

To St Mary's Parish,  
Fort Frances, Ont.

A token of devotion,  
by a former pastor,  
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The beginnings of Christianity in the Rainy Lake region go back to the year 1732 when the first Catholic priest appeared in the region. Even before that time the Indians had established contacts with French traders, explorers and missionaries. Some Indians of the district probably made trips to the trading posts at Kaministiquia (Fort William), Sault Ste. Marie, Chequamegon (Bayfield, Wis.) and Michilimackinac (Mackinac, Mich.). In their associations with Indians who had accepted Christianity and in their dealings with French traders and explorers, the Rainy Lake Indians were able to learn about Christianity. They could likewise have met Catholic missionaries at these posts. So, both the Chippewa (Ojibwe) and the Sioux who disputed the Rainy Lake region, had established relations with French traders, explorers and missionaries prior to 1732.

Besides the Chippewa and the Sioux, there was at this time in the Rainy Lake district, a tribe of Indians whom the French called "The Moneoni". This tribe, in the course of time, seems to have been completely assimilated by the Chippewa (Ojibwe). Near the Lake of the Woods there were a number of Cree Indians. Some of these gradually moved further north, while many others migrated to the prairies as far west as central Saskatchewan. The Moneoni as well as the Crees were allies of the Chippewa (Ojibwe) in their warfare against the Sioux.

By the year 1732, the Chippewa were almost complete masters of the Rainy Lake region. In addition to this, the Chippewa country comprised the Lake of the Woods district, the entire northern shores and drainage of Lake Superior and Huron. The south shore of Lake Superior and the northern part of the present State of Minnesota from about latitude 46° 30' were likewise occupied by the Chippewa.

To the south and west of these regions dwelt the Sioux. Their territory originally centered about Lake Mille Lacs (Minn.), and toward the headwaters of the Mississippi River. On their eastern frontier the Sioux were within striking distance of the Chippewa settlements. And strike they did on many occasions and in several directions. They harassed the Chippewa and made frequent raids into their territory near the Lake of the Woods, Rainy Lake and along the south and north shores of Lake Superior. Names like Sioux Narrows and Sioux Lookout are grim reminders of this. But the Chippewa did not miss a chance to strike back. Having obtained firearms from the French before the Sioux were able to do so, the Chippewa gradually drove the Sioux southward and westward until nearly the whole Sioux nation was forced

to move to the Minnesota and Red River basins.

French traders and missionaries tried to reconcile these warring nations, but in vain. At times, treaties were drawn up only to be broken, on one side or the other. Mutual hatred for each other was deeply rooted in these two races. So, the tribal wars went on. Such conditions were not very favorable for the evangelization of these rival Indian races. Neither the Chippewa nor the Sioux would take time out to discuss Christianity when they were on the warpath. Nevertheless intrepid Jesuit missionaries came resolutely into these war-torn lands (some of them at the cost of their lives) to preach the gospel of love and peace.

The Chippewa were the first to come into contact with the French traders, explorers and missionaries. Ethnically, the Chippewa belonged to the great Algonquin family. The Algonquins were always friendly with the French and had accepted Christianity from the early days of the French regime. As there was similarity between the Algonquin and the Chippewa dialects, early traders and missionaries did not find language too great a barrier to their dealings with the Chippewa. So, in the course of time, trading posts were established in the more important Chippewa settlements. The chief gathering place of the Chippewa was Sault Ste Marie. Because of this, the Chippewa were called "Saulteurs" or "Saulteux" by the French from the French word "sault".

The actual coming of the missionaries among the Chippewa was due, to a certain extent, to a war between two other great Indian nations; the Hurons and the Iroquois. The Hurons, whose homeland was in the Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay region were first evangelized by the Recollet Fathers who came to New France in 1615. The Recollet Fathers handed over the Huron missions to the Jesuit Fathers who came to Quebec in 1625. The apostolic labors of these zealous missionaries were not in vain and many of the Hurons embraced the Catholic faith. As these Hurons were gradually pushed westward by their relentless enemies, the Iroquois, the Hurons took refuge among the Chippewa, who, eventually, stopped the westward march of the Iroquois and the devoted Jesuit missionaries followed the fleeing Hurons wherever they went.

Fr. Isaac Joques, S.J. and Fr. Charles Raymbault, S.J. visited Sault Ste Marie in 1641 and to them belongs the honor of planting the Cross among the Chippewa. After that, the post was visited occasionally by the Jesuit priests from Nipissing. It was not until 1688 that the Jesuit Fathers established a permanent mission at Sault Ste Marie. Fr. Jacques Marquette, S.J. was the first resident missionary and it was he who erected the first chapel

there. From this post zealous missionaries ranged far and wide in their quest for souls.

The Rainy Lake Indians were in close communication with the Indians at Kaministiquia, Sault Ste Marie, Chequamegon and Michilimackinac. The Rainy Lake Indians went to these posts to attend the council meetings of the great Chippewa tribes. As there were important trading counters in these settlements, thither they brought their furs and exchanged them for supplies and ammunition. The missionaries at these posts lost no time in meeting the Indians during their stay at the trading posts and explained to them the elements of Christianity. When these Indians returned home, they related their experiences to their fellow-tribesmen, nor did they overlook their meeting with the "black-robed men of prayer". Thus the Rainy Lake Indians became acquainted, even though ever so imperfectly, with Christianity.

But it would be a mistake to think that the evangelization of the Indians was exclusively the work of the missionaries. To the everlasting credit of those brave, daring French traders and explorers, it must be said that they, too, did much to bring about the religious betterment of the natives. The traders and voyageurs were Catholics almost to a man. They practiced their religion as well as circumstances allowed. When starting out on a trip they usually blessed themselves with the Sign of the Cross and sang religious hymns as they paddled along. They had rosary beads, crucifixes, medals and other small religious articles. Whenever they took possession of a new locality, it was always by erecting a cross. All this made a deep impression on the Indians whose natural curiosity prompted them to ask questions as to the significance and purpose of these religious articles and practices. The answers given by the humble voyageurs were not necessarily masterpieces of Catholic theology, but, most probably, they were adequate.

The great explorers and officers in charge of the various posts were often zealous Catholics who took personal interest in the evangelization of the Indians. Thus we read of Groseilliers and Radisson instructing the natives in the elements of Christianity and baptizing some two hundred children in danger of death during an epidemic. Great explorers, such as Joliet, LaSalle and LaVerendrye made sure they were accompanied on their expeditions by priests: Joliet by Fr. Marquette; LaSalle by Fr. Hennepin and LaVerendrye by Fathers Messaiger, Aulneau and others.

The presence of a priest was not only a comfort to those great Catholic pioneers, - it was often considered as a safe-guard. Priests were looked upon with great respect and awe by the Indians. They considered the priest to be a "black-robed medicine man" and among Indians, the medicine man was feared. In a letter to his mother, who worried about his safety among Indians, Father (later Archbishop) Taché, C.M.I. wrote as follows: "The natives consider us as magicians, and, as they are excessively superstitious, they are careful not to do us the slightest harm for fear that we might cast some evil spell over them. Consequently we (priests) are always safe wherever we may be." Even as late as 1820, the priest was considered to be more than an ordinary human being. Fr. Adrian Morice, C.M.I., in his "History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada" relates the following incident to bear this out: "In 1820, a certain Indian wishing to find out whether priests were really invulnerable, shot at Fr. Dumoulin as he was reading his breviary along the Pembina River. The bullet went through the priest's hat. Not satisfied with this first experiment the Indian tried again the following spring with similar results. This time the Indian was captured by the priest's friends, but, somehow, he managed to escape, convinced, no doubt, that the priest was no ordinary human being".

Priests were the object of esteem for yet another reason. The Indians, though primitive in their ways, were, by no means, lacking in observation. They soon found out that priests were upright men who could be trusted. Ross Cox in his book "Adventures on the Columbia River" stressed this point when he wrote: "The impression they (the priests) made on their wayward wards was such that at the beginning of the 18th century, the descendants of the latter had not forgotten 'the good White Fathers', who, unlike other White men, never robbed or cheated them." So great was the Indians' idea of the honesty and justice of priests, that they used the good offices of priests when treaties of peace were contemplated.

Even for human motives did the traders and officers encourage the efforts of the missionaries. If rival, hostile Indian tribes could be persuaded to accept a common religion, it would tend to bring about better relations between the Indians and the French, and among the Indians themselves.

Explorations could be carried out more safely, trading would be more prosperous and the lives of all concerned far more secure, if all were united in the same religious beliefs and observances. So, besides encouraging the missionaries in their apostolic work, French explorers and officers were ready to do their personal part to bring about the civilization and evangelization of the Indian tribes with which they had to deal in the Lake Superior and Rainy Lake regions.

This long exposition shows clearly that the Indians of these regions, even though not actually visited by priests, could have acquired at least an elementary knowledge of Christianity. Before speaking of the coming of the missionaries to the Rainy Lake region, let us first follow the gradual westward advance of French traders and explorers and see how this eventually led to the coming of the first missionaries to the Rainy Lake district.

Medard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers and his brother-in-law, Pierre Radisson, seem to have been the first traders to appear in the Lake Superior region. In 1659, they came to Kaministiquia and built a fort in which to spend the winter. The following spring (1660), before leaving for the East, they seem to have explored a part of the north shore of Lake Superior. They were, most likely, the first Frenchmen to visit the mouth of Pigeon River, 45 miles southeast of Kaministiquia. But it is doubtful whether they ventured inland to any distance.

In the footsteps of these two adventurers, came Daniel Greysolon, Sieur Du Lhut. He has been generally credited with the establishment of a fort on the Kaministiquia River, in the vicinity of the post built by Groseilliers and Radisson. Since it has been proved that Fort Kaministiquia was built by Du Lhut in 1679, it would seem reasonable to assume that DuLhut spent the winter of 1679-80 at Kaministiquia. His brother, Claude Greysolon, Sieur LaTourette, is associated with the construction of the first post near the mouth of Nipigon River (1679). Later on this post was replaced, in 1684, by Ft. LaMaune, also called Fort LaTourette. This fort was built by order of DuLhut at the mouth of the Ombabeka or LaMaune River in the Nipigon district.

The first Frenchman actually known to have ventured inland was Jacques de Noyon who came out in 1688. He followed what was later to be called the "Kaministiquia Route". This route led north on the Kaministiquia

River to Dog Lake, then in a westerly direction till Lac Mille Lacs (Ont.) was reached. After that the route went in a southwesterly direction to Lac la Croix, then on to Rainy Lake and Rainy River to the Lake of the Woods. De Noyon negotiated the various rivers, lakes and portages all the way to Rainy Lake. On the south shore of Rainy Lake, near the head of Rainy River, De Noyon erected a small trading post (near the present Ranier, Minnesota), and went as far West as the Lake of the Woods. After having wintered at his Rainy Lake post, DeNoyon returned to Quebec.

Between De Noyon's voyage (1688-89) and 1717, the posts at Kaministiquia and LaMaune seem to have deteriorated. Fort Kaministiquia was abandoned after 1697 and quickly fell into ruins. But Fort LaMaune was kept in operation to intercept the Indians who were taking their furs to the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Fort Albany. By 1717, the authorities of New France became alarmed at the state of affairs in the Colony and decided to revive the fur trade. The construction of three forts was decided upon. Fort Kaministiquia was to be re-activated and new posts were to be established at Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods. The man chosen to carry out this plan was Zacharie Robutel, Sieur de la Noue who left Montreal in July 1717. On his arrival at Kaministiquia he proceeded forthwith to build a fort there. Sometime between 1717 and 1721, the Rainy Lake post was established (near the present Fort Frances, Ont.). But it must be stated that even before de LaNoue was able to build his post at Rainy Lake, there were already some unauthorized traders on the shores of Rainy Lake who dealt with the Indians. Previous to this, these Indians were accustomed to take their furs to the English posts on Hudson's Bay.

De la Noue's trading adventure met with failure because of the frequent wars between the Chippewa, Monsoni and Cree Indians on the one part and the warlike Sioux on the other. He tried his best to pacify these warring races and actually sent one of his officers, Jean Daniel Vienney Pachot to the western tip of Lake Superior (site of the present Duluth, Minn.) to draw up a treaty of peace. This mission was unsuccessful. So, de La Noue decided to abandon the post at Rainy Lake and, in 1721, he returned to New France. But Pachot remained behind and explored the region around Pigeon River (45 miles Southeast of Kaministiquia). Some think that Pachot went all the way to Rainy Lake over this more southerly route which came to be known as the Pigeon

River or Grand Portage route. At any rate Pachot, in his report to the authorities of New France, recommended the Grand Portage route as a shorter and more easily negotiated route than the Kaministiquia route which it joined at Lac La Croix.

After de la Noue's departure in 1721, the posts at Kaministiquia and LaMaune were kept active. It is at Nipigon (LaMaune) that we find Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye, in 1727, where he was second in command to his elder brother Jacques Rene Gaultier, and whom he succeeded in 1728. It was while he was at Nipigon and Kaministiquia that Pierre de laVerendrye heard the natives speak of a "Western Sea". Lured on by these stories, LaVerendrye decided to embark on an expedition to find the famous "Northwest Passage".

During the summer of 1728, LaVerendrye took the furs from his posts of Kaministiquia and Nipigon to Michilimackinac to exchange them for much needed supplies and trade goods. While there, by coincidence, he met Fr. Nicholas de Gonnor, S.J., who had been attached to Fort Beauharnois (on Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River), which post was being abandoned. Fr. de Gonnor was returning to Quebec. LaVerendrye spoke to the priest of his plan to explore the country to the West. He asked Fr. de Gonnor to use his influence with the governor of New France to obtain the necessary permission and financial aid to carry out the project. This Fr. de Gonnor did when he arrived in Quebec.

In 1729, while at Kaministiquia, LaVerendrye had Ochagach, an exceptionally intelligent Cree Indian chief, trace a route with charcoal on a piece of birch bark. A copy of this map, prepared by the engineer Chaussegros de Lery, was sent to the authorities in France. This map was remarkably accurate, outlining rivers, lakes, rapids, portages and the heights of land. (Several copies of this map are found 'with slight alterations' in history books)

Eventually, LaVerendrye succeeded in persuading authorities to give him a combined commission to explore the West and to trade at the same time. The right to trade was necessary because the home government in France refused to allot sufficient funds to finance the expedition. So, LaVerendrye was summoned to Quebec where he arrived in the summer of 1730.



He set to work at once to organize his combined trading company and exploration expedition. It was decided that LaVerendrye would have a complement of fifty men and that he would be accompanied by a missionary priest. Second in command was LaVerendrye's nephew, Christophe Dufrost, Sieur de la Jemmeraye, who had secured knowledge of western conditions and had shown qualities of leadership and courage while stationed at Fort Beauharnois. The next members selected were the three sons of the leader: Jean Baptiste, aged 18, Pierre 17 and Francois 16. (A fourth the youngest son, Louis Joseph joined the expedition in 1735). Besides these there were about forty-five matured voyageurs among whom were twelve uniformed soldiers, a blacksmith, some carpenters and canoe men. (Most of the men were enlisted in Quebec while some were hired at Michilimackinac). Arrangements for provisions and trade goods proved difficult, but finally, everything was ready.

LaVerendrye and his party left Lachine (near Montreal) on June 8, 1831 and after many toilsome weeks, reached Michilimackinac in the second half of July. Here, Fr. Charles Messaiger, S.J. joined the expedition which left Michilimackinac sometime in August. Most probably, LaVerendrye and his men stopped over for a few days at Kaministiquia. This time was employed to acquire additional information on the route to be followed and to obtain competent guides to show the way. The Cree chief Ochegach was appointed official guide of the expedition. The Pigeon River - Grand Portage route- was chosen and on August 26, 1731, LaVerendrye and his men arrived at the mouth of Pigeon River, 45 miles southeast of Kaministiquia, at a place subsequently called Grand Portage.

When the men, already somewhat exhausted after an arduous trip of two and one half months, realized the nature and length (9 miles) of this "carrying-place", they balked and refused to go further, at least that year, as it was already late in the season. After much pleading and with assistance from Fr. Messaiger, LaVerendrye was able to persuade some of the men to proceed inland over the great portage. So, on August 27, La Jemmeraye, Jean Baptiste, LaVerendrye, twenty five men and a guide set out in four canoes for Rainy Lake. LaVerendrye with the rest of the men returned to Kaministiquia for the winter.

