

HISTORY OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD CATHEDRAL

Part 1

The Jesuit role in the Founding of Sault Ste. Marie and the Establishment of Christianity



AD MAIOREM DEI GLORIAM
For The Greater Glory of God

The history of Precious Blood Cathedral is undoubtedly tied to the establishment of Christianity and the Roman Catholic faith here at Sault Ste. Marie and in the Great Lakes Region.

*To realize what is needed of us today, it is important to understand and value what was done for us so many years ago. It is hoped that you will read and enjoy this brief history of our early beginnings.

Background: State and Church

The great age of European expansion in the 16th and 17th centuries brought the first wave of French explorers to the shores of North America. **The ultimate goal was the discovery of an overland route to the Pacific Ocean and beyond to the riches of the Orient.** Notable among these early adventurers are such names as **Jacques Cartier** and **Samuel de Champlain** who repeatedly risked crossing the Atlantic Ocean in an effort to establish a foothold in the 'new world' **for France and for the greater glory of God.**

The strong religious fervor of the previous century had led to the establishment of a number of Catholic missionary orders, devoted to proclaiming the Gospel, "that all non Christian souls might be brought into the love and the light of Jesus Christ. **State and Church aligned to achieve their objectives.**

The 'Recollets', a French religious order following the rule of St. Francis, arrived at the close of the 16th century, and although they may have reached the Great Lakes region, they were unable to establish themselves in numbers necessary to be successful. It is recorded that they, the Recollets, actually requested the assistance of the recently established 'Society of Jesus' to take on this daunting task.

The monumental work was quickly and zealously taken up by the '**Jesuits**'. **The Society of Jesus** was founded in 1540 by St. Ignatius de Loyola as an all male order devoted to evangelization and the propagation of the faith through disciplined obedience to the Pope and the Church of Rome. They referred to themselves as 'soldiers of Christ', and in a short time, they had dedicated themselves to the establishment of Missions throughout the known world.

The 'unclaimed souls' of North America soon became a prize to be secured.

They were, for the most part, men of culture and learning, who believed that conversion to Christianity would best be achieved through education, perseverance, and the genuine love of Christ for the peoples they had chosen to claim for Him.

From our place in time, it is almost impossible to fully understand the tremendous hardships these men encountered in their efforts to live among and be accepted by the native peoples. They endured constant hunger, cold, loneliness, the lack of any familiar comforts in the vast wilderness around them, much disappointment and above all, the knowledge that they were always at risk of torture and death. **All of this, they willingly and gladly endured 'for the greater glory of God'.**

About the time of the arrival of the first Jesuits at Port Royal, Acadia (Nova Scotia), in 1611, we know that **Etienne Brule**, a young adventurer/explorer had been sent by Champlain to venture west beyond Lake Huron (le Mer Douce), in search of a

great body of water, the shores of which native legend said, was rich with copper ore. Upon his return, Brule provided confirmation of the existence of the 'Grand Lac' (Superior) and of **the river and rapids** connecting it with Huron.

All of this is noted on Champlain's famous 1632 map of the region, where the rapids or 'sault' are named 'Sault du Gaston' in honor of the brother of the French King. **The settlement he found there was given the native inhabitants name 'Bawating' – meaning 'the place of the fast flowing water'. Brule called the Ojibway people he found living there, 'Saulteurs'.**

Meanwhile, by 1625, as their numbers increased, the Jesuits chose to advance their efforts, first to the banks of the St. Lawrence River, where their first mission in North America was established, and where they developed survival skills and some understanding of the indigenous Algonquin peoples; learning their language and customs.

By 1632 they had moved westward into the lands of the Huron (Wendat) people where by 1639, near Georgian Bay, they had built the mission/fort of 'Sainte Marie' or Huronia. Sainte Marie was considered the 'jewel' of the missions in North America, and from here, they established a number of satellite missions which were basically nearby native villages or places where the Indians gathered in numbers for safety from their traditional enemy, the Iroquois.

The day by day existence and experiences of the Jesuits were faithfully chronicled and sent in letters from the Father Superior to the Superior General in Rome and on to the 'Provincial' in Paris, where these reports were compiled and recorded as 'The Jesuit Relations'. They are treasured today for their thorough detail and accuracy.



Ref: Francis Parkman http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1465136

The 'Relations' record that in September of 1641 while witnessing the mystical rite known as the Feast of the Dead near Huronia, a number of the Chippewa 'Saulteur' who were also present, requested that the 'blackrobes' or 'wamitigoshe' come back with them to their village so that they might learn of their magic and strange ways. The opportunity was gladly seized, and after 17 days travel by bark canoe, FATHERS (SAINT) ISSAC JOGUES AND CHARLES RAYMBAULT reached the little village of Bawating, situated at the site of the present Sault Ste. Marie.

