

by Francis Pierz, Missionary, July 15, 1847

“About 180 years ago the Ottawa Indians, coming from the Manitoulin Island, on the British side of Lake Huron, extirpated the whole tribe of Mashkotens, living where at present is the missionary station of Lacroix, (1) and established themselves from Waganakising, (2) on the shores of Lake Michigan to the Little Traverse, and in the course of time they spread themselves still further.

“Their chief village was built on an eminence, three miles from Middle Village (3) near a large crooked tree, under which they held their councils, and whence the mission has taken its name--Arbor Croche.

“The Rev. G. Richard, pastor of Detroit, while visiting, about twenty-five years ago the missions of Sault St. Marie and Mackinac, of which he was the founder, made several excursions among the Indians of this place, who were as yet pagans, and, finding that they were favorably disposed towards our religion, he wrote to the Rt. Rev. Bishop Fenwick of Cincinnati, who sent hither the Rev. John Dejean in 1829, the first missionary stationed here; he baptized more than three hundred Indians, and thus established a mission among the Ottawas. He erected on the shores of the Little Traverse Bay the first church which he dedicated to St. Peter (4). Here the neophytes under his direction, built a village of sixty houses. He remained with them but two years.

“His successor, the Rev. Frederick Baraga, who came here May 31, 1831, applied himself to the good work with so much zeal, that in the space of two years he converted 461 persons from paganism.

“This indefatigable missionary established also six other dependent missions: one at Cross Village, with a church dedicated to St. Anthony (5), one at Middle Village, Church of St. Francis Xavier (6), one at Cheboygan, Church at St. Mary; one at Castar Island, Church of St. Leopold, one at Manistie, Church of St. Joseph, one at Grand Traverse Bay where there is no church.

“He has opened schools everywhere, and given a great part of his time to the instruction of the children and catechumens. His successors, Rev. Fr. Simon Sanderl and Rev. Mr. Debruyne, baptized, during five years, 325 persons; but they have particularly applied themselves to confirm the converts in their faith, and perfect the missions by thoroughly instructing all.



“God has so blessed my labors in this mission, that, from the date of my arrival Sept. 30, 1839 to July 15, 1847, I have added to it 956 souls, mostly converts from paganism. There have been altogether about 200 deaths, leaving, at present in the mission, 1, 842 Catholics. To attend this mission and ten others, some at a considerable distance, as they should be attended to, is a work by far exceeding the strength of a single missionary. It became therefore, necessary to divide them into two parts, which was done by the Rd. Rev Bishop Lefevere during his visit here the 10th of July, 1847. He has left to my care the mission of Arbor Croche, Cheboygan, Agakatchiwing, (7) Grand Traverse, and all the other places to Machigong; (8) on the lake shore, the whole containing 1,242 souls, mostly excellent catholics.

“The missions of Lacroix, Middle Village, Castor Island and Manestie, containing 600 souls he has confided to the Rev. Ignatius Mrak (9).

“After the example of my predecessors, I have, with all energy and diligence, applied myself, not only to teach the Catholic religion and the sciences to our Indians, but also to instruct them in whatever is necessary to a good education and tends to civilization; and I see my endeavors so blessed and so Fruitful, that this mission presents an evident example that the Indians are capable, not only of being brought up to good Christians, (in which they by far surpass the whites), but also are susceptible of the highest civilization; for they are generally industrious and skillful in what they undertake. There are among them good carpenters, joiners and coopers; they build neat and substantial houses. They are assiduous in cultivating their farms which they bought from the government, and sell much fruit and vegetables.

“The women are also very industrious and have made great proficiency in household economy, making all the clothes for their families, and mats, baskets and other fancy work with porcupine quills, which display great taste and skill.

“In fine, I can truly assert, of the Indians of these missions, that they make such great progress in their schools and in civilization as fully to satisfy their supervisors; that they have gained the esteem of the whites, and deserve all the favor of our government.”

Francis Pierz, Missionary

- (1) Cross Village
- (2) Arbor Croche District
- (3) Middle Village or Goodhart
- (4) now “Holy Childhood”
- (5) now “Holy Cross”
- (6) now “St. Ignatius”