

DENONVILLE'S EXPEDITION

by Alexander M. Stewart

Pierre Millet, S. J.

Father Millet was born November 19, 1635, in Bourges, which is the exact center of France. The colossal cathedral of Bourges is one of the most perfect monuments of thirteenth century architecture.

But a more fundamental religious grandeur moved his heart so that he exchanged what might have been a life of Priesthood in cathedrals for a life of apostleship in the rustic bark chapels of the Iroquois.

In Paris on October 3, 1655, he entered the Jesuit Order. Then in the last days of July and the first days of August 1668, he saw the stately procession of the shores of the magnificent St. Lawrence River pass by as his ship proceeded up river to Quebec, where he arrived on the fifth of the month.

His First Mission

The Iroquois Missions, which had been opened the year before by Father Jacques Fremin, were calling for missionaries and very soon he went to Onondaga, and Father Julien Garnier, who was later to become the apostle of the Senecas, went to assist him.

In 1672 he was at the arduous mission of St. Francis Xavier among the Onedias on Oneida Creek in the region of the modern municipalities of Oneida and Minnsville, N. Y.

He showed humor and clever wit in combating the jugglers of the tribe who controlled the people by false prophecies.

He proved himself the better prophet by foretelling a total eclipse of the moon which to the amazement of the Onedias occurred exactly as he had foretold on January 21, 1674. Whatever was the best scientific knowledge was possessed by the Jesuits of that time.

To Fort Frontenac

In view of the oncoming expedition of Governor De La Bar against the Iroquois in 1684, all the Jesuits left the Iroquois Cantons except Father Jean Lamberville. Father Millet went to Fort Frontenac and succeeded as chaplain there. Father Claude Chauchetiere. Between 1684 and 1689 he spent his time at Fort Frontenac with an interval at Fort Niagara in 1688, indicated as follows:

After De Denonville had finished his attack on the Senecas, he (De Denonville) embarked at Irondequoit and sailed westward on Lake Ontario to the site of the present Fort Niagara (not built until 1726). On this spot he built a small fort and left in it a garrison of 100 men.

A frightful year of disease and death followed for these men. Revengeful Senecas lurked in the forests and killed those of this fort who went outside in search of food and firewood. Scoury played havoc on those within.

Twelve men out of a hundred remained at the time that a rescue party with Father Millet came from Fort Frontenac. Father Millet erected a cross and gave thanks with the twelve survivors for their lives, showing in submission before the mystery of the death of all their companions.

The cross now in the enclosure of Fort Niagara commemorates this cross of Father Millet and was placed there at the suggestion of our colleague Mr. George B. Selden, by the Knights of Columbus.

In July, 1689, during Father Millet's residence in Fort Frontenac as chaplain, part of an army of 1400 Iroquois entered the stronghold. The chaplain was persuaded to step aside. Two strong Indians seized him. He was carried to a canoe, stripped of all his religious articles and all his clothing except his trousers, and taken to Onondaga.

The Lachine Massacre

Meanwhile the Iroquois army, wrought to a fury by the enslavement of their chieftains by De Denonville, proceeded down the St. Lawrence River to Lachine, a suburb of Montreal. There, on the night of August 3, 1689, they committed the most

awful massacre in Canadian history. Skeletons of white men bearing French religious ornaments unearthed on the Dann farm at Honeoye Falls, New York, seem to be the remains of captives brought to the Senecas from the raid on Lachine. Father Millet was taken from Fort Frontenac among the first captives of this uprising of revengeful violence.

Two other white captives were killed after receiving the last sacraments from him, and according to the customs of the Iroquois, the first captives must die by torture. While being held captive in the village of the Onondagas, an Indian mother and daughter whom he had baptized in former years came to him and gave him a cloak for his naked back and a crucifix for religious comfort.

The husband and father of these worthy women was an influential chieftain at Oneida. The other Indians demanded his death; this family protected him. Sometimes he was hidden in one house; sometimes in another, or sent to some remote corner of the forest to hide. At any moment there might have been a sudden blow of a tomahawk, and he would have been numbered among the martyrs.



The Iroquois had a way of remembering their illustrious dead by calling their spirits back to earth and making some living person the carrier of the spirit. The person so endowed ceased to be himself in the estimation of the tribe and was actually a reincarnation of the illustrious ancestor. The friendly chieftain was finding growing difficulty in preserving Father Millet alive.

