

KATERI AT MASHTEUIATSH

ONE OF THE OLDEST RESERVES of Quebec and doubtless of Canada chose as patroness Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. This was Pointe-Bleue on Lake St. John, known since 1986 under the Montagnais name of Mashteuiatsh: We'll-see-you-at-the-cape.

On July 16, 1647, Fr. John Dequen, S.J., discovered Lake St. John. Fr. Francis de Crespieul, S.J., spent the winter of 1671-1672 there; on June 8, 1676, he began the construction of a chapel at Metabetchouan which was replaced in 1846 on the arrival of the Oblates Fathers by a new chapel. In 1875 the Montagnais obtained a new reserve at Pointe-Bleue. In 1875 the chapel at Metabetchouan was moved on the frozen lake to Pointe-Bleue. The first Oblates to reside there arrived in 1889. Ten years later Brother Lapointe oversaw the construction of a new temple which was blessed in 1900.

Until 1986, the old church dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo served the population of Pointe-Bleue. On March 12, 1986, it went up in flames. The holy vessels, a crucifix and a Madonna of great historical value were saved. A new church was immediately planned and Mr. Pierre Gill was named to head the project.

The Pastor, Fr. Jean-Claude Pelletier, O.M.I., was well aware of the generosity of his flock. Already from 1860 to 1865 the forty or fifty families of the period had furnished the respectable sum of \$1,200 for the adornment of the place of worship. The present-day Montagnais are worthy of their forebears. They organized a very effective finance committee. The insurance premium of \$177,000, the \$50,000 contributed by the local Credit Union and the \$30,000 added by the religious communities of the vicinity stimulated the committee. Then thanks to the Walk-a-thons, to the benefit performances and especially to the visits to the homes, the \$500,000 which were needed were quickly accumulated.

"The population", wrote Fr. Pelletier, "had settled on the equivalent of a week of its revenue as the sum to be given by each one. It could be the sum resulting from a week of work, from social benefits, or old age pensions. Everyone contributed as he or

she could. It's very significant when one takes into consideration that 80% of the people do not work full time".

Meanwhile, on May 13, the faithful solicited their Bishop, His Excellency Jean Guy Couture of Chicoutimi, to raise their Mission to the rank of a parish. On November 17, the Pastor wrote to the Bishop: "With regard to the possibility that Blessed Kateri become the patroness of our parish, a little referendum is being organized on the parish level. The final result will be known next November 23". Without any hesitation, the Mohawk Maiden was designated as the protectress of Mashteuiatsh.

On January 10, 1987, at Chicoutimi, Bishop Couture raised to the rank of "parish and movable cure" the Mission of Pointe-Bleue under the invocation of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha with her feast-day on April 17. At the same time, he ordered that the decree be read at the Sunday masses on January 26, 1987 and had the news published in the *Quebec Official Gazette* of March 23, 1987.

The *Progrès du Saguenay* of January 18, 1987 had already foretold the beginning of the construction work for the first days of May. With a seating capacity of 415 people, the edifice was to be of rather traditional style but the possibility of arranging the interior with Montagnais fittings was not excluded.

On May 3, Bishop Couture came to lift the first spadeful of earth at the site of the future church. The architect was Mr. Jean Claude LeBeuf of Dolbeau, P.Q., the contractor was the church council, the foreman, Mr. Charles Courtois of the reservation, the workmen, 27 Montagnais and three French Canadians.

The construction advanced at a brisk pace and it was decided to honor specially the new patroness of the new church. A full-sized statue of Blessed Kateri had been carved by Mr. Charles Courtois. Lessons on her life had been given to the pupils of the school during an entire week to prepare them for the solemn ceremony of the unveiling of the statue on December 4, 1987. That day they wanted to celebrate their beloved patroness by a procession on the lakeside and through the village. A banner and pennants, symbols of nature which inspired Kateri Tekakwitha's prayer, were passed out to the participants and they marched through the village on their way to the newly built church.

