

# MINNESOTA'S FORGOTTEN MARTYR



Fort St. Charles - 1732

**MASSACRE ISLAND**

By  
Emmett A. Shanahan





*Cross erected in 1905 on Summit of Massacre Island. No trace  
of it left now.*



Bishop's House  
Crockston, Minnesota



August 5, 1949

To the Reader:

The title of this short monograph quite aptly describes an historical episode of which we ought to be aware. It took place in the Northwest Angle of Minnesota, the most northern part of this country, - an area that is little known despite the fact that its shores are graced by one of the most beautiful lakes on the continent, Lake of the Woods.

In this pine-spired amphitheatre over two hundred years ago was enacted a drama of a priest who was slain in line of duty. It is the true saga of a martyred priest and his companions when Fort St. Charles was the most northern and western outpost of civilization in mid-America.

Father Shanahan, the present pastor of Warroad, Minnesota, in whose parish Father Aulneau labored and was buried, has captured the spirit of this pioneer missionary. It is the story of a priest who came to preach God's Evangel in a wilderness and among a hostile people. When you read it, your own soul will be strengthened by his courage. He braved untold hardship and death itself because he loved God more than his own life.

Such heroism of the Faith deserves to be known and perpetuated in the minds of men. Father Aulneau sought to build for God. We of this Northland propose to make real his unfulfilled dream. We seek to build in his memory a church which will enshrine the God for Whom he gave his life.

But Father Aulneau's memory belongs not only to Warroad and to the Diocese of Crookston. It belongs to Minnesota and to the nation.

The parish at Warroad is small and limited in its resources. It deems it an honor to make sacrifices for the building of this memorial. If you wish to share in this sacrifice, we shall be truly grateful.

Sincerely yours in Christ,  
*Francis J. Schenk*  
Bishop of Crookston



SPEC  
CAPAM



*Discoverers of old fort and cross they erected there in 1908.*

NIHIL OBSTAT

AUGUST L. ZELLEKENS,  
*Censor Librorum*

IMPRIMATUR

† FRANCIS J. SCHENK  
*Bishop of Crookston*

Crookston, August 5, 1949.



## MINNESOTA'S FORGOTTEN MARTYR

Gulls veered high like white kites flashing in the sunlight against May's soft blue sky over the quiet sun-flecked waters of the harbor of La Rochelle in France. Now and then, singly and in groups they would dip screaming to quarrel over and carry away bits of refuse which had been tossed from the sleek and tidy man-of-war anchored there bearing the name "Ruby." The ship this twenty-ninth day of May, 1734, after many quiet weeks in port, now hummed and clattered with the sounds of officers' orders and sailors' shouted responses, of ropes passing through protesting pulleys, and the dull clang of the ship's huge anchor chain as it came up from the depths link after link. With a fair wind filling her canvas she headed out to sea escorted by the same gulls she had befriended these many weeks past. The "Ruby" once again was bound out of La Rochelle for the port of Quebec, New France.

On board were the fundamental elements of colonial expansion which for a little over two hundred years had been trickling in greater volume across the seas from mother countries to be absorbed in the seemingly boundless expanse of the New World whose treasures were beginning to excite the greed and arouse the envy of two great nations, France and Britain. There were soldiers on the "Ruby" to augment the existing garrisons and to establish new forts and posts to protect the colonists from the attacks of resentful, hostile Indians and to make more secure these lands of New France in the face of the strong British lion to the South. Colonists were aboard, too. One hundred and eighty of them with their fears and homesickness and hopes for the establishment of farms they could truly call their own and hand down to their children in this vast, free land. And in the darkest, foulest part of the ship were fifty others with tattered clothes, unwashed and sore-covered bodies who were constantly under an armed guard. They were smugglers who would be given their freedom to start life anew only when they landed at Quebec. They also were destined to be the unwitting reason why so many on board the "Ruby" were never to see land again.

One other group making the journey remains to be mentioned. It was a small group of eight men, most of them in their twenties or early thirties. Four were Jesuits and three were Sulpicians. Another cleric whom they addressed with greater respect and whom they engaged, whenever they could, in animated conversation filled with questions which he never grew tired of answering,



was older than the rest and wore apparel signifying that he was a Bishop. This was Bishop Dosquit, the fourth Bishop of Quebec, returning to his Diocese well pleased with the results of his latest trip to France. In the interests of his Diocese whose western and northern boundaries were constantly expanding to embrace more and more territory containing more and more tribes of Indians, he, like a general of an army, had returned to the country of his birth to recruit more and more priests to man those far-flung outposts in the wilderness and to teach the Faith to savages living in the primordial darkness of ignorance and superstition. From bishop to bishop, from monastery to monastery up and down the length and breadth of France he had gone begging young priests to aid him, a successor of the Apostles, in carrying out the ancient mandate given the first Bishops by their heavenly King. He, while stressing the importance of the work to be done and the lasting rewards that such work would gain, did not for an instant minimize the hardships and the dangers which these recruits would have to face. Better to tell them the bare truth than to have them come to him later and say they had been led there by false promises. He knew from his own experience and from firsthand reports what lay in store for pioneer missionaries who had already been under fire in that wild vastness of forests and swift rivers, and lakes and the ever present Indian. There would be almost unbearable loneliness, he had told them; they would suffer from the heat and the cold, from hunger, from physical exhaustion, from bites of hordes of mosquitoes; and he held out for some the prospects of horrible tortures and finally death at the hands of those they had come to help to live as children of God. Dreary was the future in a material sense; bright and glorious was the future in a spiritual sense. They were not to go like colonists hoping for farms that would bring them material comfort and wealth; they were not to go like these smugglers on board with freedom from jail waiting for them; they were to go solely to make Christ and His Church better known and loved in this new land that lay before them.

As helpers in this task only men, strong men of great faith and great hearts were wanted. No other need apply. Despite the picture he had painted, seven new recruits had volunteered to come back with him and his heart sang. Perhaps he could have used seventy. But seven? Well, he was happy to have seven. No wonder then on board the "Ruby" he was the center of these seven, no wonder they plied him with questions while their eyes grew bright in anticipation of the struggle ahead. They were young and strong. In their hearts burned fiercely bright the fires of zeal and love of God.



The wind was fair and the sea was calm. Day after day the "Ruby" serenely and proudly surged through the waters with a slight hissing sound and filled with happiness her human cargo which was convinced that the crossing would be a speedy one. But these pleasant, distance-consuming days were very few. Soon they were met with contrary winds that prevailed for week after week, and each day's progress was but a fraction of that covered during the pleasant, happy days which everyone had now completely forgotten. Nor was it enough that the winds were contrary, but storms arose to buffet them so that they could not have a fire in the galley. So tossed about were they that the priests could not even celebrate Mass for days on end.

Now came the grim spectre of disease and death striding through the ship from one end to the other in the form of little grey body lice that came aboard on the soldiers and most of all on the sore-covered bodies of the half-naked smugglers. Armed guards could keep the smugglers confined, but they were powerless to stave off the march of the grey, pestilence-infested horde that now took command of the ship which was now no longer proud but a tossing, bedraggled pest-house filled with sickness and running sores, maggots, fetid stench, and, now and then, death.

The priests in their zealous care for the sick became examples to all and among them was one, a strongly built young Jesuit, who even excelled his companions in their works of mercy. He was twenty-nine, this young Jesuit. As yet he was not an ordained priest. Before that office would be conferred upon him another year of theology was required. He would put in that remaining year in the seminary in Quebec. He was Jean Pierre Aulneau leaving behind a rather wealthy widowed mother, mistress of an estate in Vendee, France, for the life of a Jesuit missionary in the wilderness of New France.

During the height of the plague within the ship he was everywhere and most of all where men were the sickest. He who had been accustomed to cleanliness from his youngest days, who had in the midst of his rich home developed a sense of delicacy, was now throwing himself in the midst of filth and dirt, performing the most menial tasks for the poor sick wretches in the hold, administering to their physical needs and all the while consoling them in their misery, and preparing those souls which were about to leave their sore-ridden, feverish bodies. So conspicuous was he in his care of the sick that one of the Jesuits felt constrained to write home, "God preserved his health for the consolation of those on board."

