

KAHNAWAKE

This Mohawk reservation is situated on the south shore of the St. Lawrence west of Montreal and just opposite Lachine. About 20 km/12mi downstream in the heart of present day Old La Prairie, the Jesuit missionaries founded the *St. Francis-Xavier Mission* in 1667 as a haven for the local native catholic population. After moving upriver four times the Mission settled down permanently some five decades later at its present site, called Kahnawake, meaning "above the rapids". Since the opening of the Victoria railway bridge in Montreal in 1859, the first such bridge to span the St. Lawrence, the Mohawks of Kahnawake have become famous throughout North America for their expertise as iron-workers on high steel construction projects (bridges, skyscrapers, etc.).

St. Francis-Xavier Mission (formerly "du Sault St-Louis")

Situated in the center of Old Kahnawake, the entire Mission complex is located within the semi-fortified precincts of old *Fort (du Sault) St. Louis*, the wall of which was never completed (1725). The main rectory building was finished in 1720, as was the original church. Its west wing (no visiting allowed) was built in 1754, originally as an officers' mess. The sacristy was annexed to the church around 1790. Only in 1914 was the entire space between it and the church bridged over and subsequently made into a small *museum* that now showcases sacred and liturgical vessels and objects

dating back to the mission's beginnings.

Church

The present *church*, which was dedicated in 1983 as the "Kateri Tekakwitha Shrine", replaced the original building in 1845, retaining only the former's bell tower base. *Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha's* tomb is located in the right transept.

The "Lily
of the Mohawks"



A young Mohawk girl was born in 1656 in Ossernenon (now Auriesville) on the Mohawk river, 50 km/30 mi west of present-day Albany, the capital of New York state. After seeing both her parents and brother fall victim to a small-pox epidemic in 1660, she managed to survive, but with her sight and health seriously impaired. She was then adopted by her uncle who named her "Tekakwitha", meaning "one

who moves forward hesitantly". She was baptized in 1676 at the neighboring Jesuit mission of Caughnawaga (now Fonda), N.Y. and given the name Kateri after St. Catherine of Sienna. A year later, however, she was forced to leave the Mohawk Valley and sought refuge at the St. Francis-Xavier Mission, where she died in 1680 at the age of 24. Her saintly life was immediately recognized and by popular acclaim she soon became known as the "Lily of the Mohawks". 300 years later, during the tri-centennial of her death in 1980, Kateri became the first native American to be declared "Blessed" by the Roman Catholic Church.

Church, rectory and museum

Open all year-round, daily 10 am-5 pm (Sunday and holidays 12 noon - 5 pm). Free admission. The walkway adjoining the old fort wall along the St. Lawrence Seaway provides a remarkable panoramic view of Montreal's West Island, of Mount Royal itself as well as of the entire Mission complex

viewed from behind. (Tel.: 632-6030)

The "Kanien'kehaka Raotiohkwa" Cultural Center

Located some 700 m/2400 ft to the east of the Mission, on the same side of the street, this cultural resource center is devoted to the preservation and promotion of the Mohawk culture and language. It houses a specialized library and documentation center, an interpretation center and photographic archives. Open Monday through Friday 10 am-4 pm, (except holidays), on weekends by appointment only. Free admission. (Tel.: 638-0880)

Access

The Kahnawake reservation is located 15 km/9 mi from the center of Montreal. It can easily be reached via throughway 20/720 and the Mercier bridge (route 138), taking the first exit to the right off the bridge. For the Mission follow the signs "Sanctuaire (Shrine) Kateri Tekakwitha". ■

WELCOME
TO
KATERI'S
SHRINE

