

Summer 2025 Spécial Édition 4

Le Trésor
des Kirouac

Bulletin of the descendants of Alexandre de K/voach
Witness to Kirouac Activities since 1983



Photo : Marie Kirouac

Reverend Sister Cécile Kirouac (1907-2007)

- ✠ Kirouac

✠ Kérouac

✠ Keroac

✠ Kéroack

✠ Breton

✠ Curwack
- Kirouack

Kérouack

Keroack

Kyrrouac

Burton

Curwick

✠

INTRODUCTION

by Céline Kirouac

FOREWARD

This story was first published in French as **HORS-Série 4** of *Le Trésor des Kirouac* in 2017.

This is the life story of Sister Cécile Kirouac. She was born in Quebec City where her father operated a thriving business and her mother was a piano teacher. Very young she showed a natural love for music and her talent asserted itself over time.

I first met her at the convent of the Sisters of Jésus-Marie. I was very impressed by her cordial welcome, her radiant joy and her enthusiasm; obviously, she was happy. Her comfortable life in a prosperous family, her brilliant artistic career as a young woman were exchanged for a very different commitment, more discreet, a life of service enabling her to achieve her full potential.

I often worked with her filing her sheet music. As she wrote her memories, I part take in her confidences. I never felt that she had any regret concerning her choice of life. Quite the opposite, as she so often expressed her gratitude to the Lord who invited her to this life.

One aspect of her multifaceted musical talent was improvisation which grew through her lifetime. I often heard her colleagues, her religious sisters, shared the most beautiful testimonies about the pieces she improvised at the end of the Sunday Mass. Those spontaneous organ creations were more appreciated than some well-known classical works usually played. At many Kirouac annual gatherings, to everybody's delight, at the end of the Sunday Mass, Cousin Cécile played Charles-Marie Widor's famous Toccata. As I was turning the pages, how could I ever forget the sheer bliss of then.

Accomplished musician, devoted to her religious community, and extremely generous towards one and all, these were the dominant traits of her life. Her religious commitment was as profound as her deep desire to share her love of music. Read on to discover the great lady whom I loved very much.

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Homage to Sister Cécile Kirouac

Of the Congregation of Jésus-Marie at Sillery

Excerpts from Le Trésor des Kirouac, number 57, September 1999

In our June 1997 bulletin, we announced our intention of writing an article about a woman with a most exceptional life journey. During over sixty years, Sister Cécile Kirouac (**GFK 00500**)* served the Lord as a nun of the Congregation of Jésus-Marie. Every person who had the chance to know her, knew that she was an artiste in her soul, an emeritus organist, a concert pianist in great demand and an excellent piano, organ and singing teacher. She was also very proud to be part of Quebec City's Kirouac branch. We asked her to share with us some good moments of her family, religious and artistic life. To start with, we will let Sister Cécile tell us about her youth and what it was like growing up in her family.

Marie Kirouac

I was born in 1907, in the parish of Saint-Roch in Quebec City. We lived on Saint-François Street near the church where my grandfather was the organist. Photos from my childhood bring back memories, lots of them. I see myself surrounded by beautiful toys, or on Saint-Joseph Street with my mother, or visiting my grandparents Bolducs and Kirouacs. I started school with the nuns of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, at first in the convent located across the street from Saint-Roch Church, then at their Notre-Dame-du-Chemin school in Old Quebec. Then from 1916 to 1921, I studied at the convent of the Ursulines Sisters on Rue du Parloir (parloir = visitors' room in religious institution). From there I went to the Convent of Jésus-Marie at Sillery, as a boarder from 1921 to 1927. There my father's sister, Alma Kirouac (**GFK 00495**) was a nun called Mother Marie-du-Rosaire, and their first cousin was Mother Marie-des-Anges (Adelcie Kirouac **GFK 00574**). My Kirouac

grandparents lived on Prairies Street in Saint-Roch, in a large house where they raised twenty-one children, two of them becoming nuns¹. My mother's parents lived on Saint-Joseph Street; they had five children, including one who became a priest.

Now I would like to talk about some of my memories, the good ones and the not-so-good ones. Let's start with the earliest one. In 1911, when I was four years old, I met Sir Wilfrid Laurier². My grandfather Bolduc was welcoming clients at Myrand & Pouliot, a large department store on Saint-Joseph Street. I was in his arms. The motorcade of the then Canadian Prime Minister passed in front of the store as he was on an official visit to Quebec City. He travelled in a convertible car and, as my grandfather was holding me in his arms, I presented Sir Wilfrid with a bouquet of flowers. As a reward the illustrious visitor gave me a kiss. I was delighted and felt spoiled.

On a December day, I was out shopping with my mother when I stopped in front of the display window of the Paquet Department Store; I spotted a doll and wanted it. My mother said to me: *There are similar ones in your father's store. He could certainly give you one.* But I would not listen; that was the one I wanted. I dropped to the sidewalk screaming because I wanted that doll and none



Cécile Kirouac as a toddler
(Photo : Céline Kirouac Collection)



¹ Alma Kirouac (1882-1951), Sister Marie-du-Rosaire of the Congregation of Jésus-Marie and Blanche Kirouac (1886-1978), Sister Marie-Eustelle, of the Congregation of Saint-Augustin.

² Wilfrid Laurier (1841-1919) was the first French-Canadian to become Prime Minister of Canada, a position he held for fifteen years from 1896 to 1911.

* Number in the 1991 KFA genealogy book of the descendants of Maurice-Louis-Alexandre Le Brice de Keroack, author, François Kirouac.

other... Thank goodness, at that moment, a good Samaritan offered to pick me up and carry me back home. There, the first thing my mother did was to put me to bed... I was still screaming and crying. When my father arrived for dinner, I stretched out my arms to greet him but when my mother told him about my outrageous conduct, he scolded me in his usual way and told me to dry up my tears. My mother, Alice Bolduc-Kirouac, was a calm but firm woman who never tried to satisfy my whims.

Christmas time holds a very important place in my early memories growing up. When shopping with my mother, we habitually visited grandmother Kirouac (born Amanda Lemieux) and aunt Graziella, my father's sister, who was usually in the large sewing room where she made Christmas stockings for the *J.-A. Kirouac* store³, under the kind watchful eye of grandfather Kirouac who, although retired, once in a while still liked to observe what was going on at his store. There were two departments, the imported toys and the books. My father was a broad-minded businessman and I remember that he used to travel to Germany to buy toys. There were so many family gatherings around Christmas and New Year in our extended family. For those occasions, grandmother Kirouac sent a large box of surprises to the families of every one of her 21 children. It was her *guignolée*, i.e., collecting food and gifts for all: turkey, bottle of wine, candies, etc. This grandma had a heart of gold!

Traditionally, my mother always received the family at Christmas... there was a beautiful tree filled with small gifts from *Santa Claus*. After marrying my mother, as a first Christmas present, my father bought her a beautiful *Kranick & Bach* grand piano from New York. However,



Cécile's parents: Ernest Kirouac (1884-1945) and Alice Bolduc (1887-1962)
(Photo: Céline Kirouac Collection)



Cécile's grandparents: Amanda Lemieux (1860-1940) and Joseph-Arthur Kirouac (1853-1935)
(Photo: Céline Kirouac Collection)

³ In 1888, Joseph-Arthur Kirouac and Odilon Pruneau founded the business **Pruneau & Kirouac**, located on Saint-Jean Street in Quebec City, selling books, office supplies, stationery, games, trinkets and ornaments. In 1904, the store was engulfed in flames. The same year, now the sole owner, Joseph-Arthur opened a new store, named *J.A. Kirouac*, at 34-36 Côte de la Fabrique, across the street from Quebec's City Hall. In 1936, once more a major fire destroyed Joseph-Arthur's store. But thanks to his sons' endeavours, the store rose from its ashes, this time at the corner of Saint-Jean and Collin Streets. This new venture carried mainly imported toys, electrical trains and educational games. Joseph-Arthur's enterprise kept growing as the next four generations carried on the business.

afraid I might damage it when I began playing it at the age of four, my father bought me a big upright piano that was placed in the kitchen. Years later, I had the joy to inherit my mother's grand piano; it was placed in my music studio at Sillery next to the grand piano of Mother Sainte-Cécile-de-Rome⁴. Most sadly! Both pianos went up in smoke during the fire that destroyed the convent in 1983.

On New Year's day, the Kirouac families went to the house of grandfather Kirouac, on Prairies Street, for the blessing, the dinner and the concert given by artists, pianists, violinist, cellist and flutist, singers, etc. The blessing took place in grandfather Joseph-Arthur's bedroom; it was always a very moving ceremony. Each family in turn, patiently waiting in the hallway, went to kneel down in front of grandfather to receive his blessing, my father as the eldest of the twenty-one children was the one to ask for the blessing. Around the room, it was total silence. We listened to the wishes of our grandfather for the new year... and to each one of us he gave a generous envelope. In the next room, the small grandchildren were already playing with dolls, trucks, wooden blocks, etc. It was an effusion of joy and warm wishes ... Afterwards, we shared a toast to the New Year.

Every Sunday through the year, grandmother Kirouac invited her children for dinner. These dinners bring back such unforgettable memories. There were two dining rooms in the large home: one for the adults and one for the children. When we received an invitation, we had to answer by Friday to give aunt Graziella enough time to buy the food, including the famous baked desserts from *Pâtisserie Vaillancourt*. Later this bakery was bought by Marie-Antoinette Restaurants. I also like to reminisce about our visits to my father's grandmother, Marie-Julie Hamel-Kirouac⁵. We loved visiting her. She was always wearing her delicate white lace bonnet and, with a good kiss she would give each one a dime. She kept a supply of dimes in a small platter especially for her grandchildren (and great-grandchildren).