At one time during the voyage two hundred were sick, and before the "Ruby" finally put in at Quebec, still with many sick



on board, twenty of those who left La Rochelle that bright May day had been consigned in death to a watery grave. At the beginning of the journey there had been high hopes of setting a speed record for the crossing. As a matter of fact a record was set. No other ship up to that time had taken so many days to make the crossing. Eighty long days and nights. They had left France in the full tide of spring and now in Quebec the waning days of August held in the air the faint, crisp hint of fall.

No sooner had the "Ruby" docked than her remaining sick were transferred to the hospital, and close on their heels was the young Jesuit, Jean Aulneau, loathe to part with the objects of his solicitude and ministering hands. They had been so thankful for all he had done for them on board ship that he wanted to be with them still. His religious Superior had other ideas, however. It was only by the grace of God that the young Jesuit had been spared the disease himself and now, at the hospital, with many others to care for them, it was foolishness to let this new arrival, already worn thin and weak by the labors shouldered during the voyage, continue to put his health in danger. The Superior forbade young Aulneau to visit the hospital.

The Superior's order came too late because Aulneau already had become infected with the virus of the dreaded sickness, and very soon after his arrival at Quebec he lay at death's door, a victim of the disease. His naturally strong and robust condition saw him through not only the initial attacks, but through a relapse he suffered when well on the road to recovery. Weeks later, when he was sure that he was well again, he mentioned the sickness to his mother in a letter written on October 10, 1734, saying, "The relapse was more serious than the first attack. I am, at last, thank God, once more enjoying good health."

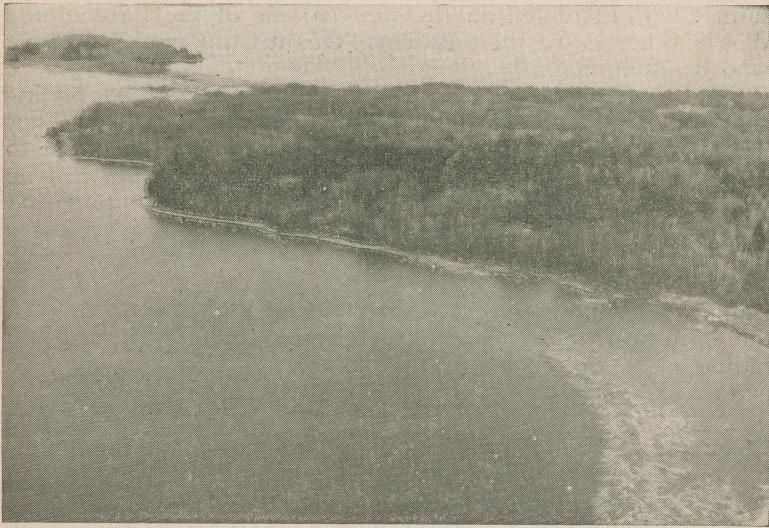
Having recovered his health, much work remained for him to do that winter of 1734-35. The final year of formal schooling before his ordination remained and, in addition, he was to learn as much as he could from everyone the bits of practical knowledge so necessary for survival in the wilderness he was about to penetrate.

The first sight of the pagan Indians thoroughly disgusted him. They seemed so stupid, so oblivious of anything but the present moment. Their uncouthness and bodily filthiness contrasted so strongly with all that he had known at home that he had to steel himself lest he bolt from their presence to quiet his upset stomach. Yet it was for these he had come. He was, in his own little way, to carry on the task that had been begun in this new land by others before him who had obeyed that old, old order, "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations . . ."



Into Quebec for the winter came various missionaries who had spent months and years among the different tribes of the interior, some near at hand and others from places that had never seen a white man before. They had tales to tell; tales of successes and failures, of dangers run and evaded, of the whiteness of the fields for the harvest and the need for more laborers in the vineyard. These priests could tell, too, how their Indians lived and what they believed concerning the Supernatural and a life hereafter, if they believed anything at all.

At every opportunity Aulneau would spend his spare time with them eagerly drinking in their every word, their every story. At the risk of being considered a nuisance he would ask question after question, and they would answer him even if the question did seem foolish sometimes. They, too, could remember the first days they spent in Quebec when they were fresh from France.



*Site of old Fort Saint Charles (woods in extreme right foreground).  
Pénasse at far left.*

As he studied these men, as he heard them talk, the disgust and loathing he held in his heart for the Indians and even this new, cruel land gave way to a burning desire to help them and to teach them about Him who loved them with an infinite love. The tinder of his own love for the Indians was ignited and now began to burn with a steady flame that was never to be extinguished. This was



the greatest thing that happened to him that winter and he gives credit for it to these missionaries returned from the front line with whom he says, "I met nearly all this winter; and the striking example they have given me of zeal, recollectedness, self-denial and interior union with God has, through our Lord's mercy, awakened in my heart a true and sincere desire to make every effort I can to imitate them."

In April 1735, shortly after his ordination, his Superior called him in and gave him his missionary assignment, an assignment described in the words of a fellow Jesuit writing from Montreal to Father Aulneau's mother, "I dare say it is the longest, most painful and dangerous journey ever undertaken by a missionary in Canada." Father Aulneau was to go to a tribe whose members no white man had as yet seen. Knowledge of their existence had been gathered by La Verendrye's men from wandering Chippewas who had dropped in on the French at little Fort Saint Charles situated on the western side of the Lake of the Woods. They called these Indians "Ouant Chipouanis"—"Those who dwell in holes."

One of the greatest drawbacks in the work of converting the Indians of the West was their habit of wandering. They would never stay long enough in one place to have time to listen to the instructions of the missionaries. They had no set dwellings. They were constantly on the move trapping and hunting. Now information had come that there was at least one tribe that had a fixed place of residence, holes in the ground. Conditions for the acceptance of the Faith on the part of these Indians were more favorable than among the wanderers. With the Faith firmly entrenched in such settled communities it could radiate out from them spreading its blessings even to those who had no fixed dwellings. Father Aulneau was to be the first priest to visit them. He was to learn their language, and instruct them. He was to make this long and perilous journey alone. No other priest would accompany him; no other priest would be within a thousand miles of him.

Because neither Father Aulneau nor La Verendrye ever reached these Indians "who lived in holes" it is not certain who they really were, but it is generally thought that they were the Mandans who did sometimes live in caves dug into river banks. So far away from Quebec did they live that it would be impossible for Father Aulneau to reach them within the year of his setting out. He was to spend the winter at Fort Saint Charles and while there he was to parcel his time among the Chippewas and the Assiniboins, learning their languages and their customs in addition to instructing and baptizing them. Everything that he could learn



about them which might be of help to future missionaries was to be written down. Especially desirable would be a dictionary of their language.

Now that he knew where he was to be sent, he gathered all the information he could from any source. He already had seen fellow priests who came into Quebec from the north and the west. Now he concentrated on those who knew at least a little about the district he himself was to visit. He went to the French soldiers and officers who had been out that way and asked them question after question. He went to the river, to outfitters, and to merchants in search of voyageurs who had canoed and portaged to the West from Lake Superior to the height of land and down the string of lakes and rivers that finally emptied into the Lake of the Woods. Very few of them knew anything about the land that lay beyond it to the West. They had heard of the "Indians who live in holes." They had never seen them; they did not even know where they lived. Fort Saint Charles marked the boundary between the known and the unknown.

Fort Saint Charles, despite its name which brought thoughts of cannon and bastions and great sturdiness, was after all a simple enclosure sixty feet wide and a hundred feet long of a double row of cedar posts extending about fifteen feet above the ground. On its corners were places for sentries to keep a lasting lookout, and provisions had been made in its construction for its defense should the occasion arise. It could not have been more elaborate than that because it had to be built from materials at hand. Nevertheless, it served its purpose well. It was never attacked.

