

Pre-Colonial
History in the
Diocesan Area

EXPLORATIONS

How Catholics
Shaped Course
of Our History

By Alexander M. Stewart

Editorial Note

French Catholics who visited, and evangelized the Indians and their colleagues in the area which is now the Catholic Diocese of Rochester did more to make known the hitherto unknown pathways of Eastern North America than all other groups of white men combined.

This area includes the homeland of the Seneca and Cayuga Indians.

Work which the pioneer Catholic missionaries did among them not only led the way of exploration in this then unknown continent. It lighted the torch of Christianity here and laid the foundation for carving out of the wilderness the destiny of the great republic which we all love.

Exploration is the forerunner of settlement. Exploration is the cornerstone of history in America. The exploration which revealed the land that was to become the home of scores of millions of Americans is epic and epochal.

Catholic missionaries led in that exploration.

Although there was more than 3,000,000 words of translated material from French sources, and many maps and drawings awaiting the sober-minded student of this phase of American history—to study, analyze and give to the world—progress is pathetically slow.

The scholarly works of earlier writers on this subject gather the dust of years in our libraries.

Not until the Catholic Courier dug into this reservoir of historical facts were they brought to general public attention, and the credit which is due pious men who long ago passed to their reward began to be given.

In six previous articles which were written by the Rev. A. M. Stewart of Rochester and published in the Courier, much of this history was given as it related to the Senecas and the Iroquois League of Nations. (See references.)

In this fiftieth anniversary number the connection between the work of these missionaries, which began in this area, with the epochal revealing of America to civilization is shown with graphic realism.

It is a document of transcendent importance in making historical truth known—in bringing belated justice to the memory of real makers of history.

The Courier, in previous articles, assembled the largest collection of facts relating to the French colonial contact which has ever been brought out in the Rochester area. The article in this issue is of national significance.

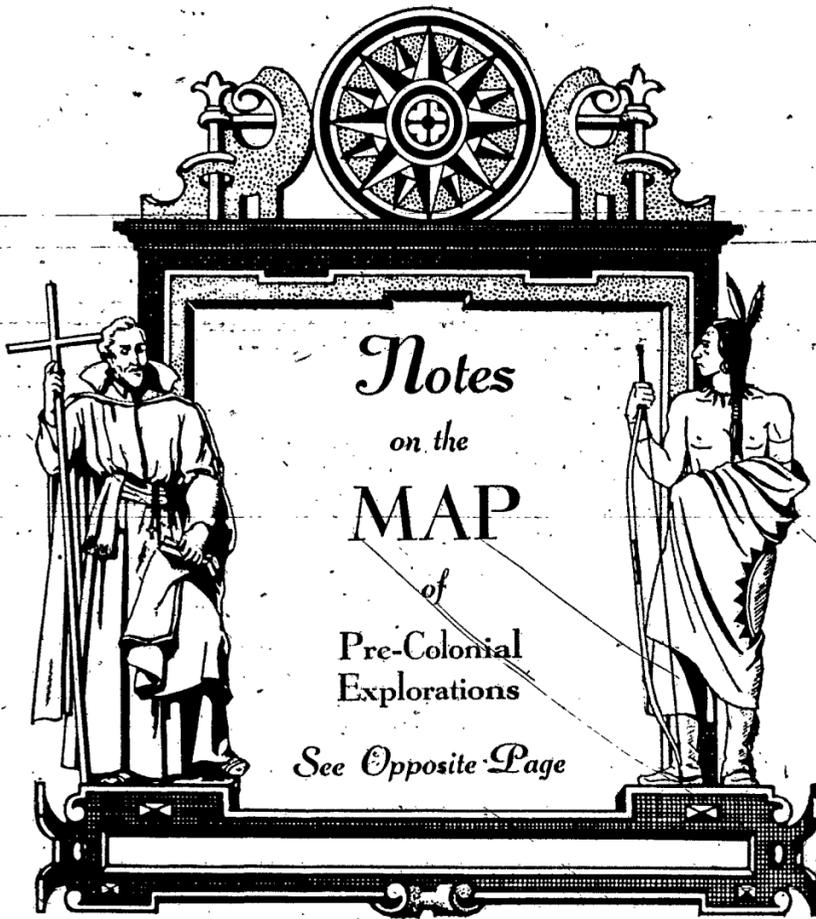
Their complete lack of prejudice is guaranteed by the fact that their author is a retired Baptist clergyman, who learned the facts only through long, patient research; whose indignation was aroused when he discovered that bias was responsible for the injustice of accumulating years.