*** THIS EVENT OPENS THE HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THIS REGION.**



Sketch of native Bawating....representative of the dwellings used by the native inhabitants at the time of the Jesuits.

The visit of these first missionaries was short, although they promised to return. The years of 1648/1649 were devastating for both the Huron people as well as the Jesuits at Sainte Marie and throughout all the French settlements. The Iroquois, who had obtained muskets from the Dutch and British, now waged an all out war of annihilation against the Hurons and of course, the French and the

Jesuits. Sainte Marie was destroyed, and the Hurons were scattered and hunted relentlessly to starvation and death. In addition, they had no natural defense for those common diseases brought by the Europeans. Eventually, the Huron nation, for the most part, ceased to exist.

Sadly, a number of these early Jesuits and their followers were killed and martyred between 1642 and 1649. Today, the Martyrs Shrine at Midland, and the recreated Mission of **'Sainte Marie Among the Hurons'**, stands as a lasting tribute to the eight Holy Martyrs, including **Saint Issac Jogues**, who chose to die in the service of God and for the love of Jesus Christ. www.martyrs-shrine.com



During these difficult years, Jesuit visits to Bawating were brief, and occurred on route to other areas around Superior. Father **Rene Menard**, passed through, but disappeared mysteriously in the wilderness of Wisconsin.

Father Claude Allouez, known as the **'Founder of Catholicity in the West'** preached here in 1667, and is said to have given the name **'Sainte Marie'** to the river and its rapids.

Legend has it that there was much discouragement in establishing a mission here and the Jesuits, near the point of despair, considered giving up, until one of them had a vision in which the Virgin Mary appeared before him and assured them of Her protection, asking them to carry on the mission in Her name. The place, from that time on became known as **'Sainte Marie du Sault'**.



Superior/Father **Claude D'Ablon** together with **Claude Allouez** and Father **Jacques Marquette** have become known as the **'Great Triumvirate'** through their unwavering dedication to bringing Christianity to the region. The distance covered in their arduous travels is truly astounding.

It was not until 1668 that Father Marquette was sent to establish the long anticipated Mission on the South Shore of the St. Mary's River. **Sainte Marie du Sault** was chosen as the headquarters for a western mission territory reaching as far as Chequamegon Point (near present day Ashland Wisconsin) on the southwestern shore of Lake Superior. It was known that a group of the Huron refugees from Sainte Marie had fled to this region following the destruction of their homeland. Father Menard had been trying to reach them when he disappeared. In 1669, Father Marquette was sent there and established the Mission of St. Esprit, and it was here that he learned of the great (Mississippi) River to the southwest, and the Illinois people along its route. His desire to move on and establish a mission in this territory led eventually to the well documented three month adventure with **Louis Jolliet** which led to the discovery of the Ohio, Arkansas and Missouri Rivers and on to the great Mississippi, however, the elusive route to California and the Pacific was not found.

Prior to this great expedition Father Marquette, in an effort to safeguard the refugee Hurons who were now in conflict with the Sioux tribes near Chequamegon, travelled back with them by way of **Saint Marie du Sault**, to establish a safer haven, first on Mackinac Island and eventually on the mainland at St. Ignace. Over time, this mission would become more strategic and the Sault's importance waned.

Because the 'Sault' was also an important location on the vital fur trade route, it became the centre of extensive activity both missionary and expansionary. These years, brought many notable historic individuals to 'the Sault', including the courier/explorers **Louis and Adrian Jolliet, Radisson and Grosseilliers**, and the great 'fur barons' **Daniel Greysolon (Sieur du Lhut) and Antoine de Lamothe Cadillac**. All of these influenced the development of the Sault du Sainte Marie, the lives of its native peoples and hence the work of the Jesuit missionaries here. Father **Claude D'Ablon** was sent to the 'Sault' as **Superior of all the Great Lakes Missions**, and in 1670, Fathers **Gabriel Druilletes** and **Louis Andre** joined D'Ablon to, as stated in the 'Relations': "implement all potentialities of the Sault Mission".