In 1914, the event that most upset my life was the birth of my young brother Robert. One day, as I had been well-behaved, my father promised me a beautiful doll that would talk



Cécile, her mother, Alice Bolduc, and her brother, Robert.
(Photo: Céline Kirouac Collection)

and sing. At the same time, he told me that we would move to another house on Salaberry Street in the *Haute-Ville* (Quebec City's upper district), and that I would have to live at grandmother Bolduc's house for a whole month while the move took place. My birthday being on 21 June, what a surprise it was to see, on 13 June, in my new bedroom a second bed, a cradle where a baby was sleeping ... and mother in her bed. I sobbed and bawled and asked my mother to get rid of it... However, it did not take long for little Robert to become my best toy, because he so much enhanced my life, we needed each other.

Here is another childhood memory: one morning, around ten o'clock, my teacher, whom I loved very much, was worried because I was not yet in the classroom. She called my mother to ask if I were sick. *She left very early as usual*, answered by mother who, now, being very worried, called the police who found me on *Avenue des Braves*, picking tulips in a private front garden. *What are you doing little girl? Aren't you going to school this morning?* – *I am picking tulips for my teacher*, I answered. The police officer said nothing more but took me to school. Back home later, my mother said: *Cécile, in the future, you must always ask permission before taking what does not belong to you.*

When I was studying at the Ursulines Convent on *Rue du Parloir* (street), after school, I used to stop at my grandfather's store *J. A. Kirouac*, located on *Côte de la Fabrique* (A). I often needed something. Perhaps at that time, I somewhat believed that the store was mine! But one evening at supper, I was greatly surprised to find a note from my grandfather on my plate. A note from the J.A. Kirouac store. There was no need for an explanation; I understood immediately what it was about. It was an

⁴ Sister Sainte-Cécile-de-Rome, born, Dina Bélanger (1897-1924), was beatified by Pope John-Paul II on 20 March 1993. She was a very important person in the life of Sister Cécile.

⁵ Marie-Julie Hamel (1830-1915), wife of Chevalier François Kirouac (1826-1896) who was the mayor of Saint-Sauveur and became the first representative of that district when it was annexed to Quebec City in 1889.

NOTE A : Côte-de-la-Fabrique: Fabrique refers to the administrative body of a Catholic parish in Quebec; Côte as it is one of the steepest streets in Old Quebec.

invoice, and I had to pay it. As you can well imagine.

And my father then to tell me that from now on I would need to ask for his permission at his office whenever I needed something. Once in a while I wanted to buy little gifts for my friends, up to five dollars for a birthday gift. When I went to the store, it was always a great joy to meet Mr. Gustave Gagnon⁶, my mother's piano professor.

Although my mother did not have many piano students, I know that one of them was Bernadette Létourneau, a friend of Dina Bélanger. She taught her during nine years, until she achieved her laureate, then she passed her student on to Mr. Arthur Bernier⁷, organist at Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church. Thanks to him, Bernadette became the organist at Notre-Dame de Jacques-Cartier church and met Dina Bélanger who lived in that parish. My mother being a very generous and charitable person, worked tirelessly for the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Society in Saint-Dominique Parish where we lived many years after moving from Salaberry Street. Asked to establish the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Society in the Jacques-Cartier Parish, she successfully created it.

In the early 1920s, I had the privilege to drive my father's car. One day, on my way to Neuville, where we spent the summer months, I had an accident. I was making a left turn but wanting to catch my scarf I hit a parapet; the good thing is that it stopped me from falling into a river, but it pulled off the car's running board and the one wheel to get the car back on the road. At that moment, a trucker stopped and asked me if anyone was injured. Oh, no. But the car!... He took me to the first house so I could call my father in Quebec City. *Are you injured?* He asked me. - *Not at all, papa, but the car,*

oh! La! La! – His answer was: *I prefer to pay a garage bill than a hospital bill.* What a good father saying that in spite of the pride he took in his beautiful car.

In 1932, after returning from my time in the USA, my brother, Robert, and I went to Europe. This holiday was a gift from our parents. We crossed the Atlantic on the *Empress of Britain* from Quebec City to Cherbourg, in France. As well as France, we visited Switzerland and Italy where we were privileged to be received by Pope Benedict XV.

In Lourdes, my brother and I were the only visitors to an early 5 o'clock Mass at the Grotto where the Virgin Mary appeared in Lourdes. The



Cécile Kirouac, before entering the convent to become a nun.
(Photo: Céline Kirouac Collection)



The Quebec Symphony Orchestra founded in 1903.
Ernest Kirouac, violinist, Cécile's father, is the sixth person in the front row, from left.
(Photo: Céline Kirouac Collection)



⁶ Gustave Gagnon, organist, pianist, composer and music teacher was born at Louiseville (Quebec) on 6 November 1842 and died at Quebec on 6 November 1930.

⁷ Joseph-Arthur Bernier, born in Lévis on 19 March 1877, died in Quebec City on 28 April 1944. He was organist at Collège de Lévis (1893-1896), then in various churches in Quebec, including at Saint-Sauveur (1892-1908), also at Notre-Dame-de-Jacques-Cartier (1908-1917) and, from 1917 until his death at Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church. (Source: Culture & Communication Quebec)

beautiful sunrise was glimmering in the Gave river, such lifting beauty! One evening in Saint-Malo, *beau-port-de-mer*, i.e., *beautiful seaport, as the French song goes*), in Brittany around nine o'clock while walking, two young people asked us where we were from, adding: *certainly not from Saint-Malo, because it is forbidden for a young woman to be outside at this time of night*. I cherish many more memories from this extraordinary holiday where I learned so much about the old countries. Back home, in memory of my time at Lourdes, I wrote the music for *Hail Mary at Lourdes* and dedicated it to the *Chorale du Rosaire* (Rosary choir), in memory of all the happy moments I spent with this choir.

Here, I would like to underline my special affection for Brother Marie-Victorin, born Conrad Kirouac (1885-1944), a first cousin of my father, extremely well-known scientist as the author of *La Flore laurentienne*, his famous botany book, and as the founder of the



Sister Cécile Kirouac and Adelcie Kirouac, sister of Brother Marie-Victorin, in front of his monument at the Montreal Botanical Garden.

Montreal Botanical Garden. I met him twice: once at a family gathering for Mother Marie-des-Anges⁸, his older sister. Also, when Marie-Victorin came to the Convent of Jésus-Marie and he admired the small botanical garden made by the youngest pupils from the elementary classes. These students were learning to cultivate the land according to the movement he had proposed, small gardens in schools in order to acquire agricultural knowledge. Even if I did not meet him more often, I feel that I know him quite well, through newspaper articles, his correspondence, many documentary films about the man and his works, through his sister. etc. A man of faith, moved by a great love of nature, in his work, he never missed the opportunity to underline the Creator's hand.

I collaborated indirectly to the book entitled *Confidence et combat* (published in 1969 by Éditions Lidec Inc., Montreal). Brother Gilles Beaudet after obtaining his PhD in literature from the Sorbonne in Paris wanted to publish part of Brother Marie-Victorin's correspondence. Mother Marie-des-Anges had her brother's letters in her safe-keeping; being afraid they might get lost in the mail; she asked me to deliver them personally to Brother Gilles Beaudet in Montreal. So, I made the trip as special messenger. At the same time, the Brother asked me to harmonize two melodies on poems by Émile Nelligan (B). It was a pleasure to do that for a colleague of Brother Marie-Victorin.

Entering the Convent and Becoming a Nun

Quoting the Gospel, Sister Cécile explains this to us: One day, Jesus said to Nicodemus: *Do not be surprised if I say to you, that one must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, you do not know where it comes from nor where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*

Like for all young girls, came a day when I had to make a big decision. Was I called to religious life or to married life? I needed the Holy Spirit to decide. One morning, at sunrise I decided to go to my *Alma Mater*. Immediately in the corridor when I walked in, I met the Superior who asked me point blank when I would be entering the novitiate. I was taken aback because I only knew her by sight, so without hesitating, I said: *Don't you think there is as much merit in married life as in religious life?* Mother Superior's question shook me profoundly, nevertheless. Today, why mention this moment? Because I believe that sometimes we say intense things that can turned into grace with the Spirit of light and faith.

After that encounter, Mother Superior suffered a lot and prayed a great deal to make sure I would not lose my vocation because of her question. To this day, I owe her eternal gratitude. I had two suitors at the time, and, with one of them, I was starting a novena to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart at the Sanctuary on Sainte-Ursule Street to find out God's will. A few days later, during an encounter, this time with my former piano professor who knew absolutely nothing about my questioning, said to me that God had told Mother Sainte-Cécile-de-Rome - Dina Bélanger -, that I had a religious vocation. It was an unforgettable surprise!



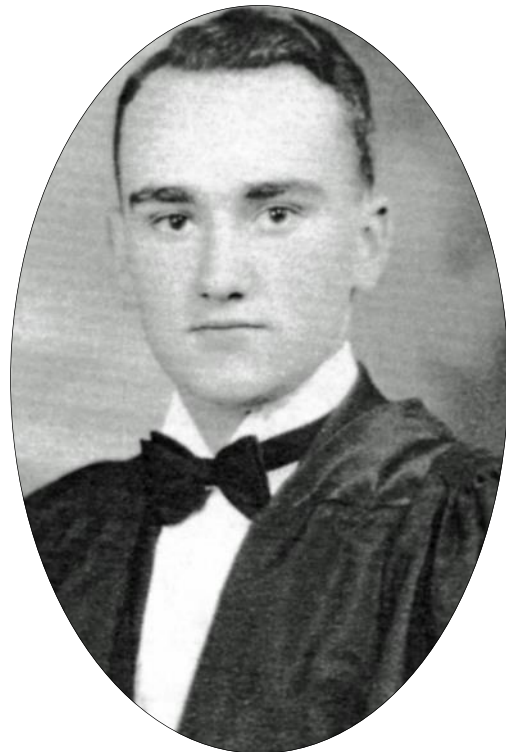
⁸ Mother Marie-des-Anges, Adelcie Kirouac (1883-1967), of the Congregation of Jésus-Marie.

