

# KAHNAWAKE "AT THE-RAPIDS" CAUGHNAWAGA

by G.A. ROGERS, Past President, Chateaugay Valley Historical Society.

The Iroquois, one of the Five Nations Confederacy, which included the Onondaga, Seneca, Mohawk, Onondaga and Canandaigua tribes, had turned against New France when Samuel de Champlain killed two of their number during his first exploratory journey by canoe up the Richelieu river and into Lake Champlain. At that time they resided along the banks of the Mohawk river in New York State; first near Fort Orange (Albany) at Ossernenon about 1642, then about 1660 further up the river at Kendaougue (Auriesville) and about 1668 at Kahnawaki (Caughnawaga).

Ossernenon was an Oneida village about 40 miles west of Fort Orange and Kateri Tekakwitha, the "Lily of the Mohawks", was born there in 1656. This is where the French priests: Isaac Jogues, Rene Goupil and John de la Lande, were martyred prior to 1650. In 1642 the first Jesuits, the "Black Robes", had travelled to the Mohawk valley to convert the pagan Iroquois to the Catholic faith and over the years many were martyred for their efforts.

In 1649 the Seigniory of Laprairie was granted to the Jesuits and following the building of a fort and a Jesuit mission in 1668, the first Christian Iroquois were persuaded to move from the Mohawk valley and to participate in colonization in the vicinity of Laprairie de la Madeleine (Kentake). The Marquis de Tracy had stuck terror into the hearts of the Iroquois by his expedition of 1666 and the peace which he concluded with them was to last 18 years, a most favourable period for the Jesuits and their Indian converts.

Kateri Tekakwitha was the daughter of a pagan Iroquois father and a Christian Algonquin mother who had been baptized at Three Rivers and carried away an Iroquois prisoner to the valley of the Mohawk. Smallpox took Kateri's parents and left her with impaired vision and marked features. Father James de Lamberville, following his arrival in 1675 prepared her for baptism and lay the foundations of her Christian training. She was baptized on Easter Sunday, April 18, 1676, at the age of 20. She was mocked and insulted as a Christian and in 1677, together with her brother-in-law and a Lorette Huron Indian, escaped via the Mohawk Valley and Lake Champlain to arrive at Sault St. Louis Mission. Kateri Tekakwitha was a miracle of grace in the Sault Mission and impressed all who came in contact with her.

The previous year in 1676 the Indians moved from Laprairie to the Portage river, nearer the foot of the Lachine rapids, where the mission consisted of twenty-two Huron and Iroquois cabins in addition to the chapel and Jesuit house. Two Huron and two Iroquois warriors governed the village. In 1670, Father Dablon, superior of the French Jesuit Missions in North America, decided

that a church should be erected in honor of St. Francis Xavier. It was here that Kateri spent the last few years of her life in purity and penance, dying peacefully during the afternoon of April 17th, 1680. She was buried in the cemetery by the riverside, near the first church which became Kateri Tekakwitha's Shrine. The fame of her holiness brought pilgrimages from far and wide including: Mgr. de Saint Vallier, Bishop of Quebec and the Marquis de Denonville, Governor of Canada, the Intendant de Champigny, etc. In 1890 a memorial was raised due to the generosity of Rev. Clarence Walsorth, Rector of St. Marys in Albany. It was surrounded by an iron railing and engraved:

Kateri Tekakwitha

April 17, 1680

"The Liveliest Flower

That Blossomed Among the Indians"

In 1689 the village moved to Kahnawakon at the foot of the Lachine rapids and here the Jesuits built the first grist mill, which stood until a few years ago. Today only a few stones remain in the mill race, located in the trailer park adjacent to the Cote Ste Catherine lock of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Here also has been relocated the cenotaph and monument of Kateri Takakwitha.

About 1719 the village moved for the fourth time to its present site at Kahnawaki (Caughnawaga). As early as 1714, Father Cholenec the indefatigable Jesuit in charge of the Iroquois mission during this period (1712-1722), had informed Governor de Vaudreuil that his Indians could no longer survive at Kahnawakon because the soil was worn out the forest too remote. The court in far away France finally allotted funds to build a new residence and fort at the present site of the mission church at Caughnawaga, on land that had been granted to the Jesuits many years before by intendant Jacques Duchesneau.