Fort Saint Charles had been founded in 1732 by La Verendrye, the first soldier-explorer of central North America, as a part of his undertaking to discover for France what all the great powers of Europe were looking for—a Northwest Passage by water from the Atlantic through the continent into the Pacific Ocean. The Northwest Passage was the substance of the dreams of men driven by the compelling urge to seek out and find new lands, strange territory. La Verendrye was one of these. Three years before, in 1729, he was in command of a small trading post on the shores of Lake Nipigon near what is now Fort William, Ontario. From time to time Indians would drop in to tell, among other things, strange tales of a great river flowing westwards and emptying into the Western Sea. An Indian named "Auchagah" drew a crude map showing this river flowing westwards out of the Lake of the Woods. This was too much for La Verendrye. He states that for three nights as he slept on the shores of Lake Nipigon he dreamed that he, La Verendrye, had at last solved the mystery of the Northwest Passage, had claimed for his beloved France all



that vast country and all its riches—precious metals and timber and furs. He must go in search of it. Finally, after much troublesome negotiation, some uncompleted, with the French Governor in Quebec, with the Crown in France, and with merchants in Montreal, he set out in 1731 with fifty men and a Jesuit priest, Father Charles Mesaiger, in canoes. The canoes were loaded with supplies which included powder, balls, flints, and guns and trinkets for trading with the Indians and gaining their good will. They skirted the shore of Lake Superior and then began the arduous struggle against the swift flowing Pigeon River. Here at intervals they encountered rapids which meant that everything had to be unloaded and then carried on their backs upstream until navigable water was found again. Some of these portages were only a few feet long, others were a mile or more. At last they came to what later was called Grand Portage. It was the height of land. West of that portage the water flowed westwards; up to the grand portage the water had been flowing eastwards. This portage is a distance of nine or ten miles and here they waited until the spring of 1732, having first sent an advance party with six canoes to visit the Indians in the immediate territory west of Grand Portage.

And so in the summer of 1732, when George Washington was but five months old, when the land west of the Alleghenies had yet to feel and hear the tramp of white feet in any number, there stood La Verendrye with his sons, a Jesuit priest, and fifty Frenchmen in the heart of the Continent, poised on the threshold of the Lake of the Woods about to continue the search for the Northwest Passage. They had received a grand welcome from the Indians and on this July day in 1732 fifty canoes of them acted as an escort for La Verendrye as he first felt the waters of the Lake of the Woods slap the birch bark sides of his canoe.

Before them lay the sparkling wide waters of this most lovely of all large lakes. Long, long ago the Indians had given it its name from the thousands and thousands of islands, large and small, covered with pines, some of which grow all gnarled and grotesquely shaped from crevices in the bare rocks. It was a gem of beauty and a garden of plenty with the game on its shores—moose, and deer and partridges. And in its sparkling depths were fish in abundance. There was wild rice in its countless bays. There were ducks on its surface. The innumerable streams flowing into it were hosts to the beaver and mink and muskrat with their warm, soft furs, All these the lovely lake had to give those who would take them. And because these things were there in abundance the Indians of the Lake and the forest would battle it out from time immemorial with the foraging Indians from the prai-



ries for the privilege of using these primeval and lush hunting and fishing and trapping grounds. So popular as a north and south highway for war parties either in canoes or on foot on its banks had been a small river flowing into the Lake on its extreme southwestern end that it had been called by the Indians "The river of bloody ground." It was pointed out to La Verendrye as his canoes skirted the southern shore of the Lake. The French then called the river "Chemin de la Guerre," the road of war, and later on the English named it the Warroad River. At the mouth of this river La Verendrye followed the shore west and north until he came to another stream flowing into the Lake from the northwest, now called Angle Inlet. A little ways up this river they camped on an island (Magnusson island) and here he decided to establish his headquarters. Axes flashed and rang as they bit into trees; mauls and splitting wedges caused protesting logs to creak and crack, and very soon were raised the walls of the fort he called Fort Saint Charles in honor of the patron Saint of Marquis Charles de Beauharnois, governor of New France, and the Jesuit priest, Father Charles Mesaiger. Father Mesaiger was there with him helping to build it, but in two years he had to go back to Quebec with his health broken and be shipped as an invalid back to France. Father Aulneau was to replace him at Fort Saint Charles for one winter.

Such was the information he had gathered from his ceaseless questions, and what he now knew filled him with eagerness to begin the work for which he had been trained, to make as he had written "every effort to imitate" those gallant and courageous priests he had met during the winter. And because he was young, dreams of great accomplishments—hundreds of converts and many little rustic chapels—blossomed in his mind. In the midst of the eagerness and glowing dreams there arose the chill and forboding spectre of fear. Fear of the natural hardships that would bar his way—excessive heat and cold; long, tiresome, exhaustive journeys; sickness, hordes of mosquitoes, raging waters, and the silent attacks of hostile Indians. Fear of an unknown land and unknown, secret, hidden dangers. He knew these dangers existed. In France Bishop Dosquet had mentioned them all; in New France others who had experienced them had pointed them out. Then they seemed so far away, but now they were almost as near as tomorrow.

There remained one hardship which he had not expected, a hardship he had never experienced in the slightest degree—the hardship of being alone as a priest. When he would finally meet the Indians "who live in holes" there would not be a fellow priest





*Massacre Island from the air.*

within the radius of fifteen hundred miles. No priest to whom he could go for spiritual consolation. Not another man with similar interests and similar problems to whom he could talk and who would understand. The Indians, the soldiers, the voyageurs, the officers had common companionship, but he would be alone among men and constrained to keep so many things to himself. They could go to confession; he had no one to whom to confess. In danger of death there was a chance that they might receive Extreme Unction and Viaticum; there was no such chance for him. It was this dread of being the only priest that was his Gethsemane and, like his Model in the first Gethsemane, he resigned himself to the will of God and accepted the assignment.

Concerning this task he wrote in 1735 to Father Bonin, "Doubtless I shall have to undergo many hardships; they would have been more than welcome had it been advisable to give me another Jesuit as a companion; but I am to be sent alone among these tribes whose languages as well as whose manner of living is unknown. It was not without much pain that I brought myself to obey. May God accept the sacrifice I make of my life and of all human consolations as expiation for my sins. I shall be separated by several hundred leagues from any other priest, and in that lies the greatest hardship of all my mission. (A league



was about five miles.) But God seems to require of me the sacrifice of even this consolation. I can refuse Him nothing; may His Name be blessed forever."

The shadow of violent death at the hands of the savages was so common as to be expected. Several fellow Jesuits had been tortured and killed within the memory of many in Quebec and it had happened not so far away. Now and then quietly into Quebec came news of this one and that one far in the interior who had made the supreme sacrifice. He had to die some day; there was no more glorious way to gain heaven than by dying for the divine King whom he served. He writes in the same letter, "In this country we should set little value on our own lives which are so often in danger. I should deem myself happy if I should be judged worthy of laying my life down for the One from whom I received it." Death and loneliness. It was the loneliness he feared.

About a year had passed since he had seen the gulls dip and wheel over the sun-flecked waters of the harbor of La Rochelle and since he had put his foot on the strong deck of the sturdy man-of-war. Now once more he stood on the shore about to travel westward again. This time the waters were those of the broad St. Laurence. Gulls were there, too, and so was the sunshine, but instead of the "Ruby" was a nameless loaded birch-bark canoe quivering by the dock waiting for him to fill the small space reserved among so many bundles of supplies.

The time had come for the last, quick farewells and the canoes noiselessly and very quickly drew away from the shore. As long as they could be seen by the watchers on the bank the flashes of their paddles came with great rapidity because these young men, these voyageurs, were showing off. It was part of their nature to leave with a show of dash and bravado, and this was their way of doing it. As soon as a bend of the river took them out of sight of the city, the beat of the paddles was slackened and settled down to the steady distance-consuming pace of men who knew the limits of their endurance and how to get the best out of it.