Given 'Another Spirit'

So, gathering his friends as witnesses around him, in front of Father Millet he called to an illustrious founder of the Iroquois League in the spirit world and with due ceremony placed him in the body of Father Millet. To the Oneida villagers Father Millet had become this man. To the Senecas he was a man of the village would dare to touch the chaplain with evil intent. He was saved from death because according to pagan thought, another spirit had come and dwelt in him.

For four years he remained among the Onedias (1690-1694), esteemed as a brother by his fellow villagers, but he was sought for imprisonment by the English and for death by other Iroquois. A Protestant minister named D. Ollus, who spoke French, did much to relieve Father Millet.

Beginning with the great Saint Paul, captivity has been used many times as an opportunity for promoting the Gospel. Father Millet, then the only resident missionary among the Iroquois, proceeded to evangelize his Oneida friends. There is little information about him after his release from captivity in 1694.

His letters appear in the Jesuit Relations. He died December 1, 1708, the apostle of the Oneidas.

J. Lamberville, S. J.

Rouen is an ancient French city on the Seine River between Paris and the English Channel. Before the days when sea-going vessels required very deep water it was the chief seaport of northern France. Norse pirates, the knights of

Foussart Chronicles, and the martyrdom of Joan of Arc are chapters in its local history.

A cathedral with the famous Tower of Binger stands by its market place. In Rouen on December 27, 1633, was born Jean Lamberville.

Eight years later, March 24, 1641, his brother Jacques Lamberville was born in Rouen. This younger brother also became a Jesuit and part of the time assisted his brother at Onondaga. Two years later, November 22, 1643, Robert Cavalier de LaSalle was born there.

There was a Jesuit school in Rouen which LaSalle attended, and doubtless he became acquainted with the Lambervilles at this time.

Later their paths crossed again when in 1673 LaSalle came to Onondaga to gain the consent of the Iroquois to build Fort Frontenac, site of Kingston, Canada, where Lake Ontario meets the St. Lawrence River.

Jean Lamberville, the hero of this sketch, entered the Society of Jesus March 3, 1656, and after the usual course of Jesuit studies in France, he arrived in Canada in 1669. He went soon to Onondaga, the capital or central council fire of the five Iroquois tribes in what is now New York State.

The location is the Keough Farm on Butternut Creek near Jamesville, a suburb southwest of the city of Syracuse.

With the exception of a trip to France and return, 1678-1680, he remained at Onondaga until 1687. In 1692 he went home to remain in France. He died in Paris, February 6, 1714.

Soon after his attachment to the mission of St. Jean at Onondaga in 1669 and upon the retirement of Father Jacques Fremin, Father Lamberville became superior of the Iroquois missions. Under his direction were chapels and missionaries in each one of the five Iroquois Cantons, namely, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, and by means of these chapels and missionaries he promoted the beginnings of European sacred culture across our present New York State.

Father Lamberville was a man of rare tact, and like any other worthy ordained servant of Jesus Christ, he recognized the fundamental dignity and eternal possibilities of every human soul. He was so unusual, however, in expressing this quality that an unbreakable trust and a mutual manly admiration grew up between him and his Indian chiefs.

This mutual trust, this supreme understanding and confidence between this cultured white teacher of religion and the shrewd knowing savage leaders of Onondaga, is one of history's rare and remarkable stories.

When in 1684 hostility had developed between the Iroquois tribes and the French to such an extent that Governor De La Bar of Canada came with a military expedition to La Famine (now Selkirk Shores State Park near Pulaski, New York) all other Jesuit missionaries had to leave the Iroquois Cantons being in danger of their lives.

The Onondagas, however, kept Father Lamberville. Some writers say they kept him prisoner as a hostage. But there is reason to believe that the Onondagas kept Father Lamberville because they liked him. He was the only Jesuit able to remain among the Iroquois and continue missionary work from 1684 to 1687.

In 1687 de Denonville with fair promises persuaded Father Lamberville to send more than 50 Iroquois to meet his army at Front Frontenac. Possibly hoping that peace might be effected by sending these Onondagas who were the keepers of the Central Council of the Iroquois confederacy, Father Lamberville persuaded important leaders and beloved chiefs to go to Fort Frontenac. The Onondagas knew Father Lamberville and would pledge their lives on their faith in his word.

Imagine the pain and horror of mind of this missionary when he found that de Denonville had used the

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