

# The Jesuit Mission to North America

Fifty-three years after the Jesuits entered Mexico City, others from France, in 1625, settled in Quebec. Nine years later, others from England settled at St. Mary's City, Maryland. Segments of these three cultures, Spanish, French, English, from which grew the rich variety of the Church in the northern continent, were eventually to be brought together within one political unity by the creation and expansion of the United States of America.

—William V. Bangert, S.J., *(The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972)*



▲ Figure 1. *Nouveau Plan de la Nouvelle France*, 1657. Illustrated map by Francesco Bressani, S.J. (1612-72). The first Italian Jesuit in North America. National Library of Canada, Ottawa.

## BLACK ROBES ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

Although the Huronia mission met its demise at the hands of the Iroquois Confederacy. The Iroquois sacked and burned Huron villages in 1647–49, and killed the Jesuits residing there (including Jean de Brébeuf, Gabriel Lalemant, and Antoine Daniel) after one of the lengthiest and most gruesome torture sessions in the annals of history, an episode immortalized in this engraving.

Black Robe was the name given by Native Americans to 17th-century Jesuit missionaries to America. Among these men were the North American Martyrs, six priests of the Society of Jesus and their two lay companions from the Jesuit mission of Huronia, martyred by the Iroquois between 1642 and 1649 and canonized by Pius XI in 1930.

chaplain to troops because he could not learn Huron; by drowning for Father Ménard; by disease and exhaustion for Father Marquette.

Commoner still, and bitterly felt, were the humiliations of Father Davost, that perennially inept traveler; or the grinding discouragement that led Father de Crépeul, to sign himself “an unprofitable servant of the Missions of Canada”; or the frustrations of Father de Carheil, unable to keep his converts away from brandy. Eight of the Jesuit missionaries to North America have been declared saints, but the Relations show that even the saints were entirely human and therefore entirely interesting.

—S. R. Mealling, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: A Selection* (Catholic University Press, 1906)

### NORTH AMERICA MARTYRS

St. Jean de Brébeuf, S.J.	St. Isaac Jogues, S.J.
St. Noel Chabanel, S.J.	St. Gabriel Lalemant, S.J.
St. Antoine Daniel, S.J.	St. René Goupil
St. Charles Garnier, S.J.	St. Jean de Lalande

The Jesuit missionaries in North America have been abundantly idealized. They were indeed a highly selected body of men; but their archetype is hardly to be found in a martyr like Father Brébeuf, who conducted his mission with such ebullient success and met his cruel death with such fervent courage. There were humbler forms of martyrdom: death by exposure for poor Father de Noue, relegated to be

## New Spain

In 1566, only a decade after Ignatius's death, the third Jesuit General, St. Francis Borja, responding to the request of Philip II of Spain, sent Pedro Martinez, S.J., and two companions to Florida. Martinez was former rector of the Jesuit college at Valladolid but had begged for the privilege of serving the missions. He was the first Jesuit to enter what is now the United States and the first to be martyred there as he reached the shore.

## New France

The first permanent Jesuit mission in Quebec was founded in 1625. During their first years, the Jesuits studied Amerindian languages, since ministry to the indigenous people was a primary goal. By 1632, the Jesuits launched their missionary efforts among the Amerindians, an enterprise that soon gained them worldwide fame thanks to the publication of their *Relations* in Paris by Paul Le Jeune, S.J. Like their counterparts in Spanish America, the Jesuits soon realized the dangers of having Amerindian villages too close to European settlements—owing to colonial animosity toward the indigenous population and the corrupting influence of brandy and other vices—and founded reductions, or mission towns, outside the colonial centers.

## The British Colonies

The Jesuit mission in Maryland began with the foundation of the colony. On March 25, 1634, the first expedition of the Lords Baltimore landed at St. Clement's Island at the mouth of the Potomac River. There Fr. Andrew White offered Mass and Governor Leonard Calvert raised a ceremonial cross. It was the beginning of Catholicism in English-speaking America. As the suffocating social atmosphere [anti-Catholic legislation] of Maryland became worse and social ostracism more stringent, the Jesuits looked to the freer atmosphere of Pennsylvania. There, in 1733, Fr. Joseph Greaton opened the Chapel of St. Joseph at Willing's Alley in Philadelphia.