June saw them in Montreal where they were delayed longer than they expected. Beyond Montreal to the west was the wilderness proper which they would penetrate as quickly as possible in order to reach the tiny outpost of Fort Saint Charles before the coming of winter. The prolonged stay in Montreal gave Father Aulneau a welcome and unlooked for opportunity to write letters once again before arriving at Fort Saint Charles. En route there was no time to write. And so at Montreal he



wrote letters to those who were nearest his heart—his mother, his sister, and Fathers Faye and Bonin.

To his mother he mentions the work that lies before him, the wandering life he will lead for the next three years, and he assures her that he will write when there is an opportunity to do so and then asks for her prayers, "Pray God, my dear Mother, that I may acquit myself in a manner worthy of Him. I trust that, separated for His sake from all that might afford human consolation, He will not forsake me; and that if in the midst of the forests, whither I go to pass the rest of my life, and in the midst of wild beasts I find nothing to flatter my self-love, I may find an opportunity to destroy and annihilate it by my sufferings. Ask Our Lord to send me many sufferings and to give me patience to bear them with resignation to His holy and divine will. Nearly every day I pray for you at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and shall continue until death to offer it for you. There is nothing else that I am able to do to express the gratitude I owe you."

To his sister Theresa, a nun in a French convent, he again outlines his task and mentions the difficulties he will encounter. He recalls the earlier French priests who "watered the wilderness with their sweat and blood," compares himself with them and is appalled by his lack of virtue, and therefore writes, "Pray more and more for me, and beseech the ladies of your community to do the same." Then, as an afterthought, he asks her to send him, if she can, some altar linen and decorations because, "In this respect I am in a pitiable condition of penury." He ends the letter, "Goodbye, my dear sister, and let your love for me in Our Lord Jesus Christ be as deep as mine is for you." He was never to write to his mother or his sister again.

He speaks of his health to Father Faye. "With every increase of active work my health has become more robust, and the closer insight I have of the worry and sufferings of the life I am to lead, the more thankful I am that God has deigned to call me to the missions of this forlorn country. . . . My work foreshadows many hardships, the least of which will be that I shall have to wander about in the woods four or five years with no fixed habitation. In this, though very different as to merit and virtue, I shall resemble the missionaries of this poor country who watered it with their sweat and blood."

They left Montreal on June 12, 1735. He remained a few days at Iroquois Mission at Sault St. Louis and was again on his way on July 21. Some weeks later Father Aulneau was visiting Father de Saint Pe at Michillimakinac Island (now Mackinac Island)



in Lake Michigan. Father Saint Pe proved to be the last priest Father Aulneau was ever to see.

Skirting the shores of Lake Superior to the mouth of the Pigeon River they continued their ever westwardly way. Now they left Lake Superior and began the hard, difficult ascent up the fast-flowing Pigeon. Digging with all their might against the current, unloading the canoes, and digging again with their paddles, they spent the months of August and September and the first half of October.

Somewhere along their route a band of Indians on a hunting expedition had set fire to the forests. The fire had burst the bounds they had set for it and the entire region was on fire. In addition to the stifling heat and the constant hordes of stinging insects the Frenchmen had to fight their way through thick smoke. Writing seven months later about this part of the journey Father Aulneau says, "We journeyed nearly all the way from Lake Superior to Fort Saint Charles through fire and a thick, stifling smoke which prevented us from even once catching a glimpse of the sun." In the evenings as they prepared their blankets the sky glowed red from the flames.

By the end of September they had reached the height of land, had made the grand portage, and had reached that labyrinth of little lakes and streams whose waters swiftly and sluggishly by turns flowed west to Rainy Lake and out of Rainy Lake in the Rainy River to lose themselves in the Lake of the Woods. Now in the mornings when they arose from the night's sleep the air was crisply cold and a thin layer of frost covered the gunwales and paddles of the canoes. Waterfowl were gathering for their southward journey and no longer were there birds to sweeten the growing silence with their songs. The songsters had departed weeks ago. When they paddled near rice beds in the shallows the air became filled with the whirr of the wings of thousands of feeding ducks which sounded like a strong wind in the tops of the mighty pines. October was on the border of chill and harsh old age when Father Aulneau saw the Rainy River's banks withdraw from one another like curtains to reveal a large bay beyond which he beheld what La Verendrye had seen four years before—the wide expanse of the waters of the Lake of the Woods. He would never leave that Lake alive. Over a century and a half would pass before his bones would leave it. Fort Saint Charles lay on the western side of the Lake. The end of the summer's journey was only days away.

It was the twenty-third of October when they came around the point of an island and saw the pale, blue smoke rising from the



chimneys of the huts within the palisades of Fort Saint Charles. These palisades, trimmed of their bark, loomed pale before the dark curtain of the live spruce in the forest behind it.

Father Aulneau had reached the end of his journey. He had traveled three thousand miles since setting out in early May. Fort Saint Charles was the last dot on his map; beyond it lay uncharted lands, unknown people whom he had come to visit and to meet. This, however, was not to be done until spring should come again. He was to winter at Fort Saint Charles and he had reached it just in time.

There was a deathly grimness about the preparations for the coming winter at the Fort. Men worked hard and silently with their minds full of anxious thoughts as to how they would pass the lean months that lay ahead. That summer, two canoes heavily laden with supplies for the winter, had been lost in the rapids on the Pigeon River because of the carelessness of a guide. In addition to this tragedy the wild rice crop that fall had been very light because the level of the Lake had been abnormally high during the summer. Now they had to range far and wide seeking the few places where the rice could be harvested, and when the harvesting canoes returned to the Fort they contained only a small amount of the precious grain. As the weather grew colder much of the preparations took the form of fishing for white fish which spawned in the fall. These were caught in large numbers and cached away in an ice house dug back of the Fort. Some of the fish would spoil before the continuous freezing temperature of winter would set in. That made no difference; they had to take the chance.

Early in November the freeze-up came. At first open water could be seen in the middle of the channel and far out on the huge open part of the Lake; in a few days there was no open water anywhere. The Lake was transformed into a wide blanket of dazzling whiteness with the snow which fell in white, howling storms. Winds whipped it into drifts in the open spaces; it was always deep and soft in the woods. The startling silence of winter settled everywhere. In the night it would be broken rarely by the hooting of the great white owl. When the temperature was thirty below or more, trees would crack like pistol shots and the ice would split shaking the earth and a rumbling would start which died in the distance like far away rolling thunder. On clear winter nights Father Aulneau would love to stand outside awhile to gaze at the dancing display of the Northern Lights. Sometimes they would swoop down to the treetops; at other times he could hear them crackling in the sky. Their beauty,



their liveliness so impressed him that months later he mentioned them in a letter to Father Bonin.

During the winter most of the activity at the Fort centered about the business of keeping warm and having enough to eat. Had it not been for occasional bands of wandering Indians dropping in to trade quarters of moose and caribou for powder, balls, and trinkets, the entire garrison would have died of starvation. In memory of the extremely hard winter and the Frenchmen's hunger the Indians called the island which lies a little north and east of the Fort "Bucket Island"—"I am hungry Island"—a name it bears to this day.

Father Aulneau immediately undertook the task of learning the language of the Indians and the preparation of a dictionary and a grammar. He encountered difficulties because the Indians, acting upon the instructions of their medicine men, refused to answer questions he would ask concerning their language. Occasionally an Indian who was more friendly would help him out and a start was made on the book which was the first attempt of its kind.

Father Aulneau was thwarted at every turn. Consolations from his work were very few. The Indians were polytheistic. There were good gods and bad gods. No attention should be paid the good gods; they were always good. Adoration should be shown the evil gods in order that they would be good. They were the ones that should be placated by prayers and offerings of meat and tobacco.