NOTE B: Émile Nelligan: (1879-1941), Canadian Poet, an iconic figure in Quebec Culture, considered the greatest Canadian poet in any language. Source Wikipedia.

For me, it was a clear calling and, without a moment of hesitation, I went to see Father Martin, the Saint-Dominique parish priest. Providentially, he was at the presbytery. *Father, I am asking a favour from you, please tell my parents that I have decided to enter the convent of Jésus-Marie tomorrow evening.* I told him why I had decided *subito presto*, so abruptly, and about the Lord's message to Dina.

«But Mother Sainte-Cécile-de-Rome is not even Blessed yet, this is not an article of faith and, as far as I know you are in love, you will not even last a week. Think about your mother who has been so crushed by your brother Robert's departure when he entered the missionary congregation of the White Fathers of Africa; that was two months ago and she has yet to get over it. - Cécile answered: Father, I have decided; I am entering tomorrow. The parish priest ended: *I cannot give that news to your parents.*

Deep down in me, I kept telling myself that I was the one to know whether I was in love or not. The way I answered that calling, I felt it then and I still feel it today, it was a "yes" without any doubt or appeal. In a way it was like Marie's answer to the Archangel Gabriel. What a stunning grace! The following morning was the first Friday of the month, after Mass, I told my mother the great news. At first my mother thought that I was not feeling as well as usual, and perhaps I was losing my mind. Without understanding my attitude, she called my father at the store to tell him the staggering news. I had the car at my disposal for the day, so led by the Spirit of Light, I went to various places quite unconscious of what I was doing, without being even affected by my mother's tears, which was strange as I had never seen my mother cry before. At supper, alone with my father, suddenly he said: *I feel like the holy man Job, God gave me everything and now He is taking everything.*



Robert Kirouac (1914-1969), Sister Cécile's brother. He was an important and well-known businessman in Quebec City in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s (Photo: Céline Kirouac Collection)



Cécile, as a postulant, with her aunt, her father's sister born Alma Kirouac, Mother Marie-du-Rosaire, in the Congregation of Jésus-Marie. (Photo: Céline Kirouac Collection)

Upstairs, my mother was crying her heart out, it was a dissonant sound flow cascading on the staircase; I was crying onto my chicken salad. Today at 92, as I write this, I am shedding tears again, but tears of love to accompany all the emotions that no words can express. What a huge debt of gratitude I will forever carry towards all the people who prayed for my vocation! Saint-Peter must have all their names written in his large account book without forgetting the interest... And around eight o'clock, I left the house with my father and my mother driving the car for the last time to the Convent of Jésus-Marie. Imagine returning home without the Cécile they loved so much! How much gratitude I owe my dear parents for the education and love they showered on me! May our Eternal Father for ever glorify them for me.

If I accept today to tell the story of my vocation, it is to confirm the authenticity of the Lord's message given to the blessed Dina about me. When I arrived at the convent on the evening of 3 November 1933, I was greeted by Mother Saint-Omer-de-Luxeuil to whom I had explained in the morning what would happen fortuitously at eight o'clock, assuring her that I would be arriving then but to keep it secret. It was another surprise when other nuns were asked to the parlour, the Mistress of the novices and Mother Marie-des-Anges (Adelcie Kirouac), my father's first cousin. Imagine the explosion of joy of these dear Mothers.

After my parents had left, Mother Sainte-Élizabeth, Mistress of the novices, took me to the novitiate's chapel, then to the very bedroom Dina had occupied at the end of her life. The following day, she took me to the infirmary's chapel and after Mass, at breakfast, the whole community greeted the arrival of the thirty-third postulant, all clapping, an answer to prayers at the occasion of the Jubilee. After completing my

postulate, I received the habit on 12 February 1935. That is when I was given the name, Mother Saint-Robert-Marie (as my brother's name was Robert) and his patron saint was Saint-Robert Bellarmine⁹. If you split the word in three, you get *bel-art-main*, (*beautiful hand art*), I took that as a confirmation of my art.

One year after receiving the habit and my religious name, I made my final vows. In 1966, according to the decisions of Second Vatican Council, I took back my own name. The Council then also granted permission to nuns to go into the world, for example to visit their families and to help them when they were in need. As the Church says today, we must go to people.

My Professional Career

Although it was said that at the age of three, I used to play simple tunes on the piano, it is at the convent of the sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame in Saint-Roch that I started taking piano lessons and did so too at their other school in Notre-Dame-du-Chemin in Quebec City's upper town.

After that, I was a day-boarder at the Ursulines Convent from 1916 to 1921. There, my piano teacher was Mother Sainte-Agathe who prepared me for the Superior Diploma at Quebec's Music Academy. I was rather nervous at the exam. After playing *Marche mignonne* by Poldini, Mr. Arthur Bernier, the judge, came to the piano and looked at the music sheet. I had played the piece from memory, so he asked me if the copy was mine. Then he put it on the lectern and told me to play again. Having noticed that I had transposed the piece, I started crying. *No, no, my dear, do not cry, you will not lose points for that, quite the opposite.* I was given a very good grade. My teacher must have been very happy because she

told me that she would teach me to play the harp the following September. My mother was not surprised at all by what I had done because, at home, when she was reciting her rosary, she would regularly stop and say: could you please play that piece on the right pitch; I cannot pray when you don't. My mother knew, she had perfect pitch.

After completing my classes at the Ursulines, my parents decided to send me to the Convent of Jésus-Marie at Sillery, where I was a boarder from September 1921 until June 1927 learning piano and doing my classical studies.

While boarding at Jésus-Marie, my first piano teacher was Bernadette Létourneau. The previous summer she had started as a postulant at the convent and before that, had studied piano with my mother for nine years. I wonder if that was the reason I was a boarder at Sillery, in order to study piano with her or maybe more, because she had been to New York to pursue her musical studies at the New York Conservatory of Music. I spent six years at Sillery, during Bernadette's canonical year, I had another piano teacher, her friend

⁹ Roberto Francesco Romolo Bellarmino (known as Robert Bellarmine), born in Montepulciano, Tuscany, Italy, on 4 October 1542, died in Rome on 17 September 1621, was a famous Italian Jesuit priest, theologian, writer and apologist. (Source: Wikipedia)

¹⁰ In 1891, a group of Quebec society ladies, inspired by the Ladies Morning Musical Club created in the USA and in English Speaking Canada, formed a first musical society in Quebec using the same English name. It was eventually translated in French as *Club musical des dames de Québec*. Its aim was to provide opportunities to young local talented classical musicians to perform. Quite rapidly the Club started inviting renowned national and international artists to perform. (Source: La fabrique culturelle.tv)

Dina Bélanger, Sister Sainte-Cécile-de-Rome, who came to teach me from the convent at Saint-Michel-de-Bellechasse, where she was teaching. From 1927 to 1933, music was my main occupation, I was busy with various activities like concerts, recitals, etc.

At the Ladies' Morning Musical Club¹⁰, I was invited to give a recital first with Mrs. Madeleine Monnier, a cellist from Paris, then with Mrs. Esther Dale, an American violinist. At the Musical Club, I also accompanied my brother, Robert, who was then studying with Mr. Robert Talbot¹¹, when he played a movement from Bériot's violin concerto. Robert was following in the footsteps of our father, Ernest, well-known Quebec violinist and one of the founders of the **Quebec Symphonic Orchestra** in 1903. At the Quebec Seminary, when Father M. A. Lamarche, Dominican, gave a lecture entitled: "Bachelières & cuisinières" (Women: cooks with bachelor's degrees).

As I was one of the pioneers of CHRC radio station¹², I often played piano, either as a soloist or as an accompanist. I could be called in to give a musical interlude with only an hour's notice. At the time, many Quebec musicians were happy to accept to perform at such short notice. Among other things, I also wrote the music to accompany publicity messages, for example, for the Pony Brand products singing the qualities of their coffee, jellies, golden syrup, and food products.

I also organized a series of live concerts of music from Canadian composers from Quebec, like Raoul Vézina (C) (Mosaique), Omer Létourneau, Henri Gagnon, Georges-Émile Tanguay from Montreal. The works were performed by well-known and loved musicians like Rodolphe Plamondon¹³ from

Montreal and Edwin Bélanger¹⁴ from Quebec City, Gilbert Darisse and many other musicians making up a small orchestra and choir.

One unforgettable recollection: one summer, our handsome baryton Louis Gravel¹⁵, who was pursuing his career in Paris, France, received a contract for a concert at Springhill, Massachusetts. Immediately he sent me a telegram at Neuville, Quebec, to let me know he would be coming. After preparing a beautiful programme including works in various languages, tickets in hand, we boarded a train at Lévis, Quebec, for this unknown destination. At Valley-Junction in the Beauce region, we were met by a car and brought to the presbytery at Springhill, Megantic (D).