The present stone residence of the missionaries and priests was built about 1720 and the old yellow pine ceiling beams, some over twelve inches square and thirty feet long have been scraped and restored to their natural color. This rectory building also contains the old museum filled with interesting historical documents and relics, including the 824 page Iroquois-French and 590 page French-Iroquois dictionaries, a grammar of the complicated Iroquois language and many other manuscripts, parish records and archives, including those of early Chateaugay up until 1775. There is also stored in the fireproof vault the Iroquois baptismal records going back to 1735. As a matter of interest, the Iroquois language contains only 11 letters, 4 vowels: a, e, i, and o and 7 consonants: h, k(g), n, r (l), s, t, (d) and w. It is essentially a visual language, abstract nouns being unknown.

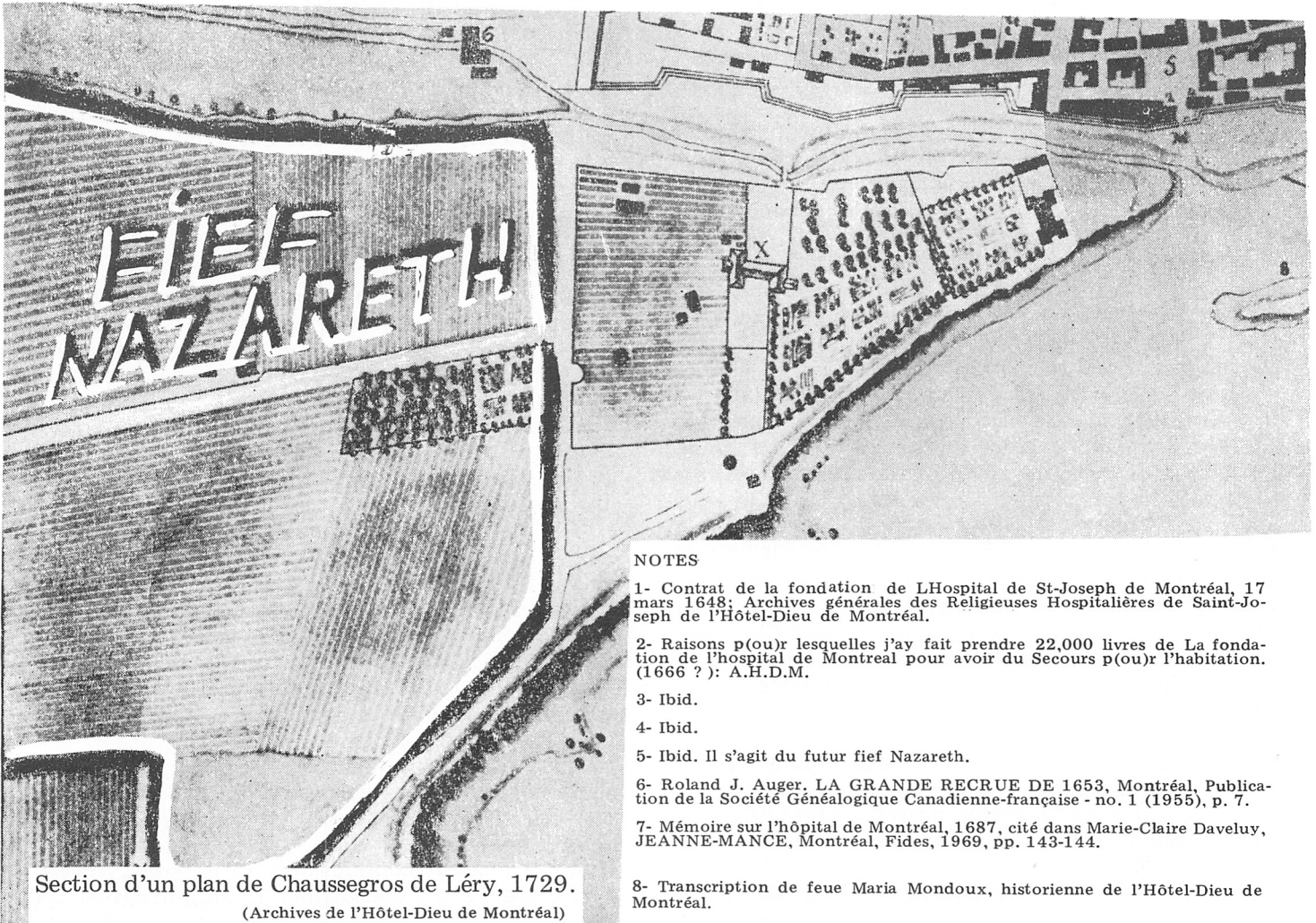
## UN CONTRAT D'ENGAGEMENT

“Le vingt troisième jour de Mars mil six cens cinquante-trois, après midy,

Par devant nous, Pierre de la Fousse, Notaire Royal à La Flèche et y demeurant, ont esté présens, establis & soubzmis, Paul de Chaumedei, escuyer, sieur de Maisonneuve, gouverneur de L'Isle et fort de Montréal et terres en dépendantes en la Nouvelle France et noble homme Hiérosme Le Royer, sieur de la Dauversière, Procureur de la Compagnie des Associez, pour la conversion des sauvages de la Nouvelle France en lad. isle de Montréal, demeurans scavoir led. sieur de Maison neuve, aud. fort de Ville Marie en lad. isle et led. sieur de la Dauversière, aud. La Flèche, d'une part. Et Pierre Godin, compagnon charpentier de la Ville de Chastillon sur Seine, Paul Benoist aussi compagnon charpentier de la ville de Dijon: René Truffault, aussi compagnon charpentier de la ville de Laval et Fiacre Ducharne, compagnon menuisier de la ville de Paris, estans tous de présent en ceste dite ville de la Flèche, d'autre part. Lesquelz ont fait et accordé ce que s'ensuict c'est à scavoir que lesd. Godin, Benoist, Bondy, Truffaut et Ducharne ont promis et se sont obligés servir en lad. isle de Montréal tant de leur mestier que aultres choses qui leur seront commandées dont ils seront capables durant cinq années entières et consécutives à commencer du jour qu'ils entreront dans lad. isle soubz le commandement dud. sieur de

Maison neuve a effect de quoy ils ont promis et se sont obligés mesme par corps de se rendre dans la la ville de Nantes au logis de Me Charles Lecocq, sieur de la Baussonnière, dans le dernier jour d'Avril prochain pour s'embarquer avecq led. sieur de Maison neuve pour led. pais au moyen de quoy, lesd. sieurs de Maison neuve et de la Dauversière esd. noms ont promis de les norrir, lever (sic) et coucher, tant pendant le voyage que led. temps de leurs services et iceluy finy les faire