La Jemmeraye and his group negotiated the distance, some 200 miles, successfully and built a small fort before an early winter set in. After

having spent a cold and hungry winter at the fort, which they named, Fort St. Pierre in honor of LaVerendrye, La Jemmeraye and his men set out in the spring for Kaministiquia which they reached late in May 1732. On May 29, 1732, the few bales of fur which they had managed to bring back with them were dispatched to Michilimackinac with Jean Baptiste LaVerendrye in charge of the operation. (He and his canoe men did not rejoin the main group until Nov. 12, 1732.)

After having spent the winter at Kaministiquia, LaVerendrye set out for Rainy Lake on June 8, 1732, exactly a year after he had left Lachine. He was accompanied by his nephew, LaJemmeraye, his sons Pierre and Francois, Fr. Messaiger and a complement of twenty-five men. They set out in seven canoes and travelled in easy stages. They arrived at Fort St. Pierre on July 14th, thirty-six days later. The situation at Ft. St. Pierre did not call for a long stay. Most probably the stopover was long enough for Fr. Messaiger to say at least one Mass, the first in the Rainy Lake region. This was probably on July 15, 1732.

At Fort St. Pierre, LaVerendrye and his men were the object of a grandiose reception by the Monsoni Indians of the locality. But LaVerendrye was too anxious to proceed westward to take part in such a demonstration. Nevertheless, a flotilla of some 50 canoes accompanied the expedition down the Rainy River. At the Lake of the Woods LaVerendrye was met by a group of Cree Indians, who escorted him to the southeast entrance of the Northwest Angle Inlet. There, on the south shore of an island (Magnussen) Fort St. Charles was built. LaVerendrye planned to make this fort his headquarters for further explorations (1832-1838)

The first two years (1832-34) were employed to win the favor of the Indians. During this time, Fr. Messaiger looked after the spiritual needs of the men at Ft. St. Charles and Ft. St. Pierre. His efforts to win over the Indians to Christianity were not very successful. When his health failed him in 1834, Fr. Messaiger left the region and returned to Quebec, passing through Ft. St. Pierre on his way. Fr. Jean Pierre Aulneau, S.J. was appointed his successor in 1735. Fr. Aulneau left Montreal on June 12, 1735, but did not reach Ft. St. Pierre until October and Ft. St. Charles on October 23, 1835. He made the trip with LaVerendrye who had gone to Quebec the previous year.

LaVerendrye's youngest son, Joseph Louis, came out at the same time.

That winter (1735-36) was a miserable one and supplies were very low. Fr. Aulneau worked hard trying to prepare an Indian dictionary and grammar with the help of the Indians who were not very co-operative. In the religious sphere it was much the same. When spring came, LaVerendrye decided to send a group of picked men to Michilimackinac for supplies. Fr. Aulneau asked to join the party which set out on June 5, 1736, with Jean Baptiste LaVerendrye in command. But they did not travel far. Before they were out of the Lake of the Woods they were intercepted by a band of Sioux Indians on the warpath and on June 6th, all 21 members of the party were massacred.

The next priest to pass through Ft. St. Pierre was Fr. Claude Cocquart, S.J., who in 1741 had been appointed chaplain to LaVerendrye's headquarters, which since 1738, were at Fort La Reine, near the present Portage la Prairie, Man. For some reason or other, Fr. Cocquart was detained at Michilimackinac and did not come through Ft. St. Pierre till August 1743. His stay out West was very short and by July 21, 1744, he was back at Michilimackinac.

Fr. Cocquart's successor, Fr. Jean Baptiste de la Morinie, S.J. came through Ft. St. Pierre in 1750. He, too proceeded to Ft. LaReine. But Fr. de la Morinie did not get along very well with the officer in charge, Jacques le Gardeur de St. Pierre who had succeeded LaVerendrye. Father de la Morinie did not make much headway with the Indians either. So, when winter was over, he returned to Michilimackinac, stopping over at Ft. St. Pierre on his return trip. He was the last priest to appear in the district for some time. Fr. Nicholas de Gonnor, S.J. is mentioned, occasionally as having accompanied LaVerendrye on his explorations. But this statement has been refuted. Fr. de Gonnor's association with LaVerendrye was a passing one, when the priest met LaVerendrye by chance at Michilimackinac in 1728. Occasionally priests made trips to Kaministiquia from their headquarters at Michilimackinac. It is possible that some priest came all the way to Ft. St. Pierre, 1500 miles away but there seems to be no extant record of any such trip to the Rainy Lake region after the departure of Fr. de la Morinie in 1751.

In 1756, the Seven years' War between the British and French broke out. As the explorers and commanders at the various forts were officers in

the army of New France, they were all recalled from their posts which were eventually abandoned, about 1760. The French were defeated in Quebec in 1759 and in 1763, New France passed officially into the hands of the British. That marked the end of the first phase of church history in the Rainy Lake region.

For a period of 65 years (1751-1816) the Rainy Lake district was without the ministrations of a priest. But this does not mean that during this period Christianity suffered a total eclipse in the Rainy Lake region.

After the fall of New France, many of the French voyageurs accepted employment in the English trading companies, especially the famous Northwest Company. These voyageurs were Catholics almost without exception. Though remiss, at times, in the practice of their religion, they had a deeply rooted Catholic faith, and this faith was constantly revived when the voyageurs made return trips to their native Quebec. Many profited by the occasion to fulfill their religious duties. If they did not do so of their own accord, their relatives, especially, their good French Canadian mothers made sure they did. And the new recruits to the ranks of the voyageurs were Catholics. Before they set out for the West they received plenty of advice as to how they should behave. Most of the time, mothers made their departing sons promise that they would remain steadfast in the practice of their religion and faithful to their daily prayers. On Sundays and feasts of obligation, these rugged men would often say prayers in common and under no condition would they perform unnecessary manual labor. The feast of All Saints was especially well observed. The souvenir of solemn liturgical functions, carried out so faithfully in their homeland, kept recurring to their minds and prevented them from losing their faith.

As many of these men took unto themselves Indian wives, these, too, came to feel the beneficial influence of the Catholic religion. The voyageurs spoke to their Indian wives and children, of God, of His Commandments, of his representatives on earth, the priests. They retold as much of the Bible History as they remembered and this impressed their Indian wives and children, who were taught to say prayers and to observe Catholic practices as far as this was feasible in the wilderness. The children were baptized as were the old people in danger of death. In this way, during the period of seeming religious neglect, these Catholic voyageurs took the place of the missionaries who could not be found for the western regions.

The Indian wives of the French voyageurs were a powerful influence in the acceptance of Christianity. Anyone familiar with primitive Indian customs knows that Indian husbands treated their wives almost as beasts of burden and slaves. Indian women who married French voyageurs appreciated the way they were treated by their Christian husbands. All in all, the lot of the Indian wife of the French voyageur was an acceptable one. She was treated as an equal of her husband and honored as the mother of his children. It is not surprising, therefore, that Indian maidens were anxious to marry these men. When married to them, they readily adopted the ways of their White husbands as well as their religion. Even the Pagan relatives of these women did not escape the influence of the Catholic religion. In this way Indian wives helped to prepare the way for further evangelization. The ground was prepared for the missionaries whose coming was eagerly expected and ardently prayed for.

Their coming was hastened through influence from another source. By the end of the 18th century, the trading posts on the Red River (St. Boniface and Winnipeg) had acquired considerable importance. Some 300 voyageurs and employees of the trading companies had settled there with their families. When Lord Selkirk established his Red River Colony (1812), the number of Catholics increased and by 1815 there were more than 700 residing in the Red River Settlement. The need for a priest became apparent, nay, urgent. The first governor of the Colony, Miles Macdonell, was a staunch Catholic who pleaded with Lord Selkirk to provide a priest for his settlement. In the absence of a priest, the governor himself officiated at marriages and baptized the children of Catholic parents. He was anxious to be relieved of this responsibility. An Irish priest, Charles Burke had accompanied the first contingent of Lord Selkirk's colonists. But this priest remained at York Factory and did not reach the Red River. He returned to Ireland the following spring on the next boat to come to York Factory. When it became apparent that missionaries could not be had from Europe, Macdonell wrote to the bishop of Quebec (under whose jurisdiction the entire country of Canada was originally placed). The document sent to the bishop gave a remarkable view of the situation. When Lord Selkirk fully endorsed all that Macdonell stated, the bishop of Quebec, Joseph Octave Plessis, decided to take action.

His first idea was to send two missionaries to Rainy Lake. From their headquarters at Rainy Lake, they were to make periodical trips to the Red River

Colony. But Macdonell and Lord Selkirk pointed out to the bishop that a resident priest in the colony was an absolute necessity. So, in 1816, Father Pierre Antoine Tabeau was sent out to study the situation. On his arrival at Rainy Lake, Fr. Tabeau heard of serious unrest in the Red River Colony. He decided that it was useless to go further. After a short stay at Rainy Lake, he returned to Quebec and started to work on a report which was to advise against a permanent priest in the Red River Colony as long as the rival companies (Hudson's Bay Co. and Northwest Co.) were in open strife.

But before Fr. Tabeau's report reached the bishop, Lord Selkirk himself had gone to his colony. He had a petition circulated, and signed by everyone of note in the settlement. Impressed by this document, the bishop set aside the temporizing report sent in by Fr. Tabeau and decided on a permanent mission in the Red River Valley. Thus, in 1818, the bishop dispatched two priests and a seminarian to look after the spiritual needs of Catholics in the Red River Colony, and in all the adjacent territories, which included the Rainy Lake and the Lake of the Woods regions.

Before speaking of the labors of these new apostles of the West, it is perhaps proper to describe the mode of travel and the route followed by all the missionaries who came out between 1818 and 1845 inclusively. The mode of travel was the same used by the early missionaries: the canoe. The route followed was likewise first blazed by pioneer traders and voyageurs.

The starting-off point was Lachine near Montreal. During the French regime, the brigades followed the usual voyageur highway which was well known, at least as far as Michilimackinac. The stopping places were always the same except when something unforeseen happened. Here are the general points on this route. Leaving Lachine and proceeding on the St. Lawrence River in a southwesterly direction the voyageurs entered a channel which flows between "Ile Perrot" and "Ile de Montreal". The route then led into the Ottawa River, across Lake "Deux Montagnes", up to the Mattawa River. Travelling up the Mattawa River for a certain distance, after a series of portages, the course led down a little river which flows westward to Lake Nipissing. Lake Nipissing was crossed in its entire length. Then came French River which empties Lake Nipissing into Georgian Bay.

From Georgian Bay on, travelling was a bit easier. The way led along the north shore of Georgian Bay, the north shore of Lake Huron between

the islands and the mainland. As a rule the voyageurs followed the shoreline to avoid the dangers caused by sudden storms and squalls on the larger lakes. Once west of Manitoulin Island, a detour to the southwest, of some 100 miles, was made to reach Michilimackinac. The route from Lachine to Michilimackinac covered a distance of about 1500 miles. When the load was not too heavy, the travelling time for the trip was almost always according to schedule. It took 26 days to "go up" from Lachine to Michilimackinac and 20 days to "go down" to Lachine from Michilimackinac. When the canoes were heavily laden, travelling, naturally, was slower.

During the French regime the stopover at Michilimackinac was mandatory. Every expedition had to be checked by and cleared with the French authorities there. Permission had to be obtained to proceed further, men had to be hired and supplies were acquired. All this required several days and, at times, several weeks. Michilimackinac was the dividing place for two important routes: 1) that to the South via Lake Huron and Detroit or via Lake Michigan, and 2) that to the West through Sault Ste Marie and over Lake Superior.

The brigades destined for the West would back-track from Michilimackinac some 90 miles and then enter the channel that joins Lakes Huron and Superior. (After the French regime the detour to Michilimackinac was dispensed with and much time was saved). After a portage at Sault Ste. Marie, travel was over Lake Superior in a northwesterly direction up to Michipicotin and then to Lake Nipigon. The north shore of Lake Superior was skirted to escape its frequent storms. From Lake Nipigon on, the course was in a southwesterly direction to Kaministiquia (Fort William). This was another stopping-off place before embarkation on a trip to the Far West.

From Kaministiquia on, there was a very difficult stretch. There were two principal waterways leading westward. Both routes met at Lac la Croix. 1) the Kaministiquia Route - The starting-off point was the mouth of the Kaministiquia River, going upstream on this river to Dog Lake, whence, by a series of portages Lac des Mille Lacs was reached. Pickerel Lake, Sturgeon Lake and Lac la Croix were attained in that order after a south westerly course of travel. Then Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods were reached. The Kaministiquia was the first waterway over which the fur trade was serviced to and from Lake Superior. This historic route was destined to play a great role in the discovery exploration, settlement and evangelization of the Far West. 2) The Pigeon River - Grand Portage Route <sup>started</sup> about 45 miles southwest of

Kaministiquia where the Pigeon River empties into Lake Superior at Grand Portage. This was a shorter, easier and better waterway even though it necessitated more portages (36 in all). This route, in large part, followed the present international boundary between Canada and the United States of America. From 1731 to 1803, it supplanted the Kaministiquia route.

The superiority of the Grand Portage route was admitted by all those who were familiar with conditions in the area. Yet this canoe waterway had to be abandoned for political reasons. The Treaty of Paris (Versailles), signed between Great Britain and the United States of America, on September 3rd, 1773, placed all land south of the Pigeon<sup>River</sup> under American control. Grand Portage, where the elaborate depot of the Northwest Company stood, was found to be on American soil. When the American Government declared its intention to tax British merchandise passing through Grand Portage, the partners of the Northwest Company decided to abandon Grand Portage.

By the summer of 1802, a new post on the east bank of Kaministiquia River was under construction. Even before this post was finished (1807) the old Kaministiquia route was re-activated and used exclusively after 1803. Once more, canoe brigades passed to and fro over this voyageur's highway between Fort William (this was the name given to Kaministiquia in 1807) and the North West. It was over this 'road' that the three missionaries, sent out by the Bishop of Quebec, came to Rainy Lake.

At Rainy Lake, the old French Fort St. Pierre had ceded its place to two trading posts belonging to the rival companies: The North-West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. The North-West Company had moved into the Rainy Lake country long before the Hudson's Bay Company appeared on the scene. Shortly after the end of the French regime (1763), British traders began to move in. In 1779, a large number of these traders formed the powerful North-West Company. It is not clear when the North-West Company established a post in the area. Alexander Mackenzie, the great explorer, wrote that in 1787, he was at the North-West company's post at "Lac La Pluie". Some think that this post was there as early as 1783.

This fort, second in importance to the North-West Company's headquarters at Grand Portage (at Fort William after 1803) was situated three quarters of a mile below the falls on Rainy River. It was a large establishment with some fifteen buildings in its one acre enclosure. For several decades it



was the "turning around" point for the voyageurs from the far West. It was just close enough for the voyageurs to make a return journey from the Athabasca hinterland between break-up and freeze-up of the water highway. So Rainy Lake became the eastern terminus for the brigades from the Athabasca district. Here they delivered their bales of fur while a special set of canoe men from the East brought in supplies, ammunition and trade goods.

These conditions still prevailed in 1818. By that time a tract of land, about fifty acres large, had been cleared. Here vegetables were grown and animals pastured. From twenty to forty men were employed at the Fort.

7 → The Hudson's Bay Company did not establish a post in the Rainy Lake region until 1793. The fort had been built below Manitou Rapids about thirty-two miles downstream. This post could not compete profitably with the strongly entrenched North-West Company's fort. So the Hudson's Bay Company withdrew from the scene in 1898. The Hudson's Bay Company came back to the area in 1816. Lord Selkirk, with his "de Meurons" troops captured the North-West Company's fort and claimed it for the Hudson's Bay Company. By 1817, this post had been repossessed by its original owners. So, in 1818, the Hudson's Bay Company built a new post close to the site of old Fort St. Pierre, the ruins of which were still visible at that time.

The competition between these two great fur trading companies continued as fierce as ever. The struggle was ruinous to both sides. By 1820, both rivals realized that an amalgamation was the only sensible course. After prolonged negotiations, the agreement to merge was signed on March 26, 1821. At Rainy Lake the North-West post was abandoned but its farm was retained by the Hudson's Bay Company's fort at the outlet of the lake.

In 1818, the North-West Company's brigades from the far West, still brought their furs to their own fort below the falls. After a few days, cargoes were exchanged. Then the voyageurs and traders would return to their respective posts. Those going westward would proceed down Rainy River, northward through the Lake of the Woods and down the cascading Winnipeg River to Lake Winnipeg. After travelling over Lake Winnipeg, in a southerly direction, to the mouth of the Red River the voyageurs proceeded up that river a short distance to its confluence with the Assiniboine River and the Red River Settlement was reached.

