



The GRAND PORTAGE

MISSION: 1731-1965

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IN THE FAR northeastern corner of Minnesota, wedged between Lake Superior and the province of Ontario, lies the Grand Portage Indian Reservation. There, in a Chipewewa village on the banks of Grand Portage Bay, begins the strategic nine-mile trail which bypasses the falls of the lower Pigeon River and which once made this isolated spot the headquarters of a continent-wide fur trade empire. On a hill overlooking the village stands Holy Rosary Church, a structure of tamarack logs covered with white clapboard. Built just a hundred years ago, it serves what has often been called the oldest Catholic parish in Minnesota.

Missionary activity at Grand Portage began in the first half of the eighteenth century with the onset of the French fur trade in the area. After 1731 successive fur traders and

explorers were accompanied by Jesuit missionaries who endured the perils of the wilderness to bring their religion to the French and Indians of the western posts.

The first priest to arrive at the Grand Portage was the Reverend Charles Michel Mesaiger, who accompanied the trader and explorer Pierre Gaultier, Sieur de la Vérendrye. When the party reached the mouth of the Pigeon River in August, 1731, they realized that navigation was impossible and that they would have to make a lengthy portage to the upper river. Only an Indian trail existed, and a path had to be cut to transport the canoes and merchandise through the woods. The voyageurs balked at doing this, so La Vérendrye sent his nephew, Christophe Dufrost de la Jemeraye, over the portage with three canoes and on to Rainy Lake. The rest of the party, including Father Mesaiger, paddled along the north shore of Lake Superior to the mouth of the Kaministiquia River. They spent the winter near the present site of Fort William, Ontario, and then returned to cross the Grand Portage and push westward to Lake of the

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Woods. There, on what is now Magnuson Island, they established Fort St. Charles.¹

Father Mesaiger returned to Quebec in 1733; his health was broken and he never again engaged in mission work. In 1735 he was replaced by another Jesuit priest, the Reverend Jean-Pierre Aulneau, who followed the Grand Portage route west to La Vérendrye's headquarters. He found the journey a rigorous one; a forest fire was raging and for most of the distance west of Lake Superior the party traveled "through fire and a thick stifling smoke which prevented us from catching a glimpse of the sun."²

Father Aulneau was never again to pass over the portage trail, for he accompanied a group of nineteen Frenchmen, commanded by Jean-Baptiste, eldest son of La Vérendrye, who left Fort St. Charles in June, 1736, for Mackinac Island to obtain supplies. After a single day's journey over Lake of the Woods they landed on an island to spend the night and were set upon by Sioux, who massacred the entire party.³

His successor was the Reverend Claude Godfrey Coquart, who wintered on the Kaministiquia River with La Vérendrye's company in 1741. The next fall, hearing of possible Indian trouble, he went to Grand Portage to try to prevent war between the Chippewa and the Sioux. The Marquis de Beauharnois, governor of New France, reported the incident thus in a letter to the French minister of marine on October 13, 1742: "Father Coquart, returning from the post of Kaministikwia, writes me on the ninth of last month that Sieur de la Vérendrye's men being at Grand Portage, the Saulteurs [*Chippewa*] of that post came to hold council with an Indian chief of that place who possesses much influence; that this chief told him last spring that it was intended to make a descent on the Sioux, that he had represented to them several times that this was going directly against my orders; that the result nevertheless of the different councils held was that the Saulteurs of point Chagouamigon [*La Pointe, Wisconsin*] . . . were to assure them during part of the win-

ter by living on good terms with them, so that the Sioux, considering themselves to be at peace and having no suspicion, shall of a sudden find enemies on their hands. The chief, in question, with the tribes from Nipigon, Kaministikwia, Tecamamiouen [*Rainy Lake*], the Monsoni, Cree, and Assiniboin are to fall on them and create all the carnage they can." Whether Father Coquart was successful in preventing this treachery is not known.⁴

LA VÉRENDRYE held the sole trading license for the country beyond Lake Superior until 1747, when he fell from favor with the French authorities. After that other French traders pushed eagerly into the Northwest by way of the Grand Portage trail. The treaty of 1763 gave the entire region to the British, and missionary activity among the Indians at Grand Portage virtually ceased until 1837. This period of seventy-four years saw the organization of the North West Company, the establishment of a fort on the bay, and the peak of traffic over the portage trail. By the treaty of 1783 the area became American territory, but only after twenty years of illegal occupation did the North West Company bow to the inevitable and move its headquarters across the border to Fort William.⁵

The busy post at Grand Portage then lapsed from its commercial prominence into

¹ Nellis M. Crouse, *La Vérendrye: Fur Trader and Explorer*, 57, 59 (Ithaca, New York, 1956); Colman Barry, "The Great Carrying Place," in Vincent A. Yzermans, ed., *Catholic Origins of Minnesota*, 41 (St. Paul, 1961); Francis J. Nelligan, "Catholic Missionary Labours on the Lake Superior Frontier, 1667-1751," in *Ontario History: Papers and Records*, 51:240 (Autumn, 1959).