When Father Aulneau would finally arouse in the minds of visiting Indians an interest in the Faith, and it would seem that they were becoming serious in their desire to learn more about it, they would suddenly decide to go on a hunt, pack up their belongings, join the main band and fall back into the old paganism. After months of such experiences he writes almost despairingly, "As for the Indians who dwell here, I do not believe, unless it be by a miracle, that they can ever be persuaded to embrace the faith; for even not taking into account the fact that they have no fixed abode, and that they wander about the forests in isolated bands, they are superstitious and morally degraded to a degree beyond conception. In addition both the English and the French, by their accursed avarice, have given them a taste for brandy and this traffic in liquor with the Indians has brought about the destruction of several flourishing missions, and has induced many an Indian to cast away every semblance of religion. This practice constitutes one of the greatest crosses the missionaries have to endure here among the Indians." He gives his companions at Fort Saint Charles a clean bill of health concern-



ing their dealings with the Indians. "I must say in justice to the French with whom I have journeyed, that they have not mixed in this infamous traffic, and that in spite of all the repeated demands of the Indians, they have refused to trade liquor for the goods the Indians have to trade."

If there were more missionaries in the field, he is of the opinion that the conversion of the tribes could be effected. These missionaries, he writes, "could be stationed at different points, and could head off, as it were, the roving savage who, if he escaped from one, would fall into the hands of another." But only one missionary in this vast country? "But what can one poor mortal do in such an extent of country, the very limits of which are as yet unknown?"

Such were the thoughts he put on paper during the long winter nights of cold and hunger and disappointments. As winter entered its dying days, their hunger increased. Now they were compelled to eat the whitefish which had spoiled and had great black blotches on it. The store of wild rice was gone. It was eat decaying fish or die. They chose to live.

The days had been getting longer with the sun mounting higher and higher in the sky and soon came the morning with that first soft, warm breeze from the south which has always caused men in the North to smile a little and to whisper to themselves, "It's spring again." Almost all at once it seemed that the Lake and the forest became alive again. The naked and stark birch and poplar put on the first thin garments of delicate green. On the floor of the forest scampered all the wild small things that had slept the winter through, while out on the Lake the returning waterfowl set up a loud cacaphony of boisterous and raucous sound. At night men were awakened by the high pitched and hysterical laughter of the loon. Fresh fish was now obtained in abundance; wild fowl again revolved on spits over the hot coals. Eating now was not only the necessity it had been, but also a pleasure.

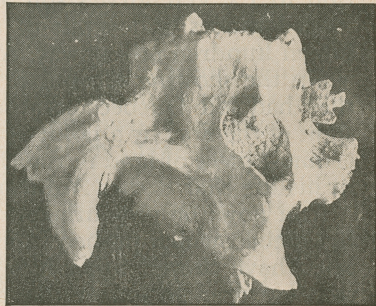
Under the bewitching spell of spring's new life, the men of the Fort forgot the winter with its cold and hunger and crackling northern lights and began to plan and prepare for summer. Father Aulneau was not immune to the spell. He was still young, and it was spring. As he stood on the sandy shore of the little bay in front of the Fort, as he heard the friendly, soft lapping of the waves on the rocks and pebbles, as he felt the pure and sweet touch of the light wind on his face and his hair, he, too, dreamed dreams and planned plans for the summer ahead. He wrote of the plans to his Superior in Quebec with high hope and, then, as an afterthought like a small dark cloud far off in a bright sky,



he feels the cold presentiment of an early death and writes, "After all, what the issue of all these projects will be is known to God alone, and, who can tell, perhaps instead of receiving the announcement of the realization of these plans, you may hear the



*Decayed remnants of cedar palisades.*



*Jawbone with imbedded arrowhead.*

news of my death . . . I place all in God's hands. I am disposed to offer Him with a light heart the sacrifice of my life."

And that little dark cloud in the distance began to creep closer without Father Aulneau's knowing of its approach. Discouraging news came concerning the long planned expedition to the southwest, to the Mandans on the Missouri. It was necessary to postpone the long journey until the following year, 1737, because of a lack of supplies. La Verendrye the elder decided to send three canoes with a party of men to Mackinac Island for provisions and merchandise, and above all, for gunpowder which they needed so badly. They were to travel at top speed, to return as soon as possible in order that something could be accomplished before the season had become too far advanced. Father Aulneau asked to be permitted to accompany the group in order that he



might consult with the priests at Mackinac concerning problems pertaining to his mission and that he might also go to confession. At the same time Father Aulneau asked that Jean-Baptiste La Verendrye, the eldest son of the Commandant, be put in charge of the little flotilla. Since Jean-Baptiste was second in command, he argued, his presence and authority would enforce better discipline and result in a more rapid accomplishment of their task. After some hesitation La Verendrye agreed to put his son in command.

In the afternoon of June 5, 1736, nineteen picked men in addition to La Verendrye's son and Father Aulneau in three half-loaded canoes glided out of the little bay for Mackinac Island fifteen hundred miles away. Again the quick pull of the paddles, again the showing off, but it was over more quickly than when they had left Quebec, because they were soon cut off from the sight of the Fort by a point of land now called Penasse, the northernmost piece of land in the United States. This was the first time in his life that Father Aulneau was traveling east.

And now the presentiment of death which he had faintly felt in Quebec, which pushed itself into his mind at Montreal, which must have preyed upon him constantly because he wrote of it so often, was no longer like a little dark cloud in the distance. The cloud had now settled upon the water and had become a war party of about 130 prairie Sioux.

This war party had come down the traditional route of warring bands, the Warroad River, into the Lake of the Woods and was now skirting the shores in the vicinity of Fort Saint Charles in search of small bands of Crees and Chippewas they might attack and scalp. Whether they saw the three canoes in the distance and followed them from afar, or whether they saw the lights of the fires when the evening meal was prepared, is not known. The Frenchmen had stopped for the night on the shores of one of the larger (and the highest) islands which jut out into the open part of the Lake of the Woods called the Big Traverse. The island is between eighteen and twenty miles from Fort Saint Charles. Exactly what transpired there the night of June fifth or the morning of June sixth will never be known because no white man lived to tell the tale. What is known has been handed down from Indian to Indian and then to the French who wrote the various versions of what they heard.

Very probably making overtures of peace the Sioux came upon them, sat down with the French to complain that the French were trading guns and ammunition to their enemies, the Crees and the Chippewas, and then at a prearranged signal fell upon the French who fought back valiantly but futilely in the face of



superior numbers. One account says that the Indians did not mean to kill Father Aulneau whom they feared because he was a "blackrobed medicine man," but that one young warrior, crazed by the sight of so much blood and anxious at the same time to acquit himself as a great brave, fell upon the priest killing him with a tomahawk. When the last Frenchman was dead, there took place on the wild shores of that island a blood orgy which saw the Indians with drawn knives mutilating the bodies of the dead. Everything of value the Frenchman had on them or with them was taken. Finally they severed the heads from the bodies and placed them in an orderly row on beaver skins. All except two. The heads of La Verendrye's son and Father Aulneau they took with them as trophies of the slaughter.

As they were completing this grisly work, they were frightened by the dull rumble of thunder and the approach of a black cloud indicating wind and rain. Putting their own dead into their canoes they frantically sought the shelter of islands whose closeness to one another would break the force of the short storm. As they huddled together in the storm and noted its fierceness, the thought came to them that this storm with the wind and the lightning and ear-splitting thunder was obviously a sign of the Manitou's displeasure because of the deed they had done. With their dead they fled towards the mouth of the Warroad River down which they had so lately come with thoughts of war and plunder. Two friendly Indians reported to La Verendrye, perhaps weeks later, that they had seen on the eighteenth of June in Muskeg Bay, near what is now Warroad, Minnesota, twenty Sioux canoes bearing blood stains and at the same place limbs of dead Indians protruding from the sand where they had been hastily buried.