The entire trip from Montreal to the Red River Colony usually took

from eight to ten weeks. (Today it is a matter of some thirty hours by railroad and only a few hours by airplane). But it should not be imagined that all this journey was plain sailing or paddling. Between Montreal and the Red River Settlement there were 72 portages of various lengths and about the same number of semi-portages. Semi-portages necessitated the lightening of the load in the canoe. The canoe was pulled by men on the shore, while two remained aboard to steer the canoe. This was always a strenuous operation. If the men on shore missed their footing or those in the canoe lost their balance, the consequences could be disastrous. Besides the portages and semi-portages, there was the ever perilous "shooting the rapids". Even on open lakes navigation was dangerous at times due to sudden storms and squalls, submerged rocks and other perils which the voyageurs had to face and overcome.

After having explained the route and mode of travel, let us resume our narrative. The two priests and the seminarian appointed as missionaries of the Red River Colony and the adjoining territories were: Father Joseph Norbert Provencher, Father Joseph Dumoulin and William Stephen Edge. Father Provencher, the Superior, had the full powers of a Vic<sup>ar</sup> General of the Bishop of Quebec. The three missionaries left Montreal on May 9, 1818, and by June had reached Fort William. After a brief halt there, they set out again and arrived at Rainy Lake on July 3, 1818. They were now in the field of their operations and set to work forthwith. Fr. Provencher had planned to give a mission to the men, but the voyageurs from the West had not arrived on time. He did visit both forts and ministered to all the Catholics. Seventeen children were baptized during the three days stay here. As a sign that he was formally taking possession of the region for Christ, Fr. Provencher erected a large cross. Thus the active evangelization of the Rainy Lake region was resumed after a long interruption of some sixty-seven years. (1751-1818).

The missionaries left Rainy Lake on July 6, went down the Rainy River, through the Lake of the Woods, down the Winnipeg River over Lake Winnipeg and up the Red River. The eager, but, by this time, weary travellers, reached their destination on July 16, 1818. Their reception at the Red River settlement was heart-warming. Many wept for joy, especially those white women who had come out to the colony. These pioneer women had accepted the privations of civilization with good grace, but they could not be reconciled to forego the comforts of religion. The Indians and the metis descendants of the voyageurs were awe-stricken at the first sight of these "Men of Prayer",

about whom they had heard so much from their French Canadian fathers. The Catholic governor of the Colony, Miles Macdonell welcomed the missionaries with a generous, but withal, frugal hospitality. The expectations of the Catholics were realized and their prayers answered. It must, however, be acknowledged that this happy event was owing, in great extent, to the influence and generosity of one who was not a Catholic, Lord Thomas Selkirk, the magnanimous founder of the Red River Colony.

After having established their headquarters at St. Boniface (this was the name given to the Catholic parish in the Red River Colony) the missionaries began to radiate from there in all directions. We shall speak of their labors only in as much as these activities refer to the Rainy Lake region. By the way, up to the year 1845 inclusively, all the Red River missionaries without exception, passed through Rainy Lake on their way out, and again when they returned to their native Quebec. Coming or going, they must have stopped over at Rainy Lake and may have ministered to the spiritual needs of the Catholics.

Fr. Dumoulin made his first trip to Rainy Lake in 1819. He probably continued to make periodical visits to Rainy Lake until his departure for Quebec in 1823. Fr. Dumoulin's work among the Indians and Metis had a deep influence in the region even as far as Rainy Lake, and he it was who laid the foundations for the later Catholic mission at Rainy Lake.

In August 1820, Father Provencher and Mr. Edge came through Rainy Lake on their way to Quebec. Mr. Edge had decided against advancing to the priesthood. Father Provencher had been appointed bishop of the Red River district and was on his way to be consecrated. That same summer (1820) Father Thomas Destroismaisons (dit Picard) and a seminarian, Mr. Sauvé came through Rainy Lake on their way to St. Boniface. Mr. Sauvé did not advance to priesthood. He became one of the first school teachers in the colony.

In 1822, Bishop Provencher returned, bringing with him a seminarian, Jean Harper, who was the first priest ordained in the West. The following year, 1823, after five years of devoted service in the colony, Father Dumoulin returned to Quebec via the voyageur's highway. Francois Boucher, a seminarian came out in 1827. He became a priest shortly afterwards, the second one to be ordained in the West. That same year, after a seven years stay in the colony, Fr. Destroismaisons returned to Quebec. In 1830, Bishop Provencher went to Quebec on important business which required a lengthy stay. On this occasion the Bishop made an earnest appeal for volunteers to work in his diocese.

Only one priest, Father George Anthony Belcourt, answered this ardent call.

It was in 1830 that the Rainy Lake Fort received a new name. Up to that time it was still called "Lac La Pluie Fort". On February 24, 1830, Governor George Simpson married his cousin, Frances Ramsay Simpson. The honeymoon trip brought the Simpsons all the way up to York Factory on Hudson's Bay. It was on June 1, that they reached "The Establishment of Lac La Pluie Fort". Later on we find the following entry for September 25, 1830 in the diary of the Fort: "This morning at Sun rise the new flag Staff was up and the New Flag hoisted. In the meantime a flacon of Spirits was broken and spilled on the foot of the Staff, and the Fort named Fort Frances in honor of Mrs. Simpson's christian name. All the Whites gave three Hearty Cheers - and the Indians fired above 300 shots".

In 1831, Fort Frances had its first look at Fr. George Anthony Belcourt and was to see him frequently thereafter. On his arrival at St. Boniface he set to work at once to study the Chippewa language which he soon mastered to perfection. He was officially placed in charge of the Rainy Lake mission and made regular trips practically every year. Later on he composed several books in that language. We shall have more to say about this remarkable missionary as the narration goes along.

Bishop Provencher returned to his diocese in 1832, bringing with him Charles Edward Poiré, a seminarian, whom he ordained shortly after. But the poor bishop was saddened by the departure, that same year, of Father Jean Harper. The year, 1833, saw the arrival of a fine recruit in the person of Father Jean Baptiste Thibault who was to labor in the diocese for thirty-six years (1833-1869). No sooner did Father Thibault come than Father Boucher took leave and returned to Quebec.

Two years later (1835) Bishop Provencher went to Europe in the interests of his diocese. He returned in 1837 bringing with him a capable young priest, Fr. Modeste Demers. Two more priests came out in 1838. They were Fr. Francois Blanchet and Arsene Mayrand. But the number of priests in the colony did not increase as Fathers Demers and Blanchet were sent to the West Coast where both became Archbishops in the course of time. That same year (1838), Father Poiré left for Quebec.

Father Belcourt was sent to Fort Frances in 1838 to study the possibility of establishing there a permanent mission, with a resident priest. Fr. Belcourt

reported that as far as the white population and the Metis families were concerned, things were in a fair condition, but it was not so with the Indians. The prospects of converting them were not very bright. These Indians had deeply rooted pagan superstitions; they had been depraved by their contact with unscrupulous white men; and had an unquenchable thirst for the white man's 'fire water'. Fr. Belcourt added that, in spite of all this, the task of converting the Indians was not hopeless. He continued to visit the mission at least once a year. Shortly after his return to St. Boniface, Fr. Belcourt decided to go to Quebec.

Fr. Belcourt returned the following year. But he found quite a change in the situation at Fort Frances. A scholarly Methodist minister had visited the post in 1838. In 1839, the Reverend James Evans returned bringing with him other Methodist ministers. Leaving the Rev. William Mason in charge of the Methodist mission, the Rev. Evans went further West, to Norway House and as far as the Athabasca region. It is the Rev. Evans who reduced the Cree language to an alphabet, and even established a printing press for Cree publications. So, at Fort Frances, and at other posts the Catholic missionaries no longer had the field all to themselves. As a rule, Protestant ministers were well supplied with funds and enjoyed the favor of the Hudson's Bay Company. So, from this time on, Catholic missionaries had to cope with these complications in their work.

In 1840, Father Belcourt again made his annual visit to Fort Frances and continued to do so up to 1845 inclusively. Father John E. Darveau, an excellent prospect came out in 1841. His career, however, was cut short three years later when he was murdered by hostile Indians on Lake Winnipegosis.

In 1843 Bishop Provencher went to Dubuque Iowa, via St. Paul, Minnesota. The purpose of his trip was to obtain some nuns for the Red River Colony. Having failed in this, the Bishop decided to go all the way to Quebec. At Montreal, he succeeded in persuading the Superior of the Sisters of Charity (Gray Nuns) to send four sisters to the Colony in 1844. The Bishop set out before the Sisters, and came through Fort Frances in the spring of 1844.

While on his way to make his customary visit to Fort Frances, Father Belcourt met the canoes bringing out the four sisters. They were accompanied by two priests, Father Louis Lafleche and Father Joseph Bourassa. Both gave twelve years of generous service to the diocese. Ill health forced Father Lafleche to leave the mission field and Father Bourassa returned to Quebec with him.

The year 1845 was an eventful one for the Red River Diocese. Two Oblates of Mary Immaculate came out to the Colony. They were, Father Peter Aubert O.M.I. and Alexander Taché, O.M.I., not yet a priest. Incidentally, they were the last missionaries to come out by the voyageur's highway, through Fort Frances. (From 1846 on, missionaries journeyed directly by railroad to St. Paul, Minn., and thence by Red River carts to St. Boniface. Later on, (about 1877) priests went by steamboat to Duluth, by train to Moorhead, Minn., and from there by paddle-wheel steamboat up the Red River to St. Boniface. By 1879, St. Boniface had rail connections with the American railroads and finally the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed in 1885).

It was in 1845, that Fr. Belcourt made his last trip to Fort Frances. In 1846 he handed his Indian missions over to the Oblates and in 1847, following certain difficulties with the Hudson's Bay Company officials, he left the Diocese and returned to Quebec. He could not, however, resist the call of the West and returned to the western plains in 1849. But this time he went to Pembina, N.D. on the American side of the boundary, some fifty miles south of St. Boniface. Here Father Belcourt labored faithfully until his return to eastern Canada in 1859. He died at Shediac, New Brunswick on May 31, 1874.

Fr. Belcourt deserves special recognition, not only because he looked after Rainy Lake for fourteen years, but because he was one of the most remarkable of the pioneer missionaries. He became an authority on the Chippewa (Saulteux) language which he learned to perfection. He published several books in this language. His most outstanding work is his Dictionary of the Chippewa Language. For many years the manuscript of this Dictionary lay unrecognized in the archives of the episcopal residence in St. Boniface. It was ultimately discovered and published under the supervision of his first assistant at the Pembina mission, Father Albert Lacombe, O.M.I. This dictionary proved invaluable to all who wished to learn the language. It was in French and Chippewa (there is no Chippewa-French form) and gave the etymology of each word and the complete particles which throw much light upon the knowledge of this language and enable one to seize the genius thereof. This dictionary has been copied on film slides from the original for the Minnesota Historical society which declares that "it is by all odds the most complete record in existence of the pristine Chippewa tongue translated into French". It fills two volumes of

nearly a thousand pages of close-written script. There is an excellent biography of Fr. Belcourt written by Monsignor J. Reardon of the Archdiocese of St. Paul. The title of the book is: George Anthony Belcourt. The book was published by the North Central Publishing Company of St. Paul in 1955. It is of interest to note that a town in North Dakota and a postoffice in Manitoba are named after Father Belcourt.

After this tribute to a deserving pioneer missionary let us continue our narrative. On their arrival in St. Boniface (1845), Father Aubert and Brother Taché were asked to take over all the Indian missions in the Red River Diocese. The congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate generously accepted this difficult task. The transfer was made official in 1846. Fr. Aubert's stay out West was a relatively short one for after five years he was recalled to <sup>the</sup> Western Canada. But Bro. Taché was to have a distinguished career in the western mission field. He was ordained to the priesthood on October 22, 1845, when only twenty-two years old. On the following day, he made his perpetual profession as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate. This was the first religious profession in the West. Of interest to historians is the fact that Father (later Archbishop) Taché was a direct descendant of the famous explorer, LeVerendrye.

Fathers Aubert and Taché spent the winter months after their arrival studying the Chippewa language with Father Belcourt as their teacher. In the summer of 1846, Fr. Taché was sent to the northwestern missions while Fr. Aubert replaced Father Belcourt and went all the way to Rainy Lake. The following year, 1847, Fr. Aubert again set out for his missions. After his return from Fort Frances Father Aubert reported that the Indians, in the various missions refused to accept Christianity. He was convinced that the dispositions of the Chippewa Indians did not warrant the presence of a missionary among them. Bishop Provencher viewed the situation in a similar manner. Regretfully, he abandoned the missions among the Chippewa and sent the missionaries to the Northwest where the Indians were better disposed to receive the Gospel message.

The Protestant ministers in the Rainy Lake region came to the same conclusion. The Rev. Mason left in 1843. He was succeeded by the Rev. Peter Jacobs who left in 1846. The mission was abandoned and was not re-established till 1853 under the Rev. Allen Salt. The Methodist mission was again abandoned in 1858 and the Rev. Allen Salt departed from the scene.

After the abandonment of the missions in 1847, the Chippewa Indians did not see a priest in the Rainy Lake region until 1851. That year, Father Taché, O.M.I., who had been appointed co-adjutor bishop to Bishop Provencher, set out for Europe where his consecration was to take place. Instead of going by the new route via St. Paul, Minn., Father Taché chose to retrace his steps over the waterway route which he had followed when he came out to the Colony in 1845. He planned to return the same way in 1852. He was, however, delayed on his return trip. The Hudson's Bay Company's canoes left Sault Ste Marie before he arrived at that point. So the newly-consecrated Bishop Taché had to retrace his steps to Detroit and then proceed to St. Paul and to the Red River Colony by the Red River Cart road. There was no other Catholic missionary activity in the Rainy Lake region for the next sixteen years (1851-1867).

The thought of re-activating the missions among the Chippewa Indians haunted Bishop Taché who succeeded Bishop Provencher in 1853. In his book "Vingt Annees de Missions" (Twenty years of Missions), Bishop Taché expressed his state of mind as follows: "Without questioning, in the least, the pressing motives which necessitated this move (abandoning the missions among the Chippewa Indians), may I be permitted to express the regrets which I feel, even at this date (1865). Our Divine Master Himself wants us, at times, to shake the dust off our sandals, nevertheless He Himself did weep over a Jerusalem that spurned the gift of God. To abandon what has been done, to renounce even the hope of converting, is something that always breaks the heart of a missionary. So I deeply realized the sorrow that the good and zealous Father Aubert must have experienced when he had to yield to a sad necessity so contrary to the desires of his heart. These regrets became still more poignant when, a few years later, the Catholic chapel at Wabassimong was handed over by the Hudson's Bay Company to the Church of England".

On another occasion, in a letter to Mr. S.J. Dawson (Feb. 9, 1859) Bishop Taché expressed his hope for the evangelization of the Chippewa Indians: "I do not consider this conversion to be completely unattainable. I know of virtuous deeds performed by some of the converted Chippewa Indians, actions which prove that God has some of His elect among them. If our missionaries, so few in number, were not more useful elsewhere, if our resources were more abundant, I would try to carry out a project in favor of these



Indians, a project which, perhaps, would have some measure of success. But considering actual circumstances, all this is but a dream".

Bishop Taché began carrying out his plan in 1861. Father J.M. Lestanc, O.M.I. set out from St. Boniface to work among the Chippewa Indians who lived near the mouths of the Red and Winnipeg Rivers. Twice a year he carried out this meritorious work. This was a gradual advance toward Rainy Lake. Bishop Taché wrote, "Would that we could return there one day! Would that these poor Indians could merit the grace that would bring us back among them!" In 1862, Fr. Lestanc again journeyed as far as Fort Alexander at the mouth of Winnipeg River. In 1863 it was Father L. Simonet, O.M.I. who went to Fort Alexander. He was followed by Father Lestanc who had a harrowing experience while making his trip in mid-winter. There seems to be no record of journeys in 1864, but most probably they took place. The chronicle for 1865 records two trips made by Father Lestanc to Fort Alexander. No doubt, the same holds for 1866.