reconduire en France à leurs frais et despens sans qu'il en couste aulcune chose ausd. Godin et consort et de leur fournir de tous oustiz nécessaires pour les choses ausquelles l'on les emploira mesme de leur fournir à chascun d'eux une espée et un pistolet et en oultre de leur payer à chacun d'eux la somme de cent livres de gaigne par chacune desd. cinq années payables à la fin de chacune d'icelles fors que sur la première année il leur sera avancé ce qu'y leur sera nécessaire pour les équiper. Ce que dessus stipulé par les parties dont elles sont demeurées d'accord. Et à ce, faire et tenir et obligent & renoncent & fait aud. La Flèche, présens: Marin Bertin et René Maillet, praticien demeurans aud. La Flèche, tesmoins et lesd. Godin, Ducharme et Benoist, ont dict ne scavoir signer.

Paul de Chomedei - J. Le Royer - René Bondy - Maillet - Truffault - Bertin - P. de la Fousse, notaire”. (8)



### NOTES

1- Contrat de la fondation de L'Hospital de St-Joseph de Montréal, 17 mars 1648; Archives générales des Religieuses Hospitalières de Saint-Joseph de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal.

2- Raisons p(ou)r lesquelles j'ay fait prendre 22,000 livres de La fondation de l'hospital de Montreal pour avoir du Secours p(ou)r l'habitation. (1666 ?): A.H.D.M.

3- Ibid.

4- Ibid.

5- Ibid. Il s'agit du futur fief Nazareth.

6- Roland J. Auger, LA GRANDE RECRUE DE 1653, Montréal, Publication de la Société Généalogique Canadienne-française - no. 1 (1955), p. 7.

7- Mémoire sur l'hôpital de Montréal, 1687, cité dans Marie-Claire Daveluy, JEANNE-MANCE, Montréal, Fides, 1969, pp. 143-144.

8- Transcription de feu Maria Mondoux, historienne de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal.

Section d'un plan de Chaussegros de Léry, 1729.

(Archives de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal)

The museum also contains precious silver relics: a chalice from the Empress Eugenie, a ciborium, a holy water stoop and candle sticks, a crucifix and the most prized possessions: a wampum belt given by the Hurons to the Iroquois in 1676 on the occasion of their move from Laprairie to the Portage river and a silver-guilt monstrance, an outstanding example of French classic art and fitted with an extraordinary large lunette, the glass case containing the Host. This was presented to the Jesuit fathers to honor God in the first church of the Iroquois in 1668; given by Claude Prevost, an ex-alderman of Paris and his wife, Elizabeth LeGendre.

Behind this field stone residence of the Jesuits, stand the ruins of Fort St. Louis, partially erected in 1725 by the King of France to protect the Christian Iroquois. Only the lower walls and a powder magazine remain, marked by a bronze plaque:

“Ronontüo knows rowl rotenhaon  
kiken tekentstenroti mahotinonna  
nonkwe onwe tehatiason tha 1725”.

