

Kanatakwenke, Fourth Site of Caughnawaga

by Wilfrid Jury

EARLY in the spring, Father Béchard, in a letter which arrived at my desk at the University of Western Ontario, had acquainted me with the danger to which the foresite of Caughnawaga might be exposed, on account of the St. Lawrence Seaway excavations. At the close of the summer, arrangements were made for me to visit Caughnawaga and do a little exploratory examination in hopes that we would be able to find the foresite. I left home on October 29, at 7:00 P.M. and, arrived in Montreal about 7:30 A.M. the following morning. I was met by Father Béchard and Brother Beaudry who drove me to the Jesuit residence of the Mission.

We immediately called upon the seaway people and the Department of Indian Affairs' representative and were cordially received. A few of the older Indian residents pointed out where they thought the site was. It is situated at the confluence of the little stream known as La Suzanne and the mighty River St. Lawrence.

Our first test trench was run on a part of the land reported by an Indian woman to be the spot where she had picked up relics for many years. We found evidence that Indians had resided there. For two days we continued our excavations. Later we moved closer to the banks of the St. Lawrence hoping to find the palisades that undoubtedly surrounded the village. No palisade poles were found. I then went to a higher elevation nearer the banks of the little river, running a test trench five feet wide.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Archeologist Wilfrid Jury of the University of Western Ontario is well known for more than fifty Indian sites he discovered and explored, particularly for his seven years' work at the Canadian Martyrs' Shrine at old St. Mary's, Midland Ontario. To excavate Kanatakwenke, no one is better qualified.

I soon came upon the bedlogs of the foundation of a dwelling that had nails spread around the outside. This, of course, indicated that we were on the site of a dwelling built by the French Fathers. We continued our digging, running the five foot test trench directly away from the St. Lawrence and found one piece of Indian pottery, a number of small pieces of glass, probably bottles used for mass wine, two pieces of European pottery or vessels, and one hinge used to hang the shutters on. We were at the site of the building which, in all probability from its situation, may well be that of the Jesuit residence. Undoubtedly the church will not be far from it. Rumors and reports told us that the Jesuit cemetery or the cemetery containing the bones of Indians and, it is hoped, of Fathers James de Lamberville, S.J. and James Bruyas, S.J. was across the way.

One kindly resident told us of an arched tomb built of stone and brick that has long been supposed to be the grave of one of the Fathers. This we opened and found to be a bake oven containing hundreds of stones. We found it to be four feet wide and about twelve feet long. At one end, many bricks were recovered, about six bushels in all, and eighteen of them were intact. Here we found six inches of white ash with a few pieces of carbonized wood and a few nails in them. Assuredly, this was one of the bake ovens used while the village was located there.

We now have established the fourth site of the Mission known to the Iroquois as **Kanatakwenke**. It is a picturesque site. The roar of the mighty St. Lawrence and the Lachine Rapids is very much the same today as it was when the site was occupied. We have only to turn back in our imagination the pages of history to visualize this village before it was moved. It is one of the landmarks of Canada. This historic site must be preserved. It is in jeopardy from the development of the seaway. It is important that Canadians preserve these old sites. The University of Western Ontario is proud to have had the opportunity of doing a small piece of research in definitely establishing the site. I have had much experience and it is always a thrill to find a site on which the early missionaries of our country have lived and labored among the natives of Canada. It is my sincere hope that this place, so long ago abandoned, will be excavated soon, and the sites of the dwellings and the church with the graveyard found and set aside as a memorial that will be kept in reverence and respect.



Photo: Armour Landry

Mr. Wilfrid Jury with one of the two spigols for mase-wine kegs he uncovered.



Photo: Armour Landry

▲ Archeologist Jury, Mrs. James Delorimier and Mr. Harold H. Chapman of the Department of Indian Affairs, the Vice-Postulator (with Gallic beret) on the fourth site of Caughnawaga at the confluence of La Suzanne Creek and the St. Lawrence River.

▲ Indian Harry Mayo, the Vice-Postulator, and Professor Wilfrid Jury work at uncovering the hearth of the Jesuit residence (1696-1716).