Finally, in 1867, twenty years after the missions had been abandoned, mission posts of lesser importance were established at Fort Alexander, Lac Seul and Fort Frances. They were visited by priests from St. Boniface, especially by Father Lestanc. While he was parish priest at St. Charles, Man. (1867-1875), Father Joachim Allard O.M.I. managed to make missionary trips each summer to Peguis, Lower Fort Garry, Fort Alexander, Rat Portage (Kenora), Lac Seul and Fort Frances. Father Lestanc did likewise even when he was stationed at Qu Appelle (1870-1874). After Father Lestanc's transfer to Calgary (1874) Bishop Taché asked Fr. R. Giroux, parish priest of St. Anne des Chenes, Man. to look after Fort Frances. Travelling over the Dawson Road, Father Giroux made trips to Fort Frances in 1873, 1874, 1875 and 1876.

In 1876, Father J. Allard O.M.I. established permanent residence at Fort Alexander, where a church was built in 1877-78. From there, Fr. Allard visited the Indians along the Winnipeg River, Lake of the Woods, Lac Seul, English River and Fort Frances. In 1877, Father Joseph Stanislaus Marcoux, O.M.I. came to assist Father Allard. From that time on, all these missions were attended regularly by these two priests. In 1880, Father Albert Lacombe, O.M.I. became the first resident priest in Rat Portage (Kenora). He made at least one missionary excursion to Fort Frances. This was probably in 1881. In the meantime, Fathers Allard and Marcoux continued to look after Fort Frances

from their base at Fort Alexander. In 1884, Father Marcoux established residence in Rat Portage and kept on looking after the missions on the Lake of the Woods and at Fort Frances. Father Marcoux left Rat Portage in 1888, and had Father Charles Cahill O.M.I. as his successor. Father Cahill made his trips regularly from Kenora to Fort Frances up to 1893. It was in that year that Fort Frances became a permanent mission, with a resident priest in charge.

By 1893, the aspect and atmosphere at Fort Frances had undergone a great change from what it had been in the heyday of the fur trade. After the merger of the two rival companies (in 1821), the combined Company maintained posts in the area and continued to use the old canoe highway which led through Fort Frances. Eventually, the site of the fort was changed from Pither's Point to a fine spot just opposite the lovely falls of Rainy River. (Near to where the paper mill and mill yard are now located). But the fur trade abandoned this canoe waterway in favor of the more convenient route out of York Factory on Hudson's Bay. The Athabasca and Far Western voyageurs no longer delivered their furs to Fort Frances. They went directly to York Factory. As a result, Fort Frances lost much of its past grandeur and soon degenerated into an ordinary trading post. It did, however, continue to be the headquarters for a number of smaller establishments and wintering posts along the Rainy River, on the Lake of the Woods and at points north and east of Fort Frances.

But there was still a trickle of traffic coming through Fort Frances even after 1821. Many people working their way out West, continued to use the old canoe route, especially fur traders and explorers such as Alexander Henry, Alexander Mackenzie and David Thompson. Nicholas Garry, after whom Fort Garry was named, passed over this route in 1821. In 1822, the members of the International Boundary Commission, David Thompson, Doctor John Bigby and Major Delafield and their crews of surveyors came through Fort Frances. Sir George Simpson, the governor of the Hudson's Bay Company for forty years, continued to pass over this route well into the 1850's, as he toured his vast empire, in his express canoes manned by picked crews of superb Iroquois voyageurs. Up to 1845, inclusively, all the Catholic missionaries came out by this route. In 1843, Henry Lefrois, on his magnetic survey of the Northwest, Paul Kane, the illustrious painter of North American Indians in 1846; and, in 1848, Sir John Richardson, in search of the ill-fated Franklin expedition; - all came over the old canoe highway.

By the mid-century (1850), the fur trade began to wane. Steamboats and railroads spelled doom for the voyageurs and their birch bark canoes. These new modes of transportation also meant a rapidly dwindling wilderness. Frontier settlement moved at an accelerated pace. One of the problems facing the various governments during the time preceeding Confederation, was the question of westward expansion. Men's thoughts turned to surer ways than canoe routes to link the East and the West. Moreover, the Canadian government was anxious to hold British Columbia for the Empire against the obviously increasing aggression of American frontiersmen. This itch for conquest by the Americans perturbed British authorities in London. As a result of these apprehensions, two exploration parties were sent out to Western Canada in 1857. The Imperial Government dispatched an expedition to examine the possibility of building a road and a railroad from Lake Superior to the Red River and from there on, across the Rocky Mountains, to the Pacific coast. Canadian government officials fearing that the British report might be unfavourable, organized an expedition of their own.

The British expedition was placed under the command of Captain John Palliser. It was one of the best organized, best managed and most successful that visited western Canada. For three years, Palliser's experts probed our geology, mapped our geography and scoured the country for botanical species. As far as the country between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement is concerned, these men proceeded methodically with the exploration of the region. Their findings were negative. Palliser reported that to build a road or a railroad between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement would not justify the large outlay of funds required for such undertakings. He advised the linking up with existing American railway lines.

The Canadian expedition was under the leadership of George Gladman, Henry Youle Hind and Simon J. Dawson. Its commission was: "to make a thorough examination of the tract of country between Lake Superior and Red River. By which may be determined the best route for opening a facile communication, through British territory from the Lake to the Red River settlements, and ultimately to the great tracts of cultivable land beyond them". It was S. J. Dawson who made a thorough survey of the region from the Lakehead to the Red River Settlement. (1857-59). Dawson maintained that the easiest route between these two points was along the old Kaministiquia canoe highway. But,

to eliminate some of the most difficult portages and to save many days of toilsome travelling, Dawson proposed two short-cuts. 1) He suggested that a wagon road of 45 miles be constructed from Fort William to Shebandowan Lake and that the portages between Shebandowan Lake and Lake Kashabowie, and between Lake Kashabowie and Lake "Lac de Milles Lacs" be improved; 2) The other short-cut would be at the western end of the route—from Northwest Angle Inlet on the Lake of the Woods—overland 95 miles to St. Boniface on the Red River. Though approved in principle by the Canadian government, this combined water and land route, of some 450 miles, was not built until after Confederation (1868-74). Simon J. Dawson was appointed to supervise its construction. Because of his association with the route, it was named after him 'The Dawson Road'.

Work was far from complete when, in 1870, Wolseley's military expedition travelled westward over The Dawson Road to quell an uprising in the Red River Settlement. The halt at Fort Frances was a pleasant one. Captain G.L. Huyshe speaks of it as follows: "Glad indeed were we to see signs of the abode of man after the desolate and inhospitable region we had passed through ..... This green and fertile oasis in the midst of rock, forest and water, was like a glimpse of the Promised Land". Before leaving Fort Frances, Wolseley had a company of the First Ontario Rifles pitch a camp near the Fort and remain as a garrison. It is of interest to note that while the Wolseley expedition carefully avoided the shortcut from the Northwest Angle Inlet on the Lake of the Woods to Fort Garry, the return trip of the expedition was over the Dawson road all the way from Fort Garry to Port Arthur.

After the Wolseley expedition, the value of the Dawson Route was evident to all. So the Dominion government proceeded to make this link between the East and the West as good as circumstances would permit. The route was opened to regular traffic in the spring of 1771. By 1774, it was virtually completed even though its facilities continued to be of a rough frontier nature. In spite of untold hardships, immigrants to the opening West poured over the Dawson Road, - 2,000 alone in the peak year of 1875. After this the Dawson Road ceased to be used by immigrants. American steamboats and railroads provided a faster and less arduous means of reaching Manitoba. By 1877, the Dawson Road was little travelled and quickly fell into decay. But it was still used to transport employees and goods belonging to the Government. In its dying days, the Dawson Road served the final purpose of facilitating the construction of the

Canadian Pacific Railway, many of whose supplies passed over the course of the route it was destined to supersede.

All this notwithstanding, Fort Frances derived many benefits from The Dawson Road. The steamboats used to transport the troops, in 1870 and 1871, were left on the various lakes along the route. In 1874, the first large steamboats were placed on Rainy Lake, Rainy River and the Lake of the Woods. Besides those members of the Wolseley expedition who remained at or near Fort Frances, some of the men employed in operating the Dawson Road transportation system, settled down in the vicinity. At the same time several immigrants were favorably impressed by what they saw in the Rainy Lake region and decided to establish domicile in the neighborhood.

And now, it is time to say a few words about the canal that was supposed to aid navigation on the Dawson Route. In 1873, the John A. Macdonald government, which advocated the construction of a transcontinental railway to bind Canada together, was defeated. Macdonald was succeeded by Alexander Mackenzie whose policy was, that the railway should, where possible, link existing water routes. This policy led to the building of a canal at Fort Frances. Work on the canal began in 1875. The construction of the canal and the locks brought many persons to Fort Frances. For a while all was bustle and commotion. But when the Mackenzie government was defeated the project was abandoned (in 1878). The unfinished canal never aided steamboat navigation, which, by that time, was the chief form of transportation. When the Canadian Pacific Railway construction gangs appeared near Rat Portage, that place became the hub of activity in the region. In 1879, the Hudson's Bay Company moved its headquarters to Rat portage, which shortly after, (1882) had rail communication with Winnipeg. In 1885, Rat Portage became an important divisional point on the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway. After that, many travelled by train to Rat Portage and from there by steamboat to Fort Frances. By 1890, there were twenty-one steamboats plying between Rat Portage and Fort Frances. Immigrants came to Fort Frances and joined those who had remained behind after the construction of the canal had been called off. Although the Hudson's Bay Company's post still survived (up to 1903), it was, at that time, more of a general store than a fur trading counter. Fort Frances was no longer a primitive fur trading emporium. It was a budding village, soon to become a prosperous center for lumbering enterprises and agricultural exploitation.

Such was the situation in 1893 when religious authorities decided that the time had come to establish a permanent mission with a resident priest at Fort Frances. This marked the end of another phase in the religious history of the region and the beginning of a new era for the Catholic Church in the Rainy Lake district.

On September 21, 1893 four priests, all Oblates of Mary Immaculate arrived in Fort Frances and went to the little house belonging to the missionary. This building stood on what is now Mowat and Portage Avenues, near Sinclair street. Father (later Archbishop) Adelard Langevin, Vicar of Missions came to establish a permanent mission center in Fort Frances. Father Joseph Camper had been invited to preach a retreat to the Indians on the Couchiching Reservation. Fr. Charles Cahill was appointed the first resident priest of Fort Frances. He had already looked after Fort Frances and the neighboring missions since 1888 from his headquarters at Rat Portage. In addition to this, the bishop of Duluth, Minn., James McGolrick had asked the Oblate Fathers to attend the various posts in the northern part of his large diocese. As it was well nigh impossible for Father Cahill to minister to all the Catholics in so vast a district, Father Philip Valès was named to be his assistant.

The two priests were reminded by their superior, Father Langevin, that their field of labor was immense; that their efforts would not always be crowned with the desired success; but, that by complying with the orders of their superiors, their merit would always be recognized by God. Fr. Langevin exhorted Fathers Cahill and Valès to follow in the footsteps of the heroic priests who had proceeded them in the Rainy Lake portion of the Lord's Vineyard.

The Vicar of Missions then assigned the patron saints for the Indian reservation and for the village of Fort Frances. St. Peter was chosen for the reservation. This was a definite association with Fort St. Pierre and Pierre LaVerendrye. The Venerable Marguerite d'Youville, foundress of the Gray Nuns of Montreal was designated as the patron saint for the White population of Fort Frances. Here, again, there was an obvious link with the past. Christophe Dufrost de la Jemmeraye who had built Fort St. Pierre in 1731 was Marguerite d'Youville's brother and LaVerendrye's nephew. With the selection of the patron saints and the nomination of the resident priests, the permanent mission at Fort Frances was duly inaugurated.

Fort Frances was a good-sized Village in 1893 with a fairly large White population. But there were only five adult Catholics within the confines of the village. Besides these, there were about sixty persons of mixed extraction and some one hundred treaty Indians on Couchiching reservation. The number of Catholics on the American side of the boundary was not indicated in the census taken in 1893. As there was no Catholic church in the village, services were held in a school on the Indian reservation.

Shortly after settling down to work, the priests decided to open a school for Catholic pupils. As there were not enough Catholic ratepayers to organize a Separate School Board, the school had to be a "Private School". A little house belonging to John Dwyer was rented for that purpose. It was located near the priests' residence (Mowat Avenue & Sinclair Street). Mr. James Fitzpatrick was the teacher. He offered his services free of charge. On the first day of school, November 8, 1893, only three pupils answered the call of the school bell. There is no further mention of this school in the extant records of the parish. Could it have come to an untimely end? Perhaps it is more reasonable to assume that it continued to offer instruction to a larger group of pupils than on the first day of its humble existence.

In 1894, Fort Frances was stricken with gold fever. Gold had been discovered, the previous autumn, on one of the islands on Rainy Lake. A gold rush set in and, in a very short time, forty acres of heavily-wooded land were cleared in the middle of winter. By spring, Rainy Lake City, (on the American side) had a population of over 400 inhabitants. Dreams of Fort Frances becoming a mining metropolis were rampant. Even the priests were smitten. Foreseeing a large influx of population, they thought of building a hospital and of erecting a full-fledged parish with a duly appointed parish priest. But the gold mine did not prove sufficiently profitable for exploitation and soon things calmed down. In spite of another gold rush, this time at Seine River, the Catholic population at Fort Frances remained quite small. There were ten White Catholics, including two women (one of them married), and twelve Metis (half-breeds) in the village proper. Within a three mile radius there were 57 Catholics and 114 more on the Couchiching reservation.

There was talk of building a boarding school for Indian children on the reservation, but Rat Portage was given preference for the school. The possibility of having Gray Nuns come to the Indian reservation was mooted,

but this, too, was found to be premature. When things did not progress as expected, Father Valès was recalled. On June 26, 1894, he left for another assignment. In the fall of that year arrangements were made to have religious services in Fort Frances. Louis Hamel offered his home for the winter months. (His house was on the site of the present High School). Here, on September 9, 1894, High Mass was chanted for the first time in Fort Frances. The Indians from the reservation took care of the singing. Mass was then said alternately in Fort Frances and on the reservation.

Gradually, the number of Catholics in Fort Frances began to increase. Father J.B. Dorais O.M.I. came in March 1895 to help out with the work. The Louis Hamel house was too small for the congregation and other provisions had to be made for religious services. Father Cahill had already acquired property during the gold rush in 1894, "for a future church and a hospital". But circumstances did not call for a hospital and lack of funds did not permit the building of a regular church. So the Oblate Fathers decided to build a combined house-chapel with their own funds on their own property. This land was on First Street, just back of where Wells Hardware Store used to be. A part of this property was purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company and the remainder was acquired in an exchange with Louis Hamel.

On June 10, 1895, work started on the combined house-chapel, with Brother Theodore de Bijl O.M.I. in charge. The building would be 36 feet by 24 with an annex, 22 feet by 16. The ground floor was to be used as the rectory. The upper floor, which had an exterior stairway, would serve as a church. The annex was to be used as quarters for the housekeeper. The total cost of the building was estimated at \$2,000.00. Construction advanced rapidly and, on July 28, 1895, though not yet completed, the chapel was opened for services. Father J.B. Dorais celebrated the first Mass and Fr. Charles Cahill delivered the first sermon in the humble chapel.

The Catholic mission in Fort Frances was raised to the rank of a regular parish in September 1895. As the first Mass in the new chapel had been celebrated on the feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the patronal feast of the church was changed to that of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Father J.B. Baudin O.M.I. was appointed the first parish priest. He arrived on September 5th and took charge of the parish on Sept. 8, 1895. Father Cahill remained as missionary but Father Dorais left for another post in northern Manitoba.



That same autumn, the little chapel became the second "Private School" in Fort Frances. On school days the Blessed Sacrament was removed from the chapel and a drop-curtain hid the altar during school hours. Miss Boileau was the first and only teacher in this improvised school. The experiment was not successful and, after one year, the project was abandoned. After that, Catholic children went to public school but on Saturdays they came to the chapel where one of the Fathers taught them catechism.

A significant change took place in 1896. Two diocesan priests: Father Joseph Clovis St. Amant and Father Louis Zephirin Chandonnet came to Fort Frances early in January. Father Chandonnet was sent to look after the Catholics residing at Pine River (now Pinewood) and in the vicinity. Father St. Amant, who preferred to work among the Indians, established residence on the Couchiching reservation. He began at once to study the Chippewa language.

Fathers Baudin and Cahill remained at Fort Frances. As there was a fairly large Catholic population at Mine Center, it became necessary for a priest to go there occasionally. The first Mass was said there on January 30, 1896 in the home of Joseph Collins. The first marriage at Mine Center, that of James Walsh and Florence Hill, took place on May 14, 1896.