Meanwhile, in the eery hush that precedes a storm, the bodies of the dead Frenchmen lay more than deathly still as if they had always been a part of the barren rocks and the creeping lichen. Not a bird called; the waters of the Lake became calm and placid as glass. La Verendrye's oldest son, his favorite and second in command, lay headless and prone with a sort of iron hoe imbedded in his loins. Father Aulneau was on his knees, propped up besides a heavy clump of bush where he had fallen and had been left there after the Sioux had hacked his head from his body. The mutilated bodies of the others lay where they had fallen. Soon came the storm with its darkness. Livid flashes of lightning played upon the still forms. The wind and the thunder and the dashing waves played their requiem. And the rain fell, washing from gaping wounds and severed heads the blood which slowly began to trickle down the rocks and mingle in red threads





*Skulls as found during excavation.*

with the tossing water which ran to meet it. The storm soon passed. The sun shone again. Birds called. And the water gaily rippled and sparkled in the brightness. High overhead the gulls flecked white against the blue, blue sky.

In the clump of brush with his knees on the bare rock Father Aulneau met violent, horrible death far from his native France, from his mother, from a fellow priest. What he had never ruled out as impossible, what he had steeled himself to accept had happened. "Doubtless I shall have to undergo many hardships. . . . May God accept the sacrifice I make of my life . . . I can refuse Him nothing. . . . I shall deem myself happy were I deemed worthy of laying down my life for the One from whom I received it . . . You may hear the news of my death. I am disposed to offer Him with a light heart the sacrifice of my life . . ." No longer were these words which he had written mere rhetoric. All of it had come to pass that day. Premonitions had given way to actuality. Two years had passed since that day the "Ruby" left La Rochelle and now he knelt dead on an island that has ever since been known as Massacre Island, an island at which no pagan Indian will as much as look and who, should he have to pass it, will without fail cast on the waters a handful of tobacco to appease the anger of the Manitou.



Rumors began to drift to Fort Saint Charles that the Sioux war party had been in the vicinity at the time of the departure of the three canoes for Mackinac. The uneasiness that was aroused by these rumors was heightened when a trader from Montreal arriving at the Fort on June seventeenth reported that he had not met La Verendrye's canoes on the way. Two days later La Verendrye sent his sergeant with seven men to follow the same route that his son and Father Aulneau would have taken and to investigate the islands on the way. Within a few days the sergeant was back at the Fort with the sad and tragic news of the massacre. As the news of the disaster spread among the Indians who were friendly with the French, they descended upon Fort Saint Charles in droves and begged La Verendrye to lead them to do battle with and take revenge on the Sioux. La Verendrye had to use all his powers of diplomacy and persuasion to discourage them from a war which would accomplish no good purpose.

In the meantime a party of friendly Indians had landed on the island of the massacre and piled a huge tumulus of stones over the bodies to protect them from the elements and birds and animals. Digging a grave was out of the question because only a few inches of soil covered the rock base of the island.

Before La Verendrye could send canoes for the bodies, it was September. In his journal he wrote, "On September 17, I dispatched the Sergeant with six men to raise the bodies of Reverend Father Aulneau and my son and on the eighteenth I had them buried in the chapel together with the heads of all the Frenchmen killed, which they also brought in accordance with my orders."

One day in September of the same year, relates Le Garduer de St. Pierre, commander of Fort Lepin, there came to him an Indian chief wearing a silver object in his ear. St. Pierre asked him where he had obtained the earring, for the Commandant had recognized it as a seal belonging to Father Aulneau. The Indian laughed in answer, whereupon the angry St. Pierre leaped upon the chief, tore the seal from his ear, and sent him out of the fort.

It is related, too, that Father Aulneau's chalice, taken by the Sioux, came into the possession of a widowed squaw. She was the mother of several stalwart braves who were the pride of the tribe. Soon after she received the chalice these sons, one by one, died horribly in her sight. She, ascribing these deaths to the chalice, in a frenzy of grief and anger seized the chalice, ran to the banks of a river, and hurled the silver cup in a gleaming arc into the



stream's brown depths placidly flowing into the Lake of the Woods.

La Verendrye left Fort Saint Charles the following year for the West where he reached the Mandans in 1739. The year 1740 found him back at Montreal reporting to his creditors and being discredited by jealous traders. He then resigned his commission as Commandant of the Northwest. Upon his reinstatement he set out upon another expedition to the Western Sea which death cut short in 1749.

In the years that followed little Fort Saint Charles with its quadrangle of double stakes enclosing the bark huts for the commandant, the missionary, the soldiers, and the little chapel was soon forgotten. It stood bravely for a while as a symbol of the courageous men who built it and whose bones had found rest within it. But the odds were against it. It was to be neglected for almost two hundred years. Two centuries of winter's snows and summer's high winds and pounding rain were to beat upon it. Wandering Indians, forest fires started by lightning or careless trappers, the crashing of old dead trees, the coming of new ones, the rubble of two hundred autumns' fallen leaves—all combined to gradually and relentlessly erase the Fort from the face of the earth and leave its location tangled in a maze of traditions handed down from Indian to Indian of successive generations.

Once more for almost two centuries Angle Inlet, and the islands and the lovely Lake became as they had been before that day in July 1732 when axes first rang clearing the site for the Fort.

Father Aulneau was forgotten also, forgotten with the site of the Fort which sheltered during those two hundred years his mortal remains. And he would have remained forgotten even among his fellow Jesuits had it not been for a strange coincidence which took place in the town of his birth, Vendee, France, in Advent of the year 1889.

At that time three Jesuit Fathers were giving a mission in Vendee. Among the six hundred men, who received Holy Communion at the close of the mission was an aged and venerable descendant of the old Aulneau family. This old man had never seen a Jesuit Father before, but he told them that he had in his possession an old heirloom that had been handed down from father to son for generations. The heirloom was a packet of letters more than a hundred and fifty years old. From them it appeared that some members of the Aulneau family in years past had been Jesuits and that one of them had met his death at the hands of Indians on a lake in the wilds of North America.

Among this group of letters were letters written by Father Aulneau to his mother, to his sister, and to fellow Jesuits. In-



cluded in the packet also were letters of contemporary Jesuits to Father Aulneau's mother telling her of the death of her son, of his piety, and of his zeal.

These letters were copied, translated into English and made their first appearance in the magazine, "The Canadian Messenger." In 1896 the Jesuit Fathers of Montreal published them in book form.



*Skulls after cleansing.*

No sooner were these letters translated and published in the missionary magazine than interest in the forgotten Jesuit was revived. Especially keen was this interest among the Jesuit Fathers who had shortly before, in 1885, taken possession of Saint Boniface College in Saint Boniface, Manitoba. Where had the Fort been? Where had the massacre taken place? Was there any chance of solving these questions? The Lake was so large, streams by the hundreds flow into it, the islands can be counted by the thousands. There were no reliable maps marking either the island or the fort. Perhaps the Indians had some traditions concerning the locations. Could these traditions be trusted? The Jesuits at the College agreed that an attempt should be made to discover these historical sites.

In the summer of 1890 two Jesuits, Fathers Kavanagh and Blain, got in touch with a Captain Laverdiere who had traveled the Lake of the Woods for years, had an intimate knowledge of the various islands, and, what is more, had remembered all the old Indian traditions which he had heard from time to time. Yes, there was a tale about an island on which "a man of prayer" had been murdered long ago. As a matter of fact the navigators on the Lake of the Woods called the island "Massacre Island." The Indians who inhabited that part of the Lake called it "Manitou Island," thought it haunted, and would never dare to land upon its shores. The little expedition of Jesuit Fathers



and Captain Laverdiere went to this island which is about a mile long and half a mile wide and is part of the fringe of islands which front upon the large open part of the Lake of the Woods. Before leaving the island they erected on the lofty rocky summit of the east end a cross in a pile of stones.

After the passage of twelve more years Archbishop Langevin of Saint Boniface, who took an intense interest in the early history of the Lake of the Woods, headed a gathering of priests and laymen which visited Massacre Island. The Archbishop had various excavations made on the island in a futile attempt to find some relics of the slaughtered Frenchmen. He also had a small memorial chapel erected on a high bluff and dedicated the chapel to Our Lady of Martyrs.