In an animated dialogue with approximately four hundred persons, the leader invited them to praise and applaud the Trinity which had showered Kateri Tekakwitha with so many blessings. To the applause of the crowd, Mr. Claude Robertson, donor of the

statue, unveiled it. Mr. Aurélien Gill, Chief of the reserve, then invited the population to imitate the virtues of Blessed Kateri. The Pastor followed, exhorting his parishioners with the holy life of the humble Flower of the Woods after which he blessed and distributed medals of the Beata. The ceremony ended with the hymn, "Oh powerful Protectress, Kateri Tekakwitha, lead us to Jesus..."

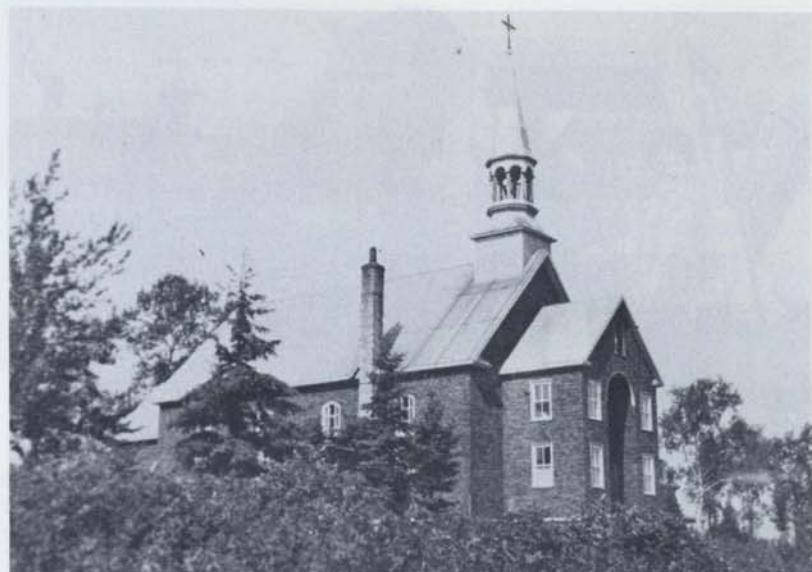
To the immense joy of all, Fr. Jean Claude Pelletier in his capacity as Pastor celebrated the first Mass in the new temple on Christmas eve 1987 at nine o'clock in the evening. This liturgy of the Nativity pleased all the Montagnais of the reserve, but most of all undoubtedly Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

Bishop Couture had another great joy in store for the Native People: the consecration of their church seeing that it was free of debt. On October 2, 1988, he presided the celebration; Fr. Denis Paquin, O.M.I., Provincial Vicar General attended His Excellency. The Pastor, Fr. Jean Claude Pelletier, O.M.I., with the help of his parishioners had organized the ceremony, a special time reserved for thanking the Lord who had taken care of the Montagnais brothers and sisters of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. When the ceremony was over, all joined together in a community dinner at the Amishkuisht Center of Pointe Bleue.

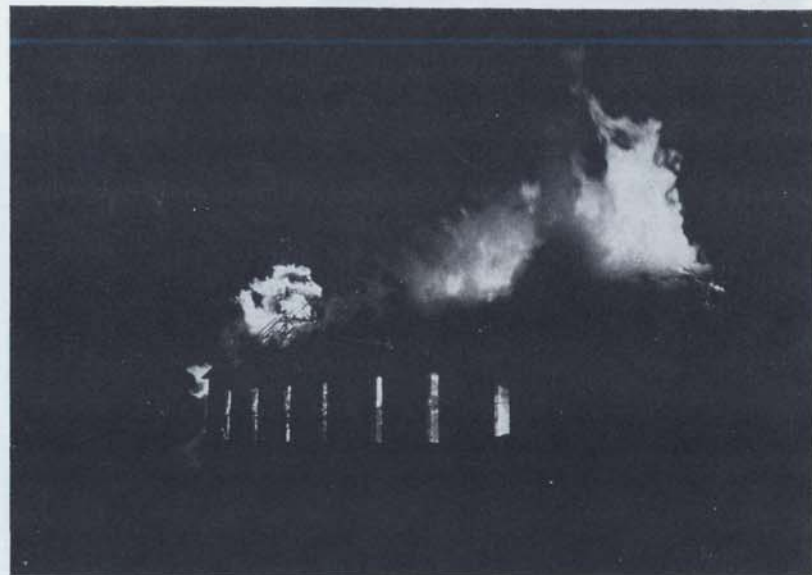
Lately Sister Olivette Paradis, N.D.B.C. of Mashteuiatsh recently wrote me a few lines, the last one of which will serve to close this article to the glory of the Lily of the Mohawks: "In 1989, a project of Employment and Immigration yielded \$45,895 for the decoration in Montagnais style of this gem of a church".