We noticed the sparsely populated area when we expected to be in an important American town. The Parish priest gave us supper while a piano with a broken pedal was being moved to the church hall. The broken pedal was duly replaced with a boot tongue. Lighting was provided by oil lamps! We were taken aback, so we immediately decided to modify the programme, replacing the German, Spanish, English and French works, by simpler pieces, the kind usually chosen for encores after a concert. About 100 people came, it was, to say the least, an unexpected evening. The important fee anticipated, turned out to be very modest; however, it was an adventure, and we had a good laugh about it all.

It was such a privilege to learn from Dina Bélanger, *Le rêve d'amour*, *Liebersträum*, by Franz Liszt. Love dream! I could never have imagined the loving surprises the Lord had in store for me and for Dina. I had no idea how intense her intimacy with the Lord was. That would be a future extraordinary surprise; it was another



Robert Talbot, violinist and composer.
BAnQ P428, S3, SS1, D44, P325 /
Archives of L'Action catholique /
Robert Talbot / Unknown Photographer,
[circa 1920].

¹¹ Robert Talbot, (1893-1954) Canadian violinist, composer and conductor, was born in Montmagny (Quebec) and died in Quebec City. He was the conductor of the Quebec City Symphony Orchestra from 1924 to 1942. (Source: Wikipedia)

¹² Quebec City AM Radio Station from 1 April 1926 until 30 September 2012. (Source: Wikipedia)

¹³ (Joseph Marcel) Rodolphe Plamondon. Tenor, teacher, cellist, (1876-1940) born and died in Montreal. He studied cello and solfège and also took voice lessons. He sang in France with most great musical European ensembles.

¹⁴ Edwin Bélanger (1910-2005), violinist, conductor, military band leader, arranger, professor and Quebec publisher of sheet music, was born in Montmagny (Quebec), died in Quebec City. (Source: Wikipedia)

¹⁵ Louis Gravel (1895-1977), singer, teacher, and church cantor. After studying at Quebec City's teacher's training college, he took singing and harmony with Arthur Bernier, then pursued his singing training at the Damrosch Conservatory (Julliard School of Music) in New York City, and also in Europe. Source: Dictionary of Canadian Biography.

Note C : Raoul Vézina, son of Joseph Vézina: see *Le Trésor, Special Edition*, number 10, pp. 76-78

Note D: In 1874, Springhill, was the first railroad crossroads near Megantic, Quebec, now the municipality of Nantes.

improbable “love dream” at the time. The beautiful memories of those years of happiness in the convent as a boarder certainly molded me for religious life. Let me talk more about Mother St-Omer-de-Luxeuil, who prepared me for the music teaching diploma at the Music Academy, without having to interrupt my classical studies.

At that time, one summer I had the privilege to study with a pianist from Chile, Mrs. Rosita Renard (1894-1949), winner of the Berlin Conservatory Award and the Stern Award, who spent the summer vacations at the Ladies Hostel attached to the Convent at Sillery. When my studies at Jésus-Marie were completed, I studied piano with Mrs. Berthe Roy who lived at the Château St-Louis on Grande Allée, Quebec City. She prepared me to take part in the prestigious **1928 Prix d'Europe** competition. (E).

Later on (1932-1933), I pursued my training at the **New York Conservatory of Music** and at the **Julliard School of Music**, also in New York, developing my musical knowledge and abilities. During that year, I was able to live in the *Ladies Guest House* (F) of the Sisters of Jésus-Marie, on 14th Street. Over the years, many Canadians would live there.

I loved to play sonatas with Robert Talbot, a seasoned musician, who will always be remembered as an exceptional professor, director of Laval University Music School, director of the Quebec Symphony Orchestra, violinist, composer and a friend. One morning each week, I went to his home in Quebec City to work at least two hours. During the summer months that I spent at Sainte-Pétronille (one of the island's villages), on Orléans Island, I met him at the convent of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame in Saint-Laurent (another island village). There we enjoyed playing works by Cesar Franck, Gabriel Fauré and others. Before becoming a nun, I wrote a piece dedicated to him: *Souvenirs** (Memories), that I gave him on 27 February 1933, in gratitude for the many hours filled with wonderful music. In March 1999, in Laval University's archives I found the original, the author's only copy of that piece that I had not seen since 1933. I made this happy discovery thanks to Marie Kirouac who went to the Archives looking for memories and mementos concerning me.

Once a nun in the convent, I started studying the organ with Mother St-Omer-de-Luxeuil, the organist. I obtained my bachelor's degree in organ from Laval University. In 1971,

after Mother St-Omer-de-Luxeuil's death, I became the organist at the Jésus-Marie Provincial House. Again, at Laval University I studied for my Master's in Gregorian Chant and also followed the courses to obtain a License in Music but did not have the time to write my thesis. Furthermore, I had many other opportunities to improve my musical training, especially in Paris.

I taught piano, singing and organ during fifty-two years, I directed choirs and was in charge of musical teaching during many years. In 1942, I was posted to the Teacher's Training College at Beauceville for a month-long interlude that lasted four years. Among my best students there, many obtained their qualifications from Laval University and are now music teachers. Sister Rachel Fournier is the director of the music department at Sillery; Sister Pauline St-Hilaire, organist, created the Music School at the Convent of Jésus-Marie in Lauzon (south-shore, near Lévis) with a solid reputation on Quebec's south shore; Sister Georgette Cantin taught piano before becoming a nurse; Thérèse Lacombe, won a regional competition in Beauceville and this honour opened her the door to Vincent d'Indy School where she completed a Master's degree and pursued a career as a supervisor at Radio-Canada, responsible for selecting the artists.



NOTE E: Prix d'Europe was created in 1911 by the Quebec government, including a substantial scholarship, to encourage young musicians to further their studies in Europe.

NOTE F: The Ladies Guest House: convent often had a guest house for women guests.

* See pages 24-30 in the present Special Edition to read the music of *Souvenir* (memories) composed by the 26-year-old Cécile Kirouac, before she became a nun.



Sister Cécile Kirouac playing the organ at Notre-Dame-des-Victoires Church in Quebec City on 17 July 1994, during the Kirouac Family Association annual gathering.
(Photo: Kirouac Family Association Collection)

After four years at Beauceville, I was back at Sillery in 1946 where I carried on teaching music. It was good to meet again with Mother Marie-des-Anges, although she was getting old. So I accompanied her more during the last years of her life. My bedroom was next to hers, and as she was almost immobilized, I could much better take care of her needs. This close relationship enabled me to better know her as the great educator she was. After her death in 1967, I needed a rest, so I was sent to Paris for a sabbatical year.

“Recharging my batteries” in such rich cultural surroundings in the French capital gave me the chance to live experiences that proved to be precious for my following years as a teacher. Besides visiting museums and attending concerts, I was able to meet some important people in the musical world, including Mrs. Martenot, famous pianist renown for her teaching method applied to piano and arts. (G) -*Méthode Martenot*)

At the Martenot Art School at Neuilly, Paris, I used to meet her and benefitted from the group-classes about her piano teaching method for beginners, elementary level, up to contemporary music writing. She was



Photo : AFK Collection

Sister Cécile Kirouac with her second-cousin, Jean-Yves Kirouac, who was the president of the Kirouac Family Association in 2001-2002.

kindness personified, her welcome and her depth of feelings were exemplary, this great artist later came to Quebec long enough to teach her method at College Jésus-Marie and at Laval University. She died in 1998 at the age of 95, I shall never forget her.

I was also lucky to study organ with the great organist, Jean Langlais¹⁶, the blind organist at Sainte-Clothilde

Church in Paris, well-known for his compositions on Gregorian themes and his incredible talent for improvisation. There is another great organist and master of improvisation with whom I spent wonderful times, Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)¹⁷. I used to go to the Trinity Church to listen to him. At the Paris Catholic Institute, privileged centre of religious culture, I had the benefit of following the organ classes of Mr. Courboin (H), a specialist of Bach.

My activities were so numerous across the French capital that I had to learn how to move from point A to point B, and I became quite good



Photo: Céline Kirouac Collection

Sister Cécile Kirouac and her niece, Micheline, daughter of her brother, Robert.

¹⁶ Jean Langlais, born in 1907 in La Fontenelle, France, died in Paris in 1991, was an organist, musical improviser, pedagogue and French composer. (Source: Wikipedia)

¹⁷ Olivier Messiaen, born in 1908 in Avignon, France, died in 1992 in Clichy, (France) was a modern composer, organist, pianist. (Source: Wikipedia)

NOTE G: Martenot: Famous musical teaching method created in France in 1912 by Members of the Martenot family and adopted around the world since. Wikipedia

NOTE H: Charles Marie Courboin (1884-1973) Belgian-American organ virtuoso.

at it, even daring at times navigating through very busy areas. So it was that in October 1968, with my niece Micheline, my brother Robert's daughter, to whom I really wanted to show Paris and its treasures, we found ourselves in the middle of a riot where the policemen used teargas trying to neutralize the revolt; nevertheless, we managed to escape safe and sound. Ten days before I had been able to meet up with my niece and my brother Robert in Madrid, at the worst of the riots. We spent a week travelling through Spain and every night slept in one of our convents.

At another time, I spent a week travelling with Mother Sainte-Agnès, in Belgium and in Switzerland where I learned so much more about Europe.

After three wonderful years abroad, I came back to Quebec City. I was very enthusiastic about taking up teaching music again and being involved in many related musical activities through which I was keen to play an apostolic part. To answer the request of the Assumptionist Fathers, I accepted to play the organ at the *Montmartre canadien* (I), replacing Father Van der Meschen at the eleven o'clock Sunday Mass for six years.