The ongoing struggle for supremacy in the fur trade finally led to the founding of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670, and the developing settlement at the 'Sault' became once again, a strategic and important focal point on the vital fur trade route. **The following event proves just how important...**



In 1671 the Quebec Intendant Jean Talon, sent Simon Francois Daumont Sieur de St. Luson to Sault du Sainte Marie as the personal ambassador of King Louis XIV, to take possession of Lake Superior and all of the surrounding lands as well as all territory lying between Montreal and the South Sea (Pacific Ocean), in the name of the King of France. St. Luson was accompanied by Nicolas Perrot, who was to become the first French Governor of all the Western Land and who had gathered here, a large assembly of ambassadors of at least fourteen tribes. It is noted that close to 1000 'souls' were present.

The 'Jesuit Relations' records the ceremony in great detail, including all those present for the raising of the Cross and Banner of France. Superior D'Ablon blessed the assembly and Father Claude Allouez eulogized the King. Several days later, it is said that both the Cross and the Banner had disappeared.

As previously mentioned, it was during this event +that Father Marquette arrived here with the large company of Huron, Chippewa and Ottawa refugees – men women and children who were fleeing the Mission at Chequamagon in fear of an imminent attack from the Sioux, and that they were directed on to the Straits by Superior D'Ablon. Some of these Chippewa chose to go east to the Manitoulin.

As a result of the increasing hostilities between the Saulteurs and the Sioux, who had been enemies for many years, the native population at the Sault decreased, and the Mission became less prominent and less prosperous. In addition, the first chapel built in 1668 was destroyed by fire in 1671, as was the second chapel built in 1673. Another disastrous incident also occurred that same year, when the house of the missionaries was the scene of a massacre of ten Sioux ambassadors and twenty other tribesmen who had come there to negotiate peace with the Ojibways. In the battle, the mission house was burned to the ground. **The Relations suggest that this event severely retarded the growth of the Church in this area, and influenced the decision to move the mission headquarters to the better defended site at St. Ignace in 1673.**

The real tragedy for the Saulteurs lay in the renewal of conflict with the western tribes who continued to seek revenge for the massacre, causing the majority of the remaining Ojibway to disperse and abandon the old mission site at the Rapids. References to the Mission at Sault du Sainte Marie become very sketchy after this date, and it is generally believed to have been abandoned by 1689, although the Sault's position on the fur trade route and its proximity to the mission at St. Ignace and Michilimacina, ensured occasional visits by priests to the small but growing population.

The Jesuit presence in North America, although steadfast in resolve, was fraught with many hardships, impediments and political issues, both in North America and in Western Europe, where in 1773 the Jesuits were subjected to Suppression by Papal edict. The complex and primarily political issues at work both inside and outside the Church leading to Suppression, also depleted the resources of the Jesuit Ministry which in turn impeded their ability to maintain their missions abroad.

By the time of their severe diminishment, the Jesuits had left their footprint and legacy everywhere from the St. Lawrence to the lands around the Mississippi and north to Hudson Bay. The founding of our Nation would have been a far more formidable task without their accurate record keeping and skillful cartography. Apart from the severe personal hardships they endured, they were beset by years of political intrigue and bloodshed, due to the ongoing struggle with the English and the warring Iroquois nation, the Seven Years War for supremacy leading to the fall of Quebec, Pontiac's Rebellion, the American Revolution, and eventually the War of 1812, all of which would shape the Canada to which the Jesuits would return in the mid 1800's.

As a result of the tremendous respect and admiration for the valiant work of these great and saintly missionaries in the early days in the history of the Sault, Monsignor T. J. Crowley, (then Father Crowley), along with the Roman Catholic people of the city saw to the erection of a fitting marble and granite monument of Christ with the Cross on the lawn of the Church.

This celebration took place during Discovery Week, in August of 1923 on the grounds of the Sacred Heart Church and was attended by a number of Church dignitaries including the Canadian Jesuit Provincial, the Very Rev. J.M. Filion; the Bishop of Sault Ste. Marie, the Rt. Rev. D. J. Scollard; the Bishop of Peterborough, the Rt. Rev. M. J. O'Brien and many other local clergy, religious and faithful.

On reporting the occasion, the Sault Star used the following unattributed commentary:

“In the view of the Savior we mean to express the burning love and apostolic zeal of our missionaries, the white marble speaks to their immaculate lives, whilst the solid granite base characterizes the solidity and enduring nature of the doctrine they preached.

They have lived amidst suffering and privation untold. We bless their names and try to imitate their charity”.

*Credit for a good deal of this history must be given to the diligent work done in preparation for the Centennial celebration of Precious Blood Cathedral in 1974/75 by Don Burgess, Kay Punch and Hildegard Lewis. We hope to build upon their efforts as we move forward with the continuing story of the establishment of Precious Blood.



The monument reads:
1641 TO COMMEMORATE THE HEROIC DEEDS OF THE
EARLY MISSIONARIES 1923