One of the problems that preoccupied the Fathers since 1893 was the acquisition of property to serve as a Catholic cemetery. At first the civic authorities opposed the idea of a denominational cemetery. But after recourse was had to officials of the Provincial Government in Toronto, permission was finally granted on February 3rd 1896 by the local civic authorities. A plot of two and one half acres on the east side of the cemetery was ceded to the Catholic parish. Two months later, in April, Father Baudin was notified that his services were needed elsewhere. So, on May 12, 1896, he left Fort Frances after a stay of only eight months. On June 5th, it was Father Cahill's turn to leave. He had been recalled to Rat Portage where he was to supervise the construction of a boarding school for Indians. On completion of the school he was appointed its first principal.

Father St. Amant was left in charge of the parish and of the Indian reservation. Services were held in Fort Frances only on the fourth Sunday of the month. A violent storm which tore off the roof of his residence on the reservation, forced Fr. St. Amant on August 3, 1896, to take refuge in the

priest's house-chapel in Fort Frances. In November, Father St. Amant returned to a new home on the reservation. From then on, services alternated between the reservation and Fort Frances. When Father Chandonnet left Pinewood in September 1896, Father St. Amant was asked to add that mission to his large field of labors. The various posts were visited occasionally on week days when that was possible.

April 1897 found Father St. Amant back in the house-chapel in Fort Frances, for the summer months. It was in April that Mr. Joseph St. Amant, the priest's father, sent an organ for the Indian mission on the reservation. Since no one there could play the organ it was installed in the parish chapel. The organ was inaugurated on Sunday May 2nd. The organist was Mrs. Clark, who was not a Catholic. The soloist on that occasion was another Protestant, Mr. Round, who was manager of the Hudson's Bay post at Fort Frances. The chronicle adds that there were many other Protestants present at the ceremony.

In October, Father St. Amant went to Pinewood to oversee the construction of a log cabin church there. It was a very humble church indeed, measuring 36 feet by 24 feet. Thanks to a generous "working-bee" on the part of Pinewood pioneers, the building was closed in by October 7th. While Fr. St. Amant was away at Pinewood, Father Cahill, now principal of the Rat Portage Indian Boarding School, came to Fort Frances in quest of Indian pupils for his institution. He returned to Rat Portage with six children from the reservation.

At Christmas, instead of having the Midnight Mass on the reservation, it was celebrated, for the first time, in the village chapel. It was quite an event. Those who think that ecumenism began after the Vatican Council II, had better listen to this. The organist was Mrs. Keating, a Protestant. The Misses Short, both Protestants, were violinists. They were helped out by Mr. Pat. Roche of International Falls. Mr. Joseph Baker, also from International Falls, played the flute. The singers were Messrs. Clark and Round, both Protestants, with assistance from Mr. Tom Kinshella of International Falls and Mrs. James (Tilda) Paul. Among the many Protestants present at the ceremony were three ministers: Reverend Mr. Fry, Methodist; Reverend Mr. Grant, Presbyterian and Reverend Mr. Bartlett, Anglican. Everything went well and all returned home with a pleasant souvenir of the first Midnight Mass at

Fort Frances (Dec. 25-1897).

Another of Fr. St. Amant's consolations in 1897 occurred when one of his parishioners, Miss Elzire Decaire of Pinewood embraced the religious state in the community of the Sisters of Charity (Gray Nuns). This was the first religious vocation to come out of the Rainy River region. It was the fond hope of the zealous pastor that it would not be the last.

The great event of 1898 was the first pastoral visitation by Archbishop Adelard Langevin of St. Boniface. He arrived at Pinewood by steamboat late on September 20th. He was accompanied by Father Joseph Thibaudeau O.M.I. and Fr. Charles Cahill. The latter went on to Fort Frances to prepare the people there for the Archbishop's visit. On September 21, Archbishop Langevin blessed the little Church and dedicated it to God's service under the title "Our Lady of the Wayside". This was a delicate allusion to the past when the voyageurs and explorers passed by here on their way to more distant posts. Having celebrated Mass, the Archbishop administered the sacrament of Confirmation to thirty-two persons. It was the first time that Confirmation had been solemnly conferred in the Rainy River district. Before leaving Pinewood, Archbishop Langevin blessed the Catholic cemetery.

The Archbishop accompanied by Fathers St. Amant and Thibaudeau set out on September 22nd by steamboat for Fort Frances. Immediately on arrival, Archbishop confirmed twenty-three persons. This was followed by the blessing of a church bell with the assistance of Fathers St. Amant, Cahill and Thibaudeau. With its bell blessed and installed the little church in Fort Frances took another step forward towards its status of a full-fledged place of worship. It was a singular coincidence, that, five years after he had founded a permanent mission here, Father Langevin, now Archbishop, officiated at this memorable ceremony.

It would not be amiss to say a little more about the story of this bell. The names given to it by the Archbishop were "Marie, Marguerite". These names honored Our Lady of Perpetual Help, patroness of the parish and Venerable Marguerite D'Youville, to whom the mission was originally dedicated in 1893. The bell, weighing 309 lbs., was purchased from the Meneely Company, Bell Founders of Troy, New York. The bell cost, F.O.B. at New York, \$78.00. It was shipped via Rat Portage on the Canadian Pacific Railway, and then by

steamboat to Fort Frances. The cost of the bell was defrayed by the proceeds of a St. Patrick's concert, organized by Mrs. "Tilda" Paul. The actors, under the able direction of the Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Mr. Grant, gave a masterful interpretation of the drama: "Uncle Tom's Cabin". An item not to be overlooked was that the concert was staged in the "Orange Hall". This last detail was not exactly to Father St. Amant's liking, but he was happy at the thought, that from then on, the chimes of the bell would call his beloved parishoners to divine worship.

Before closing the chronicle for 1898, it would be proper to mention an event that was destined to leave a profound impress on the entire community: the coming of a railway to Fort Frances. In the spring of 1898, work started at both ends, on the Canadian Northern Railway from Winnipeg to Fort William. The eager population looked forward with great expectation to the day when Fort Frances would have rapid communication to the East and West. The prospect of having a daily mail service overjoyed the people of the relatively isolated village of Fort Frances. The sporadic delivery by steamboat in summer and by dog-sled in winter, or even the more expensive service via Tower Minn and Duluth, was far from satisfactory.

Pending completion of the railway, life went on in Fort Frances, at a slightly accelerated pace. As far as Father St. Amant was concerned, the year 1899, brought him a much desired relief from his heavy burden of ministering to the Catholics scattered over a vast area. Shortly before being relieved of his duties as parish priest of Fort Frances, Fr. St. Amant welcomed the arrival on August 10th of a 300 pound bell for his little church in Pinewood, towards the cost of which Archbishop Langevin donated \$50.00. Then, on Aug 20th the little mission acquired an organ for the church. Much as he would have liked to, the Archbishop was not able to come to bless the bell. He delegated his Vicar General, The Very Reverend Joachim Allard O.M.I. to perform this ceremony which took place on October 1st, 1899.

Father Allard then proceeded to Fort Frances and took charge of the parish as well as the mission on the reservation. The new pastor was well known in the entire district. He had made many visits to Fort Frances, as far back as 1867. From St. Boniface at first, and then from Fort Alexander, Fr. Allard came to minister to the Catholics at Fort Frances. The parishioners welcomed Father Allard and were pleased to hear that Father St. Amant would remain in Fort Frances to look after the neighboring missions. Among these

missions was Mine Center, where on January 14, 1900, High Mass was sung for the first time in the school house. Miss Theresa Ferguson was the organist on that occasion.

By 1900, work on the Canadian Northern Railway was advancing rapidly. There were construction camps all along the right of way. On March 18th, 1900, when on his way back from Mine Center, Father St. Amant visited one of these camps at Bear's Pass, some 20 miles east of Fort Frances. He was pleasantly surprised to find many Catholics there, among whom were several musicians. So a High Mass was sung probably on March 19th to the accompaniment of a violin and a guitar. Those who think that the guitar is a distinctive feature of the contemporary era, take notice.

In his chronicle for 1900, Father St. Amant mentions the introduction of several ceremonies which show that the little parish was gradually coming of age. On February 2nd, Candlemas day, the blessing of candles took place for the first time. On March 25, feast of the Annunciation, solemn Vespers were chanted for the first time in the little chapel. On April 12, 13 and 14, Holy Week ceremonies were performed for the first time in Fort Frances. However, the first solemn procession of the Blessed Sacrament on the Feast of Corpus Christi took place on the reservation. Back in Fort Frances, on June 22, Feast of the Sacred Heart, there was the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament throughout the day, followed by a Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Finally, on December 23rd, 1900, the Stations of the Cross were blessed and installed.

Before this last event, Father St. Amant had received notice of his appointment as parish priest of the newly erected parish of Pinewood. He left Fort Frances toward the end of October, 1900, for his new post and remained there until 1907. During his stay in the Rainy Lake country, Father St. Amant endeared himself to the people on both sides of the boundary. The 'oldtimers' of the region spoke of him with great veneration. After having occupied many important posts in the St. Boniface archdiocese, Father St. Amant was promoted to the rank of Domestic Prelate. His death took place in St. Boniface in May, 1960. Father Hervé Péran O.M.I. who arrived on November 30, 1900, took charge of the missions attached to

Fort Frances. But his stay here was very short - by January 6th, 1901, he had left for another assignment.

Archbishop Langevin made another pastoral visitation of the district on July 14, 1901. He went first to the Indian reservation and commended Father Allard for having started the construction of a church on the Couchiching reservation. The Archbishop then expressed the hope of seeing, in the near future, a boarding school, built on the reservation, for Indian children, with the Gray Nuns in charge. By the way, the church that was being erected there measured 50 feet in length and 25 feet in width. The edifice was built entirely by the Metis and Indians living on the reservation. This church was blessed by Father Allard on Dec. 21, 1901. It was tentatively dedicated under the title of Our Lady of the Lake, pending the designation by the Archbishop of a patron saint.

After having administered the sacrament of Confirmation on the reservation, the Archbishop returned to Fort Frances where the ceremony was repeated for the benefit of the parishioners. Archbishop Langevin addressed the people and wondered whether the spiritual progress of the parish would keep pace with the material changes that were taking place with the coming of the railway to Fort Frances. The Winnipeg - Port Arthur section of the Canadian Northern Railway was finished in the autumn of 1901. The first train between Winnipeg and Port Arthur came through on January 1st, 1902. Pioneer days were over at Fort Frances. The advent of the railway spelt doom for the steamship traffic and in a short time steamboat transportation was practically nonexistent.

Other changes took place. In 1903, the Hudson's Bay store burnt down and was not rebuilt. On April 11, 1903, Fort Frances was officially incorporated as a village. At the same time there was a considerable increase in the population. From the Catholic Church point of view there was progress. But the aged pastor, Father Allard, found it a difficult task and asked for help. It was not until September 1903 that Father Hector Brassard came to assist him. Fr. Brassard took over the Indian missions and made his headquarters on the Indian reservation.

In 1904, Father Allard thought that the time had come to build a Separate School in Fort Frances. So he decided to organize a Separate School District. Many of the ratepayers were opposed to the idea out of fear that taxes would be too high in the Separate School system. To keep

taxes in line with the Public School system it would be necessary to find other sources of revenue. Some suggested, socials, fairs, bazaars and the like but those who were in a position to organize these activities refused to do so. Somewhere along the discussions a false step was made and soon many of the Catholic ratepayers were up in arms. Some of the more excited ones went as far as saying that if the Archbishop wanted to have a Separate School in Fort Frances, he should build and support it out of his own funds. Things looked bad for a while. Even the Protestants looked on with amused curiosity at what was going on among the Catholic ratepayers in Fort Frances.

Things took a sudden and unexpected turn when, on April 5th, 1905, Father Allard received notice that he had been appointed to the Chaplaincy at St. Mary's Academy and at Misericordia Hospital in Winnipeg. Father Allard left promptly and on April 10th, the new pastor, Father Ernest Croisier O.M.I. took charge of the parish. Father Croisier set to work immediately to calm down the aroused Catholic ratepayers. A general meeting was held, opinions were expressed and discussed, quite sharply, at times. But gradually the opposition subsided. Father Croisier assured his parishioners that every effort would be made to keep the Separate School taxes in line with those of the Public School system. When possible, the parish would help out. But what proved most effective, was the promise that all the moneys collected at various logging camps, would be handed over to the Separate School Board. When, finally, the assembly was called to the question, an unanimous vote favored the purchase of two lots and the immediate construction of a Separate School. The Oblate Fathers consented to provide the necessary funds at a reasonable rate of interest. Without delay work started on the new school which was situated on Nelson Street, just east of the present St. Mary's Separate School.

Father Croisier then informed his parishioners that negotiations were in progress with the Benedictine Sisters of Duluth, Minn., to open a Catholic hospital in Fort Frances in the course of the year (1905). It was agreed that one sister would teach in the new school. It was the fond hope of the pastor that, with a sister teaching in the school and a Catholic hospital in operation, hearts would be softened and purses opened a bit more widely to support the Separate School. He intended to explain Catholic doctrine more and insist less on the obligation to support the school. Pretending

not to notice the opposition that still smoldered in some quarters, he invited all his parishioners, men and women, to take a more active interest in the school. His conciliatory tone and persevering efforts brought about a more serene atmosphere in the parish.

The pastor's next task was to make some much needed improvements in the church which was in the same primitive state as it had been when built in 1895. Here again, Father Croisier met with a strong spirit of retrenchment. The women in charge of the building fund were loath to part with their savings so religiously gathered and so carefully guarded. By 1905 this building fund had reached the respectable amount (in those days) of \$500.00. But the pastor stood his ground. He did not intend to hear confessions in the open at the communion rail as his predecessors had done, and he would not celebrate Mass and perform other religious rites unless the vestments and objects of worship were in conformity with dignity and religious standards. Shortly after, a confessional was built, new vestments were provided, candlesticks and other objects of worship were purchased. At the same time, the resolute pastor began making plans for an Altar Society which would look after the church sanctuary and provide all that was necessary for religious services.

Another of the efficient and systematic pastor's projects was the parish census. Father Croisier was just as practical and thorough in this as in his other undertakings. Every family was visited and the names of all the members ~~of all~~ were listed. There were brief comments on the religious status of the parishioners at times. In the parish there were at that time (1905) some 30 families (139) persons. In addition to these, there was a shifting population of about 150 persons: lumberjacks, trappers, employees on the railroad and the like. Father Croisier found small pockets of Catholics in the missions: at Emo, Big Fork, Mine Center and other points along the Canadian Northern Railroad. It was difficult to tend to the religious needs of these sparsely populated centers because they could be visited at irregular intervals only, and that, on week days only when many of them were away at work. Finally, Fr. Croisier surmised that the missions on the American side; International Falls, Littlefork, Big Falls, Indus and Loman would be taken over, in the near future, by American priests. Work on a dam across the Rainy River, and a power-house had started in 1905. This brought in a large number of men to International



Falls. These were followed by settlers along the American side of the Rainy River.

While International Falls was in the process of out-growing Fort Frances, disaster struck in the former fur trading post. On June 5th, 1905, early in the morning, a serious fire broke out and most of the business section and several residences were reduced to ashes. But the energetic businessmen and the residents were not discouraged by this setback and soon all the business enterprises and homes were rebuilt and improved.

It would, perhaps, be of interest to mention some of the pioneer families of the Catholic parish in Fort Frances. Louis Christie came in the fall of 1894 to be followed in early spring 1895, by his wife (Ellen Welch) and daughters, Catherine age 5 years and Marguerite, age 8 months. Their son, Wilfred, was born in Fort Frances in 1897. Mrs. Christie (Nellie) took an active part in all church, community and recreational activities.

Next in seniority was the James Paul family. Mr. Paul came in 1894. His wife (Mathilda Carroll) and daughter, Rita arrived in December 1895. Mrs. Paul (Tillie) took a great interest in all church activities and her good example was faithfully followed by her daughter Rita, Mrs. Emile Cousineau.

Then came the Ed Martin, John Gagné, Narcisse Gagné and Cyrias Gagné families. Their descendants took a keen interest in church doings. Several of them are still prominent in church and school organizations.

The Ocatave Jalbert family came here from Mine Centre. Both Mr. and Mrs. <sup>Jalbert</sup> were staunch Catholics and generous supporters of the church and Separate School. Both occupied important offices in the various church organizations. Their greatest claim to special consideration as distinguished members of the parish is that two of their daughters became nuns and their three sons became priests. Mrs. Jalbert's sister, Louise deChamplain who lived with the Jalberts, later became a nun.

