

# When LaSalle Visited Irondequoit Bay -- 1669

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Diocesan historian, Father Robert McNamara of St. Bernard's Seminary, continuing to document the heritage of our area, today writes about the earliest recorded Masses in the Rochester metropolitan area. A French explorer brought missionary priests into the Irondequoit Bay area 300 years ago this month.

By FR. ROBERT McNAMARA

One of the most famous — and dramatic — explorers of the American continent was Rene-Robert Cavalier de la Salle (1643-1687). He had a burning desire to discover a passage through North America to China, and this dream led him to explore the Mississippi River system.

For 18 years he struggled mightily against great odds, always meeting frustration. Even his end was a failure: a disgruntled employee who had accompanied him to Texas assassinated him. But he had meanwhile left his mark upon the history of Canada and of the United States.

LaSalle traveled much along Lake Ontario during his preparations for forging into the West. On at least four occasions he stopped at Irondequoit Bay in order to make contact with the Seneca Indians.

The first of these visits took place exactly 300 years ago this month. The LaSalle party landed at the head of the bay apparently on Aug. 10, 1669, and remained in the Seneca country, apparently, until Aug. 26.

On this first trip LaSalle and his companions hoped to get a Shawnee guide to take them into the West, for they planned to search out the Ohio River. They also wished to get traveling provisions. This was the first official stop made by LaSalle in his program of western travel.

So the "LaSalle trail" through Middle America can be said to begin at Irondequoit Bay.

The 26-year-old dreamer was, of course, not alone on this phase of his pilgrimage. He had not only selected companions, but was actually only a co-leader of the expedition that



LaSalle lands at Irondequoit Bay, August 1669. From a diorama, Rochester Museum and Science Center.

had left Montreal on July 8. A Stipician priest, Abbe Francois Dollier de Casson, 33, had secured permission to set out for the West to investigate the possibility of setting up missions among the tribes that spoke Algonkian, a language of which he had lately made an intensive study. It was agreed that he and LaSalle should go together, each with his separate purpose.

Another Sulpician cleric, Abbe Rene Brehand de Galinee, accompanied the expedition as its mapmaker and the keeper of its log. Galinee was 23, and was as yet not an ordained priest, but a deacon.

Before landing at Irondequoit, the seven canoes of the explorers, accompanied by two canoes of Seneca Indians, stopped for a while with a lone Indian who had established a home for himself on an offshore island. This would be one of the islands in Sodus Bay.

From this place, the Senecas went ahead to announce their tribesmen the early arrival of the party from Montreal.

The explorers were given a royal greeting at Indian Land-

ing. The Senecas invited them to come to their great village, several miles to the south, on the following day. It was agreed that Father Dollier and some of the party would remain at Irondequoit to guard the canoes, while LaSalle, Galinee, their Dutch interpreter, and the rest of the party went to the Seneca capital.

Galinee, who tells us all about this visit in his journal, later states that Father Dollier was accustomed to offer Mass three times a week on a crude altar made of stakes and paddles. Since the LaSalle group tarried in Seneca country for over a fortnight, it is only fair to conclude that Father Dollier celebrated Mass more than once at or near Indian Landing (now in Rochester's Ellison Park).

These would be the earliest recorded Masses in the Rochester metropolitan area.

LaSalle and Galinee, led on a sort of triumphal progress to their village destination, found that place located in the midst of a large clearing about five miles in circumference. It stood on the brow of a "small hill" ("petit cousteau"). It was enclosed by a square fence of high saplings; this was, however, not a stockade but a sort of barrier, presumably against wild animals. At all events, it was not a fortification.

Just where this village stood has been much disputed. Most historians identify it with the Seneca village site on Boughton Hill, just south of Victor. But Boughton Hill is a "big hill", not, as Galinee described the site of the village they visited, a "small hill."

Others say the village site at Rochester Junction fits in better with the Galinee description. Archeologists Wray and Schoff, who think that the Boughton Hill village site was not yet occupied by 1669, permit us to make a third suggestion: the Marsh farm site east of Holcomb, now commemorated by a monument as Gaudougarie, the Huron captive

Frenchmen might get killed, and they — the Indians — would be blamed for allowing them to go to their death. This reason is not very plausible.

They refused to assign to the French party the only Shawnee in the village, but this was probably because he was already designated for execution as a reprisal. Abbe Galinee tried to ransom him, thinking both to save his life and to secure a guide. Young and zealous Galinee tried to press the issue, but both LaSalle and the Dutch interpreter played hands-off, because of the rigidity of Iroquois custom in such matters.