1983 was a particularly traumatic year. In May 1983, our convent went up in flame. I lost all my (sheet) music, all Dina Bélanger's manuscripts, her grand piano, my mother's grand piano, another thirty pianos, all my family photos, as well as all the famous letters from brother Marie-Victorin, and so much more. The nuns survived that dreadful ordeal living in various houses and homes. As for myself, I was welcomed by the Augustinian nuns on Saint-Louis Road where I spent twenty-two months, until the construction of the new convent was completed. I played the organ at the main ceremonies and took part in the nuns' life. One touching memory of that time comes back: after the fire, Mrs. Smith Roy, a former president of the Ladies

Morning Musical Club for many years, gave me her Mason & Rich piano. I was extremely grateful for her generous gift.

In 1989, the Augustinian nuns asked me to compose a cantata for the 350th anniversary of the arrival at Quebec of their first missionaries, including Mother Sainte-Catherine-de-Saint-Augustin their foundress. The text was written by Sister Thérèse Bergeron, an Augustinian Nun. I worked and composed the cantata in gratitude to the sisters who had been so welcoming. The first performance was at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré's magnificent basilica for the gathering of the Augustinian sisters commemorating the arrival of their first missionaries. Upon hearing the cantata, Sister Jeannine Bélanger, Augustinian Provincial councillor, suggested that I use it, with a different text for Dina Bélanger ... thus a new text was composed by Sister Charlotte Genest. And the cantata later inspired our Mothers to ask me to write a Mass using the themes from the various parts of Dina's *Ricordanza* for piano. It was produced and sung on 20 March 1993, for the beatification of Dina at the ceremony held at the Church of the Canadian Holy Martyrs in Rome. On 6 June 1993, at Quebec, the *Ricordanza* Mass was first sung at the Jacques-Cartier parish church where Dina had made her first communion. So, on that June day, the cantata was sung at the communion as a Thanksgiving for the beatification of Dina as well as the canonisation of Claudine Thévenet¹⁸.

In 1993, I also wrote the music to one of Dina's poems entitled *À notre Mère Fondatrice*, (*To Our Founding Mother*). This poem was found in an autobiography I received as a gift two days after the tragic fire in May 1983. Having lost so much at that moment, it was with great happiness that I read that book and when I read

the poem, a melody came to me. I immediately wrote it down and that draft has been miraculously saved, so it will never be forgotten. Much later in 1993, ten days before the canonization of Claudine Thévenet, I providentially found that ten-year old draft; Dina certainly wanted that to happen. When I saw it, I felt that she wanted that her colleagues, the Sisters of Jésus-Marie, pay homage to Mother Claudine.

I felt really happy thus, without hesitation, I told the Provincial Mother, Sister Jeannine Bélanger, about my discovery. She was so happily surprised that she immediately sent a fax to Sister Irène Légère, General Councillor at Rome, who promptly answered that she was very happy to carry on the project. She proposed to contact Sister Annette Haché in New-Brunswick who could sing the melody at the concert that very evening in the chapel. So, I immediately harmonized the melody and gave it a new title: *Honneur à toi, Ô Mère Fondatrice* (honour to you, Mother Foundress) I sent it to Sister Annette Haché and to Sister Pauline Saint-Hilaire who would accompany her in Rome.

In 1995, it is through her *Rêverie sur le Saguenay* that our Blessed musician reached me again. What joy! In 1920, Dina accompanied by her friend, Bernadette Létourneau, travelled to Chicoutimi and at the same occasion, enjoyed a cruise on the Saguenay. The trip was organized



NOTE 1: *Montmartre canadien*, Catholic retreat centre in Quebec City

¹⁸ Claudine Thévenet (1774-1837) was a nun from Lyon, France. Her religious name was mother Marie-Saint-Ignace; she founded the Congregation of Jésus-Marie to educate abandoned children. (Source: Wikipedia)

by Monsignor Omer Cloutier who asked Dina to compose a piece for relatives and friends in memory of that voyage.

On 20 April 1921, back at the Convent of Jésus-Marie at Sillery, Dina wrote: *Rêverie sur le Saguenay*. In 1938, the year of the diocese of Chicoutimi's centennial, an eighteen-year-old woman sang the melody at a gala concert broadcasted by Radio-Canada. In 1939, this young woman, now married with nine children, Mrs. Martin, moved to Quebec City. In 1995, while going through her sheet music, she found the manuscript of the piece she had sung in Chicoutimi at 18 and was very impressed. Without delay, she contacted her former professor of the Good-Shepherd Congregation, Sister Dionne, who was very happy to tell her that Dina Bélanger, the author of *Rêverie*, was indeed Sister Cécile-de-Rome, nun of the Congregation of Jésus-Marie who was now Blessed. Sister Dionne also gave her my name and it was an overwhelming joy to meet her and for us to hold this

treasure as, so far, the only things we had from Dina, were the *Ricordanza* and *Les cloches de l'Abbaye* (the bells of the monastery).

Mrs. Martin's copy was made by Mother Saint-Omer-de-Luxeuil for Father L. Tremblay (Oblate), the Centennial celebration organizer in 1938. This piece, a keepsake of the expression of the deepest feelings of Dina's soul, reveals to us something of her mystique. We owe this lady sincere gratitude for the glory of God and of our Blessed Dina. Right from the first page this work calls for introspection; I adapted it for organ and violin. I think that Dina sent it to me so I could play it at the *Cœur Eucharistique* on her behalf and on the behalf of those who come to our chapel to pray on her mausoleum. Pilgrims who come to pray on her tomb in our chapel often ask me to play this melody in memory of our Love Mendicant. This adaptation is now available, computer written, as well as a copy of the original piano piece.



Much gratitude to Sister Cécile Kirouac for agreeing to go back in time and share some memories with us. And much gratitude to Céline Kirouac, her niece, for generously collecting and typing out all her memories.

As for our Association, those present at the Mass on 16 August 1980 in the Parish church at L'Islet-sur-Mer, remember that Sister Cécile Kirouac played the organ during the celebration of our first ever KFA gathering.

Again she played the organ on 5 September 1982, during the Mass in the parish church at Cap-Saint-Ignace. And again in the church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires in Quebec City on 3 August 1986.

Sister Cécile was also present at the Montreal Botanical Garden at a special event marking the Centennial of Brother Marie-Victorin.

She was our honored guest at our annual gathering in Kamouraska on 29 July 1990. She was very happy to be in Sainte-Justine-de-Langevin on 16 August 1998 when we paid homage to her dear uncle, Abbé Jules-Adrien Kirouac (1869-1945). When leaving the church that day, Sister Cécile seemed particularly happy to share with us this special moment of grace, she even offered to write a

rallying song for the Kirouacs. Who knows, perhaps one day she will improvise on the Breton anthem!

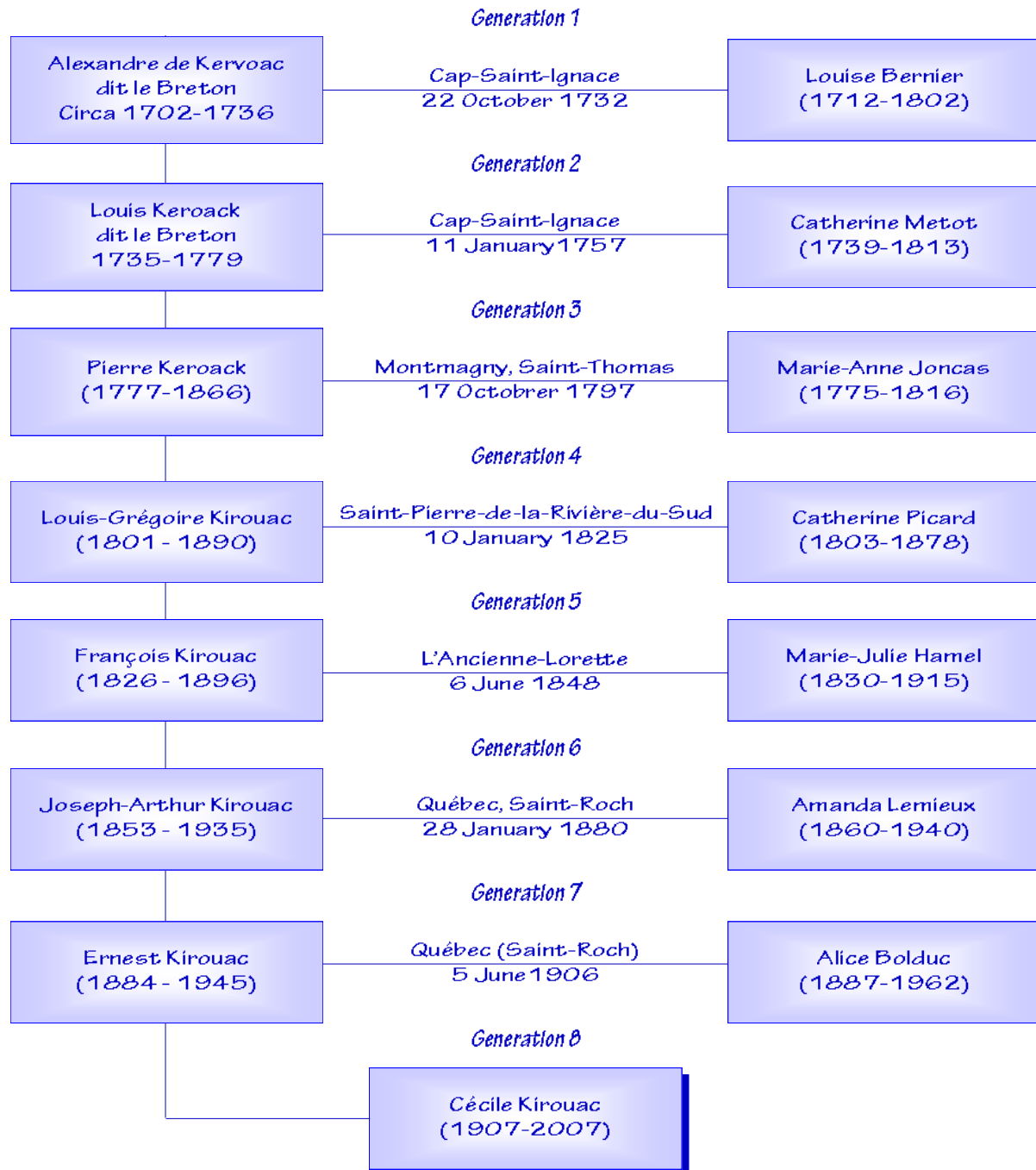
Finally, we cannot forget to mention her dedication when coordinating the superb exhibition held on 26-27 October 1985 in the atrium of Collège Jésus-Marie at Sillery. This exhibition was organized in collaboration with Brother Gilles Beaudet (De La Salle Brothers), our Association and of course the nuns from Collège Jésus-Marie. Without Sister Cécile, such an event would not have been possible. (See photos, pp. 16-19).

