

Explorations

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the widespread exploration of America by pioneer Catholics.

There was Le Moyne Denonville, who had been a commander on a naval expedition to Hudson Bay and later in 1706 was the first governor of Louisiana. There was Father Jacques Gravier, who after 1700 made several voyages from the Lake Michigan via the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. There was Henry de Tonty, La Salle's most faithful lieutenant, who went from Illinois searching down the Mississippi to Louisiana for La Salle, his lost commander in the fall of 1687. After the Denonville expedition, members of the Joncaire family (See Courier C 35) were resident with the Senecas and then went everywhere in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys where Indians of Eastern America went.

In 1721, Charlevoix a Jesuit and a professor in a college in Paris was sent to make a report of the French empire in America. He came from Montreal and Quebec via the St. Lawrence River canoe route. He entered and described Irondequoit Bay. (See inscription on Our Lady of Mercy High School monument, Rochester.) Thence he voyaged by the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River to New Orleans. His scholarly histories, with some botany included, helped civilization in its taking over the wilderness. In 1749 the Celeron expedition came along the south shore of Lake Ontario and stopped in the Seneca country on the way.

Father Bonnacamp S. J. was map maker and chaplain of this expedition. This expedition of about 100 men went by Lake Ontario, Niagara River, Lake Erie, and then by portages through Chautauqua Lake. The expedition circumnavigated most of the state of Ohio on connecting rivers and placed lead plates at strategic points upon which was inscribed a proclamation which claimed all of Ohio for the French.

In 1751 Father Picquet made a tour around Lake Ontario and paddled up the Genesee River to the Lower Falls. He went to New Orleans via the Mississippi canoe route when the "fierce" British broke up New France, 1659.

About a century ago in the years around 1839, Father De Smet, a Belgian Jesuit (who seems to have visited friends here in Rochester) preached the Gospel to Indians and uplifted the Cross where the waters flow into the Pacific Ocean. He seems to have traversed the Oregon trail before that well known Protestant missionary, Marcus Whitman. Evidence has now been outlined in this article on "Explorations" which shows that the early Catholic residents and sojourners in the area of this diocese participated not only in local history and are to be considered not only as interesting historical incidents, but performed services of exploration which were of continent wide importance to all subsequent history and civilization. We invite historians to lay aside their shackles of racial and creedal discrimination and give these French Catholic explorers their honorable place in the history of America and of the Church.

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OUR CONGRATULATIONS to His Excellency, Most Reverend James E. Kearney, Bishop of Rochester, on this the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the CATHOLIC COURIER, official publication of the Diocese of Rochester, New York. Studios of Daprato Statuary Company, Chicago, New York, Pietrasanta, Italy."

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