming the centre of a growing farming community.

Today, Samuel and Catherine rest together beneath their headstone in Saint-Canut Cemetery, only a short distance from the historic Irish cemetery at Saint-Colomban where so many members of their extended family are buried. Together, these two cemeteries tell the story of one Irish community whose families crossed parish boundaries with ease—building farms, raising children, worshipping together, and leaving a legacy that still shapes the Laurentians today.



Headstone of Samuel & Catherine
Saint-Canut Cemetery - St-Columban Irish collection



Église de Saint-Canut
Built 1887 - Patrimoine Laurentides

Sources

- Patrimoine Laurentides – *Église de Saint-Canut* :
https://www.lieuxdeculte.qc.ca/fiche.php?LIEU_CULTE_ID=135207
- BAnQ – Saint-Canut Concessions : <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4494489>
- 1881 Census of Canada – Saint-Canut, Deux-Montagnes County: Ancestry.ca
- Saint-Colomban, Sainte-Scholastique and Saint-Benoît parish registers: Genealogy Quebec
- St-Columban Irish: <https://photos.stcolumban-irish.com/picture.php?/641/category/23>
- O'Rourke-Phelan Family Group Sheet: Ancestry.ca
- Atlascine: Blackwell-Phelan: Joseph Phelan & Catherine Brennan Story – Eng/Francais: <https://rs-atlascine.concordia.ca/saint-colomban/index.html?module=module.stories&cinemapId=1f73e0b49775583ea97862cb3c74a8e5>

Saint-Canut Cemetery

9984 Boulevard de St Canut

Mirabel, Laurentides Region, Quebec J7N 1K1 Canada

Coordinates: 45.71783, -74.08119

Find a grave: **Cemetery ID:** 2436152