No non-Catholic participant in the early history of the region which is now the Catholic Diocese has been omitted. The facts in all these articles have been selected without religious bias. There has been only a single motive—to find the truth and make it known.

Mr. Stewart says:

"I insist that those Catholics who refuse to recognize the virtues of these French missionaries

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This map is intended to show some of the widespread explorations of some of the early French residents and sojourners of the vicinity of Rochester, between 1609 and 1749 A. D. With such explorations these early Frenchmen cannot rightly be omitted from national history.

Champlain is the only explorer, part of whose explorations are depicted on this map, who did not actually enter the area which may be variously described as the homeland of the Seneca and Cayuga Indians, as the Rochester Region, or the Catholic Diocese of Rochester, or the Genesee Country. Since these explorations began with Champlain, Etienne Brule, when he came into the said region, was an agent for Champlain, so therefore Champlain is included.

Etienne Brule, part of whose travels are indicated on the map, was the first white man, of whom we have a written record, to visit the Senecas. He came from France via Quebec, and was in the employ of Champlain as early as 1609, possibly earlier. His exact date of arrival in Canada is unknown. He left Cahaugua with Huron Ambassadors in 1615, but he did not arrive among the Senecas until about April 1616. See Text. It was impossible to depict all of Brule's explorations on this map without making a confusing net of lines. In 1631 he was in Lake Superior with his associate explorer Grenoelle.

Brule's explorations contributed to the first knowledge of civilized men of the Great Lakes. On the map from near Rochester, New York to east of Auriesville, New York are numbers in circles. See also Iroquois tribes under the Legend of the map. While the homeland of these tribes corresponded fairly closely to the encircled numbers on the map, they nevertheless by their successful wars came to be feared by, and to have some influence over most of the Indian tribes on the immense area of the map. This influence of these Iroquois tribes on subsequent American History is beyond calculation. The most populous tribe was our Senecas and their capitol was at To-ti-a-K-ton in our Monroe County.

Father Simon Le Moyne's life has been brought out fully in a previous issue of the Courier Calendar (Courier E). He made the first recorded voyage from Montreal via the St. Lawrence River to Lake Ontario and Onondaga. He was located with the Cayuga Indians near missionary monument on the Lake Road, north of Aurora, New York, (Cayuga County) in 1661. He brought the first physician into that region.

Father Louis Hennepin was at Totiakton, (spelled Tiokton on the map, there are various spellings) on New-Year's day, 1679 where he met the resident pastors, Father Julien Garnier and Father Pierré, or Peter Raffex. Late in June, 1679 he was near the side of the monument at Our Lady of Mercy High School, Rochester, New York, where he and his fellow Franciscans erected a temporary chapel. Read his "New Discovery" edited by R. C. Thwaites, Rochester Public Library.

Rene Cavalier De La Salle, born 1643 Rouen, France, died 1687 near Trinity River, Texas. His first sojourn with the Senecas was in August 1669 at Totiakton. At this time he went with Father Rene Galinee (Sulpitian) to the Burning Spring in Bristol Valley, modern W. B. Case Farm. Again he was at the site of Mercy High School in June 1679, with Fathers Henne-pin, Membre and other Franciscans and he doubtless visited the Senecas several other times. His explorations started a movement which made the Mississippi Valley French territory for more than a century after his time. He is a part of our local history which is of continental importance.