Through her whole life story, the keys were love and art. We see the importance of Sister Cécile in the musical world during her lifetime. We are very grateful for her precious contribution at the religious ceremonies during many of our annual gatherings.

Dear Sister Cécile, your life has contributed so much to the reputation of our family name, the Kirouacs are very grateful to you and deem it an honour to count you as one of our great family.

Ad multos et fructissimos annos
Marie Kirouac

Ancestry of Sister Cécile Kirouac



François Kirouac, 23 January 2017

Centennial of Brother Marie-Victorin's Birth:

Exhibition at Collège Jésus-Marie in Sillery (Québec)

26-27 October 1985



Photo: AFK Collection

Brother Gilles Beaudet and Sister Cécile Kirouac, standing in front of the bust of Brother Marie-Victorin, during the exhibition held at College Jésus-Marie at Sillery to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Conrad Kirouac in 1885. The exhibition was jointly organised by the Frères des Écoles chrétiennes (Brothers of the Christian Schools, known in English as De LaSalle Brothers), the sisters of Jésus-Marie at Sillery and the *Kirouac Family Association*.

Photo: AFK Collection



Some visitors at the exhibition marking the 100th anniversary of Brother Marie-Victorin: from left to right: Louise Bélanger, daughter of Jeannette Kirouac, Marie-Rose Frégeau, wife of Arthur Kirouac, from L'Islet-sur-Mer, Mrs. Émeric Kirouac-Lavoie, a first cousin of Brother Marie-Victorin, Marie Kirouac, KFA Board member and Maurice Drolet, nephew of Brother Marie-Victorin.



Photo: AFK Collection

Marie Kirouac, Brother Gilles Beaudet and Jacques Kirouac, KFA founding president.



Photo : AFK Collection

Left to right: unidentified, Marie-Anne Chalifour and Raymonde K  rouac-Harvey.



Photo: AFK Collection

Part of the exhibition on Brother Marie-Victorin and his family held at College Jésus-Marie at Sillery on 26-27 October 1985.



Photo: AFK Collection

Marie Kirouac and her son, Julien Bergeron, talking to a visitor at the exhibition.

This exhibition was for the general public and the Kirouacs. Brother Marie-Victorin's fame greatly contributed to attracting many visitors during the two-day event.



Photo: AFK Collection

Centre: Renée Kirouac with her parents (to the right), Renaud and Denise (Pépin) Kirouac from Warwick (Quebec); second from left: Gérard Kirouac.



Photo: AFK Collection

Photo: AFK Collection



SISTER CÉCILE KIROUAC CONVEYS HER GRATITUDE

Translation of excerpts from *Le Trésor des Kirouac*, number 58, December 1999

It is my turn now to express my warm and sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the publication of my biography in the last issue of *Le Trésor des Kirouac*, our outstanding association's news bulletin.

It was Marie's¹ greatest wish and goal because she was determined that my story should be told. The emeritus writer with the seven gifts, made sure this document was announced by the faithful KFA secretary, François² in his article entitled: *From the secretary's desk* published in the June issue. Then at the festive gathering in Warwick, again the publication of my biography was kindly announced by Clément³, when he mentioned my 92nd birthday last June. His wishes were much appreciated, particularly those for longevity as he would like me to attend the great Kirouac gathering in 2000.

There is even more, at the beginning of the Autumn, there was a wonderful launching of another bulletin with my homage to Sillery College where I taught until

1990. Thanks to the initiative of the KFA founder, Jacques Kirouac, the man with a heart of gold, and with the KFA Board's accord, this wonderful gathering took place. They were sure of a warm welcome at the College especially as the superior, Sister Marcelle Lachance, was so happy with the initiative.

This unique homage of appreciation for my life touches me deeply. My heart overflows with gratitude and I cannot find the words to express it except if I let the Spirit of Love and Harmony thank all those who have contributed so many hours to produce an artistic creation and this perfectly cheerful family gathering.

Therefore, I am asking He, the only One who can definitely pay my debts of extraordinary gratitude, to do so. I am very happy and proud to belong to the great Kirouac Association, on earth as in heaven.

Sister Cécile, r.j.m.
Sillery, 27 October 1999

¹ Marie Kirouac, responsible for the bulletin, *Le Trésor des Kirouac*.

² François Kirouac, KFA secretary from 1989 to 2002 and president from 2005 to 2024.

³ Clément Kirouac, KFA Board member, 1992-1993; V-P, 1993-1994; President, 1994-2000.



18 September 1999: Sister Cécile Kirouac and her second-cousin, Maurice Drolet, and her cousin, Simonne Kirouac Masson. (Photo: Marie Kirouac)

Homage to Sister Cécile Kirouac

Gathering at Sillery, 18 September 1999



Photo : Marie Kirouac

Sister Cécile Kirouac is in the centre, surrounded by colleagues; left to right: Sister Réjane Veilleux, Sister Jeannine Bélanger, Sister Annette Haché, Sister Pauline St-Hilaire, Sister Rachelle Fournier, Sister Marcelle Lachance and Sister Marie Talbot.



Photo: Marie Kirouac

Sister Cécile with, to her left, her cousin, Céline Kirouac, and to her right, her niece, Micheline Kirouac.



Photo: Marie Kirouac

Sister Cécile Kirouac with two long-time friends, (left) Mrs. Patricia Poitras, and right, Mrs. Suzanne Longpré.



24 November 2001 - Sister Cécile Kirouac and her cousin, Céline Kirouac, at the launching of *Return to the Sources*, the souvenir book of the trip to Brittany 3-18 July 2000.
(Photo: KFA collection)

Amicalement vôtre -
Cécile Kirouac "Le Bihan"

22 Dec 1999

Note: Sister Cécile Kirouac's new signature, at the end of 1999 after our ancestor's family name was discovered.

SISTER CECILE KIROUAC DIED A MONTH BEFORE HER 100th BIRTHDAY

Cousin Cécile often said to me: *The Lord will decide when it will be time for me to leave.* Yes, she was hoping to celebrate her centennial at Sillery; however, it was to be in heaven that she would mark this date as she died on 25 May at the age of 99 years and 11 months, counting 74 years of religious life. Always walking briskly, she stumbled and broke her hip last Friday, 6 April 2007. After major surgery, she was back at the convent infirmary but her health deteriorated. She left us serenely. On 25 May 2007, a few weeks before her 100th birthday which we planned to celebrate on 21 June. She was a woman with a deep faith and not afraid of death. She was at peace knowing that death was soon approaching.

The story of this cousin who had a rather exceptional life has already been written in a long article published in our bulletin *Le Trésor des Kirouac* (September 1999, number 57, pages 4 to 19). Thanks to Marie Kirouac's persistent request, Sister Cécile finally "resigned herself" to tell her story. I had the privilege and pleasure to assist her in this task. It was such a chance to get to know her better and appreciate the riches of her inner-life. Here I will attempt to relate some key moments in her life.

1907 to 1933

She was surrounded by music from birth as her mother was a piano teacher. Cécile's natural talent developed by leaps and bounds through her life. After completing advance studies at the *Julliard School of Music* in New York, she was a gifted concert pianist in demand everywhere in the province of Quebec.

Recently a friend sent me an article, dated 27 November 1931, published in the French daily newspaper *L'ÉVÉNEMENT* (1867-1967). The

article is about a concert held in Quebec City where the main guest artist was no other than Roméo Jobin*, a star tenor at the Paris Opera (*while in France, the French had asked him to change his name to Raoul) he was accompanied by Henri Vallières and Cécile Kirouac, pianist. The critique wrote a glowing review about the young Miss Kirouac: *Her clear, pure and precise technique was noted as well as her lovely sonority, what a beautiful musical temperament she has. Chopin's Nocturne was so poetic. To create Bortkeiwick's Tempest, Miss Kirouac drew all imaginable effects from the piano. Her performance garnered a resounding success. The young pianist was so warmly applauded that she had to play many encores including Franck Laforge's Romance. This concert will be remembered as one of the most interesting of the season. M.B.*

1933

When she became a nun, she was

given the name Mother Saint-Robert-Marie. At the time she taught organ, piano and singing. She was also the choir director, the organist and the head of the music department at Collège Jésus-Marie at Sillery. Her whole life was dedicated to music. A teacher at heart, she was ever so happy to mention and remember that she enabled countless students to learn and love music. One could always perceive her pride and joy when speaking about some of her most talented students who became professional musician and those who had a musical career.