² Nelligan, in *Ontario History*, 51:242, 244.

³ Crouse, *La Vérendrye*, 59, 61, 63, 67, 100, 107; Emmett A. Shanahan, "Minnesota's Forgotten Martyr," in Yzermans, *Catholic Origins*, 35, 36.

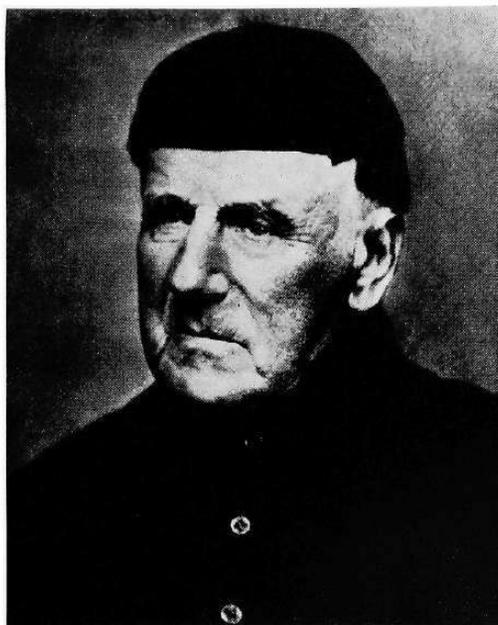
⁴ Nelligan, in *Ontario History*, 51:247-249. The governor's letter is quoted on page 249; the ellipsis marks are Father Nelligan's.

⁵ Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 188-195, 228 (Toronto, 1962); Solon J. Buck, "The Story of Grand Portage," in *Minnesota History*, 5:14-27 (February, 1923).

a sleepy Chippewa village. It was visited briefly in 1818 by the Reverend Pierre Antoine Tabeau, who had spent some months at Fort William; after that, nineteen years passed before another Catholic missionary reached the settlement.⁶

IN 1836 Ramsay Crooks, president of the American Fur Company, sent William A. Aitkin, who had charge of the station at Fond du Lac, to investigate fishing possibilities on the north shore of Lake Superior. The fishing industry was a side line with the company—a project designed to extend employment for the men, whose work in the fur trade was limited to a brief season. Fish also furnished additional paying cargo for the company schooners, which carried only property of the firm and occasionally a missionary with his belongings.⁷

As a result of Aitkin's report, a fishing station was established at Grand Portage in



THE Reverend Francis X. Pierz

⁶ J. O. Plessis to Tabeau, March 8, 1818; Tabeau to Plessis, July 9, 1818, in Grace Lee Nute, ed., *Documents Relating to the Northwest Missions*, 29, 129 (St. Paul, 1942).

⁷ Grace Lee Nute, "The American Fur Company's Fishing Enterprises on Lake Superior," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 12:488, 489 (March, 1926).

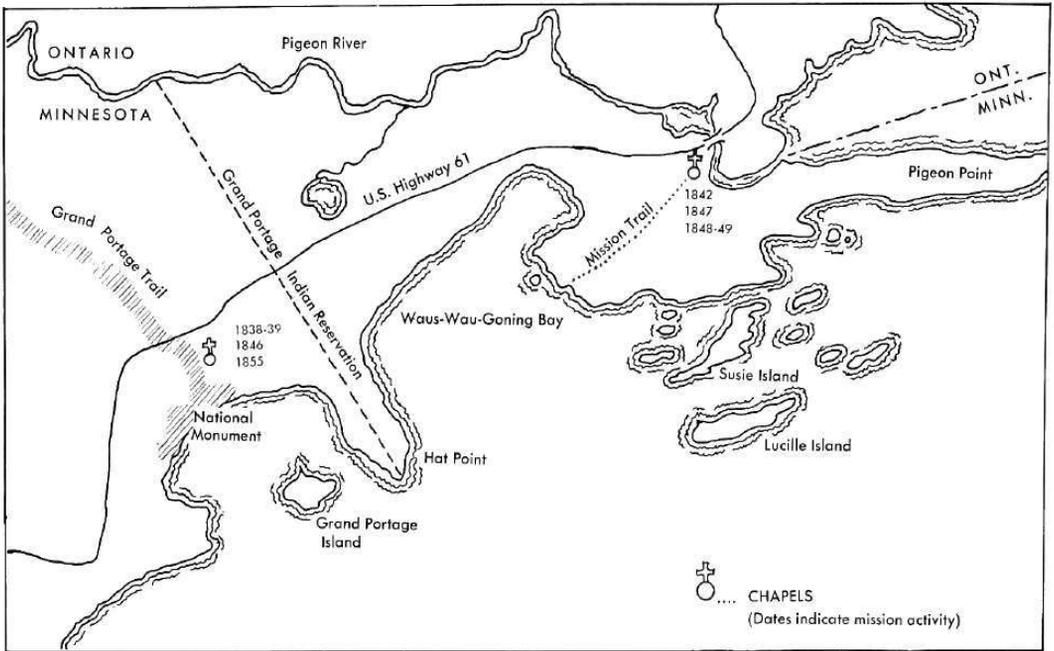
⁸ Gabriel Franchère to William Brewster, August 22, 1836 (typescript), Franchère Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society (originals in the Carnegie Library, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan); Edmund F. Ely Diary, July 20, 1836, (typescripts), in the Minnesota Historical Society (original in the St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth). Fond du Lac was a trading post in Minnesota on the St. Louis River.