In 1902 Archbishop Langevin also organized an expedition for the purpose of finding, if possible, the site of Old Fort Saint Charles. This group left Kenora, Ontario, on September second in the steamer "Catherina S." At Flag Island on the Minnesota side of the Lake they picked up two old and respected Indian chiefs, Powassin and Andagamigowinini by name, who kindly gave all the information they had concerning the site of the Old Fort. These chiefs said that there were some mounds on both sides of Northwest Angle Bay with square stones showing on the surface and that these mounds, according to their traditions, were the ruins of fireplaces built long ago by the French. Chief Powassin guided the Archbishop to such a mound on the north, or the Canadian side of the bay. Here excavations were made and the remains of an old fireplace were found with its three stone sides containing within them ashes eight inches deep covered with alluvial soil. Although the site of the fireplace was not a fitting place for a fort, the explorers were overcome with enthusiasm and proclaimed that they had at last found the site of the old fort. They immediately erected on the spot a cross bearing the very premature inscription, "Fort Saint Charles, built in 1732; discovered in 1902." The Archbishop and his companions left Angle Inlet for Kenora and home rejoicing over the comparatively easy accomplishment of a task they had considered well nigh hopeless.

But the enthusiasm did not prevail for very long. Serious thinking about the authenticity of the find was productive of grave doubts. It was really not a place for a fort. More likely it had been a sort of cabin used by a trapper or a trader long ago. With the doubts growing stronger the indefatigable Archbishop Langevin again returned to the spot and directed a more thorough search and more excavations in the neighborhood of the fireplace they had uncovered five years before. This search brought to light such objects as a steel file, some nails, and the blade of a knife.



However, they found nothing that could lead them with any positive proof to believe that it was the Fort described by Father Aulneau and La Verendrye. There were no human bones, no skeletons which La Verendrye had stated he buried in the chapel of the Fort. And so it was that Father Paquin, one of the Jesuits from Saint Boniface, suggested that the Archbishop organize a party of explorers including some of the professors of Saint Boniface College whose task it would be during the summer vacation of 1908 to resume the search for the old Fort and the relics of Father Aulneau.

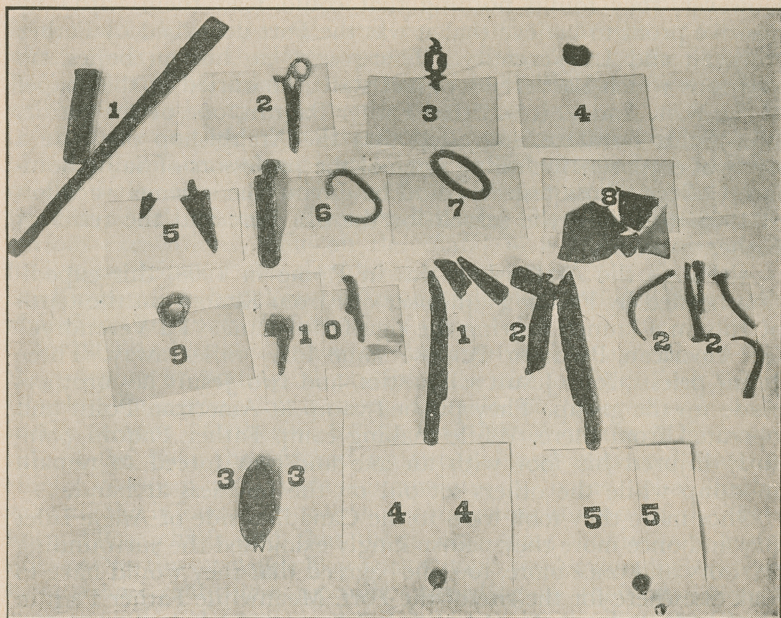
Although the Archbishop was in Rome in 1908, this expedition headed by Father Paquin set out from Kenora on the tenth of July in a launch bearing the significant name "La Verendrye" for American Point or Penasse some forty miles away. Three Jesuit priests, four Jesuit scholastics, and two Jesuit lay brothers made up the group. They pitched camp at American Point and operated from there. While making camp Father Paquin painfully injured his foot with an axe and was forced to remain in camp while the others set out on the business at hand.

Once more they took tools to the Canadian side of Angle Inlet Bay and once more they painstakingly examined the surrounding territory and once more, too, they agreed that they would have to look elsewhere for the site of the Fort. Meanwhile Father Paquin lay in his tent nursing his injured foot and at the same time reviewed the literature containing what old chief Powassin, who had died during the interim, had said about this old Fort. There was one sentence that attracted Father Paquin's attention. The more he read it the more Father Paquin became convinced that old Chief Powassin was describing a spot on the *south* shore of the Bay where he in his youth had seen remains of old chimneys. Powassin had said, "They lay close to the shore in a small cove, amid a bush of poplars, a little to the west of the site on the north shore." No wonder they couldn't find it. They had been working on the wrong side of the Bay!

When the party came back for dinner somewhat discouraged over the results of their fruitless efforts, Father Paquin had little trouble inducing them to try on the American side at a point a little more than a mile from their camp.

When the group arrived at the little bay or cove spoken of by Powassin and pointed out by Father Paquin, the men arranged themselves in a line where each man would be responsible for five feet of ground on each side of him and then proceeded to walk in a westerly direction paralleling the shore line. This was hard work. In addition to cutting their way through piles of brushwood and clambering over fallen trees and huge rocks,





*Objects found a foot or less beneath surface of soil within site of old fort: 1. carpenter's chisel; 2. scissors; 3. door latch; 4. pieces of stone pipes; 5. arrow heads; 6. iron handles; 7. tinder box; 8. pieces of glass; 9. iron ring; 10. pieces of iron; 12. knife blades; 22. nails; 33. whet-stone; 44. lead bullet; 55. pierced bead.*

they had to contend with hordes of mosquitoes which settled upon them in the hot, stuffy woods. Their progress was painfully slow.

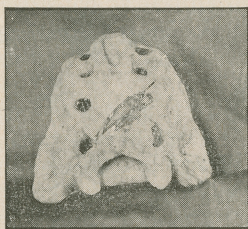
Within a very short time these discomforts were forgotten. They were electrified by a sharp, excited cry from one of the men. Rushing over to him the others beheld the cause of the sudden shout. There at their feet was a number of flat stones carefully laid upon each other. Another fireplace! A big one this time! Fatigue and pestering mosquitoes were forgotten and frantically the shovels and spades and axes were put to work. In a very little time the outlines of a huge fireplace were laid bare. They had truly found something of historical worth but, as darkness was now settling down, they went back to camp with high hopes in their hearts to report to Father Paquin and to wait for another day to dig again. There was not much sleep for them that night.

Next morning digging was resumed in a methodical way.



Poplar trees measuring from eight to twelve inches in diameter had to be felled; the soil was a maze of roots, but within five days two other small fireplaces were discovered and in the vicinity of the large chimney were found a pair of scissors, knife blades, a lead bullet, and brass handles of a cooking vessel. Unearthed in another spot was a pile of human bones. These bones, after a subsequent expert examination by physicians, represented parts of twelve different skeletons which, apparently, had been gathered somewhere and brought to the Fort for burial. Farther off from the large fireplace were uncovered half-rotted stumps of posts standing upright in the clay close to one another. In a straight line with these to the south and then at right angles to the east and then north again were other half-rotted stumps and the reddish dust of others which had entirely decayed. There was no trace of the palisades making up the north wall of the fort because the level of the Lake had risen during the years to engulf and wash away that part of it. The searching party was now confident it had discovered the site of old Fort Saint Charles and the bones of parts of the badly decomposed bodies La Verendrye had ordered brought back to the Fort for burial in September 1736. Further exploratory operations had to be discontinued for the time being because the Jesuits had to return to Saint Boniface for their annual eight day retreat.

