

Catherine Tekakwitha – Lily of the Mohawks – Indian Saint St. Mary and Joseph’s Mission near Big Lake

Research by
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A chance meeting with Don Berthiaume at the Old St. Mary and Joseph Mission near Big Lake

I was leaving Jim and Pat Northrup’s place after a nice visit and saw a pick-up at the old St. Mary and Joseph Mission. I was always curious about this quaint little place so decided to stop and take a look. There was a gracious man by the name of Dan Berthiaume who took the time to show me around.

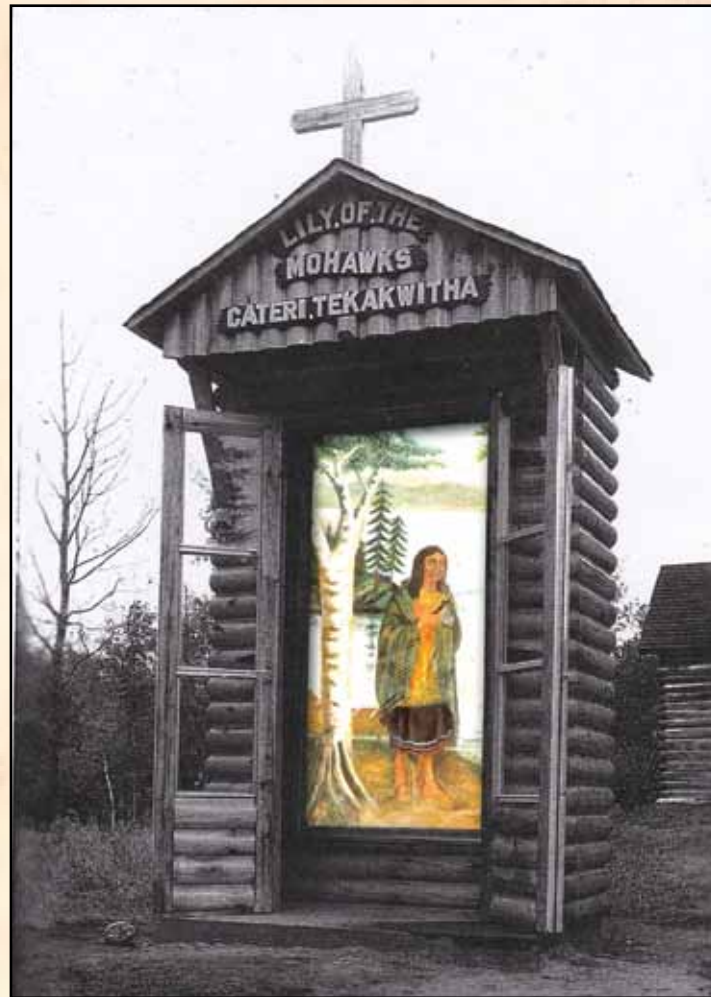
On the back of a card about Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha 1656-1680

For most of the 20th century, a shrine to Kateri Tekekwitha stood beside the mission chapel of Saints Mary and Joseph in Sawyer, MN, on the Fond du Lac Indian Reservation. The tiny sanctuary held an oil portrait of the 17th century Algonquin/Mohawk convert, painted by Father Henry Yzermans, a traveling Crosier priest. Through the years the painting suffered irreversible damage from weather and neglect. After the shrine was torn down, the picture was placed in storage. The reproduction on this card was made by artist Don H. Johnson, who used computer graphics to rebuild the original image.

On January 3, 1943, Kateri was declared Venerable by Pope Pius XII. She was beautified by Pope John Paul II on June 22, 1980. She lovingly offered up her brief life of poor health, ridicule, and great penances to her Lord. From the small village of her birth in upstate New York to the far corners of the world, veneration for the future saint continues to grow. With God, all things are made new – even broken images and lives.

An old story written by the late Nono Minor

Catherine Tekakwitha, also called Kateri Tekakwitha, “Lily of the Mohawks”, was also spoken of as *La Sainte Sauvagesse* or “Indian Saint.” She was the daughter of a Mohawk warrior and a Catholic Algonkin woman who had been captured by the Iroquois at Three Rivers, Quebec. Kateri was born in 1656 at Caugnahwaga, a palisaded town of the Turtle clan of the Mohawk, living on the Mohawk River near the present town of Auriesville, New York. Kateri was about four years old, her village was hit by smallpox; her mother and baby brother died, leaving Kateri with impaired eye sight. When she was ten, her village was burned by De Tracy, and after the destruction the Turtle clan moved to the north side of the river where Kateri was taken into the home of her uncle.



Mission Plans Indian Statue – Pine Knot of Nov. 26, 1937

Erection of a statue of Tekakwitha, Indian maiden expected to become the first saint born in the United States, is being planned on the lawn of the Mary and Joseph Indian mission near Sawyer, according to an announcement from Rev. Fr. E. E. Lemire, pastor of Our

Lady of the Sacred Heart church here and the mission.

It is expected that the canonization of the Indian maiden of the New York Mohawk tribes will be completed soon in Rome.

Tekakwitha, said Father Lemire, was part Iroquois and Algonquin. Her Algonquin ancestry made her a member of

the Chippewa people. She was born in the year 1656 and died in 1680 at the age of 24. She was baptized at the age of 20, yet her whole life was very holy.

“An interesting fact, not popularly known, that took place after her death gives the people of Lake Superior country a special claim to Tekakwitha,” said Father Lemire. “It is found in the story of her life written by the Rev. Father Edouard Le Compte, S. J. A great Canadian officer and explorer suffered for 20 years from severe rheumatism. He promised to visit the grave of Tekakwitha if she would cure him. At the end of a novena, he made in her honor, he was wholly cured and he testified himself that during the 15 months after he implored her help he had not suffered any return of the pains of his sickness. This great man was none other than Jean Du Luth, whose name was given to the city of Duluth.”

Update

Don Berthiaume reports that there is now a new little shrine by the church.

A reproduction of the original painting is inside the shrine. A frame has been made for the original oil painting and it has been placed in the newer church next door.

The old log mission of St. Mary and Joseph was accepted into the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

I had 2 images for this story but only one would fit. The historic black and white shrine photo is courtesy of Don Berthiaume of Cloquet. The original painting inside the black and white photo seemed a little dark. Don also gave me the little colored reproduction of the painting that was digitally restored by Don H. Johnson. This restoration really brought out the beauty of Tekakwitha and her surroundings. I had the idea to super impose the colored reproduction to the inside of the black and white shrine photo. I presented this to editor Zachary and our talented web master Aaron. Hope you like it and now you get the best of both images. Thanks to Don Berthiaume, Donald H. Johnson, Zachary and Aaron.