“Erected in 1725 by the French  
for the protection of the Christian  
Iroquois”.

The present church in Caughnawaga, around which so much revolves and built in 1845, was the work of Father Marcoux; a strong, resolute, forthright Jesuit, advocate, defender and petitioner of his parishioners for over 35 years. He was also a prolific writer in Iroquois and literally gave his life to these people, falling victim in 1855 to a typhoid epidemic. He lies buried in his church, St. Francis Xavier, a shrine to Kateri Tekakwitha, and final resting place for over 300 Iroquois and Jesuits.

For many years Father Marcoux petitioned the French kings and queens for a new church as the old one was in a state of decay and much too small.

In 1836 Marie Amelie, wife of Louis Philippe, King of France, sent the good father one thousand francs followed six years later by another similar gift, this time from the king. These gifts augmented by other small sums enabled Father Marcoux to begin construction of the church, architected by Father Felix Martin who also drew the plans for the church of St. Patrick in Montreal. Following further appeals over the years, new vestments and a chalice were received in the 1850's.

The church contains many fine wood carvings and panels and the ceiling is entirely covered with a beautiful painting from the brush of Guido Nincheri, an Italian artist of the Florentine school. There are also two beautiful oil paintings, gifts of Charles X of France in 1824, together with several large hand carved statues including one of St. Ignatius and one of St. Francis Xavier, both over a century old. There is also a large natural size Christus, a gift of the parishioners in commemoration of the thirty-five Iroquois high steel workers, an occupation that has made them famous in North America, who were killed in August, 1907, when part of the Quebec bridge fell into the St. Lawrence.

Perhaps more exciting and interesting than all of the relics, carvings and paintings in this old church is the story of the bells, particularly the Deerfield bell. Ordered about 1700, for the Indian mission by Father Nicholas, it was sent from France in a ship captured by the English and taken to Salem in Massachusetts. It was purchased at auction by the people of Deerfield and

hung in the belfry of the Puritan church. In 1704 at the direction of Governor de Vaudreuil, Major Hertel de Rouville, accompanied by French soldiers and Caughnawaga Indians, journeyed nearly 300 miles on snowshoes in the dead of winter, to attack Deerfield. They carried the bell away, all the way back to Lake Champlain. It weighed over 800 pounds and was temporarily buried there on the shores of Burlington bay. In the spring of 1705 it was finally carried to Caughnawaga and hung in the belfry of Francis Xavier church. In the June, 1969, issue of the National Geographic magazine there is an excellent article and color slides of this story. The Americans are still negotiating for its return to Deerfield.