The best the Sulpician could do was to instruct the condemned man to repeat "Thou who madest all, have pity on me; I am sorry I have not obeyed Thee; but if I live I will obey Thee entirely." This the captive did. Galinee was sorry later that he had not baptized him at once; for the next day the execution began, and it was too late. Even as it was, the Senecas were beginning to resent his attention to the condemned prisoner. They considered it a bad omen when a man subjected to torture showed patience.

Such was the barbarity of these otherwise remarkable people before they received the grace of a Christian spirit. True, the Senecas already had a resident missionary, Father Jacques Fremin; but he had come to them only a few months before, and when LaSalle arrived he was away at a meeting with his Jesuit missionary colleagues at Onondaga.

Now excitement in the village rose to fever pitch. Not only was the execution under way; several Indians got drunk on brandy bought from the Dutch. Of these several threatened to kill the Frenchmen in retaliation for the death of a relative of theirs in Montreal at the hands of the French.

LaSalle, fearing for his party, told Galinee he was going to return to Irondequoit Bay. The rest of their party followed them there on the next day. The explorers returned to the Seneca villages thereafter only to stock up on provisions. The attitude of the Senecas, while not hostile, had at least discouraged them from approaching the Ohio up the Genesee River system.

Actually, the explorers' sojourn in Seneca-land was in vain. Not only did the Shawnee captives not return, the Senecas conveyed to LaSalle indirectly through his Dutch interpreter that the Senecas did not want the expedition to go into the Ohio country. They were afraid, they said, that the

Fortunately, before they departed from the Irondequoit area, they met a Seneca from a smaller village near the present Hamilton, Ontario, who assured them that they could obtain a Shawnee guide there for a more westerly approach to the Ohio River country. So in the last days of August, the expedition set forth once more, westward along the shore of Lake Ontario, past the mouth of the Niagara. They heard the roar of the mighty cataract, and got into the swirl of its current, but regretted their inability to visit at that time the tremendous Falls, even in those days a tourist "must".

Once they had arrived at their destination west of Lake Ontario, LaSalle decided to part company with the missionaries. The latter went on to the west, exploring and mapping the northern shore of Lake Erie, moving up Lake Huron to Georgian Bay, and returned home eventually via the Ottawa River.

Both clerics signed an official declaration laying formal claim of the territory they had traversed, in the name of the King of France. Dollier later became a leading figure in Montreal. Galinee returned to France in 1671, died in 1678.

LaSalle, according to a later source, actually went to the Ohio country after leaving the missionaries. But this source is of questionable value. Only a decade later did he set out on his definitive explorations of the Mississippi waterways. En route now to the Niagara River and Lake Erie, where he projected the building of a ship, "the Griffon", he stopped three times with the Senecas — in late 1678, in early 1679, and again in July 1679. His principal purpose on these occasions was to obtain provisions. With him on this second expedition was Father Louis Hennepin, who was to become the explorer of the upper Mississippi.

During the next 18 years we will hear much of the LaSalle expedition, throughout this country. Let us not forget that it all started at Irondequoit Bay.

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## Confrontation

### Gabriel Richard and CCD

By JOAN ZUMMO

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The Institute, starting with the premise that one of the most common handicapping problems is lack of self confidence, has established a confidence-building course based on individuals giving a number of successful talks to groups until a pattern of success is established.

In the basic course offered by the Institute, instructors use a variety of methods including group drills and exercises to help students learn and practice techniques of effective speaking, creativity, better memory, human relations, problem solving, and Christian sensitivity and purpose.

The first lesson of the basic nine develops the idea that public speaking is really a conversation, and it also gives you basic rules for speaking and recalling names. Lesson two helps you gain insight into your own talents and abilities and suggests ways of using your own individual talents. This lesson also includes drills and practices designed to help you put your creativity to work.

In lesson three you are introduced to several rules of human relations, and you are shown how to use objects and colorful details to put across your ideas more clearly and forcefully. The next two sessions concentrate on forceful

and appealing presentation of your ideas.

Lesson six gives you a formula for organizing your ideas logically and also uses a drill designed to make you more sensitive to others and their needs and increases your tolerance and understanding. The last three lessons help you learn to think on your feet, to use skill and tact in dealing with others, and teach you an effective problem solving system.

Persons who have taken this course are generally very enthusiastic about it and recommend it highly.

Although no specific plans have been arranged with the Institute there is a possibility of offering this course as an advanced methods course for teachers of religion. The courses now offered in this area by the Institute are open to persons from all walks of life and do attract people from every kind of profession.

If you or your organization are interested in this course of instruction please contact Fr. Holland at the CCD Office and watch this column for

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