

Kateri Tekakwitha Escaped Death at Hands of Mohawks

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had turned Christian. He was a chief. As chief he hated the decay the white man's rum was causing in his tribe. He combatted drunkenness by tossing the drunks of his tribe into the village pigsty until they sobered up.

There was even more for Kateri to remember as she stood atop the hill, waiting for the return of her party member. Of more immediate import was the reason for the trip to Canada through a wilderness broken only by foot trails. There was her pagan uncle with whom she had lived. This gentleman was not noted for his calmness. And at the time of her flight he was in Albany, enjoying, no doubt, a convivial shindig with his Dutch buddies.

THE FLIGHT BEGINS

An Indian village was a goldfish bowl to live in. Nobody ever left it undetected, what with the dogs and children to contend with. But Kateri, Hot Ashes and her relative did make the break, hoping to be well started on their trip before the uncle learned of it. They paddled down the swift Mohawk, past the site of Amsterdam, to the Kinauarones, now known as Hoffman's on Route 5, about ten miles west of Schenectady. Here is Wolf Hollow, a spectacular fissure in the earth's surface. Through this ravine ran the trail to Canada.

On the arrival of provisions, the party faded into the ravine and began the long trek northward. The pace was set by Kateri but her slowness worried the

north trail from the site of Amsterdam. Actually she had been well hidden!

Days later Kateri's party moved to the Canadian mission, and here they found not only Mohawks, but Hurons and Algonquins, living harmoniously. Kateri died four years later, still consecrated to God. Her mortal remains rest at Caughnawaga, in a small casket sealed by the Bishop of Montreal. At the mission is the monsternance before which she worshipped. A memorial, contributed by Rev. Clarence Wadsworth of Albany, was raised in 1890; is engraved with these words:

"Kateri Tekakwitha, April 17, 1680, the loveliest flower that blossomed among the Indians."

Today Caughnawaga is a community of more than 3,000 Mohawks, the dominant tribe which absorbed those from other nations. The dominant religion is Catholic, but there are Protestants as well. And, at one time, there were pagans, Mohawks who clung to their old beliefs.

WAIT CANONIZATION

For 15 years, Rev. Real Lalonde, a frequent visitor at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Leon J. Desruisseau, 21 Hawk St., Schenectady, was director at Caughnawaga. He is now stationed at the St. Regis Mohawk reservation in New York. Rev. Henri Bechard, S. J., has replaced him, and his choice as successor is particularly appropriate, since Father Bechard is vice postulator for the canonization of Kateri in Canada. The Rev. Thomas J. Coffey, former director of Auriesville Shrine is



AT ST. REGIS—Rev. Real Lalonde, former director at Caughnawaga for 15 years, is now stationed at the Mohawk Indian St. Regis Reservation in upper New York State. He has been a frequent visitor to this area.

now director of the Tekakwitha League in New York City, and is vice postulator in America. Postulator means one who claims or advocates. Fathers Bechard and Coffey, therefore, serve as a "clearing house" for miracles or miraculous cures attributed to Kateri. Two must be authenticated in Rome before the girl can be declared saintly. And they must be passed upon medically.

Should all pertinent laws be fulfilled, the Indian girl probably will be canonized. Should she not be, then the entire Albany Metropolitan Area will have received a distinct honor nonetheless. She will remain a symbol of the times when Christianity itself, rather than one particular faith, entered the Mohawk nation.



EARLY WEAPON—George Stacey and Tommy Stacey, two Mohawk boys at Caughnawaga, pose with stone axe used in early tribal warfare, probably in the Mohawk Valley. The boys are direct descendants of Mohawks who once lived near Fonda, baptismal place of Kateri Tekakwitha. Even today the old Iroquois village, also known as Caughnawaga, is being excavated in an effort to find remains of the chapel in which the baptism occurred on Easter Sunday, 1676.

chief. So this plan was evolved: Kateri's relative was to walk a half mile behind, and if he saw the uncle he was to fire a warning shot.

The plan was timely, because the uncle was tipped off to the escape of his niece, did race into Fonda to verify it, and did pick up the pursuit with loaded gun. Somewhere in Saratoga County he was spotted by Kateri's relative, who fired his gun. The relative explained to the uncle he was "hunting." A half mile farther the uncle dashed into a small clearing and there, to his amazement, he saw Hot Ashes, resting on the ground, comfortably smoking his pipe! Neither man spoke a word. The uncle looked about, saw nothing more, and still silent, he moved on the return trail. Those who have studied the escape say he figured he had been ill-advised; that Kateri had taken the