⁹ Father Baraga, as well as Fathers Francis Pierz and Otto Skolla (mentioned below) were all Slovenians from the Austrian province of Carniola (now part of Yugoslavia). See Barry, in Yzermans, ed., *Catholic Origins*, 43. Father Baraga studied the Ojibway language, the universal dialect of all the Northwest Indians, and wrote an Ojibway grammar and a dictionary, as well as the prayer book, *Ottawa Anamie-Misinaigon* (Detroit, 1832). In 1853 he became bishop of upper Michigan. See A. J. Rezek, "The Leopoldine Society," in *Acta et Dicta*, 3:305-320 (July, 1914); Nute, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 12:484, 489; *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1:584. On the use of the prayer book by Ottawa, Chippewa, and Menominee Indians, see P. Chrysostomus Verwyst, *Life and Labors of Rt. Rev. Frederic Baraga*, 132 (Milwaukee, 1900).

the fall of 1836. It was under the direction of Pierre Coté (or Cotté), a Canadian mixed-blood who had been employed at Fond du Lac. At the latter post he and his Chippewa wife Margareth had given the Indians religious instruction, using a prayer book translated into the Ottawa language by the Reverend Frederic Baraga.⁸

Father Baraga had been sent from Austria by the Leopoldine Society, a group dedicated to furthering Catholic missions in America. He worked mainly among the Indians of Michigan and Wisconsin, but he had several times visited the Cotés at Fond du Lac. When they were transferred to Grand Portage, they continued their teaching activity, hoping that a Catholic mission church and school would be established there.⁹

Probably at their suggestion, the chief of the Grand Portage Indians sent Father Baraga a request for a missionary to instruct his band, and on September 30, 1837, the priest himself embarked from La Pointe, the fur company's post on Madeline Island and his headquarters for missionary work at the western end of Lake Superior. Travel-



THE Grand Portage triangle in northeastern Minnesota

ing aboard the schooner "John Jacob Astor," Baraga reached Grand Portage on October 7. There he baptized eight Chippewa and French children, among them those of Manebane Kamigichkang, Joseph Wishkob, Joseph Wabiko-digingjo, Henry Coté (a brother of Pierre), and Charles Prouleau.¹⁰

Father Baraga returned to La Pointe before winter, but in 1838 he sent his Slovenian colleague, Reverend Francis Xavier Pierz, from Sault Ste. Marie to establish a mission church at Grand Portage. Father Pierz sailed on July 1, also aboard the "John Jacob Astor," visited Father Baraga at La Pointe for several days, then went on to Grand Portage by the same vessel.¹¹

Upon his arrival, Father Pierz was rowed ashore in a small boat. In his own words, a "man walked into the water until it reached his waist, in order to be the first to shake my hand. All the rest, too, gave me a hearty reception." The priest learned later that the enthusiastic welcomer had recently recovered from a seemingly fatal illness. After discarding some "superstitious objects" that were hanging in his lodge, he had thrown

off his infirmity; he then went to Mrs. Coté to be instructed in Catholic prayers.¹²

Father Pierz described the appearance of the Indians: "Those inhabitants of the forest were in such misery and suffered from famine to such an extent that I was moved to tears of compassion. The women, although poor, were decently dressed, while the men, in addition to a loin apron (clout) were clothed in an old coarse shabby blanket; almost all the children were naked. Only the girls wore a rabbit pelt for a partial

¹⁰ Ely Diary, July 20, 1836; Nute, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 12:486, 494; Gabriel Franchère to Dr. C. W. Borup, September 30, 1837, (typescript), Franchère Papers; Father Benign Adam of the Holy Family Church, Bayfield, Wisconsin, to the author, October 24, 1963. Father Adam furnished, from manuscript records in his church, the names of the children.

¹¹ Father Frederic Baraga to Leopoldine Central Director in Vienna, September 17, 1838, in *Berichte der Leopoldinen Stiftung im Kaiserthume Oesterreich*, 12:71 (1839); Sister Mary Aquinas Norton, *Catholic Missionary Activities in the Northwest, 1818-1864*, 60 (Washington, 1930).