Pointe-Bleue seen from the air in 1962



The St. Charles Borromeo Church, blessed in 1900



The church burning on March 12, 1986



On May 3, 1987, Bishop Jean-Guy Couture came to Pointe-Bleue to lift the first shovelful of earth for the building of the new church. 1. Bishop Couture at the controls 2. Mr. Pierre Gill, general agent; Mrs. Charles Courtois; Mr. Charles Courtois, foreman, sculptor and cabinetmaker 3. Fr. Jean-Claude Pelletier, OMI, Pastor; Mrs. Jeannette Robertson, representing the volunteer workers; Messrs. Clovis Robertson and Robert Bachele representing the 27 North American Native construction-workers

Bishop Couture lifts the first shovelful of earth.



Information Center Le Progrès du Saguenay Ltée
Chicoutimi, P.Q. (June 5, 1987).



During 1976-77, Mr. Charles Courtois carved a full-size statue of Kateri for the future church.



December 4, 1987, the day the statue was unveiled, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha was honored with a lakeside procession from one end of the village to the other.



The donor, Mr. Charles Robertson, unveils the statue.



Chief Adrian Gill invites his people to imitate Kateri's virtues.



Fr. Jean-Claude Pelletier resumes the life of the Beata and distributes medals of her.

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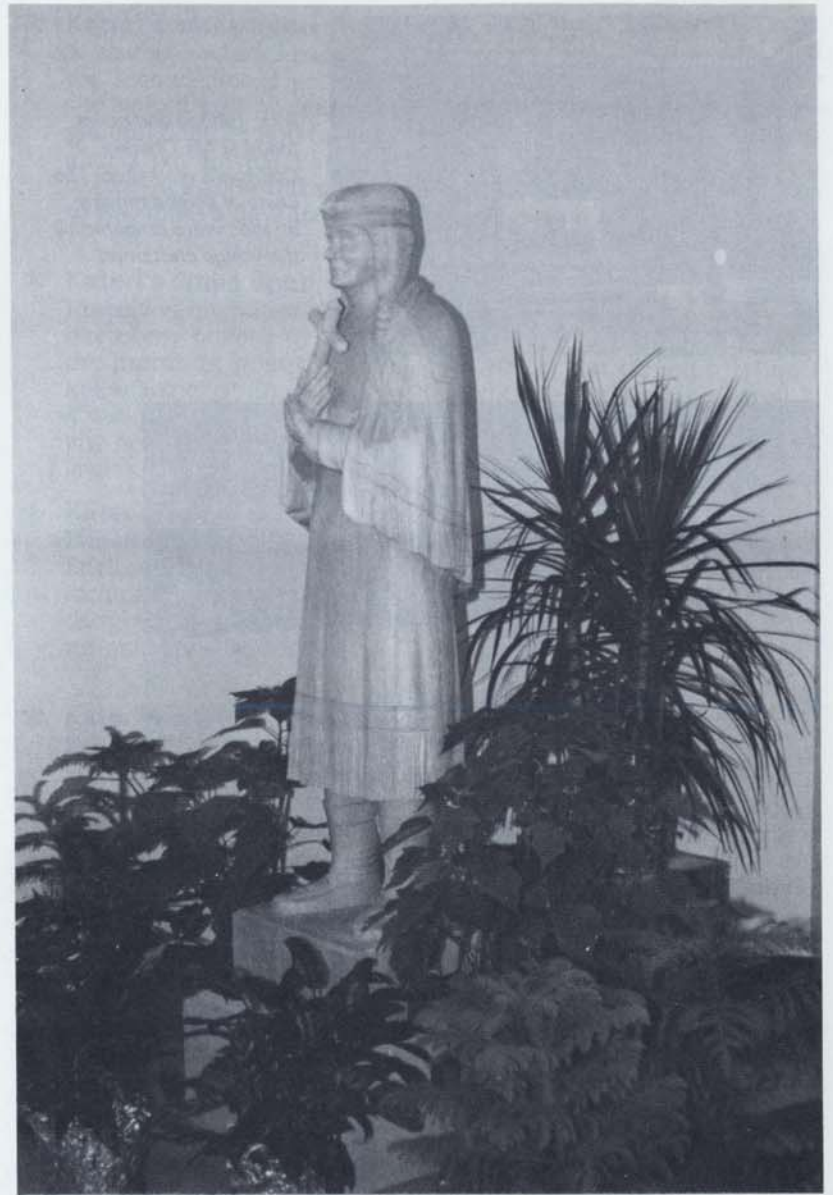
*December 1987,
the Church looking
out on the lake.*

