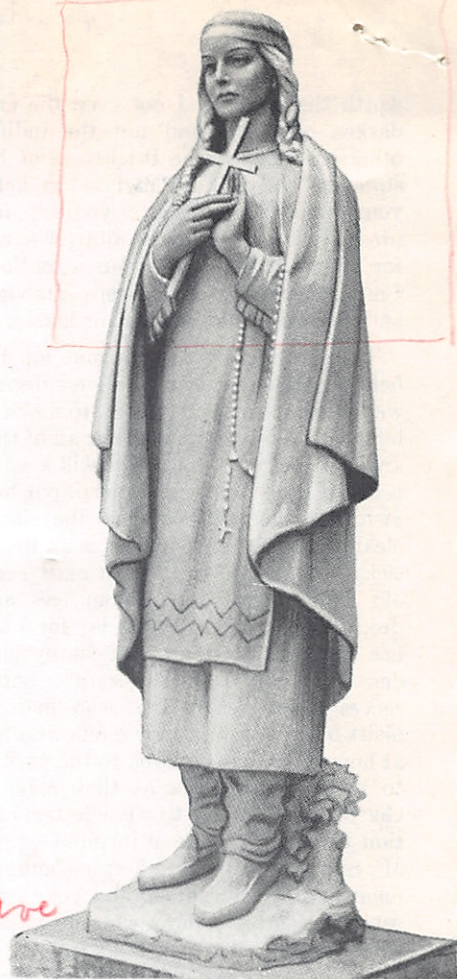


Seaway Detours for Kateri Tekakwitha

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ECAUSE of the revered sanctity of a North American Indian girl who may attain Sainthood, the expropriation lines of the St. Lawrence Seaway have been skillfully redrawn. Kateri Tekakwitha of the Mohawks, whose shrine overlooks the mighty St. Lawrence, once the water highway of her people, may rest in peace. Those in charge of the \$900,000,000 project will leave the hallowed soil of her grave untouched, undisturbed.

To the faithful of this continent the cause of venerable Kateri is a cherished one and they pray that Rome will soon be able to announce her Beatification. From all over North America and from many parts of the world pilgrims flock to her shrine at Caughnawaga, a suburb of Montreal. The mortally ill, the maimed and the sick petition her intercession that they may be cured. The confused, the troubled and the spiritually weary seek solutions to their problems or meditate on her heroic virtues and thus attain peace of soul and inspiration of faith.

Mid-way in the 17th century in New France an Algonquin girl at the mission post at Three Rivers was carried off by the Iroquois to Ossernenon, near Auriesville, west of Albany, N. Y. Her Christian modesty, piety and sweet gentleness made a deep impression on a Mohawk chief who married her, then became a convert. Their united example of faith spread the cause of Christianity among his people. In 1656 Kateri was born but four years later she was orphaned during an epidemic of smallpox. She was also stricken but recovered though she remained badly scarred by the disease.

A pagan uncle cared for her at his lodge and thus she was unaware of Christianity until 1670 when a treaty of peace brought Jesuits once more to their villages. According to the custom of the Mohawks they were about to celebrate the Feast of the Dead and Kateri's parents were exhumed as a matter of course. Into the midst of these preparations stepped the resident Jesuit. By his eloquent sermon against this paganism

he managed to persuade them to cancel the festival. The fourteen-year-old maiden who watched and listened in wonder became an ardent convert and was baptized by Father Jacques de Lamberville when he came to the village five years later. The illiterate maid had begged for instruction and when she was received into the Church on that Easter Sunday of 1675 she amazed the transient missionary by her understanding of the profound Articles of Faith and by her complete acceptance and assimilation into her new Faith. How such beauty of soul could have matured in such pagan and savage environment was a source of amazement to him.

The Mohawk valley was split asunder by religious persecution. The radiant convert received with pious humility the taunts and jeers of her own people and once defied one of her tribesmen who attempted to tomahawk her to death when she refused to marry him. She had vowed her life to God and marriage for her was an impossibility. Such an atmosphere of moral laxness, uncleanness and many other vices was unfit for so pure a Christian. Father de Lamberville felt it unwise that she remain in sight of such vice and was more eager than ever that she escape when her pious virtues put her life in great danger. At his instigation she escaped in the company of two companions who later left her to serve as decoys in the path of hot pursuit conducted by her irate uncle. Through 300 miles of dense primeval woodland and its assorted perils she fled for her life on foot and by canoe and arrived at the mission of the Sault at the Christian Iroquois settlement of Kohnawake, in the autumn of 1677.

On Christmas Day of that year a radiant Kateri made her First Communion. The humble maiden was poised on the threshold of total abandonment to God and her piety and virtues were destined to become the fruit of legends in the annals of heroic holiness. Not only did she claim Jesus Christ as her only Master but she also divorced herself from the natural vanities of her people. Greased hair, bright colours and beads were forsaken. A life of penance often so severe she had to be restrained by her confessor proclaimed what she considered her great unworthiness, vowing that her heart was not pure enough to be God's abode.

"I live for Him every moment I live on earth," was her quiet explanation for ceaseless devotion and service. In the month of February, 1680, the model of the mission became ill and for two months the already fragile Kateri suffered. As physical strength ebbed from her a spiritual strength suffused her every thought and enkindled the faith of those about her. On April 17, at the age of

twenty-four, Kateri died. Those who knelt about her couch saw the miracle which has been told through the centuries, for fifteen minutes after her death the lean face, worn by pain and disfigured by smallpox, shone with a radiant freshness of youth, free of marks, a cameo of pure loveliness.

They buried her at La Prairie but she was moved several times. Part of her skeleton, carried by pious Iroquois to a new mission at St. Regis, near Cornwall, was destroyed more than a hundred years ago by a fire which demolished the site. To-day, at the Caughnawaga Mission of St. Francis Xavier, Father Henri Bechard is the custodian of the only earthly remains of Kateri, the bones of the lower half of her body. Many years ago the Bishop of Montreal sealed them in a glass-topped casket and they will remain in Father Bechard's possession until the anticipated announcement of her "Beatification." At such time, with proper ceremony, the casket will be unsealed and the major relic will be transferred to Rome where it will be deposited at St. Peter's Cathedral. Other congregations across this continent will receive other bones so that veneration of these relics may be spread and miraculous cures obtained to advance her cause.

"When enough Catholics pray for the needed miracles," is the Vice-Postular's answer to those who ask how soon will she be beatified. During the Marian Year the Iroquois unveiled a statue at Caughnawaga to honour Kateri and they beseeched Our Blessed Mother to intercede for the two miracles needed. She was the spiritual fruit of the martyrs, an Indian maiden of great sanctity who emerged from the pagan darkness of an Iroquois forest-village to perhaps scale the heights to Sainthood. If it is established that she achieved this heroic holiness she will become North America's first Indian saint. Rome has appointed two vice-postulars to promote her cause, Father Bechard and another priest at the Shrine in New York State. Quietly, methodically and prayerfully, they collect and sift evidence and report to Rome.

More than one hundred homes on the Reserve must be moved to make way for the seaway channel. To complete the gigantic scheme 40,000 acres of shoreline area must be flooded and communities must be moved or partially removed. But above the mighty river a statue fashioned into the most perfect likeness of this Indian maiden gazes in tranquil beauty upon the activity below. Kateri Tekakwitha, beloved Lily of the Mohawks will continue to receive and aid the faithful on her own soil because the various ministers in charge and the teamwork of skilled engineers saw fit to respect her resting place.