¹² F. X. Pierz, "The Indians of North America," in *Social Justice Review*, 40:316 (January, 1948); Barry, in Yzermans, ed., *Catholic Origins*, 44.

covering." He bought clothing for the men and the children, and he supplied the people with fishing nets and garden tools.¹³

The priest discovered that the Cotés and the Chippewa had already built him a chapel of cedar bark, and two days after his arrival he consecrated this makeshift mission, dedicating it to St. Peter. It had been erected upon the site where the Indians had previously held their "Grand Medicine" ceremonies, in an open field below the present church. It was thirty feet wide by forty feet long, and the windows and door were covered with doeskin. This was the first of three bark structures that were to precede the present building.¹⁴

The Chippewa also built Father Pierz a house not far from the chapel. "My present dwelling," he wrote, "is a small house constructed of solid, untrimmed logs, the chinks being filled with mud, while the inside is brightened with white earth; there are . . . windows, and a stone fireplace and chimney, the former equipped with hooks, the entire work having been done very neatly for me by Indians."¹⁵

BETWEEN JULY 29, 1838, and May 11, 1839, Father Pierz initiated vigorous religious activity at Grand Portage, Crow Wing,

¹³ Pierz, in *Social Justice Review*, 40:317.

¹⁴ "Letters of Father Franz Pierz," in *Central-Blatt and Social Justice*, 27:250 (November, 1934); 27:285 (December, 1934); Pierz, in *Social Justice Review*, 40:317.

¹⁵ "Letters of Father Pierz," in *Central-Blatt*, 27:285.

¹⁶ Tabeau to Plessis, July 9, 1818, in Nute, *Documents*, 128. Among the family names of those baptized were Saganachens, Esabaneweia, Corbeau, Bekivetang, Akiwense, Scranton, and Belanger. Father Pierz's baptismal and marriage register for 1838-39 is in the St. Paul Seminary. Photostatic copies are among the Pierz Papers in the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁷ Pierz to Director, October 1, 1838, in *Berichte*, 13:49 (1840). The translation here and in all other passages quoted from German sources is by the author. See also the Pierz baptismal register for September 30, 1838. In the latter the bride's age is given as sixty; the godparents were Joseph Samatchi and Margareth Coté. "Windigo" is an Ojibway word meaning a devil or an evil spirit.

and other mission posts. At Grand Portage he baptized sixty-four people ranging in age from five days to seventy-five years. His records were neatly kept, arranged in ruled columns headed with Latin terms for such data as name and age of the person baptized, parents, godparents, and place of the ceremony. On the subject of godparents, Father Antoine Tabeau had written from Fort William in 1818: "We take those that are least disqualified; and as they are few, the same ones serve for many candidates." Apparently Father Pierz followed a similar policy; the Cotés were sponsors for most of those christened. In only seven entries did he include the names of the parents. With the others he either left the line blank or wrote "Pagani" (heathen).¹⁶

One Grand Portage Indian baptized was Chief François Espagnol, the fifty-five-year-old son of a Spanish merchant and a Chippewa woman. It was said that during the winter of 1837-38 he had been overcome by "windigo" cannibalism and had eaten his parents. Not until the chief demonstrated his repentance by killing another windigo who had reportedly eaten twenty-two persons did Father Pierz perform the service. The priest thus described the ceremony: "Only yesterday I baptized and married our chief with all formality of the church service. He presented himself for this holy performance in a white coat trimmed in yellow, his loins girded with a beautiful red girdle, with red trousers stitched in white and with yellow shoes. I decorated him with a rosary and hung a beautiful cross around his neck after the custom of all the Catholic Christians in Indian country. His seventy-year-old bride appeared in a black dress, red garter and yellow shoes, but covered with white embroidery from head to foot and sprinkled with bright colored glass beads."¹⁷

During the first months of his stay Father Pierz began thinking of the future of the inhabitants of Grand Portage. He was a believer in education, and on August 1, 1838, he established a French mission school. Held in the chapel, it was attended by fifty-

eight Chippewa and seventeen French pupils. "Here I preached to them every morning and evening," he wrote, "and held school for them the rest of the day, which every one under fifty faithfully attended. I taught four different groups in turn every day, reading, singing and religion." Most of the Indians learned to read, many to write.¹⁸

To protect his charges from famine and to supplement the meager living they obtained from fishing, the priest attempted to introduce vegetable gardening and general farming. Among his projects was a small nursery in which he planted fruit seeds from Carniola, his native province in Austria. The Indians responded enthusiastically to his guidance. They cleared ten islands and an area along the Pigeon River for cultivation and planted potatoes and produce. It is reported that they later found a ready market for the surplus among the miners and prospectors of the region.¹⁹

