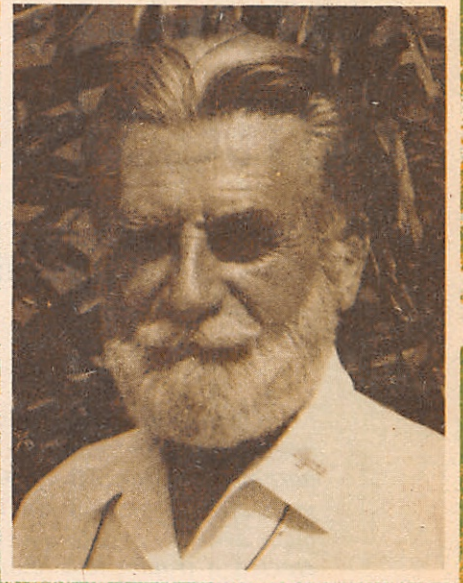


# THE JESUIT

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HERE IS A PARTIALLY secluded and little known district in northern New York and along the banks of the St. Lawrence River. It is a part of what was once known as Mohawk country and the river of that name still winds serenely from Albany to Buffalo. This was the home of the

five nations of the great Iroquois tribe and in the village along the Mohawk the first Jesuit missionaries built their rude chapels, lived their selfless lives and died in the Name of the Christ whom they had brought to these peoples.

There are memories along these time-worn trails. In this Bicentennial year when other memories are paramount let us also remember that there was more than a century and a half from the first colonization to the American Revolution. Our country was not born in the light of the lanterns in the belfry of Boston's Old North Church, but rather in the radiance of those who first came to these shores seeking religious liberty. A lot of living had gone on before Paul Revere went on his midnight gallop.

Three hundred years ago — April 18, 1676 — Kateri



*Kateri Tekakwitha, Lily of the Mohawks*

Tekakwitha was baptized a child of God by Father de Lamberville S.J. This "Lily of the Mohawks" had not walked an easy path to that day. Born twenty years before in the village of Ossernenon (the present Auriesville, N.Y.) where Isaac Joques and his Jesuit companions had been martyred only a few years previously, her family had been wiped out by a small-pox epidemic when she was a tiny girl. The disease had also left its ravages on her, and in the home of the pagan relatives who adopted her she lived a life apart, though always a cheerful and hard worker.

In 1667 three Jesuit missionaries arrived among the Iroquois and Kateri was assigned to look after them. Her mother had been a Christian and those already baptized in the village provided an example for Kateri which she longed to follow. She confided her desire to one of the missionaries but both of them foresaw the difficulties her conversion would bring. Kateri simply answered that she was prepared to suffer everything to become a Christian.

So a day that is now three hundred years old came to pass and on Easter, 1676, Kateri was baptized. Her life became a model of virtue and a seemingly unbroken union with God. Then the difficulties which had been foreseen broke out around her. Many in the village found her a constant reproach to their own lives and their former admiration turned to hatred of her piety, modesty and purity. She was threatened with death — there was one moment when she knelt and awaited the downward swing of a tomahawk — her purity was calumniated, and she was subjected to persecution of all kinds.

The next year the missionary helped Kateri to escape from Ossernenon to the mission of St. Francis Xavier in Caughnawaga, south of Montreal Island, Quebec. This was the village the Iroquois converts called "the Praying Castle" and it had served as a refuge for the new Christians who could no longer stand the environment of their native villages. Here Kateri lived a life of peace, penance and charity before she died a few years later. She was the first of the Indian race to take a private vow of chastity and her heroic virtues led Pope Pius XII to declare her Venerable in 1943. May 1976 see her raised to the highest honors of Sainthood!

**Clement J. Armitage S.J.**

# echo



What has happened to the mission villages that dotted the Mohawk Valley in the 17th Century? The St. Regis Mission, founded in 1752 as an offshoot of St. Francis Xavier in Caughnawaga, is home for the descendants of a number of Mohawks, Oneidas and Onondagas, the first converts of the five nations of the Iroquois. The mission lies both in Canada and the United States, between St. Anicet, Quebec, and Messina, New York, on the southern bank of the St. Lawrence River. It extends into three dioceses, Alexander and Valleyfield in Canada and Ogdensburg, N.Y.

The village of Ossernenon where Kateri was baptized is still commemorated in the chapel of what is now Fonda, N.Y. The Onondaga mission of St. Mary's of the Pines, once called "the Cradle of the Faith" because of its centrality and stability, was located near Jamesville, N.Y. but was leveled to the ground in 1709 by the Indians at the time of Frontenac's invasion. (In the Autumn '75 issue of *The Jesuit* Father Richard McKeon recounted the martyrdom of three Christian Indians at the spot.)

So the St. Regis Reserve is the most enduring of all the early mission locations. The Jesuits administered it since its founding in 1752 up to 1783 when the English government interfered. There was no resident priest for the next six years until the renowned Father George Rodriques McDonnell, a diocesan priest who built many churches in northern New York, took over for the next 17 years. After that the diocesan priests were in charge for over a century until 1937 when the Jesuits returned.

There was jubilation on the Reserve when Father Michael Jacobs S.J. appeared among the people. He is the only Mohawk Jesuit priest in the world and was born at the old St. Francis Mission in Caughnawaga. The priest who baptized would return to ordain him, now Archbishop William Forbes of Ottawa.

So for the last 38 years Father Jacobs has labored among his own people. He speaks the Mohawk language perfectly and he knows his Indians as only one of their own could. There are about 5200 of them on the St. Regis Reserve, 90% of them Catholic, and he is proud of their accomplishments and their ability to stand on their own feet. They are well educated, on both the Canadian and American sides of the Reserve, some even going on



*St. Regis Church, built in 1791.*

to university level. The youth in their schools and the adults at their jobs have proven that they are hard-working and skillful.

The best known Mohawk workers are those who manipulate the steel in big construction jobs, skyscrapers, bridges, etc. in all the big cities of New York State. But as a matter of fact the other men of St. Regis find work readily available on both sides of the St. Lawrence. Father Jacobs claims that, as far as he knows, there is no Indian on the Reserve who is poor or hard-up. Like all people, they know they must work to live.

Behind that exterior virtue, which is far from common with other Reservation Indians, one can detect the drumbeat of the faith that has sounded through the Mohawk Valley for over three centuries. These people have been true to their God and to their fellow men. Let us join them in their most heartfelt prayer — that their Indian sister, the Venerable Kateri, may soon be the first of their nation to be acclaimed a saint.

*Fr. Jacobs S.J., first and only Iroquois priest.*



# es along the mohawk