Pat A. Smith first came to the district in 1892. Later, he joined the Rat Portage Lumber Company. In 1900 he married Elizabeth Fitzpatrick at Rat Portage and shortly after this he came to Fort Frances, first as 'scaler', then as manager of the Rat Portage Lumber Company. Both Mr. and Mrs. Smith were good church workers and generous supporters. The P.A. Smiths were childless but they kept with them two of their nephews: Eugene and Callahan McCarthy, and two of their nieces: Mary and Theresa

Fitzpatrick.

There was a Louis Hamel here before 1895. It was in his home that Mass was said on Sundays during the winter of 1894-1895. He left for Mine Center before 1905. Here are the names of some of the other families in the order that they are listed in Father Croisier's census: William Law and his sister Annie; John Tighe, John McCrank, George Wastell, Simon Fahey, Hilaire (Larry) Frenette, Ernest Green, Pat Kerr, James Harty, John Driscoll and James Bartley, whose son Leo was ordained a priest in Edmonton in 1923. In addition to these families, there were some whose families were not here, and some single men. Two of these, James Fitzpatrick and John Dignall gave their services free of charge, to the missions and were considered as 'donnés', or men who gave themselves for the service of God.

After having become acquainted with some of the pioneers of the parish, let us resume the chronicle for 1905. In September two Benedictine Nuns arrived. They were: Sister Evangelist who was to be the teacher in the Separate School and Sister Edward the housekeeper. To get to Fort Frances, the sisters had to travel by train from Duluth, Minn. all the way to Winnipeg and then back-track from Winnipeg to Fort Frances on the Canadian Northern Railroad. The Sisters were to reside at the hospital when it would be completed. In the meantime, they occupied the housekeeper's quarters at the rectory. Unfortunately, various circumstances turned up and the hospital project was abandoned.

The Separate School was completed in due course. Archbishop Adelard Langevin came on September 20, 1905 and blessed the new school. In his discourse to the people, the Archbishop pleaded with the parishioners to co-operate with their pastor who had worked so hard to have the school built. He reminded parents that they were bound in conscience to pay their taxes to the Separate School Board and to send their children to the Separate School. He appealed to the women of the parish to show their generosity in organizing socials, fairs and bazaars in order to help out with parish and school finances. Finally, the Archbishop asked all the parishioners to think seriously of building a larger and more dignified church for the community.

That same afternoon the Archbishop went to the Indian reservation to

bless the newly-completed school for Indian children. This school had been built, in greater part, by three Oblate lay brothers: Brother Theodore de Bijl was in charge and Brothers Eugene Gauthier and Charles Sylvestre were his assistants. Father Hector Brassard was appointed principal of the school. After having served several generations of Indian pupils, this school was replaced, in 1962, by a thoroughly modern edifice. Here is a list of the principals who were in charge of this school: Hector Brassard O.M.I., 1805-1909; Matthias Kalmes O.M.I., 1909-1911; Philip Valès O.M.I. 1911-1918; Hector Brassard O.M.I. 1918-1925; Simeon Perreault O.M.I. 1925-1929; Hector Brassard O.M.I. 1929-1932; Paul Bousquet O.M.I. 1932-1934; Maurice de Bretagne O.M.I. 1934-1936; Vincent de Varennes O.M.I. 1936-1938; Placide Chatelain O.M.I. 1938-1947; Vincent de Varennes O.M.I. 1947-1957; Andrew Florentin O.M.I. 1957-1961; Fernand Delaye O.M.I. 1961-1962; Joseph R. Carriere O.M.I. 1962-1965; Raymond Dion O.M.I. 1965-1967 and Aimé Lizée 1967 to the present day.

Father Croisier had another building project going on in International Falls, Minn. A small church, 36 feet by 26 feet was being erected there. By the end of December 1905 this building was closed in, but it was not opened for religious worship until Sunday, February 4th, 1906. On Easter Sunday, April 15th, the church was blessed by Father Croisier, who acted as parish priest. Thenceforth Mass was celebrated in this church every Sunday and on week days, on request or by special appointment.

Back in Fort Frances things began to change. Sister Evangelist, the teacher, found the distance between the house-chapel and the Separate School to be too great. It was, therefore, decided to transport the house-chapel from its site on First Street, to Victoria Avenue, where the Oblate Fathers had purchased several lots. On the last Sunday in December 1905, Mass was celebrated for the last time in the chapel. Thereafter religious worship was held in the Separate School until the completion of the new church.

In spite of the cold weather, the house-chapel was moved to Victoria Avenue early in January 1906. The ground floor was used as the rectory. The upper storey, what had formerly been the chapel, was transformed into rooms for the sisters. The original home of the missionary <sup>ave.</sup> was transported from its site on Mowat-Sinclair <sup>ST.</sup> and converted into a sacristy for the new church. Whether dissatisfied with the condition of their new quarters or prompted by the desire of more privacy, the Sisters

Harty residence. Later on they moved into a house on Victoria Ave., nearer to the Separate School, and now the residence of the Robert Craig family.

The decision of the Sisters was, no doubt, a step forward, but it imposed an additional burden on the already debt-ridden parish. Then came the distressing news that since the hospital project fell through, the Sisters would be recalled at the end of the school year. The thought of losing Sister Evangelist, who was an excellent teacher, caused the perplexed pastor untold anxiety. Frantic efforts were made to organize a hospital in the quarters that the Sisters had vacated. But the plan was not accepted and had to be abandoned. After the urgent and repeated requests of Father Croisier, the Mother General of the Sisters relented and promised to send the Sisters back for another school year.

On receiving news of this decision the zealous pastor breathed a little more easily. Then he set to work to arrange for the construction of a new church. An agreement was made with the Oblate Fathers to borrow \$10,000.00, at a very reasonable rate (the actual cost of the church was \$8,694.41). Work started without delay. The new church was built on Victoria Avenue, just north of the recently transported rectory. The church proper was 72 feet long, 34 feet wide and 28 feet high. The former residence of the missionary was converted to a sacristy of the new church. Work progressed satisfactorily, and on November 25, 1906, Archbishop Langevin came to dedicate the new edifice to the service of God. The Celebrant of the Solemn High Mass on that occasion was Father Xyste Portelance O.M.I., parish priest of Sacred Heart Church in Winnipeg, with Fathers H. Péran O.M.I. and J. Clovis St. Amant as Deacon and Sub-deacon. Other priests present were Fathers Croisier O.M.I., Alphonse Hartmann O.M.I. parish priest of Notre Dame du Portage Church in Kenora and Father Joseph Poitras, the Archbishop's secretary. After having conferred the sacrament of Confirmation, the Archbishop blessed a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On the following day, the Archbishop insisted on meeting the Ladies of the Alter Society. After congratulating them and encouraging them in their work, he imparted to them the Apostolic Blessing. Before leaving Fort Frances the Archbishop made it a point to visit the

Separate School which was dear to his heart. The Archbishop had used his influence to persuade the Oblate Fathers to make loans, at reasonable rates, to the Separate School Board and to the Parish.

With the new church open for worship and the Separate School functioning satisfactorily, Father Croisier was able to relax, a bit. He was further consoled when, on October 22nd, 1906, Father Arthur J. Labonté O.M.I. arrived to help out with the work. But there was still the prospect of losing the Sisters to preoccupy the worried pastor. Things looked so bad that in February, 1907, Archbishop Langevin advised Father Croisier to look for another teacher for the coming school year. But Father Croisier was not a man to give up without making a supreme effort. He spoke to Sister Evangelist, the teacher, and made her realize the good work she had accomplished. If she left, much of this would be undone. He pleaded with good Sister to use her influence with the Superior General in order to save the school. Sister Evangelist, understanding the situation, succeeded in having the question reconsidered. The Superior General at Duluth decided, somewhat reluctantly, to allow the Sister Evangelist to return for another school year.

On March 12, 1907, Father Labonté received orders to report to St. Mary's Church in Winnipeg. He was replaced by Father Joseph Therrien O.M.I., who came up from Duluth. [On April 21, Father Croisier had the signal privilege of blessing a new bell for the church. Archbishop Langevin had graciously delegated the pastor to officiate at this ceremony at which Father Brassard and Therrien served as Deacon and Subdeacon. The bell had been donated by Mr. Ed. Martin and Mrs. James Paul.] On May 9, 1907, after a trial of almost two years, the Altar Society was officially organized. The first officers were: President Mrs. D.D. Doucette; Vice-President, Mrs. James Paul; Secretary Mrs. O. Jalbert and Treasurer, Mrs. P.A. Smith. On June 2, the Stations of the Cross, donated by St. Mary's Church in Winnipeg, were blessed and duly installed.

Changes in the personnel took place in September 1907. Father Joseph Therrien was recalled to Duluth. Father Therrien had made many friends. His pleasing personality and jovial ways had made him very popular with the Separate School Children. He was replaced by Father Francis Costiou, O.M.I. who was to give a long and distinguished service

in the district on both sides of the boundary. Father Croisier was very pleased to have him as a companion and fellow-worker. Classmates at the Seminary, they had been ordained priests side by side at Liege Belgium. The two priests teamed up excellently and went about their work energetically.

Toward the end of 1907, the people of the two border villages, especially those of International Falls, were gladdened by the construction of two new railroads which gave communication with points to the south. The Minnesota and International Railway (now a part of the Northern Pacific Railway) reached International Falls from the southwest. The Duluth, Rainy Lake and Winnipeg Railway (now the Duluth, Winnipeg and Pacific Railway, a subsidiary of the Canadian National Railway) came from the south. This latter Company built a bridge between Fort Frances and Ranier Minn. The first run of the train over this bridge was made on April 28, 1908. So Fort Frances, too, had direct access to the south. About this time there was talk of a railroad link with the Canadian Pacific Railway at Kenora. A charter had been granted and in 1925 it was secured by the Backus Brooks Company. It was anticipated that this railway would be completed in 1926. This hope has not yet been fulfilled, and considering the present railroad situation, the proposed Fort Frances - Kenora Railway will, most probably, never see the light of day.

During the first three months of 1908, Father Croisier made missionary trips to the various logging camps in the area. The purpose of these visits was not only to tend to the spiritual needs of the persons concerned, but also to gather funds for the church and school. Both purposes were attained and Father Croisier returned with the fancy sum of \$624.50. While he was away, Father Costiou looked after the parishes in Fort Frances and International Falls. In April it was Father Costiou's turn to take the road. He went as far as Atikokan and Indus Minn. Then, towards the end of April, Father Croisier struck out for the south and visited Littlefork and Big Falls, Minn.

At Fort Frances, On June 14, 1908, there was a solemn blessing of a Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Father Croisier officiated, with Fathers H. Brassard and F. Costiou assisting as Deacon and Subdeacon respectively. An international flavor was given the ceremony when a choir from Virginia Minn, under the direction of Miss M. Murphy took charge of the musical

part of the programme. This statue was donated by Messrs John, Narcisse Cyrias Gagné and by John Gagné's three sons: Walter, Johnnie and Henry.

Shortly after came the end of the school year. Sister Evangelist, the school teacher, and her companion, Sister Edward were recalled to Duluth. Their departure was regretted by the priests, the parishioners and especially the school children. The Sisters, too, were sorry to leave. Many years later, Sister Evangelist let it be known that she still had a warm spot in her heart for her former pupils at Fort Frances. This time the Sisters did not have to go all the way to Winnipeg to get to Duluth. They boarded the train at Fort Frances and went directly to their mother-house at Duluth.

Not long after the departure of the Sisters, there was another leave-taking. Just when Father Croisier had the parish well organized and could look forward to a fruitful career in Fort Frances, he received notice of his transfer to the Sacred Heart Parish in Winnipeg. It was with a heavy heart, that in August 1908, Father Croisier left Fort Frances. He had come to love his parishioners whom he served so faithfully during the past three years. Father Costiou, when announcing his own appointment as parish priest at Fort Frances, drew attention to Father Croisier's great spirit of obedience in complying with the orders of his Superiors. "But", added Father Costiou, "the walls of this church and everything around us, speak of Father Croisier and of all that he has done for the parish".

It was in August 1908 that Father Francis Costiou took charge of the parish. One of his first tasks was to find a competent teacher for the Separate School and this was not easy in these days. Almost at the last moment, Miss Marie Driscoll, a cousin of Mrs. James Harty, came and accepted the assignment.

Father Arthur Dallaire O.M.I., a recently ordained priest, was sent to Fort Frances in Sept. 1908, as assistant to Father Costiou. He was welcome as there was enough work in Fort Frances, International Falls and in the neighboring missions to keep two priests quite busy. An event which pleased Father Costiou was the blessing of a statue of St. Joseph on November 29, 1908, by Father H. Brassard. This statue was donated by Miss Yvonne LeGac, the housekeeper at the rectory.

During January and February Father Croisier came from Winnipeg to help out with the work of visiting the logging camps. On March 7th, 1909, prayers were requested for Father J.B. Baudin, whose death had taken place on February 27th at Kenora. Father Baudin had been Fort Frances' first parish priest, from September 5th, 1895 to May 12, 1896. In June 1909, Father Patrick J. Killeen, a priest of the Duluth Diocese was appointed parish priest of International Falls and priest in charge of the missions in northern Minnesota. The Fathers at Fort Frances were thereby relieved of a large portion of the territory they had hitherto cared for, but their field of labor was still large enough to keep them fully occupied. On July 11th, Archbishop Langevin came again for the pastoral visitation of the parish. He was accompanied by Father E. Croisier and Father A. Labonté. Others present on this occasion were Father P.J. Killeen, the newly appointed parish priest of International Falls, Father M. Kalmes O.M.I., principal of the Indian school, Father Costiou, Father Dallaire and Father Joseph Poitras, the Archbishop's secretary.

In the fall of 1909, the Separate School pupils greeted a new teacher, Miss Greta Fahey, who was duly qualified with an Ontario diploma. The logging camps were visited during the months of January and February. This difficult but meritorious work was carried out annually, practically as long as these camps were in operation. Father Costiou was sorry to lose his assistant, Father Dallaire, who left Fort Frances on May 2, 1910. No one came to replace Father Dallaire. The pastor had to rely on occasional help from the Fathers at the Indian School or from visiting priests. But he did receive a companion shortly after Father Dallaire's departure. Bro. <sup>DAVID</sup> ~~Donat~~ Pelletier O.M.I. a lay brother came to Fort Frances. He became the church janitor, a gardener and helped out as cook when his services were required in that capacity.

The year 1910 saw the completion of the dam across the Rainy River. The power-house was finished about the same time and began producing electricity. This changed the course of events and conditions in the whole region between Rainy Lake and the Lake of the Woods. Work on paper mills in Fort Frances and International Falls was in full swing. This was followed by the erection of large saw mills on both sides of Rainy River. Things were "booming" in the border towns.



Father Costiou was busier than ever tending to his ever-growing flock. When the school year started he was pleased to see Miss Greta Fahey back at her post as teacher in the Separate School. About the same time an anonymous benefactor donated a statue of St. Patrick, which Father Costiou blessed on September 4, 1910. Another group of parishioners started a drive to have the church wired for electricity. Mr. Pat. A. Smith paid for the wiring. The cost of the fixtures was defrayed by donations from the following parishioners: Miss Louise de Champlain, Mrs. Noel; Mr. & Mrs. James Paul, Mr. O. Jalbert, Mr. J.B. Pelletier, Miss F. Delaney, Mrs. L. Christie and Mr. John Cagne.

( An event which exerted some influence in Fort Frances was the forming of a Council of the Knights of Columbus in International Falls, (March 5, 1911). Among the charter members of this council were some men from Fort Frances. Twenty-five years later Fort Frances had its own council. (Mar. 3, 1936). )

The increase in population created a problem in the Separate School. The one class room was filled to overflowing. Another was needed, a second teacher would have to be hired and, of course, additional funds had to be found. Money was borrowed, the upper storey of the church sacristy was converted into a classroom and two new teachers were hired. Miss Fahey, who had given great satisfaction during her two year stay, planned to leave Fort Frances at the end of the school year to enter the religious order of the Sisters of Loretto in Toronto. The new school teachers were the Misses S. Macdonnell and M.T. Kelly. Having classes in the sacristy proved to be a makeshift arrangement and soon all realized that a larger school would have to be built. The parish now had 60 families comprising 275 persons. Besides this there was a floating population of considerable size. The year 1911 ended with the blessing on Dec. 31 of a statue of St. Ann, the gift of an undisclosed benefactor.