In October, 1839, however, Father Pierz received a letter from the bishop of Detroit telling him to leave the Lake Superior missions immediately and go to Arbre Croche, Michigan, to attend the Ottawa there. In spite of the unfavorable weather of the season, Father Pierz was obedient to instructions. He wrote of his departure, "Accompanied by two very expert Indians, I set out in my mission boat and recommended myself to my guardian angel and to God." The boat was four feet wide and twenty-four feet long, fitted with sails. The six-hundred-mile trip took fifty-four days amid snow, ice, cold, and high seas.²⁰

FATHER PIERZ remained at Arbre Croche until the spring of 1842. During this time he received letters of distress from the Cotés and from the Grand Portage Chippewa. He wrote to David P. Bushnell at La Pointe, the United States government subagent for the Chippewa in that area, asking for federal funds to support the Grand Portage mission school. But not until 1848 did the government consent to support mission schools conducted in the French language.²¹

At last, in April, 1842, Father Pierz received money from the Leopoldine Society. These funds paid debts he had acquired in the course of his educational activities at Arbre Croche and provided for his passage to Grand Portage and for the building of a church to serve the congregation there.²²

The Chippewa were overjoyed to see their priest again. For his renewed missionary activities he selected a site on the bank of the Pigeon River, some six miles from Grand Portage, probably because it was better suited for agriculture. There the Indians soon began building a large birch-bark chapel. It was lined with cedar mats and designed to hold a congregation of seventy, but the roof was never completed. Two smaller structures were also put up: a dwelling for the priest and a storehouse for church supplies and tools.²³

In the new buildings Father Pierz and an assistant teacher, David Mackinbins, set up another mission school, where fifty-five pu-

¹⁸ "Letters of Father Pierz," in *Central-Blatt*, 27:285; Pierz to Director, October 1, 1838, in *Berichte*, 13:49.

¹⁹ "Letters of Father Pierz," in *Central-Blatt*, 27:250, 285; Pierz, in *Social Justice Review*, 40:317; Pierz to Director, November 24, 1847, in *Berichte*, 22:97, 98 (1850). Father Pierz had long been interested in horticulture; in 1830 he had published in Europe a well-known work on the subject. See *Dictionary of American Biography*, 14:591.

²⁰ "Letters of Father Pierz," in *Central-Blatt*, 27:250; Pierz, in *Social Justice Review*, 40:353 (February, 1938); Pierz to Director, March 15, 1841, in *Berichte*, 15:63 (1842). See also Sister Grace McDonald, "Father Francis Pierz," in *Minnesota History*, 10:111 (June, 1929). Arbre Croche, in Upper Michigan south of the Straits of Mackinac, is now Harbor Springs, a fashionable resort.

²¹ Pierz to Ramsay Crooks, July 10, 1841 (copy), American Fur Company Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society (original in the New-York Historical Society); Pierz to Director, March 15, 1841, in *Berichte*, 15:63; Pierz to D. P. Bushnell, April 24, 1840 (copy), in the Minnesota Historical Society (original in the National Archives); Sherman Hall to S. B. Treat, December 6, 1849, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago.

²² Pierz to Director, October 2, 1843, in *Berichte*, 17:57 (1844).

²³ Pierz to Director, October 1, 1843, in *Berichte*, 17:57; Otto Skolla to Director, September 1, 1846, in *Berichte*, 20:74 (1847).

pils were taught agriculture, singing, and reading, the latter from Father Baraga's Ojibway prayer book. From Sault Ste. Marie Father Pierz had brought two cows, four pigs, twelve hens, and some European seed grains. He showed the Indians on the Pigeon River how to use the sickle, scythe, plow, and hoe, and he demonstrated planting fruit trees. The lessons were of short duration, however, for in October, 1842, he returned to Arbre Croche.²⁴

THERE WAS no priest at Grand Portage for several years, but Christianity had a firm hold upon the converted Chippewa. In 1844 they petitioned the newly consecrated bishop of Milwaukee, John Martin Henni, to send them a resident missionary. Since few priests were assigned to the Minnesota and Wisconsin area at that time, it was two years before Father Baraga was able to send his fellow missionary at La Pointe, the Reverend Otto Skolla, to Grand Portage.²⁵

Father Skolla, a Franciscan, spent sixteen days at Grand Portage in July, 1846, and thus described what he found: "Grand Portage is on a bay of the Lake Superior. The location of this place is very pleasant, with

²⁴ "Annual Report shewing the state of the school at Pigeon River mich. under the superintendency of Francis Pierz," September 5, 1842, National Archives, Record Group 75 (photostatic copy in possession of the author); Pierz to Director, October 1, 1843, in *Berichte*, 17:53, 58.

²⁵ Barry, in Yzermans, ed., *Catholic Origins*, 46.