—William V. Bangert, S.J., *—Gavin Alexander Bailey*

## A Jesuit Saint's Connection to the Game of Lacrosse

Lacrosse is the oldest sport in North America. Played in different forms by a number of Amerindians to resolve conflicts or to heal the sick, lacrosse was documented in 1636 by Jesuit missionary and saint, Jean de Brébeuf (1593-1649). Called “baggataway” by Native Americans, Brébeuf christened the game “lacrosse” because the stick reminded him of a bishop's crosier, la crosse in French.

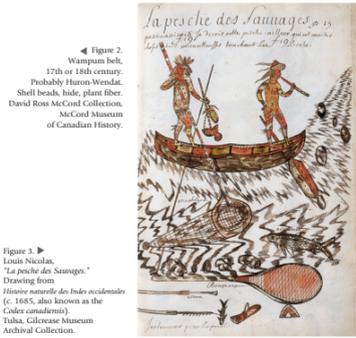


▲ Figure 2. Wampan belt, 17th or 18th century. Probably Huron-Wendat. Shell beads, hide, plant fiber. David Ross McCord Collection, McCord Museum of Canadian History.

This important belt may have been made by a Huron community to celebrate the band's decision to allow the Jesuits to build a chapel in their village, possibly the first wooden church in the Huron village of Ossosané, situated on Georgian Bay in present-day Southern Ontario, in the summer of 1638.

A traditional way of commemorating treaties among many Native American peoples, wampan belts were made of white and purple beads made from the Atlantic seashells. The Huron belt uses the traditional technique and color scheme, with a predominance of purple signifying the solemnity of the occasion, and it has a traditional arrangement of forms—in this case human figures—linked into a horizontal row to signify concordance. But the Huron belt also incorporates one of the oldest surviving Amerindian depictions of a Christian church and one of a Christian cross.

This Jesuit manuscript is one of the most important records of life in early Canada. Nicolas illustrated his manuscript with ink drawings showing the flora, fauna, and peoples of New France.



▲ Figure 3. Louis Nicolas, “La pesche des Sauvages,” drawing from *Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales* (c. 1685, also known as the *Cadre canadiennes*). Yale, Gilcrease Museum Archival Collection.

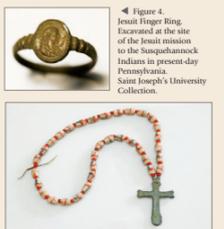
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## “outward signs of our holy Religion”

Jesuit missionaries used pictures and statues in their very earliest years in North America, beginning with Pierre Biard in Acadia, who during his sermons inside Wabanaki longhouses would pass out crucifixes and images (either engravings or small statues) to his audience, and give them medallions with Christ or the Virgin Mary to hang around their necks. During the 1630s and 1640s in Huronia, the Jesuits introduced Christian imagery by means of metal medallions, paintings on cloth or leather, simple engravings from France and Flanders, relics, rosaries, and rings. They used these in teaching the basic tenets of Christianity, and they also tried to convince the disease-stricken Hurons that images could cure them. The Jesuits

wrote about the “esteem” the Hurons and some Iroquois had for the “outward signs of our holy Religion. Crosses, medals, and other similar Articles,” they wrote, “are their most precious jewels. So fondly do they preserve These that they wear them around their Necks, even at preaching in New Holland, where The heretics have never been able to tear from Them a single bead of Their Rosaries.” From the very beginning, indigenous religious specialists recognized the power of Christian images, and believed that objects such as crosses directly hindered their own efficacy by negating their medicine bundles, rattles, masks, and other sacred objects.

—Gavin Alexander Bailey in *The Jesuits and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005)



▲ Figure 4. Jesuit Finger Ring. Excavated at the site of the Jesuit mission to the Senoiahannock Indians in present-day Pennsylvania. Saint Joseph's University Collection.

▲ Figure 5. Jesuit rosary with cross. Used as an item of trade between the Jesuits and Amerindians. Shaped mineral “trade” beads with bronze cross strung on deerskin lace. 18th century, America. Saint Joseph's University Collection.

## The Italian Jesuits in America Brokers of Culture

“Thanks be to God and Garibaldi,” exclaimed Joseph Keller, S.J., Provincial of the Maryland Province, grateful that the Italians had made America their destination. Their arrival strengthened both the Church and the Jesuit order at a crucial time when priests were badly needed.

The Founding of Woodstock College, Maryland The Italians' crowning achievement was the founding in 1869 of Woodstock College, a national seminary for the cultivation of Jesuit priests that recast the way that American Jesuits would live, study, and work. Americans would now pursue the same course of studies in philosophy and theology that was standard in Europe, thus pulling them into the intellectual orbit of the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus worldwide. The seminary's European faculty transformed the way theology was taught to Americans and professionalized the clergy, thereby launching a tradition of theological reflection and scholarship.