After La Salle several others came to visit in our Seneca country who published the vastness and the richness of America in Europe. In 1721 Father Jacques Gravier, Chicago to Gulf of Mexico. In 1721 Charlevoix made a voyage through the Great Lakes stopping at Irondequoit and thence down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. See his history in Rochester Public Library.

In 1649 Celeron Expedition—Father Joseph Pierre Bonnacamps, Chaplain, weather observer, and map maker. (See text.)

We are grateful to the Baron de Boisseau of Chateau Troujoly, Courin, France, who has sent us a picture of this chateau where Father Bonnacamps spent his old age, and a picture of the Church where Father Bonnacamps is entombed.

On this map and in the following article, we have demonstrated in brief outline that the conquest of the interior of this continent by a process of explorations was done by Frenchmen many of whom were priests and members of great Catholic orders. Most of these explorers are connected by visit or residence with our local history. Local historians cannot disregard these explorers, because of their national importance nor can national historians neglect them because of their connection with this locality. The fact that this French American history is outside the mental pattern of history of some historians of able minds is a reason why the judgment of such historians on this part of our history should be discarded.

Here is offered while standing on the ground where walked the revealers of America to civilized man, the chance to teach from their examples:

1. supreme religious devotion
2. a spiritual brotherhood which is greater than patriotism or racial feeling
3. and adventure, geography, and the knowledge of different races of men, French, Algonquins and Iroquois.

On the map and in the story occur the names of modern towns and cities. These places at the time spoken of were simply locations and in most cases were then uninhabited by whites.

Prologue

The old scout took a match out of his tin box, knelt down beside his prepared pile of dead oak leaves, whittled shavings and dry, broken branches.

He scratched the match on one side of the stones which he had put up for a fireplace, then held it in his cupped hands against the strong southwest wind. The match lighted with a burst of flame, which slowly took hold of the stem of the match.

Carefully he touched the match to one of the leaves, and as soon as it lighted he piled on others. Then the whittlings took fire, and the whole pile of dead sticks became alive with fire.

The fire was built at the edge of a field at the top of a ravine. All along this edge of the field the soil was black and greasy from rubbish of the campfires of Indians who had lived on this primitive Seneca village site.

The old scout said to his young friend:

"Paul, you are the doctor when it comes to hunting for Indian relics. You take the shovel and see what you can find and I will fix the tea and bacon."

The scout's aluminum kettle which, years ago, had paid an extra tax to the late Andrew Mellon, was a trained veteran of a hundred campfires and soon had boiling water jumping inside.

When the frying pan with the bacon in it made an ish-sh-sh sound, the old scout drew a punning remark from Tennyson's "In Memoriam" when he said, "the murmur of a happy pan."

The time was May, and the place was in the big hills, north of Honeoye Lake.

"Come on, Paul, get it before the wind blows it cold," shouted the old scout. "Come on, what's keeping you?"

Paul came and sat down to eat. "What is that relic you just took out of your pocket?" the old scout asked.

"Oh, that is a Jesuit religious ring which I dug from an Indian grave in another location," he replied.

The old scout looked at the ring. It bore the initials I. H. S., meaning Jesus Saviour of men.

As Paul placed some pieces of Indian clay kettles with Seneca chevrons on them which he had found that day, on the ground beside the aluminum kettle, the stories of these relics began to unfold to the old scout.

He could see that the pottery site had been occupied at a time when the Senecas were afraid of all of the surrounding tribes. It was far from the main trails, remote and hidden from large waterways, where enemies might come to hunt and fish.

Higher hills surrounded it so that smoke arising from campfires could not be detected from a distance and reveal its location to enemies.

Evidently the Senecas were a weak and frightened people when they lived on this site. It probably had been occupied before 1600 A. D.

The ring, he knew, had belonged to one of the Jesuit missionaries who preceded civilization into this wilderness, bringing Christianity to the Indians.

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