²⁶ Skolla to Director, September 1, 1846, in *Berichte*, 20:73.

²⁷ Skolla to Director, September 1, 1846, in *Berichte*, 20:73.

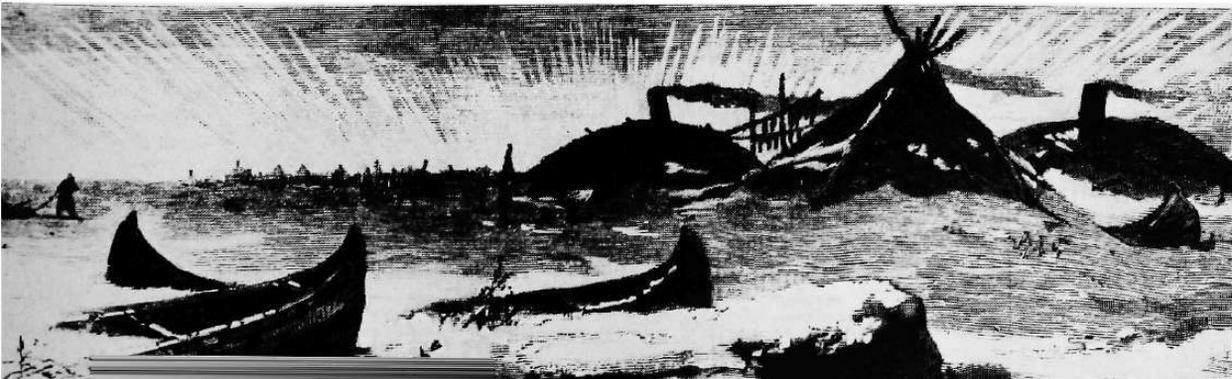
²⁸ Skolla to Director, September 1, 1846, in *Berichte*, 20:74.

fertile and smooth soil, surrounded by high hills. We found here a quantity of black slate, and in many places a kind of white earth, which in past days was used for chinking logs; currently there is no house here, but sort of a poorly covered tent. The number of native savages adds up to approximately eighty persons, besides children. They live poorly, their livelihood is a few fish, potatoes, and now and then some rabbits, which they hunt in the neighborhood; at times there is no other game in this region. Also wild rice, which they pick in the month of September in the swampy tract of land (they grow corn in the cultivated land) is an important part of the savages' nourishment."²⁶

Father Skolla found the Chippewa and the mixed-bloods or "métis" friendly. They built another birch-bark chapel near the site of the first one constructed for Father Pierz. When completed it measured twelve feet wide and eighteen feet long. In this new structure the priest held mass for twenty Indian communicants and baptized eight young Chippewa.²⁷

The métis took Father Skolla to the Pigeon River. About this location he wrote: "Here Right Reverend Mr. Pierz had many years ago [1842] begun to build a church which still stands without a roof. I have promised the Indians, to continue the building in the future spring. . . . In addition to the building of the church, Mr. Pierz, had a little house with a little room and besides another dwelling given to the custody of the church provisions and tools. The ground here is much better and [more] fertile than in Grand Portage."²⁸

WINTER in a Chippewa Indian camp on the north shore of Lake Superior





GRAND Portage in 1857, as painted by Eastman Johnson

A few days later Father Skolla returned to La Pointe, but the following summer Father Pierz again left Arbre Croche to visit briefly his beloved Chippewa at Grand Portage. After the interval of nearly five years he found his flock relatively well clothed, and housed in huts or lodges. They were doing their best to keep up the religious practices he had taught them. The Pigeon River group had planted potatoes around the unfinished church and mission house. But, through inexperience, they had neglected the livestock he had furnished them, and the animals had died.²⁹

In August, 1847, the priests of the Lake Superior region, among them Fathers Baraga, Pierz, Skolla, and a Jesuit missionary from the Manitoulin Islands, the Reverend Pierre Choné, met at La Pointe to discuss the future of the Lake Superior missions. Father Pierz was on his way back to Michigan and took up his journey to Arbre Croche after the talks had been in progress for several days. He was never to return to Grand Portage; but already Fathers Baraga and Choné were discussing the possibility of setting up a permanent Jesuit mission and school there.³⁰

THE JESUIT EFFORTS at Grand Portage were renewed in July, 1848, when Father Choné, accompanied by the Reverend Nicholas Frémot and a Brother de Pooter, arrived at Pigeon River. They found Father Pierz's unfinished chapel and two log cabins falling into ruin. At first they lodged in an Indian dwelling, but with the coming of

fall the Chippewa and the métis built them a new one-room structure. Completed and blessed on November 26, it served as chapel, storeroom, kitchen, dining room, and living quarters. At one end an altar was set up with a tabernacle and six wooden candlesticks; a curtain divided the sanctuary from the rest of the cabin. The building was nearly impossible to heat, and on cold days the ink froze in the bottle, making it necessary for Father Frémot to thaw it out several times during a morning.³¹

The Jesuits stayed for almost a year. During that period they taught English and the catechism to twelve boys and ten girls. A geologist who worked near Grand Portage in 1849-50 saw a Chippewa name in Roman letters scratched on the rock bluffs along the Pigeon River and noted: "Some of the Grand Portage band of Indians . . . under the care of Catholic missionaries, have made

²⁹ Norton, *Catholic Missionary Activities*, 69.