Early in 1912, while Father Costiou was absent on one of his visits to the logging camps, some parents, dissatisfied with conditions at the Separate School, sent their children to the Public School. On his return, Father Costiou let those parents know what he thought of them. "Their faith", he said "would not fill a <sup>m</sup>thimble". When Archbishop Langevin came on April 13, 1912 for the pastoral visitation of the parish, he censured the conduct of those parents who had taken their children out of the Separate

School. He congratulated Father Costiou and the faithful parishioners for their generosity in supporting the church and school. He commended the pastor on the good work he was doing in the logging camps. The Archbishop stressed the urgent need of building a new school large enough to accommodate the growing number of pupils. He suggested the formation of a committee to help the pastor in the administration of the parish. Finally he stated that the parish should purchase from the Oblate Fathers, the rectory with its contents and the lots the Oblates had near the church and school.

Action was taken, promptly, on the various suggestions made by the Archbishop. The School Board ordered the building of a four room, brick-veneered school. On April 28, 1912, the election of the parish trustees took place. Elected were: J. Harty, P.A. Smith, O. Jalbert, E. Clairmont and E. Gorman. In June, 1912, the parish bought the rectory with all the furniture (library and personal property of the priests excepted) and the property belonging to the Oblates. There was then an exchange between the parish and the School Board of some lots to the satisfaction and greater convenience of all concerned. Two new teachers: Miss Mae Coughlin and Miss K. Leahy were hired. In due time the school was completed at the cost of some \$13,000.00. On Dec. 1, 1912, the solemn blessing took place with Archbishop Langevin officiating. There were songs, addresses, speeches, admonitions, congratulations and appeals for a wholesome co-operation in all school and parish activities. About this time, on November 29, 1912, the canonical erection of the parish took place and it was officially incorporated according to the laws of the province of Ontario.

The parish sold the property on First Street, the site of the original house-chapel to the Wells Hardware Company, in the spring of 1913. In the fall the Misses Coughlin and Leahy returned and were greeted by a large number of pupils. The two school teachers acted as God-Mothers for all the girls who were confirmed on November 30th. This time it was the Auxiliary Bishop of St. Boniface, Arthur Beliveau, who administered the sacrament of Confirmation. On Monday December 1st, the anniversary of the blessing of the school, there was a banquet sponsored by the Separate School Board for the Bishop and all those interested in the Separate School. One of the guests on that occasion was Father Charles Cahill who had been the

first resident priest in Fort Frances.

The year 1914 proved to be a memorable one in many ways. By this time there was great activity in Fort Frances. The paper mill was already producing paper and the Shevlin-Clarke sawmill was working full blast. Many new families came to Fort Frances. Prosperity and optimism abounded on all sides. On May 10th, 1914, the entire community was saddened by the death of Pat A. Smith. He had been a prominent citizen, a stalwart Catholic and a generous supporter of the church and school.

Father Costiou informed the parishioners on July 19th that the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions had accepted to come to Fort Frances and take over as teachers in the Separate School. The invitation had been first made away back in 1901 by the Provincial of the Oblate Fathers. The Sisters, however, were not in a position to accept the offer at that time. It was on July 27, 1914, that Sisters M. St. Ildegarde, M. St. Reine, M. St. Marcel and M. St. Edana arrived in Fort Frances. The first Separate School, built in 1905, had been prepared as a residence for the Sisters. This was to be their home until 1919, when the Sisters moved into the present convent on Nelson Street.

The coming of the Sisters was the source of much satisfaction to Father Costiou and his parishioners. But the pastor was not without his disappointments. One of the questions that had come to a head in 1914, was that of a fair division of corporation taxes. The Separate School Board had claimed a fair portion of these taxes which were being paid entirely to the Public School Board. A test case was brought to court, but the trial judge decided in favor of the Public School Board. He explained that he could not give any other interpretation to the law as it stood at the time. But he did insinuate that local municipal authorities could, amicably, make certain adjustments. The village fathers, however, refused to act on the judge's suggestion. This attitude on the part of the local municipal authorities saddened the Catholic ratepayers who found it so hard to keep their taxes in line with those of the Public School Board.

There was a greater disaster in store for the community. The World War broke out on August 4th, 1914. Many young men volunteered their services in the Armed Forces. Soon casualties resulted and as these were announced there was sorrow in many a home and anxiety and apprehension in many more.

There were other occasions of mourning in 1915. The entire diocese of St. Boniface was saddened on June 15th by the unexpected death of Archbishop Langevin which took place at Montreal. The Catholics in Fort Frances had come to appreciate all that their Archbishop had done for them. That fall, the parishioners were shocked to hear of the death of one of their former parish priests. Shortly after the start of the First World War, Father Ernest Croisier, was summoned by the Government of France to report to the service of his country. Father Croisier answered the call. He had hardly reached the front lines on the battlefield when he was killed on October 26, 1915. One of the most grief-stricken persons was Father Costiou who had labored under Father Croisier here in Fort Frances and then succeeded him as pastor.

The beneficial influence of the Sisters was noticed when, in 1915, the society of the Children of Mary was organized. Another event of note was the blessing of the new Stations of the Cross on December 19, 1915. Subscriptions for these Stations had started away back in 1913. Here is a list of the subscribers: Stations 1 and 2, The Ladies Aid (Alter Society); 3, Mr. and Mrs. C. Jalbert; 4, in memory of P.A. Smith; 5, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Mohr; 6, Mr. and Mrs. Kilawee; 7, Mr. and Mrs. M.A. Malone; 8, Mr. and Mrs. O. Viger; 9, Mr. and Mrs. McCarthy; 10, Mr. and Mrs. J. Gagne; 11, Messrs C. and A. Cousineau; 12, Mr. and Mrs. James Paul, 13, The Children of Mary and 14, the parish in memory of Reverend E. Croisier, O.M.I. On the same day a sanctuary lamp, the gift of an unnamed parishioner, was installed.

It was not until late spring 1916 that Archbishop Langevin's successor was appointed. He was the former Auxiliary Bishop Arthur Beliveau. The news was well-received by the parishioners of Fort Frances. Archbishop Beliveau had produced a very favorable impression on his first visit to Fort Frances on November 30th and December 1st, 1913. On October 7th, 1916, the newly appointed Archbishop came to Fort Frances for the pastoral visitation. He was officially greeted at the railway station by two of the trustees. Messrs<sup>J</sup> Harty and O. Jalbert. The address of Welcome was read by Mr. M.A. Malone who with Mr. J. Gagne had been appointed to fill out the unexpired terms of P.A. Smith, deceased and Ed. Gorman, departed.

Two days later, on October 9th, the unexpected happened. Father

Francis Costiou, who had been parish priest since August 1908, left for France to report for service in the Army of that country. The surprised parishioners were sorry to see him leave, especially after recalling what had happened to Father Croisier. Father Costiou had been a zealous and devoted pastor who spared no pains to promote the religious and material welfare of the parish.

When trying to assess Father Costiou's work in the parish one cannot help but notice his constant appeal for the understanding of the importance of Catholic education and support of the Separate School. His ceaseless efforts in coping with the financial situation of the parish and school, impress the impartial observer. He pleaded with his parishioners to organize and patronize socials, card parties, picnics and bazaars in order to help out with the parish finances. He became a beggar for the church and the Separate School, in the parish, in the logging camps and wherever he met well-intentioned people. His ministry in Fort Frances can be summed up in the following words of St. Paul: "Preach the word of God, be urgent in season, out of season, reprove, entreat, rebuke with all patience and teaching . . . But be watchful and in all things, bear with tribulation patiently, work as a preacher of the Gospel, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy IV, 2-5). This advice of St. Paul seems to have been Father Costiou's motto and programme for life.

Father Arthur Dallaire arrived on October 21, 1916, and took charge of the parish. He was well-known in the district for he had been here from September 1908 to May 1910. He was conversant with conditions in the parish and went about his work energetically. Shortly after his arrival, it was Father Dallaire's pleasant duty to congratulate his humble companion, Brother <sup>DAVID</sup> Donat Pelletier, who celebrated his silver jubilee of religious profession on November 1st, 1917.

Early in January, 1917, Father Dallaire recommended to the prayers of his parishioners, a former pastor, Father Joachim Allard O.M.I., whose death had occurred on January 10, in St. Boniface. Father Allard had made regular visits to Fort Frances from 1867 to about 1884. Later on he became Vicar General of the St. Boniface archdiocese. From October 1899 to April 1905 he had been parish priest at Fort Frances. That same year, another deserving priest, Father Charles Cahill O.M.I. died at St. Boniface on September 6th. Father Cahill had looked after Fort Frances since 1888. In 1893, he became the

first resident priest here. He left Fort Frances in 1896, but continued to visit his former field of labor everytime the opportunity to do so presented itself. He occupied important positions later in his career and was the Provincial of the Oblate Fathers when death overtook him.

Back in Fort Frances the Sacrament of Confirmation was administered by Archbishop Beliveau on September 15th, 1918. During the month of October, Spanish Influenza broke out and took its toll of young and old. Father Dallaire made heroic efforts to administer the sacraments to the dying in Fort Frances in the various missions as far east as Atikokan. On November 11th 1918, the ringing of bells and the blowing of locomotive and mill whistles announced the end of the First World War.

In March 1919, Father Dallaire was pleased to hear that his fellow-Oblates had re-assumed charge of the parish in International Falls. In July 1919, Father Costiou returned to tend to the missions attached to International Falls. He was in familiar territory for he had attended these missions during his first stay in Fort Frances. Father Costiou remained in charge of the northern Minnesota missions until 1944. After a few years spent in semi-retirement at St. Augustine, Florida, Father Costiou went to St. Boniface where he died on September 15, 1961.

Archbishop Beliveau returned to Fort Frances for the pastoral visitation of the parish on October 19th and 20th, <sup>1921.</sup> He was pleased with conditions and congratulated both pastor and flock. The parish was no longer in debt. It had a credit balance of over \$2,100.00, even after having given a considerable amount of money to the Separate School Board. The Archbishop expressed the hope that the school would be enlarged without delay. The number of pupils increased steadily and the school was over-crowded. The original Separate School built in 1905 had been reconditioned and pressed into service to handle the overflow of pupils, but this arrangement was far from satisfactory.

Complying with the Archbishop's desire, the Separate School Board decided to construct an eight room addition to the school. A large auditorium, too was to be built. Work started on July 29, 1925, but the additional rooms were not ready for the new school year. It was not until October 12th that these rooms were opened to the pupils. Even then there was still work to be done. The first activity in the auditorium took place on December 2, 1925.

There is no record of a blessing of the new wing of the school, but, probably it took place privately on October 12th, 1925. By the way, the architect of the new wing and auditorium was Brother Theodore de Bijl O.M.I., who had already worked on the first house-chapel, the new church, and on the Indian School.

With their school enlarged and the auditorium in use the parishioners thought it was time to build a new church in Fort Frances. Consequently on October 26, 1926, a delegation met with the Archbishop, who at that time was at the Indian School. Archbishop Beliveau, fully aware of the need of a larger church wondered whether the parish was able to shoulder such a burden so soon after the school had been enlarged and the auditorium built. He suggested that a serious study of the question be made during the next six months, before action be taken on the building of a new church. The decision must have been negative because there was no further mention of a new church until much later.

It was with a feeling of joy that on July 1st, 1928, Father Dallaire announced the ordination and coming of Father Leo Jalbert to celebrate his first solemn Mass in Fort Frances on July 8th. He was the first of the Jalbert boys to become a priest. His brothers Julian and Marcel were ordained later on. Many think that Father Leo Jalbert was the first son of Fort Frances to advance to the priesthood. To set the record straight it must be pointed out that Father Leo Bartley, who had been born in Fort Frances, but raised elsewhere, was ordained a priest at Edmonton, five years earlier, on September 2, 1923.

Father Leo Jalbert came on the appointed day, July 8, 1928, but the celebration was not as happy as could have been desired, for on that same day, Father Dallaire announced his transfer to Kenora and bade adieu to his parishioners.

Father Dallaire's administration of almost twelve years' duration, was energetic and efficient. He worked hard to have his parishioners support the school and church. He made the customary trips each winter to the logging camps and he had to do it alone, for at no time during his long term at Fort Frances did he have an assistant priest. He took a keen interest in the youth of the parish and tried to organize special activities for them. He was interested in athletic events and was a good public relations man. He got along well with those who were not of his faith and even had some of them help him to beautify the Catholic cemetery.

On various topics Father Dallaire had his own personal views and the courage of his convictions. Although he had many friends in Fort Frances, there were some who did not see things eye to eye with him. So, to be frank, and truthful, it must be admitted that at the time of Father Dallaire's transfer, there was a feeling of tension in some quarters.

It was during Father Dallaire's administration that the famous "Language Question" reared its ugly head. Already in 1914, during Father Costiou's incumbency, the Alter Society had been divided into an English and a French section. Both groups operated independently, although at times, joint sessions were held. Eventually, the two groups were reunited. But there continued to be an under-current of dissension, which sometimes broke out into open strife. Father Dallaire was between two fires. Because of his French Canadian descent, he was suspected by the English faction of being partial to the French. The other side thought that, in trying to be impartial, Father Dallaire did not show enough zeal for the "French Cause".

He had been explicitly requested both by Archbishop Beliveau and by the Provincial of the Oblates, Father Josephat Magnan O.M.I., to see to it that children of French extraction be properly instructed in the French language. He was advised to do this in a prudent and discreet manner. To bring this about, Father Dallaire seems to have used a firm, authoritative method rather than a mild diplomatic approach. So there was a strained atmosphere between a good number of the parishioners and the pastor. The same could be said about the relations between the parish priest and the teachers in the Separate School. As matters did not improve, the Superiors thought that perhaps a change in pastors might remedy the situation. So in 1928, Father Dallaire was transferred to Kenora. On Friday July 13, Father Dallaire left Fort Frances with regrets, for he had come to love the people and place. For the record, it must be stated that the "Language Question" continued to be a thorn in the side of his successors. Father Dallaire was parish priest at Kenora for nine years. In September 1937 he left for Kamsack, Sask., where he served as pastor for 32 years. He retired in August, 1969, after 62 years in active ministry. He is still hale and hearty at the ripe age of 88 years.

Father Arthur J. Labonté, the new parish priest, came to Fort Frances on July 9th, 1928. He had been here previously from October 22, 1906 to



March 12, 1907. Familiar with conditions in Fort Frances, he tackled his new assignment with determination and soon realized that he could not do the work all by himself. He asked for an assistant and received one in the person of Father George Desrochers O.M.I. who arrived on September 15th, 1928 and remained until August 30th, 1929. Three other Oblate Fathers served as assistants under Father Labonté. They were: Father Charles Mondor O.M.I. (August 31, 1929 - July 9, 1930); Father Elie Savoie O.M.I. (August 20, 1930 - March 15, 1931) and Father Léandre Gauthier O.M.I. (March 18, 1931 - April 20, 1934).

Here are some of the notable events of Father Labonté's pastorate. Father Labonté, having a great concern for neatness and propriety, had the church property levelled off and landscaped, the church was painted inside and out, and the interior properly decorated. The wall between the church and the sacristy was taken out to provide additional space for children on Sundays. A curtain was installed to close off the sacristy when meetings were held there on weekdays.

The rectory was brick-veneered, and an oak floor was laid on the ground floor of the rectory. The front porch was enlarged and closed in to provide a large vestibule on the ground floor and a pleasant reading room-recreation room above. Dilapidated and outmoded furniture was disposed of. House furnishings were brought up-to-date and in conformity with modern rectory requirements. Finally a "breeze-way" was built between the rectory and the church. The entire church property and buildings acquired a presentable aspect. All this required an outlay of some \$4,000.00.

The school needed repairs, especially the auditorium roof which was on the point of caving-in. As school funds were depleted, the parish came to the rescue. Repairs were made and a new re-inforced roof was put on the auditorium. The parish footed the bill for all this work. Even at that, the Separate School Board was obliged to borrow (without interest) the sum of \$1,000.00 to carry on.

The Catholic Cemetery was next in line for improvements. New entrance gates were put up. Additional burial space was provided by the purchase of a lot east of the cemetery. The cemetery was then surveyed and each plot clearly indicated. A special section was set aside as burial plot for the soldiers of World War I. The bodies of Veterans buried in different parts of the cemetery, were brought to this common plot which was then enbellished.

