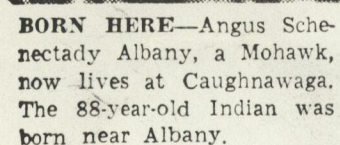


By BARNETT "SPEC" FOWLER
Times-Union Staff Writer

Two men leaped nimbly from the canoe as it rammed the north shore of the Mohawk River. They were big men, in the prime of life, and they smelled strongly of sweat and grease and campfires. The third member of the party was a 20-year-old girl, of fragile build, also buckskin clad. Despite the day's heat a shawl covered her head.



expected to become the first American born saint.

If the fact that a Mohawk Indian girl may attain such position is unusual, so was Kateri. In a nation noted in its early days for moral looseness, she remained a virgin. In a nation noted for pagan worship she was abused and threatened with death for her Christianity.

When she stood on Touerueua Hill in the Town of Glenville, Schenectady County, 276 years ago while one of her companions dashed into Schenectady for provisions for the gruelling trip northward into Canada, Kateri had much to think, much to worry about. Before her lay the unknown. Behind was misery.

Born at Auriesville, Kateri was orphaned at four when smallpox killed her Christian Algonquin mother, her Mohawk father and her brother. The disease left more than mental suffering; it weakened her eyesight, thus necessitating the shawl, and it disfigured her features. Years later she moved to a second Mohawk village, across the river, known as Caughnawaga (now Fonda) and here she was baptized at 19.

REFUGE IN RELIGION

It was after the baptism that her life became completely miserable; she was known contemptuously as "The Christian," and the lonely figure huddled in the semigloom of the Mohawk long house, shielding her eyes from glare, submissive in her silence to the taunts and threats of violence by her pagan tribesmen, found refuge only in her new religion.

Then one day an Oneida chief, known to the whites as Louis Garonhiague and to the Indians as Hot Ashes, appeared at Caughnawaga. With him was a male relative of Kateri's. The chief urged her to leave the Mohawk Valley, to go to Canada, to the Sault St. Louis Mission near Montreal, which today is known as Caughnawaga. Here, he told the girl, were the "praying Indians," the Iroquois converted by the Jesuits. Here, he said, she would find the sanctuary she sought.

AN UNUSUAL INDIAN

Hot Ashes is hardly a serious name to connect with a girl who has been declared venerable by her church. The comical aspect to such a name can be forgotten by remembering that the Indians gave highly descriptive names to one another. Further, the cold light of history reveals that Hot Ashes was an unusual Indian. He had murdered a Jesuit. He

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