³⁰ Grace Lee Nute, ed., "Father Skolla's Report on His Indian Missions," in *Acta et Dicta*, 7:250 (October, 1936); Norton, *Catholic Missionary Activities*, 69. In 1852 Father Pierz returned to Minnesota to work among the Indians, serving at Crow Wing, Mille Lacs, Fond du Lac, and St. Cloud. He retired in 1873 to Laibach, now in Yugoslavia, and died there on January 22, 1880. See John Seliskar, "The Reverend Francis Pirec, Indian Missionary," in *Acta et Dicta*, 3:77-79, 88 (July, 1911).

³¹ Report of Fathers Pierre Choné and Nicholas Frémot, July 24, 1848, from Pigeon River, hereafter referred to as Choné and Frémot Reports. The originals are in the Collège Sainte-Marie, Montreal. Typewritten copies were furnished the author by Paul Des Jardins. See also Norton, *Catholic Missionary Activities*, 70-72.

considerable progress in reading their own language, printed in Roman characters.”³²

Father Choné visited Fort William in the spring of 1849 and decided to move the mission chapel and school there. Nevertheless, in July of that year Father Frémiot was still trying to stimulate the Indians to work on the interior of the chapel at Pigeon River. All such efforts were ended by a fire the following winter which burned the buildings to the ground and left nothing standing but the crosses in the graveyard.³³

By May, 1850, the new Church of the Immaculate Conception at Fort William was finished, and the Jesuits moved their center of operations. They continued, however, to minister from Fort William to the Chippewa in the Grand Portage–Pigeon River area. Over a period from 1854 to 1877, the Reverend Dominique du Ranquet made trips by dog sled and canoe from Fort William to Grand Portage. In 1855 the small bark chapel built there nine years earlier for Father Skolla was replaced with another birch-bark structure. This was dedicated by Bishop Baraga and an assistant priest, the Reverend Eugene Benoit, and at the same time a school was opened. The next summer Bishop Baraga again journeyed to Grand Portage in the company of Father Du Ranquet, and on this visit he confirmed fifty-three Chippewa.³⁴

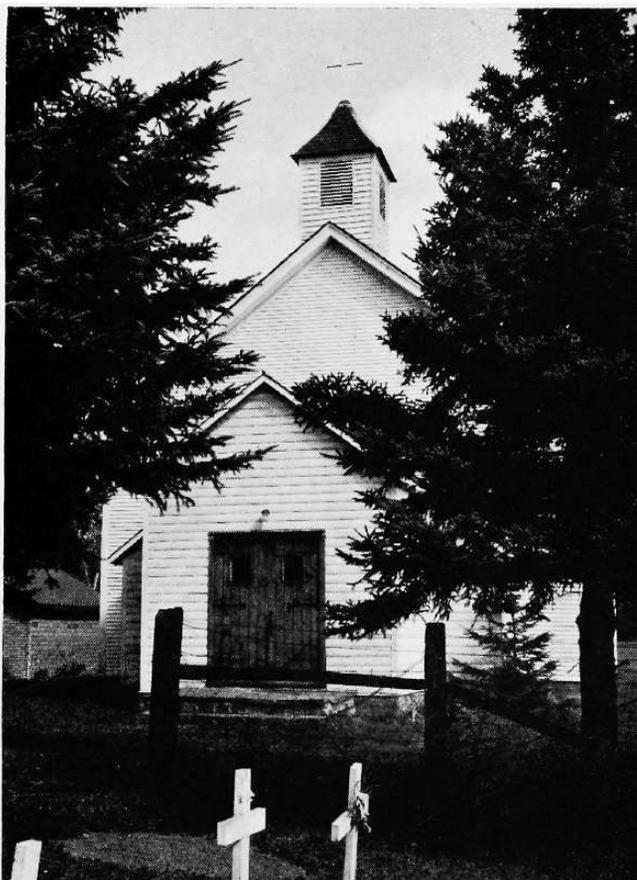
The La Pointe treaty of September 30, 1854, and another treaty signed five months later provided the Chippewa with annuity

payments of money and goods in return for Minnesota lands. As a result, beginning in September, 1855, the Indians at Grand Portage received four hundred dollars annually for a teacher, a school, and cattle.³⁵