At the end of the retreat the Jesuits again set out for Fort Saint Charles. This time they took with them Father Beliveau, Chancellor of the Diocese of Saint Boniface, and also Judge L. A.



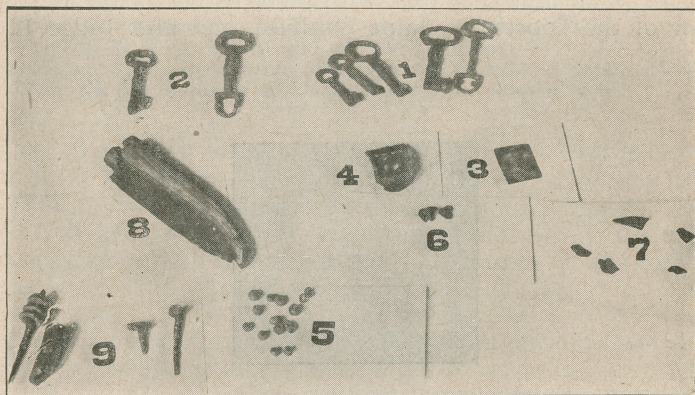
*Os Sacrum of Young  
La Verendrye showing scar of  
hoe wound.*



Prud'homme, a historian long interested in the problem the Jesuits were trying to solve. The Chancellor and the Judge were to be the official witnesses, ecclesiastical and civil, of what they expected to find.

La Verendrye in his journal had stated that he had had nineteen skulls and the bodies of his son and Father Aulneau buried within the chapel of the Fort. Only when these relics would be found, could they be absolutely sure they had actually discovered the old Fort. Consequently these relics were the primary object of the second part of the 1908 expedition. Within five days this task was completed. First the skulls were found. Nineteen of them arranged in two double rows were lying in the clay under about two feet of earth. They were in a good state of preservation. Rootlets had grown through the cavities of the eyes, ears, and nose. In the jawbone of one skull was firmly imbedded an arrow head. Certain that they were now within the limits of the chapel and would at any time come upon the skeletons of young La Verendrye and Father Aulneau a tense expectancy came upon all of them. The Jesuits proceeded cautiously. They photographed everything. They took notes and measurements in order to reconstruct on paper the ground plan of the Fort. Now a spade unearthed a piece of rotten wood. The search was about to end.

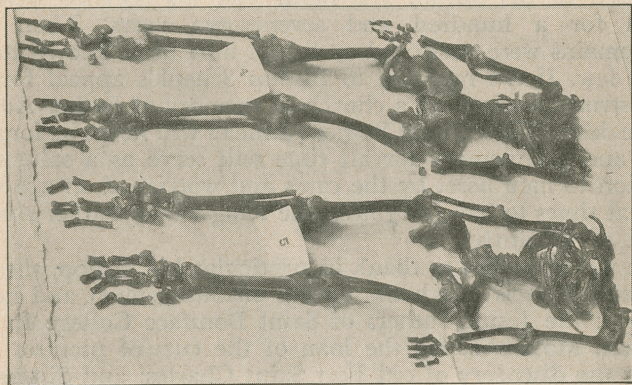
The rotten wood proved to be a part of a box and within what



*Objects found in coffin containing skeletons of Father Aulneau and young La Verendrye: 1. and 2. keys and master key; 3. piece of gilded glass; 4. shoe buckle; 5. rosary beads; 6. hook (probably hook of Father Aulneau's cassock; 7. pieces of arrowheads; 8. blade of hunting knife; 9. awl and nails.*



was left of the box were the remains of two headless skeletons. They had been put into a box two feet wide and four feet long. Some of the bones were found disarranged. This in addition to the small size of the box indicated the bodies must have been badly decomposed when they were buried. The last bone of the spine (*os sacrum*) of one of the skeletons was broken slantingly,



*No. 4—Jean La Verendrye's Skeleton*

*No. 5—Skeleton of Father Aulneau*

precisely as the wound of young La Verendrye had been described a hundred and sixty years before: "He was found with a sort of iron hoe imbedded in his loins." Among the bones of the other skeleton were found beads of a rosary, a bunch of keys and a small metal clasp such as Jesuits use to fasten the collar of their cassocks. Later examinations by physicians identified the bones as belonging to men the age of La Verendrye and Father Aulneau.

The remains of the forgotten Jesuit of 1736 had been discovered by his Jesuit confreres of 1908. Reverently the bones were gathered together—all of the bones—and brought to the College of Saint Boniface. Father Aulneau had now returned to his own. In the museum of the College were kept the relics of the courageous priest whom many would call a saint. There they were visited and held in deep respect and reverence. But even with the Jesuits his bones were not secure. On a cold November night in 1921 the College burned to the ground. Lost in its ashes were the remains of the heroic and zealous priest.

The forty years that have passed since the discovery of the Old Fort have obliterated it from the earth almost as finally as did



the hot ashes in 1921 remove from men's eyes the bones of the lonely and saintly Father Aulneau.

This little booklet has been written as a tribute to the courage and the selflessness of Father Aulneau and as an expression of gratitude. In his humility Father Aulneau would have classified himself as an insignificant failure in his work, in his death, and even in his burial. His name and his remains were forgotten for a hundred and seventy-two years. Then those very remains were destroyed and even now he is known to only a very few. If the response to Bishop Schenk's appeal for help to construct in Warroad a church in memory of Father Aulneau has the desired effect, then Father Aulneau will never be forgotten again and his memory for all time will serve as a salutary inspiration to men beset by the cares and worries of an age which seems at times to have forgotten the King whom Father Aulneau served so valiantly.

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The sources used in the preparation of this pamphlet were:

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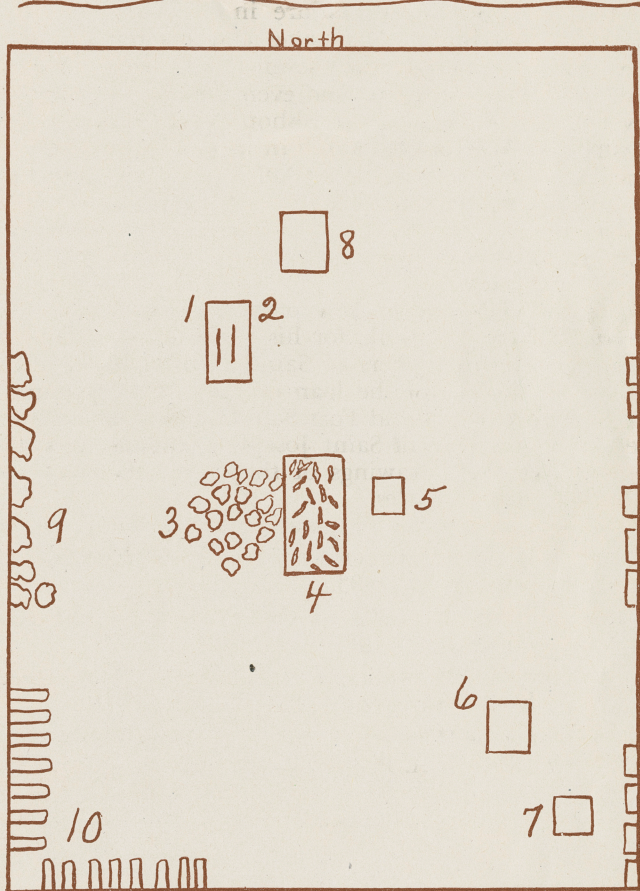
EMMETT A. SHANAHAN

Saint Mary's Church  
Warroad, Minnesota



# Plan of Fort St. Charles

Angle River



- 1, 2—In same coffin (1) J. B. LaVerendrye (2)  
Rev. Father Aulneau
- 3—The nineteen skulls
- 4—Bones to which skulls probably belonged
- 5—A fireplace—6, 7, 8 chimneys
- 9—Stones—Foundation of outside wall of chapel
- 10—Remains of stakes found around the fort



