

# Labors Of Early Jesuit Missionaries To Indians In Cayuga Area Recalled

This is the second of a series of articles recalling the early Jesuit missionaries who 300 years ago preached the Faith to Indians in Cayuga County. The author, Edwin M. Nolan is a member of the faculty of West High School in Auburn. A Field Mass, marking the 300th anniversary of Cayuga's First Mass, will be offered at 4 p.m., Sunday, August 19 at the John Gans Farm, Napleton, 8 miles south of Auburn on Route 34B.

By EDWIN M. NOLAN

The Jesuits abandoned their Cayuga mission in February, 1658, because of hostilities between the French and Iroquois. All the missionaries fled to Canada where they remained for the duration of the war. Peace was effected in July of 1660, mainly through the efforts of Chief Saonchiowaga of Cayuga who headed the delegation sent by the Indians to negotiate the termination of the war. Among the conditions stipulated by the illustrious Iroquois diplomat was the return of the Jesuits. "A Black-gown must come with me," he said, "otherwise we have no peace, and on his coming depend the lives of twenty Frenchmen."

Father Simon LeMoine was chosen for the task of returning to the Iroquois. His party reached Onondaga August 12, 1660. In his role as peacemaker, he visited the various tribes, spending a month at Cayuga. According to the Jesuit Relations, threats had been made on his life, especially by the Mohawks. Consequently, the Cayugas invited him to seek sanctuary with them. This invitation Father LeMoine was happy to accept, more for the opportunity it gave him to administer spiritually to them, than for his own personal safety.

At this time, an epidemic was gravely afflicting Cayuga. A laybrother, who was a skilled surgeon with the missionary on this visit, and his medical ministrations were so successful that he saved many lives. As a result, the grateful Cayugas were most friendly. Father LeMoine had access to every home baptizing almost all of the children and administering the Sacraments to all the Catholics. Some of the slaves had kept their Faith during almost twenty years of captivity. These faithful souls, the Relations declare, "consoled with their prayers the woods and fields where Jesus Christ had yet received no homage." So happy were they to see a priest that they wept, and Father LeMoine declared that their tears amply repaid all his toil and labor involved in his journey to them.

The "pleasant sojourn" at Cayuga was terminated by the return of Chief Garacantie of Onondaga from Montreal. On Father LeMoine's arrival at Onondaga, he was given a most courteous welcome. Among his many gifts was a present of squashes, considered a rare delicacy and one of the missionary's favorite foods.

At this time, Father LeMoine furnished interesting information on the mission chapels. He describes one as "built of bark and stakes," and narrates that daily Mass was offered a half hour before dawn. The Rosary was recited each evening, and frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament throughout the day were common. He also notes that Garacantie had a chapel in his own cabin. The priest comments to his superior: "Our Lord, who consents to be embodied under the form of bread, does not disdain to lodge under a bark roof, and the wood of our forests is not less precious in His eyes than the Cedars of Lebanon, since He makes Paradise wherever He is."

al duty to elaborate on the personality of this outstanding priest, declaring that de Carheil had sacrificed his talents and intellectual attainments for a hoped-for martyrdom in mission work. Such a life would be beyond worldly ambition and would offer him only the "hardships of the Cross." His more than sixty years of missionary life stressed humility and mortification with their concomitant personal sanctity.

Despite these facts, his conversions were relatively few, and Charlevoix comments that de Carheil's "long and toilsome apostolate" exemplifies the truth that no effort is wasted if it results in personal holiness and that conversion of souls is alone the work of God's grace.

Father de Carheil had many trials at Cayuga, and one major one for a time was the unfriendliness of Saonchiowaga, who wanted another priest to serve his people Garacantie, oddly enough, was anxious for de Carheil to be sent to Onondaga, but whatever the conditions were, the superiors decided that a change would be inadvisable.

Another trial was the ever present superstition and antagonism to the Church he accomplished much in treating these problems. One of his techniques was the device of ridicule evident in the case where he composed a "prayer" to teach them their errors in considering animals as masters of their lives. This prayer, which gave them a gradual knowledge of God and the Commandments is exemplified in the following: "O Beaver, who cannot speak, thou art the master of my life who can speak. Thou who hast no soul art the master of my life which has a soul!"

He did much to dispel their errors regarding dreams and made a very learned study of the philosophy of dreams. Another accomplishment was the correction of their idea of gluttonous feasting to cure the sick. He pointed out to them that such a procedure was against the law of God as well as being an insane and foolish cause of increasing illness. A sick woman approved his instructions on these matters on an occasion when she was the object of such a cure-feast. She rejected their savage customs, received instructions, and died shortly afterwards. Her death caused a new burst of superstition and unfriendly treatment.

On one occasion when he was unsuccessful in converting a dying woman, he wept. Seeing the painful anxieties for her salvation, "How happy is a missionary in receiving from God that which to his feebleness appears impossible."