The new government school was kept by Timothy Hegney, who in 1856–57 taught sixty-one Chippewa from three bands at day and evening classes. Two-thirds of the pupils were children. Hegney reported them reasonably easy to manage but said they preferred learning by rote to studying. No doubt listening was less effort than reading. The children were handicapped by the roving habits of their parents. On September 17, 1857, Hegney reported that the Indians were getting ready to leave for their fishing stations and that he was trying to give them as much instruction as possible in the limited time left to him.³⁶

Through Henry C. Gilbert, the Indian agent, the Chippewa of Lake Superior were supplied with farm implements, tools, and household items. He encouraged them “to

HOLY Rosary Church in 1959



³² Choné and Frémiot Reports, August 7, 1848; Norton, *Catholic Missionary Activities*, 72; David Dale Owen, *Report of a Geological Survey of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota*, 398 (Philadelphia, 1852).

³³ Choné and Frémiot Reports, April 16, July 28, 1849; May 11, 1850.

³⁴ Choné and Frémiot Reports, May 11, 1850; Indian Office, *Reports*, 1855, p. 37; *Berichte*, 28:33 (1856); Father F. J. Costello to the author, November 17, 1964.

³⁵ Choné and Frémiot Reports, May 11, 1850; William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:306, 307 (St. Paul, 1921); Indian Office, *Reports*, 1855, p. 30.

³⁶ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1857, p. 32.

build houses and adopt the habits of civilized men," and to this end he gave "every Indian living in a house a good cook-stove, with the usual cooking utensils, a table, bureau, chairs, bedstead, looking-glass, and many smaller articles." At Grand Portage a village plat was laid out and each Indian who would build himself a house was assigned a lot measuring six by twelve rods.³⁷

Although the Chippewa at Grand Portage now had a fuller life, Father Du Ranquet continued to make summer and winter visits to the birch-bark chapel. At last, in 1865, on a hill overlooking the old chapel he built a new log structure and consecrated it as Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church.³⁸ So after nearly a century and a half of intermittent ministering by missionaries of the Franciscan and Jesuit orders and by a bishop and a priest from Slovenia, the oldest Roman Catholic parish in Minnesota received a permanent church edifice.

IN 1951 the Grand Portage was designated a national historic site, and in 1960 Congress established the Grand Portage National Monument. It does not, however, take in the church and the cemetery.

The siding that now covers the tamarack logs was applied to the church between 1910 and 1920; there is no record of the specific date. The interior, which measures twenty-five by thirty-six feet, was renovated in 1954 through contributions from friends of Father Lawrence Schmidt, who was then serving both St. John's Church in Grand Marais and Holy Rosary Church at Grand Portage. In the remodeling an oak floor was installed; an altar and twelve pews seating about sixty were added; an elevated area was created for the organ, with some space for choir members; the ceiling and walls were covered with fiber board; and knotty pine wainscoting was put in. Electrical service reached the area in 1956, and kerosene lamps in the church have now been replaced.

A cast-iron bell tolls half an hour before mass. In winter, services are conducted twice a month and on holy days by a priest

from Grand Marais. When the bell does not sound, the people know that weather conditions have prevented him from making the journey. During June, July, and August a resident priest supplied by St. John's Abbey at Collegeville performs mass every day.

The parish consists of about twenty-four families, including some hundred individuals, nearly all of Indian or mixed blood. They have small opportunity to find gainful occupation, and many depend on relief for at least part of their subsistence. Employment is mainly seasonal and consists largely of road work or jobs with the National Park Service, the state forestry department, and private lumber companies. Fishing, the traditional occupation of the Chippewa in the area, has declined in recent years because of the scarcity of lake trout and herring.

Holy Rosary Church as such has never maintained a school, for although the education of its people was initiated by the missionaries, the task was taken over and furthered for many years by the United States government and is now the responsibility of the Cook County School District. An elementary school at Grand Portage accommodates about sixty children in grades one through six; for junior and senior high school the students are taken by bus to Grand Marais. In its place on the hill, however, the church remains the spiritual center of the community and a monument to the missionaries who founded the parish.³⁹

³⁷ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1856, p. 32.

³⁸ Barry, in Yzermans, ed., *Catholic Origins*, 47; June Drenning Holmquist and Jean A. Brookins, *Minnesota's Major Historic Sites: A Guide*, 145 (St. Paul, 1963).

³⁹ Detailed information on the present state of Holy Rosary Church and its parish has been supplied by the Reverend Ignatius Candrian, pastor of St. John's Church at Grand Marais. See Father Candrian to the editor, July 20, 1965, in the possession of the author.

THE ORIGINAL of the picture on page 303 is owned by the Convent of St. Benedict at St. Joseph, and the one on page 308 by the St. Louis County Historical Society. The photograph on page 309 is by Eugene D. Becker; the drawing on page 307 is from *Harpers Weekly*, January 6, 1883; the sketch on page 301 was adapted from the same source.



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