

Prize Plate

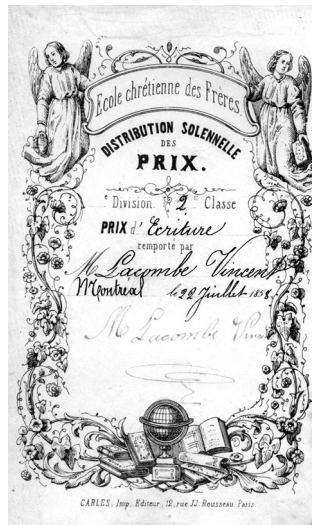
THE MOST EXCITING thing about examining bookplates is the consistently wide variety that you find in them. They can embody the personal or the institutional—or both! This bookplate is an example of both themes in one *ex libris*, signifying an award from a school to an individual. It is especially remarkable in that it was given as a prize from École chrétienne des Frères to honour the recipient Vincent Lacombe in writing and an error appears in the very first handwritten area.

Indeed, the section delineating which class the student was from has a clearly written 2 in blue ink, which is covered by a 1 in black ink. It also seems our budding writer practised his own signature at the bottom of the bookplate but failed to account for the space his name might require, running into the surrounding print of the bookplate—ah, the follies of youth.

Not much is known about Vincent Lacombe other than that he grew up and attended school in Montreal. More is known about the school itself and its founding order, much of which is represented on the bookplate.

Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, a French priest (canonized in 1900), founded the religious teaching order Frères des écoles chrétiennes, also known as the “Institute of Brothers of the Christian Schools,” in Reims, France, in 1680. The congregation had the stated goal to educate poor children and was the first Roman Catholic lay religious order for men devoted to teaching. In 1725, the order was elevated to the privileged position of a papal institute, under the direct oversight of the pope.

A distinct reference is made to the ecclesiastical origins of the school in the two large angels that surround the upper part of the bookplate. One angel holds a laurel in one hand and the



other angel holds a book. The laurel is likely a reference to the mastery of a subject, writing. The book is probably a reference to the educational aspect of the school. This emphasis on learning is further reinforced by the rather large pile of books, papers and a globe that sits at the bottom centre of the bookplate.

This bookplate is associated with the French order’s school for children in Montreal. École chrétienne des Frères opened its doors in 1837, 21 years before this bookplate was awarded. The order continues

today to engage in education in Montreal as well as around the world. The school’s global context is evident even in 1858, as indicated by the printer’s name at the bottom and its address: “12, rue. J.J. Rousseau. Paris.”

Not often could a school at that time, in the New World, afford elegant award bookplates shipped at a cost from Paris. However, Frères des écoles chrétiennes was an active publisher with global connections; in fact, the bookplate was part of an active publishing program that saw the order publish 280 unique works in Quebec between 1837 and 1945, leaving a deep imprint on the province’s education system.

There is much to be gleaned from bookplates such as this one, with a rich history behind the imagery and the text. We just have to peer a little closer, dig a little deeper, and make sure we can read the “writing” right in front of our noses.

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The Rare Books and Special Collections Bookplate Collection can be accessed from the UBC Library Digital Collections and Services site, <http://digitalcollections.library.ubc.ca>.