

Jesuits came 800 miles by canoe to set up post at Ste. Marie

Midland Eight-hundred miles by canoe through the interior of Canada from "Kebec" brought Jesuit missionaries to Sainte-Marie among the Hurons, the first European community in what is now Ontario.

Sainte-Marie was the central residence of the Jesuits' Christian mission to the native Huron Indians, and from 1639 to 1649 was a cornerstone of European culture isolated in the New France wilderness.

Living with the Huron people in longhouse villages, the Jesuits founded 12 missions in the communities surrounding Sainte-Marie. During the long winters, when the Huron men were at home the Jesuits taught the Christian gospel. As summer came, and the men left the villages on hunting trips, the missionaries returned to Sainte-Marie to rest, reflect, make their reports and talk with others of their own culture.

At its peak, Sainte-Marie housed 64 Frenchmen, one-fifth the European population of New France. A doctor, stone mason, builder, blacksmith, carpenter, cook and lay-brothers brought their skills to Sainte-Marie. By 1649, 22 buildings had been constructed including a hospital to treat natives stricken by European diseases such as influenza and chicken pox. The high death rate resulting from these diseases led the Huron people into mistrusting the Jesuits and fearing they were devils who had come to destroy the Huron people. For awhile the Jesuits' work was impaired and the number of conversions to Christianity was small.

Vicious Huron-Iroquois wars also disrupted the Jesuits' work. In 1649 the Hurons were overrun by the Iroquois. Villages and missions were captured, their occupants scattered or killed. The French position at Sainte-Marie was perilous and they decided to flee with surviving native converts to St. Joseph's Island, now Christian Island in Georgian Bay.

Considering Sainte-Marie to be holy ground and fearing it would be desecrated by the Iroquois, the Jesuits burned Sainte-Marie to the ground.

For the next 300 years the mission lay buried. Excavations undertaken in the late 1940's began to uncover the ruins and in 1964 reconstruction sponsored by the Ontario government brought Sainte-Marie back to life.

Today, a reconstruction of Sainte-Marie among the Hurons on the original site east of Midland offers visitors an historical trip back to the 17th century. An introductory film acts as a time tunnel. Then, with interpretative staff or alone, the site is open to discoveries about life in the Canadian wilderness.

Craftsmen explain the 1600's methods of blacksmithing, shoe repair and cooking while in the residence and the Church of St. Joseph "priests" explain the work of the Jesuits among the native people.

Sainte-Marie among the Hurons is open to the public daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admissions are, adults \$1.50, students .75c, children .25c and families \$2.50. The site is located 8 miles east of Midland on Highway 12.

FIRST AID TIP



NOSE BLEED
• Sit down with your head slightly forward • Loosen clothing around the neck and breathe through your mouth • Pinch your nose just below the cartilage for about 10 minutes • Do not sniff or blow nose for some hours



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