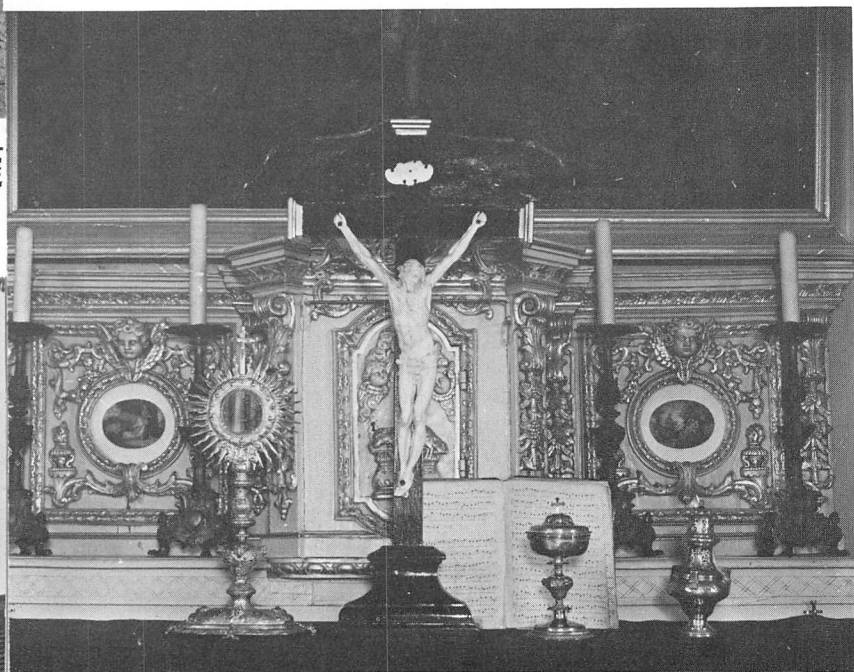
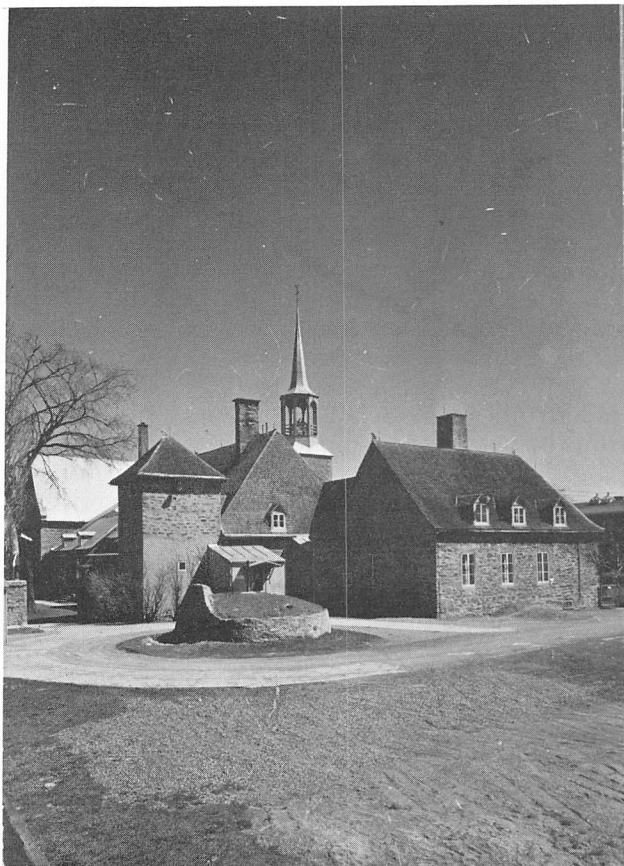
There have always been bells in the mission churches, even from the outset of the mission at La Prairie de La Madeleine. This bell was moved to the Portage river and then to Côte Ste-Catherine. While at the Portage river in August of 1683, a furious gale, the worst known to that date, wrecked the chapel, a building over sixty feet long and the two bells fell at the feet of Father Chauchetiere, one of three priests trapped in the ruins, all of whom escaped injury.

These bells were replaced in 1832 by one given by William IV of England, which was set up in the belfry beside the Deerfield bell. These two bells, one French and the other English, sang out the joys and sorrows of the little village for over one hundred years. In 1952 the King William IV bell cracked and was replaced. It now reposes on a concrete pad in front of the church. In 1967 the Deerfield bell tolled for the last time and the new bell was dedicated to Kateri Kameaktenha the first Indian to settle at the mission of St. Francis Xavier in 1667. She was a Christian Erie, who became in 1670, the foundress of the Confraternity of the Holy Family, which still exists in Caughnawaga.

Today Caughnawaga has over 3,000 habitants and nearly all but 350 are Catholic. It is still a haven for the Catholic Iroquois. Over 400 families are of Indian blood. The Iroquois have always been famed for their fighting heritage; from their earliest wars among other Indian tribes, their long and ferocious war with the French and their participation with the English in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812-14, the uprisings in 1837-38 in Quebec and in both World Wars. They also have a world wide reputation as excellent high steel workers and bridge builders and many participate in other professions.

They and other American Indians have given the world many things: democracy, deference to the public will, freedom and tolerance, a dignified culture of fine arts, music, design and handicrafts, hundreds of Indian words and place names, medicinal herbs, quinine, cocaine and curare, dyes and prints, sea island cotton, games of sport including hockey, lacrosse and handball, many principles of the Iroquois type of representative government, the example of woman suffrage, social security, freedom of religion and hundreds of cultivated plants and food products including: beans, strawberries, potatoes, tomatoes, pears, apples, vanilla, cucumbers, corn, oil of wintergreen, peppers, pumpkins, squash, sunflower oil, maple syrup, blackberries, raspberries, corn bread, cranberries, homin, peanuts, etc. The greatest gift of the Indian was America, the richest and most beautiful land on earth.





Top right —  
Aerial view of Caughnawaga, showing Côte-Sainte-Catherine Locks of the St. Lawrence Seaway and the spire of the church.

Top left —  
Part of Caughnawaga Rectory, located at the back of the church together with the Old Square Tower and Powder Magazine (early XVIIIe Century).

Bottom left —  
White Dove Oritetsrakan, Monitress of the Iroquois Choir of the St-Francis-Xavier Mission of Caughnawaga.

Bottom right —  
Reredos of the main altar of the church of Caughnawaga, carved by Vincent Chartrand, of the Quévillon school (St-Vincent-de-Paul) together with silver Monstrance (gift of Louis XIV), silver ciborium and, center, a beautiful Ivory Corpus.

(Photos Armour Landry)