2007

Once retired at the infirmary, where she spent a number of years, in total peace and quiet she prayed and, for hours, reflected on her life, particularly on the good moments. I always felt that she was so happy to reminisce about the New Year celebrations at our Kirouac grandparents, on Prairies Street in Saint-Roch (Quebec suburb), or



Photo : Marie Kirouac

9 June 2001, Sister Cécile Kirouac at Joly-de-Lotbinière Manor House. Seeing the piano, Sister Cécile made a beeline to play to the great pleasure of her cousin, Simone Kirouac, standing behind her.

when she relived memorable events, for example, her visit to the Montreal Botanical Garden with Mother Marie-des-Anges (see Special Edition 13) including the photo taken in front of Brother Marie-Victorin's monument that reminded her of that special trip.

That photo brought back so many significant memories!

Her links with the **Kirouac Family Association** always remained very strong, our bulletin, **Le Trésor des Kirouac**, was somewhat a symbol, always close at hand and visible in her room... even when she no longer read much. The Kirouacs who attended the annual gatherings all remember her presence at our various meals, something she would dream about from one year to the next. She loved so much playing the organ for the Kirouacs at those annual celebrations occasions and she was so proud to bear the family name. At 96, she attended the 25th anniversary of the foundation of our association held at Longueuil (Montreal suburb) in 2003. She was particularly pleased to see Brother Gilles Beaudet again, a long-time friend and the guest speaker that day.

Sister Cécile was ever so grateful for the Kirouacs' consideration. She was always moved by the flowers and good wishes presented to her for her anniversaries. Cousin Cécile felt really loved by her precious relatives and ever so grateful for so much affection. Today, on her behalf, I have the chance to tell the Kirouacs how deeply grateful she was, something she would have loved to express to each one. Inspired by her, I want to bear witness to her eternal affection and her happiness when taking part in our annual gatherings.

Céline Kirouac,
Quebec City
June 2007

Funeral of Sister Cécile Kirouac

Ricordanza (recollection)

By Sister Réjane Veilleux, r.j.m., 21 May 2007

My Ricordanza to Our Sister Cécile:

Around 1989, I thought of asking the Provincial Superior at the time, or rather suggest to her that ... Sister Cécile could be asked to compose a Mass in homage to our Blessed Dina Bélanger (**). The Mass would be for Dina Bélanger's Beatification. Of course, this request did not seem very reasonable given that our dear Sister Cécile was already 82 years old.

However, wasn't she a remarkable artist? The one and only, and last former music student of Dina (Mother Saint-Cecilia-of-Rome) still alive? After a short time, Sister Cécile, focussing on the project, explained to me that she used the themes from *Ricordanza*, as proposed and written for the piano for Dina Bélanger (Mother Saint-Cecilia of Rome).

Then she played for me the introduction to the Mass explaining that it had all come together rapidly.

On earth as in heaven, praise to the Adorable Trinity.

Praise to Jesus, praise to Mary.

From 1993 on, Sister Cécile was an exceptional artistic partner at the **Centre-Dina Bélanger**. The pilgrims who came to pray at our Blessed Dina's mausoleum were welcomed by our dear Sister Cécile whom they considered a "exceptional relic".

They very piously listened to *Rêverie sur le Saguenay*, (Reverie on the Saguenay Fjord) one of Dina Bélanger's piano compositions, arranged for the organ by none other than Sister Cécile. This was followed by souvenir-photos with the organist. When pilgrims came again the following years, their first question was always: *Is the organist still here? You know the elderly one...* and I would answer that our unique organist was still there.

The Congregation of Jésus-Marie is a family, and our associate group benefited from the presence of Sister Cécile Kirouac at the monthly reunions which always included some music during the moments of prayers at the chapel or when marking special feasts. On 3 February 2007, the day the members of the Congregation Jésus-Marie were visiting the infirmary, our accordionist played some well-known happy tunes for the sick patients. Sister Cécile knew the musician very well and insisted on holding the instrument. We could not refuse her this pleasure. So, standing up, she happily tried to play a few notes. Her fingers ran along the keyboard but not a sound came out... However, being deaf by then, she did not realize it and was very happy.

Prayer at the Funeral Home
For the rest of the soul
of Sister Cécile Kirouac
29 May 2007

On the eve of your centennial, Sister Cécile, you left us to join HIM who guided your life, your prayers and your mission. A passage from the psalms perfectly encapsulates your life:

I want to sing to Yahweh as long as I live, I want to play for my God as long as I last. May my language please him, my joy is in Yahweh. (Ps 104, 33-34)

You have been a Woman of **praise**. Your spontaneous heart bonded to a musical talent, turned you into a woman happy to live, to pray and to sing the praise of the Lord.

Woman of harmony, at the piano and at the organ, as you have improvised for the happiness of your students and of your sisters and, of course, the charismatic prayer groups!

Woman of projects, your tenacity pushed you to compose the *Ricordanza Mass* for the beatification of the blessed Dina Bélanger and the canonisation of Sainte Claudine Thévenet (*).

You never missed an occasion to please someone by offering a musical composition signed by yourself with your pen name *Mélody*.

Now, Sister Cécile, you have met the Great Musician. May you fully enjoy this most wholly harmonious meeting! In praise, we entrust you to the Father.

OUR FATHER ...

May our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Virgin very dear to Sister Cécile, be at the appointed meeting with Love!

HAIL MARY ...

May her soul and the souls of all the departed faithful rest in peace by the Mercy of God. Amen!

Praise be forever, Jesus and Mary!

Jacqueline Poulin, rjm, Provincial Superior, Congregation of Jésus and Marie.



Photo: Kirouac Family Association

3 August 1986 — Inauguration of the exhibition on Knight François Kirouac, Sister Cécile's great-grandfather. Left to right: Jacques Kirouac, Sister Cécile Kirouac, Marie Kirouac and Yvon Vézina, representing Quebec City Mayor, Mr. Jean Pelletier.

Compline (a prayer before night time)

Sister Cécile Kirouac died on 25 May 2007

As we are gathered here around Sister Cécile, from my heart rises a song: Praise to the Lord.

When we look at Sister Cécile's abundant works, we see that her art always gave voice to one theme: Praise to the Lord.

She was born and grew up in a profoundly Christian and musical family. From a very young age, Cécile's faith was wonderfully nurtured by love for her faith and for music. At age three, she showed a fascination with the piano and tried to play so her father bought her a piano when she was only four.

An artist at heart, she fully enjoyed her musical studies as well as sharing her music with her family, friends and contemporaries, and later with the nuns in her religious congregation, as well as her students, various parishes and prayer groups, especially the charismatic groups where her great devotion to the Holy Spirit was intensified because, as she wrote: *the Holy Spirit is the perfect gift to the artists*.

Sister Cécile was a remarkable woman with a highly developed social sense and possessing a terrific gift for human relationship whether with religious communities or in the world of artists, and she was much loved and appreciated by both.

Her intense emotions, her burning heart, urged her to produce countless melodies, Masses, poems, and songs about our foundress Sainte Claudine Thévenet and Blessed Dina Bélanger, whom she cherished particularly as she was her pupil during her boarding school years. She also composed many other pieces because of her special devotion to the Virgin Mary, the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart, and many others. Inspirations flowed from her loving heart.

Dear Sister Cécile, we thank the Lord for your life devoted to our Congregation. With courage and generosity you gave yourself for the happiness of everyone and all. Our prayer rises to Him who blessed you with extraordinary nimble fingers to play the piano and the organ for His greatest glory.

Gaétane Dumas, Congregation of Jesus-Marie, Sillery, 28 May 2007

**Claudine Thévenet (1774-1837) a French woman, founder of the Congregation of Jésus and Marie, was canonized on 21 March 1993.*

***Dina Bélanger (1897-1929), beatified at the Vatican, on 20 March 1993, by Pope John-Paul II.*

At Saint-Dominique Parish Hall
A VERY SUCCESSFUL CONCERT
 Published in the newspaper *L'Événement (Event)*, 27 November 1931

Mr. Roméo Jobin¹, tenor from the Paris Opera, accompanied by Mr. Henri Vallières² and Miss Cécile Kirouac, pianist, gave a very successful concert yesterday evening in Saint-Dominique Parish Church – our own (musicians) were admired and honored.

PROGRAMME

Three Quebec Artists, Mr. Roméo Jobin, tenor from the Paris Opera, Miss Cécile Kirouac and Mr. Henri Vallières, pianist, were heard yesterday evening in Saint-Dominique parish hall, on Grande-Allée (one of Quebec City's main boulevard). The selected listeners present very warmly appreciated each musician and many encores lengthened the evening.

It was a triumph for Mr. Jobin, the best success since he came back to



Raoul Jobin, circa 1935

Source: BAnQ, Canada Fonds Renée-Maheu
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Quebec (unfortunately, it may not be permanent; so we hear).

The Quebec tenor gave the full measure of his talent and his vocal capacity, as everyone at the concert noticed. Mr. Jobin is a light tenor, his extremely supple voice covers a vast range. These are two of its many qualities. He launched his brilliant high notes with a full chest voice**. His half-tones are remarkably velvety. The singer's mastery is worthy of praise.

Mr. Jobin gave everything he had in these difficult and fascinating works. A lot of experience and taste is needed to carry the phrasing with all nuances in two very different works, one by Rachmaninov and the other by Chausson. Mr. Jobin did it very successfully. In Massenet's *Grisélidis*, his interpretation was remarkably colourful and delicate. In Reyer's great arias from *Sigurd* and in Berlioz's *Trojans in Carthage*, the tenor unleashed his powerful voice and added pathetic accents as well, clear proof that he has the right temperament for opera.