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*Crucifix carved by Charles Courtois. The
pews were not yet ready.*

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Kateri in the new Church, Christmas 1987



Altar, tribune and pews made at Mr. Charles Courtois's workshop. The seats of plaited moose strands were prepared by the village craftsmen.



The Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Church, winter 1988



The arch represents the form of the old church. To attain God today, one must pass through the Church of the forebears. The Church opens its doors to the entire North American Native population.

❖ **Kateri's smile upon you, Mr. W. R.!**

A year ago when I had a light stroke and was in the hospital for the second time, I promised Blessed Kateri a hundred dollars if she would get me out or over this. So, Father, here is my very grateful contribution for her quick cause of canonization, as now after a whole year I am practically as good as I was before the stroke. At age 84 and single, I do my own housekeeping, walk up to two miles a day, and make a little firewood almost daily.

(Kelso, MO)

❖ **Kateri's smile upon you, Mr. D. R.!**

I received my Kateri Magazine which I love so much on the sixth day of my novena to her. On the seventh day, the First Friday of the month in honor of the Sacred Heart, she turned to Him. I knew a special financial favor would be granted me. On April 7, it was granted me. She is truly my little friend. I can call on her in any need, and somehow, no matter how small the favor I need, it is granted.

(Erie, PA)

❖ **Kateri's smile upon you, Mrs. A. M.!**

Please send me your book *The Original Caughnawaga Indians*. Enclosed is a check for ten dollars plus a dollar and a half. Also included are fifteen dollars for a favor received, the sale of my daughter's house. I keep praying every day for Kateri's canonization. May it be real soon...

(Toledo, OH)

❖ **Kateri's smile upon you, Mrs. E. B.!**

Enclosed find a small offering. I hurt my hand, the pain was bad and I was alone. I prayed to Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. I have a silver plated plaque and her relic on my dresser. I put it on my hand. This was nine days ago. Everything is well. Not a major miracle, but I promised that I would write you!

(Chicago, IL)

❖ **Kateri's smile upon you, Miss M. L.!**

Enclosed is a money order, my donation to Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha in thanksgiving for many favors received through her intercession. In the past years I had hypertension and used different medication. It did not help, I also developed diabetes, I had it bad for a number of years. Finally last October when I went to see my doctor, he told me I didn't need to take any more pills for my hypertension and that my blood sugar count was down. I also had two eye operations for cataracts. The eye operations were both very successful. I had the fortune to be blessed with the relic of Blessed Kateri before I went into the hospital for the eye operations both times. Thank you, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, for all the favors I have received from you. I will keep on praying every day for your canonisation.

(Cornwall, Ont.)