Woodstock College became for many Neapolitans a stepping stone to their missions in distant New Mexico, Denver, and California after finishing their studies and learning English. A flourishing college press issued a flood of textbooks in theology, philosophy, science, and mathematics. As soon as Alessandro Diomedi made foothold in the United States in 1874, for example, he rushed to Woodstock to master the printer's trade before centering off to the Indian Missions. Thus prepared, he founded the St. Ignatius Mission Press in Montana, which published scores of dictionaries and grammars of native languages.

When an early chronicler claimed there was “no more decisive turning point in the story of Jesuit development in America” than the opening of Woodstock College, he was not far from the truth. But by 1960 it was clear that Woodstock's physical seclusion mirrored and abetted its intellectual isolation and fostered an unwillingness to reflect positively on secular culture and on the American Catholic experience. The College moved to New York City in 1969 and closed in 1974 as a result of decreasing candidates to the priesthood.

### Italians in the West

With the nation's Catholic population doubling every decade, church leaders competed to acquire the services of the displaced Italians as they began arriving in 1848 in the wake of Risorgimento. But besides ministering to whites of all nationalities, Jesuit missionaries worked among 17 different Native American tribes in dozens of missions serving approximately 25,000 Native Americans.

Once they arrived in an untrod locale, the Jesuits immediately began composing word lists, dictionaries, and grammars to be used by their successors. These works were subsequently published by presses erected at Jesuit Missions. Thus, they applied their new learning to the task of translation of prayers and the catechism into the languages of the Blackfeet, Flathead, Kalispel, Nez Percés, Kootenai, and Salish, among others.

In addition to pastoral work, the education of youth was as much a priority for Jesuits in the American West as it was elsewhere in the world. In fact, perhaps the most lasting legacy of the Italian Jesuits lies in the numerous preparatory schools and the five universities they founded, including Santa Clara University and the University of San Francisco; Gonzaga University and Seattle University in Washington; and Regis University in Colorado.

—Gerald McKewitt, S.J., *Brokers of Culture: Italian Jesuits in the American West, 1848-1919* (Stanford University Press, 2007)

## The Jesuits in Maryland

Unlike the mission in French Canada, the Maryland mission left no paintings or sculptures, no experimental emblem books—indeed, no objects of any kind other than a handful of church silver, books, and writings. The surviving residences of the Jesuits look no different from the Georgian manors of their Protestant neighbors except for the presence of modest attached chapels, and even the few full-scale churches the Society was able to build during the eighteenth century exactly resemble the churches of the Quakers and Puritans. But precisely these similarities make them interesting. The buildings of the Maryland Jesuits represent an accommodation to the prevailing culture of Anglo-America. And this accommodation was so successful that the Jesuits survived not only 150 years of colonial British rule but even the 1773 universal suppression of the Jesuits by Pope Clement XIV.

The Maryland colony was the only settlement in English America to tolerate Catholicism. Founded on March 25, 1634, under the patronage of the Catholic Lord Baltimore, the colony counted three Jesuits—Fathers Andrew White (1579-1656) and John Altham alias Gravenor (1589-1640) and Brother Thomas Gervase (1590-1637)—among its first settlers. In an era when the penal laws prohibited the practice of Catholicism in England and its other American colonies, Maryland seemed to provide an extraordinary opportunity for the Jesuits, whose activities in England were notable primarily for ending in martyrdom.

### John Carroll

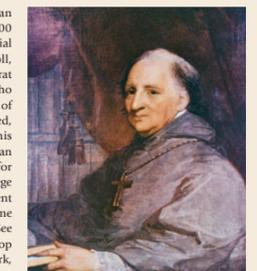
The Suppression of the Society in 1773 and the American Revolution brought the tiny American Church of 30,000 Catholics to the most perilous state in its history. In this crucial period there emerged the impressive figure of John Carroll, former Jesuit (after the Suppression in 1773), an aristocrat of polish and social ease, but above all a man of vision who not only sensed a great future for the young United States of America but also divined, because of the freedom it enjoyed, a vigorous Church. He took the initiative in rallying his fellow ex-religious in order to guarantee three things: first, an organization of former Jesuits to hold the mission lands for the day when the Society would be restored; second, a college (Georgetown) which would be a source of an intelligent Catholic laity and probably of priestly vocations; third, some sort of definite connection with Rome. In 1789 the Holy See designated him the first bishop of Baltimore. In 1808, Bishop Carroll became Archbishop, with suffragan sees at New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Bardstown, Kentucky.

—Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J.



▲ Figure 6. Saint Francis Xavier Church, Newtowne Neck, Maryland, 1731. The most interesting of the surviving Jesuit manors is Newtown Manor House in Saint Mary's County, with its adjacent church of Saint Francis Xavier. Although the manor itself is a rather plain structure, the church is a work of great elegance. Its tripartite porch and apse and its prominent steeple over the front door, added within a few years of the construction of the church, give the building a Dutch or Central European appearance.

It is the oldest Roman Catholic church structure in continuous use in Anglo-Colonial America. Built on land farmed by the Jesuits, it was originally disguised as a tobacco barn to belie its real function.



▲ Figure 7. Archbishop John Carroll Gilbert Stuart, c. 1803-5. Courtesy: Georgetown University.



▲ Figure 8. Jacques Marquette and the Indians, 1649. Wilhelm Lamprecht (German, 1838-1906). Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University.

Jacques Marquette, S.J., (1637-75) French Jesuit missionary, paddled down the Wisconsin River with fellow explorer, Louis Joliet, in 1673 and “discovered” the Mississippi River. Marquette drew a map of the country through which he passed and kept a diary of the voyage that is one of the most interesting and important documents of early American history. On his return to the mission in Kaskaskia (Illinois), his party built a log hut, the first human dwelling place on the site of what is now the city of Chicago.

## The Jesuits in Canada and the Great Lakes

The legacy of the Old Society Jesuits in non-Spanish North America, divided between Canada and Maryland, embodies a dramatic contrast. In New France (Nouvelle France), consisting of today's Quebec, Canadian Maritime provinces, and Great Lakes region, the Jesuits were the emissaries of a triumphant Church. On the one hand, they engaged in one of the world's best known—if at times famously tragic—missionary efforts, among the Huron, Iroquois, and other Amerindian peoples; on the other hand, they built the grandest churches and colleges ever seen in colonial North America, foundations that proclaimed the sovereignty of Louis XIV's France.

were doomed to failure owing to the colonists' brutal eradication of the first inhabitants of the region. Instead of grand churches and colleges, the Maryland Jesuits built innocuous-looking manor houses, humble chapels, and (in the eighteenth century) a handful of parish churches. Yet despite their differences, the Canadian and Maryland missions had something important in common: in both regions, the missionary Jesuits succeeded because they made bold accommodations to non-Catholic cultures, adopting a policy that had already become a Jesuit trademark around the world.

The most celebrated of the Jesuit missions was Huronia. The Jesuit openness to other Amerindian groups gained them the friendship of the Attigawantan, the largest band of the Hurons (Wendat), a confederacy that controlled 50 percent of Canada's lucrative fur trade. Jesuits such as Brébeuf wrote Huron grammars and dictionaries and immersed themselves in the indigenous culture.

During this period the Jesuits also began the last great mission expansion before the suppression. Beginning in the 1660s, they returned to the Great Lakes region and expanded outward into what are now the states of Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The best known of the Great Lakes Jesuits was Jacques Marquette (1637-75), who came to the region in 1668 and is most celebrated for accompanying the explorer Louis Joliet (1645-1700) on the first French expedition down the Mississippi River in 1673, as far as the Arkansas-Louisiana border.

Meanwhile, in the Maryland colony, the Jesuits lived a life of intense secrecy, working against incredible odds to promulgate the faith among a scattering of Catholics in an overwhelmingly Protestant part of the world. The Jesuits there dressed as lay gentlemen or Quakers and attended to their widespread flocks on horseback. Their missionary aims among the indigenous peoples

Jesuit missionaries such as Paul du Ru (1666-1741) were active in today's Mississippi and Louisiana between 1699 and 1704, both in the nascent colony of Mobile and among the Indian tribes of the Mississippi Delta (the town of Jesuit Bend, Louisiana, attests to their legacy).

—Gavin Alexander Bailey in *The Jesuits and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005)



▲ Figure 9. Indian Chapel, Tadoussac. Founded 1640, rebuilt 1747-50 by Father Claude-Godolin Coquery.

The only surviving Old Society church in French Canada is a humble chapel in Tadoussac, built to serve the Montagnais reduction there. It has the traditional pitched roof and clocher of the earliest Jesuit structures in Quebec. This church is also the only surviving wooden church from before the Conquest in all of New France.