Mr. Jobin was called back to sing an encore after each piece. He added to his programme *The Dream* by Grieg and the lovely *Sérénade* by one of our compatriots, Mr. Robert Talbot, professor at Laval University School of Music, and *Le départ du Matelot* (The sailor's departure), by Philippe Gaubert.

Mr. Henri Vallières (2), organist at Notre-Dame-du-Chemin Parish, was the accompanist. He discreetly and as expected cleverly assisted Mr. Jobin



Miss Cécile Kirouac, before entering the Congregation of Jésus-Marie

and did the same as a very capable piano accompanist.

Miss Cécile Kirouac, the young and brilliant artist, also accompanied Mr.

¹ Raoul (born Joseph Roméo) Jobin. (1906-1974) Tenor, teacher, administrator, senior civil servant. 1952, Doctor of Music, Honoris Causa, (Laval University). He was from the working-class district of St-Sauveur, where his father owned a tavern. For about ten years, Roméo was a member of the parish choir and a soloist. He first took voice lessons from Louis Gravel and studied (1924-28) with Émile Larochelle at Laval University. He performed in concert using his name Roméo. After a farewell recital in Quebec City he went to Paris, to study with Mme d'Estainville-Rousset (singing) and Abby Chéreau (staging), and at Paris's Gregorian Institute. Henri Büsser, noticing his exceptional voice, arranged an audition with Jacques Rouché, the Paris Opera director who offered him a contract for the next year. Jobin came back to Quebec at the beginning of 1930 to marry soprano Thérèse Drouin, they gave a series of recitals. (Source: Canadian Encyclopedia, *Hélène Plouffe*)

** Translator's note: *Chest voice* - term given to a range of notes within a singer's vocal range which causes more resonance to be felt in the chest than in the head. Chest voice is part of the modal voice register and usually ranges from the lower limit of a singer's vocal range to one octave above that.

Jobin. Again, one could admire her clear and precise technique, her melodious sonority and a beautiful musical tempo. Chopin's *Nocturne* was poetically interpreted. In Bortkeiwick's *Tempest*, Miss Kirouac generated every effect that could possibly be drawn from the piano. In short, it was a great success. The young pianist was warmly applauded and had to play encores, including Frank LaForge's *Romance*.

This concert will be remembered as one of the very best of the season. - M.B.



² Vallières, Henri Eugène (1901-1989) Organist, teacher, pianist, born at Rivière-du-Loup (Quebec). At the Séminaire de Québec he trained with organist Henri Gagnon and assisted him at the Quebec Basilica. He was organist at the seminary 1920-1925. When his father, Eugène, died, he took his place as organist at St-Patrice Church at Rivière-du-Loup. He studied in Paris (1928-1929) with Marcel Dupré (organ); Paul Loyonnet (piano) and Henri Potiron (harmony). Back in Canada, he was appointed organist at Notre-Dame-du-Chemin Parish in Quebec City (1929-1972). He taught piano and solfège at Laval University (1931-1970) and piano and organ at Quebec City Music Conservatory (1947-1972). He trained many successful musicians, including Lucille Baby, harpist with Quebec City Symphonic Orchestra, and Jeannine Bégin, professor at Montreal's Music Conservatory. He accompanied Arthur LeBlanc, violinist (1906-1985), and Raoul Jobin, opera tenor (1906-1974) during their concert tours. During the 1940s, he was musical director of Radio-Canada, religious radio programme *L'Heure dominicale*. He married Gabrielle Hudson, pianist who died in 1989. (Source: Canadian Encyclopedia, Benoît Marineau)

LOVELY CONCERT AT LAVAL UNIVERSITY

L'événement, 5 December 1931

Performers: Mr Louis Gravel, baritone, Miss Cécile Kirouac, pianist, and Mr Edwin Bélanger, violinist.

GREAT SUCCESS

Mr. Louis Gravel¹, excellent Quebec barytone, professor in Laval University's Music Department, Miss Cécile Kirouac, extremely talented virtuoso pianist, Mr. Edwin Bélanger, violinist, brilliant student of Mr. J.-A. Gilbert, all three gave a magnificent concert yesterday evening in the *Salle des Promotions* of Laval University. This musical evening to benefit the poor was organized by the Laval section of the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Society.

There was a large and distinguished audience. Most priests from the Seminary were present as well as the student-boarders. The three artists were warmly appreciated and invited to play many encores.

As usual, Mr. Louis Gravel was very successful in the three sets of pieces he presented, always loved as a musician and singer. This was his first public concert this year and the applause showed how much the public was happy to hear him again.

The two great arias from *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Gluck gave the Quebec baritone the opportunity to show the magnitude, the warm caliber, and homogeneity of his voice; he remarkably and artfully controls his voice to obtain all nuances possible. In the second group, Mr. Gravel showed a mastery in expressing various difficult melodies including the charming piece by Debussy, *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons* (Homeless Children's Christmas). Mr. Gravel's success was great, and he had to sing many encores.

Miss Cécile Kirouac played two solos as well as accompanying Mr. Gravel and Mr. Bélanger. The young musician is up to her immense reputation in both roles and, once more, the listeners admired her amazing mastery of the piano and her incredible musical temperament.

Miss Kirouac was called back for encores at the end of each group of pieces. Mr. Bélanger is a very promising violinist. Once more the public noted his strength, the ease with which he tackles difficult works and the beautiful sonority he gets from his instrument. This young violinist was warmly applauded. The Laval Conference must be congratulated for organizing this beautiful concert.

¹ Gravel, Louis. Baritone, teacher (1895-1977). He studied at Quebec's Teachers' Training College and at New York's Musical Art Institute (1916-1918). He was cantor at St-Jean-Baptiste Church in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. He also sang with the Woonsocket Opera, RI. Back in Quebec City, he was cantor at Notre-Dame-de-Jacques-Cartier Church (1920-1970). In 1924, a Quebec Government scholarship enabled him to study at Paris. Then on to Nice, where he gave many concerts. He performed across Canada with Berthe Roy, pianist accompanist.

² Edwin Bélanger. Orchestra and band conductor, violinist, violist, arranger, teacher, born at Montmagny, Quebec, 1910, died at Quebec City, 2005; honorary D (University of Quebec) 1984. He started studying violin at the Sacred Heart College in Montmagny and at the Quebec Seminary with J.-Alexandre Gilbert. There, he also studied harmony with Omer Létourneau and later married one of his daughters. He was a member of the Société symphonique de Québec (1928-1931). He won the Prix d'Europe in 1933 for violin. He went on to study violin in Paris and conducting in London. Back in Canada in 1935 he worked for CBC as conductor and arranger for many programmes. He was one of the founders of the Quebec Symphony Orchestra that he conducted until 1942. From 1937 to 1961, as Captain, was the head of the Royal 22nd Regimental Band (known as the Van Doos in English) and toured the USA, Europe and the Far East. He made several arrangements for concert band. He also taught at the Quebec Music Conservatory (1973-1985); was Musical Director of the Couperin Concerts (1977-1982); and president of the Quebec Music Academy (1947-1950, 1953-1956, 1963-1965, 1971-1974). (Référence: Auteur Cécile Huot, Encyclopédie de la musique du Canada)

To Mr. Robert Talbot, homage and gratitude
Cécile Kirouac, SOUVENIR / (MEMORIES)

A

Monsieur Robert Talbot

Hommage Reconnaitement

Cécile Kirouac

Souvenir

27 fév 1933

Violon.

Andante. Souvenir *ripertoire*

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and marked *Andante.* The title Souvenir is centered at the top, with *ripertoire* written in the upper right corner. The score is organized into four systems, each containing a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with various chords and melodic fragments. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Handwritten musical score for a piece in 4/4 time, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The score is divided into three systems. The first system has two measures. The second system has three measures, with a *pp* marking in the second measure and a *cresc.* marking in the third. The third system has two measures, with a *rit.* marking in the first and a *con cefre ma più animato* marking in the second. The piano part features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many accidentals.

Handwritten musical score for a piano piece, featuring six systems of staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mp*, *mf*, *cresc.*, *f*, and *Tutti*. The score is written in a fluid, handwritten style.

Handwritten musical score for a piece in 4/4 time, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The score is divided into four systems.

System 1: The vocal line begins with a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. A *rit* (ritardando) marking is present at the end of the system.

System 2: The tempo changes to *Tempo!*. The vocal line has a more melodic, slower feel. The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern.

System 3: The piano accompaniment features a *pp* (pianissimo) marking and the instruction *poco a poco crescendo*. The vocal line continues with a melodic line.

System 4: The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern, showing a gradual increase in volume as indicated by the *crescendo* instruction.

Handwritten musical score for a piano piece, consisting of four systems of staves. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as *f.*, *mf.*, and *p*. The score is written in a fluid, handwritten style.

Andante *Violini*

pp *cresc.*

rit.

pp *rit.*

piu animato *mag. voce*

crescendo

imp.

rit.

pp *cresc.*

diminuendo *ff*



13 April 1985 — Jacques Kirouac, founding president of the Kirouac Family Association, Sister Cécile Kirouac and Marie Kirouac, responsible of producing the article about the life of Sister Cécile, published in 1999 in *Le Trésor des Kirouac* proudly posing in front of Conrad Kirouac's monument at the Montreal Botanical Garden on the occasion of the centennial of Brother Marie-Victorin.
(Photo: KFA Collection)

Our motto

Pride Dignity Integrity



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*Alexandre
Le Bihan*

*Maurice Louis
Levis de Kervoach*

Alexandre de Kervoach

**If you know other descendants
of Alexandre de Kervoach
who made significant contributions?
Please, tell us and/or write to us about them!**

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