He also reveals the comfort that was his in the "sepulchres of saints" as he described his dead converts' graves. The most painful sight on his arrival he disclosed had been the graves of the unbaptized pagans.

FATHER DE CARHEIL, whose first missionary assignment was that of Cayuga, is described by the Catholic Encyclopedia as a "ripe scholar with a rare knowledge of languages and tribes." Hawley refers to his "reviving tact and ingenuity" and notes the "sincerity" and "devotion" which no one can fail to respect and admire.

During his absence because of his illness, Father de Carheil was replaced by Father Pierre Raffex, chaplain of a French expedition against the Mohawks in 1665, and then ministering to the Senecas, to whom he later returned. It was Father Raffex who wrote the famous letter describing the Cayuga countryside as the most beautiful he had ever seen in America. He mentioned also that more than 1000 deer were killed annually, the abundance of fish, salmon, eel and other kinds, the lake abounding in swan and geese even in winter, and the continual "clouds" of all sorts of game.

He appraised the Cayugas as "more tractable and less fierce" than the Iroquois, but greatly in need of the necessary humility conducive to Christianity. Father de Carheil had previously made the same observation when he noted that there was "nothing more desirable for the advancement of Christianity than the humiliation of their spirits," so directly opposed to the pure and gentle heart of Christ. Had the Cayugas possessed this humble spirit, Father Raffex felt they would have excelled all other tribes in the Faith.

Of the spiritual life of the



"BLACKROBES AND INDIANS"—Early Jesuit missionaries were known as the "Blackrobes" to Indians of New York State. In the 1600's the Indians living in what is now the Cayuga County area of the Rochester Diocese invited the "Blackrobes" to teach them the Faith.

Commandments among the families; their eagerness for instruction; the growing problem of drinking, their disregard for the rights of their fellowmen and their lack of concern in keeping pledges. The missionary declared: "We can truly say that we are among them as perpetual victims, since there is no day in which we are not in danger of being massacred. But this is also our greatest joy and the spring of our purest consolation."

In his narration of particular cases, the missionary revealed well his deep spirituality. On an occasion when he had tried seemingly in vain to convert a dying woman, even saying Mass for her, he declared when she finally asked for baptism that such a marvelous and miraculous conversion amply repaid his painful anxieties for her salvation. "How happy is a missionary in receiving from God that which to his feebleness appears impossible."

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him, as he put it, to succeed with his first attempted conversion. The patient's mother interfered and forbade further instruction. The man died, and the zealous priest reveals that he was greatly grieved over the Indian's death and considered it a personal "affliction."

He also narrates the "consolation" that was his in the conversion of a prisoner of war, the most docile savage he had ever seen. The man was about twenty years old. Father Raffex instructed him during his torture and execution. The young man kept sufficient presence of mind in all his torment to appreciate the truths of Faith. Before he died, he was baptized, after which he publicly thanked the priest, even singing of the love the missionary had shown him.

THE RAFFEX report notes the baptism of thirty children and adults. The priest expressed the hope that "this troop of little innocents" would pray for the conversion of the Cayugas. He also comments that the expectation of the conversion of an entire nation and to win souls by hundreds and thousands is to receive one's self Canada. He observed it was not an easy mission field. He compared the labor of conversions to the gathering of flowers, attainable only by walking through "thistles and thorns."

He added: "Persons of exalted virtue find here enough to call out their zeal. The less enthusiastic like myself are happy in finding themselves compelled to suffer much to be without consolation save in God alone and


years. In 1686, he was assigned to the mission among the Hurons and Ottawa at Mackinac, where he labored until 1701. He returned to Quebec where he remained for the next few years. He died July 27, 1726, at the advanced age of ninety-three and in his sixtieth year as a priest.

When the late Archbishop Thomas F. Hickey, second ordinary of the Rochester Diocese, on October 12, 1911, unveiled a monument dedicated to the memory of the Jesuit missionaries of Cayuga and located on the Union Springs Aurora road, he thanked God that he saw had within its boundaries spots "hal-lowed by deeds of noble men. In his remarks on this significant event, the bishop, remembered for his eloquence and oratory, said: "Today, we solemnly lift our voices to honor these missionaries of old. Today, we thank God in our hearts for what He sent in the persons of these men to the shores of our own Cayuga."

Another priest who had helped at Cayuga was Father Jean Perron, who arrived in Canada in 1667. One of his unusual experiences occurred in 1674 when he made a journey through the French colonies in disguise. He returned to France in 1678.

FATHER FREMIN and Father Millet were also at Cayuga for a time. The former priest was a missionary among the Senecas and labored in the area located near Victor, Canandaigua, and Rochester. His name has been given to the Mission Society of Nazareth College.

The Cayuga mission lasted until 1684, when the faithful Father de Carheil was robbed of everything and expelled by two unfriendly chiefs, who had been influenced by English intrigue. His unhappy departure marked the end of the Jesuit missions in Cayuga. Father de Carheil returned to Quebec, where he taught for three



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