Pastoral Visitation took place twice during Father Labonté's incumbency. On June 29, 1929, Archbishop Beliveau came and confirmed a large group of children and ten adults. On this occasion, the Archbishop made some interesting observations. One of these was the possible use of the large school auditorium as a church for a number of years. This, he thought, would cut down on expenses and help provide funds for the building of a new church. He thought this arrangement would alleviate the school situation which at that time was precarious. The next pastoral visitation was scheduled for 1932. But in 1931 Archbishop Beliveau was laid low by a serious and protracted illness. It was not until June 15th, 1933, that Bishop Joseph Guy O.M.I. of Grouard, Alberta, came to administer the sacrament of Confirmation.

A lay brother, David Pelletier, O.M.I., who had labored in Fort Frances died on February 7, 1930. The parish suffered another loss when one of its dedicated pioneers died on February 27th, 1930. She was Mrs. James (Mathilda) Paul a devoted parish worker, a competent leader in parish organizations, a staunch Catholic and a generous supporter of the church and school.

Here now are some of the salient features of Father Labonté's administration. One of his first concerns was for the youth of the parish. Shortly after his arrival, he organized the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. Altar boys were carefully rehearsed to take part in church ceremonies not only correctly but also with dignity. The Sodality of Mary was put on a more active basis. Choirs of young people were organized and trained to provide proper chant for church ceremonies. Catechism was taught in the school and special religious classes were held for high school and public school pupils.

Another of Father Labonté's interests was the promotion of the liturgical movement. The use of the missal was explained, a greater personal participation in church worship encouraged, and beautiful vestments were procured. Father Labonté promoted the practice of corporate communion. All church organizations had their communion days. First Fridays of the month were faithfully observed with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and League of the Sacred Heart devotions. Wednesdays and Fridays of Advent and Lent were always days of devotion. On these days and often on Sunday evenings there were special instructions. A truly religious spirit was fostered in the parish.

Another of Father Labonté's projects was that of improving public relations with those who were not of the Catholic faith. He took a lively interest in civic and recreational activities. Being an active member of the Canadian Legion he did much to increase the influence of this organization. One of his hopes was that a greater number of Catholics would shake off their 'ghetto' image and come out in the open to let themselves be seen and heard in commercial, civic and political spheres. Finally, something should be said about his handling of the "Language Question". When Archbishop Beliveau came for his <sup>first</sup> pastoral visitation, he was pleased to note that the spirit of the parish had improved. There was not the turmoil that prevailed just a short year ago. Father Labonté tried hard to restore calm and serenity to the parish. A native of the State of Massachusetts, whose early education was had in a school where instruction was given entirely in English, Father Labonté was well grounded in that language. Subsequently he attended French institutions of learning, but did not let this interfere with his proficiency in English. His first assignments after ordination were in English-speaking centers, especially at St. Mary's Church in Winnipeg. His overseas' experiences as a chaplain and a liaison officer in the Canadian Armed Forces gave him ample opportunities of becoming familiar with the English mentality. An avid reader of English Classics, he acquired a remarkable mastery of the language. No wonder, then, that he won over his English-speaking parishioners, promptly and completely.

But he did not overlook other ethnic groups in the parish. Each year, during lent, he had a priest who spoke Polish and Italian, come to minister to people who spoke these languages. He tried to find priests who would come and minister to those who were of Ukrainian descent. He endeavored to be fair to his French-speaking parishioners. There were occasional sermons in French. He organized the "Dames de Ste. Anne", a society for women of French extraction. During Lent, every Wednesday evening was reserved for devotions in French. In 1928, a parallel French course was inaugurated in St. Mary's School to enable children of French ancestry to acquire an adequate formation in their mother-tongue. But this was not enough for the confirmed zealots of the "French Cause". So, Father Labonté did not always have the whole hearted co-operation of a portion of the French-Canadian population. He was considered by the more ardent advocates of the "French Cause" as one who belied his French name, or as one who had crossed over to the opposition.

When Father Labonté left Fort Frances on April 20, 1934, his departure was sincerely regretted by English-speaking parishioners. But for some French-Canadians, his transfer was looked upon with feelings of complacent relief. The language question in Fort Frances was, by no means, a dead issue.

It was on April 21, 1934, that Father Edward Paquette O.M.I. began his pastorate. The new assistant was Father Elie Savoie O.M.I. who had arrived on April 19th, to replace Father L. Gauthier, O.M.I. Father Savoie who, previously, had been in Fort Frances from 1929 to 1931, left in May 1936. His successor, Father Jean Baptiste Beupré O.M.I., was here from May 1936, until September 1942. In 1941, an additional curate, Father Denys Audette O.M.I. came, and also looked after the missions of which, the most important was Atikokan. When Father Maurice Bélanger O.M.I. took charge of all the posts attached to Fort Frances, (August 1942), Father Audette became a full-time assistant. In 1941, a retired priest, Father Hector Brassard O.M.I. was here for a few months. He had been the missionary at Fort Frances in 1903 and on two occasions was the principal of the Indian School. He died at St. Boniface on February 15, 1942. In the autumn of 1942, another elderly priest, Father Eugene Baillargeon O.M.I., arrived to serve as the chaplain of LaVerendrye Hospital, thus enabling the pastor and his assistant to devote more time to other tasks in the parish.

Shortly after Father Paquette's arrival, on June 12, 13, 14, 1934, Archbishop Emile Yelle came for the pastoral visitation. He had become Coadjutor Archbishop of St. Boniface in 1933 because of Archbishop Beliveau's protracted illness. On the occasion of his first visit to Fort Frances, Archbishop Yelle met with the church and school trustees to discuss the school situation. When he mentioned the possibility of using the school auditorium as a temporary provisional church, the majority of those present did not favor the proposal. The alternative was to repair the church so that it could serve for another decade or so. It was then decided that the parish should pay a stipulated fee to the School Board everytime the auditorium was used for church activities. Finally, the Archbishop authorized the parish to lend money to the School Board at reasonable rates of interest.

As a result of these deliberations, the Separate School Board borrowed the sum of \$2,500.00 at 3% interest. The church roof was resingled, new steps were built at the front entrance, two coats of paint were given to the church exterior and the interior was redecorated. In

early January 1935, Italian parishioners donated a new sanctuary lamp. On June 24th of the same year, a statue of St. John Baptist, patron saint of French-Canadians, was blessed. It was on June 29th, 1935, that the second of the Jalbert boys, Julian, was ordained to the priesthood.

A local council (No. 2766) of the Knights of Columbus was organized in 1936 with Mr. Frank A. Hart as the first Grand-Knight. A new floor had been laid in the rectory kitchen in 1935 and the second storey of the rectory was renovated and wall-papered during the summer of 1936. Later, on September 10th, Archbishop Yelle came for the pastoral visitation. As the Separate School was still in straightened circumstances, the Archbishop permitted further loans to the School Board. It was his opinion that only after the Separate School Board paid back the borrowed money, would a new church be built in Fort Frances.

In 1937 a new carpet was laid in the church sanctuary. On May 14th of that year, Mrs. Amanda Jalbert, a prominent member of the parish, departed this life. Her three sons, Father Leon Jalbert O.M.I., Father Julian Jalbert O.M.I. and Brother Marcel Jalbert O.M.I. officiated at their mother's funeral. Many priests and a large congregation turned out to pay their last respects to this devoted pioneer of the parish. Brother Marcel Jalbert was ordained a priest the following summer on June 12th, 1938.

A new statue of the patroness of the parish, - Our Lady of Perpetual Help, - was blessed on July 2, 1939. Of interest to the pupils of the first Separate School (1905-1912) is the following item. This school, which had also served as the first convent, was moved to the west end of the town - McIrvine - as it was then called. A second storey was added to the building which is now located at 1335 Eno Road.

Early in September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and shortly after, Canada was involved in another World War. At this very time, Archbishop Yelle made his third visit to Fort Frances. Once more, he called a joint meeting of the church and school trustees. The Separate School was still in dire straits even after the parish had advanced over \$10,000.00 to the Separate School Board. The Archbishop authorized a further loan of \$3,000.00 at 3% interest. Then the question of selling the school auditorium was broached. The proceeds from the sale would have been sufficient to repay the entire amount owed to the parish. But the school

and church trustees turned down the proposition. (In 1940, the auditorium was rented to the Canadian Government and until the end of 1954 was used as an armoury and a garage for heavy army equipment.) Before leaving, Archbishop Yelle appointed Father Paquette, Dean of district #10 of the St. Boniface Archdiocese. This deanery extended from the Manitoba-Ontario boundary to the eastern limits of the diocese and included in its area the parishes of Rainy River, Pinewood, Fort Frances as well as several missions of which Atikoken was the largest in size.

Now it is time to speak of a project which Father Paquette had been mulling since his arrival in Fort Frances. This undertaking had already caused considerable concern to his predecessors in 1894 and 1905. Father Paquette thought that the time had come to provide the community with a large and up-to-date hospital. In 1940 there were in Fort Frances two private hospitals belonging to Doctors J.E. O'Donnell and D.C. McKenzie respectively. These hospitals were quite small, somewhat rudimentary and quite incommensurate with the needs of the locality.

Father Paquette invited the Gray Nuns, (Sisters of Charity) to come to Fort Frances and build a fully modern hospital. The Sisters hesitated, feeling that they could not do this singlehanded. After much discussing and soliciting, Father Paquette was able to assure the Sisters that an Ontario Government grant of \$10,000.00 would be available, that the Town of Fort Frances would give land free of charge, and that electrical services would be supplied gratis. The devoted pastor furthermore promised that he would do his best to arouse public interest in this worthy cause.

Trusting that they would receive the whole-hearted co-operation of the entire community, the Gray Nuns accepted the challenge and, on September 23, 1940, work started. The cost of the edifice was estimated at \$135,000.00, most of which would be shouldered by the Gray Nuns. On June 5th, 1941, the hospital was opened and provided 50 beds for the sick of the community. On that day Archbishop Yelle blessed the new hospital which was fittingly named "LaVerendrye Hospital".

Another of Father Paquette's pet projects was the founding of the little parish at Crozier. By 1940 a fair number of Catholic families

had settled in this neighborhood and Father Paquette celebrated Mass occasionally in farmhouses or in the neighboring schoolhouse. He decided to provide this little community with a suitable place of worship. There was, at Big Fork, an unused church which had been built by a small group of Irish settlers towards the beginning of the present century. When the older settlers died off and their descendants moved elsewhere, the church was abandoned. Father Paquette had this church moved on February 24, 1941, to Crozier where it served as a parish church for some eleven years. In October 1952 this chapel was sold for one dollar to the Ukrainian Catholics of Fort Frances, who had it moved to its present site on Victoria Avenue.

An event which caused Father Paquette some disappointment was the discontinuance of Grades IX and X in St. Mary's School. It was in 1934 that Grade IX had been added to the classes already taught in the Separate School. The following year, or, in 1936 at latest, Grade X was introduced. It was hoped that henceforth Catholic high school pupils would have the benefit of a good religious formation during these critical years of their life. But many circumstances, beyond the control of Catholic rate-payers, militated against the success of this idea.

It was difficult to find qualified teachers and to pay them salaries that prevailed in the Public High School System. The cost of setting up and equipping a Physics and Chemistry laboratory was prohibitive, and there was no provision in the Separate School for Mechanical Training and Home Economics. Arrangements to have St. Mary's High School pupils go to the Public High School for these courses proved unsatisfactory. The Separate School pupils in grades IX and X did not have facilities for athletics and social activities available at the Public High School. As there were but 30 pupils in all, the grades had to be combined in one classroom and this was a definite drawback. It was with keen regret that these grades had to be abandoned in 1941.

In August 1941, illness forced Father Paquette to leave temporarily, for Rochester, Minn., where he had to undergo surgery. After a long convalescence, he was able to resume his duties in January 1942. The pastoral visitation took place on May 31, 1942. This time it was Archbishop George Cabana, who came for the first time to Fort Frances. He had succeeded Archbishop Yelle in 1941, when the latter resigned due to ill health. Archbishop Cabana stressed the necessity of Catholic Action in the parish. He wanted a greater participation of the laity in church activities. So

Catholic Action groups were organized and encouraged not only to lead a more intense life as Catholics, but also to be apostles among their fellow-men.

One of the last of Father Paquette's undertakings was to improve the appearance of the church. Instead of painting the exterior, he had the church covered with 'insul-brick' siding so that it would match with the red brick on the rectory. Then, in August 1943, he received word of his transfer to Ste. Rose du Lac, Manitoba. Father Paquette left Fort Frances at the end of August 1943 and his departure brought to an end an efficient and devoted pastorate.

Father Paquette, a thorough French-Canadian, left an imprint of his own on the parish. Born and educated in the province of Quebec, his mentality was definitely French-Canadian. Right from the beginning of his administration, he made his French-Canadian parishioners understand that he expected them to realize the necessity and the advantage of speaking their mother-tongue. He encouraged French-Canadian parents to speak in French to their children at home. He insisted that French-Canadian children follow the bilingual course at school. In all this he was approved and encouraged by Archbishops Yelle and Cabana. The apostles of the "French Cause" were elated.

But Father Paquette made his compatriots understand that, even though a staunch French-Canadian, he was also a Catholic priest who was in duty bound to minister to the needs of all his parishioners, no matter what their racial extraction might be. He hoped that there would be enough faith and religious spirit in Fort Frances to consider things from a supernatural point of view.

It did not take long for English-speaking Catholics to realize that the pendulum had swung the other way. After having been accustomed to flawless English for six years, there was quite a let-down, even though Father Paquette's English was adequate. So, at times theirs was not exactly an enthusiastic co-operation, - it resembled more a resigned toleration. It was now their turn to put up with circumstances and wait for a change. The language problem was still there, but, fortunately, the acrimony was gone. When children of the various ethnic groups (including the descendants of those who but a short generation ago were at loggerheads) began to intermarry, the language issue faded away into insignificance. A gradual tendency toward a better understanding became more and more evident.

Father Alfred Beaudin, C.M.I., a nephew of Fort Frances' first pastor, came on September 24, 1943. He was installed as parish priest on September 26,



by Father Adelard Couture who had been delegated for this function by Archbishop Cabana. On his arrival, Father Beaudin found three priests in residence. They were: Father E. Baillargeon, Chaplain of the Hospital, Father D. Audette, assistant and Father M. Bélanger missionary. These priests, with the exception of Father Baillargeon who left on September 28, 1944, worked under Father Beaudin throughout his short incumbency.

One of Father Beaudin's first tasks was to assist at the funeral of one of the parish's prominent members. Mr. Octave Jalbert died on October 18, 1943 and was buried on October 21. Mr. Jalbert's three sons Father Leon, Father Julian and Father Marcel officiated at their father's funeral, as they had previously done for their mother.

During the month of March 1944, a liturgical altar was set up according to the specifications of Archbishop Cabana. The Sisters of the Missions under the able direction of Mother Thérèse made the drapes and other trimmings. The altar was ready for Palm Sunday when a large crucifix and a new metal tabernacle were installed.

May 7, 1945, which marked the end of World War II in Europe, was a happy day in Fort Frances. On that day whistles blew, bells rang and many came to church to offer prayers of thanksgiving. On June 6, Archbishop Cabana was in Fort Frances for the pastoral visitation. The school situation was discussed once more with the parish and school trustees. The Archbishop allowed the parish to lend the Separate School Board \$400.00 per month until further notice. In June 1945 the St. Mary's Parish (Fort Frances) Credit Union Limited was organized. On August 14, the war in Japan was over. Soon, those who were in the armed services began returning home and there were many happy family reunions. But some of the men did not come back.

On September 30, 1945 Father Beaudin announced his transfer to Duluth and bade farewell to his parishioners, who had learned to esteem this gentle and kind-hearted priest. Born in Massachusetts and orphaned while quite young, he was brought to Rat Portage (Kenora) in 1889, at the age of 7 years, by his uncle, Father J.B. Baudin. Having finished grade school in Rat Portage, he was sent to Ottawa University where he acquired great proficiency both in English and in French. After ordination, he spent several years in Duluth Minn., and became familiar with American ways of doing things and with the American mentality. But this did not prevent his parishioners from taking well to Father Beaudin. Children, especially loved this kind

and gentle priest. He left on October 5th, 1945 and was genuinely missed by all.

Father Beaudin's successor was another American by birth but Canadian by naturalization. Father George C. Šalamon O.M.I. was born in Pennsylvania, not far from Pittsburg and came to Western Canada when he was twelve years of age. He was of Slovak ancestry but spoke English and French fluently. Besides his mother-tongue (Slovak) he had a working knowledge of Polish, Czech and Croatian. Parishioners of Slavic extraction were delighted to have a priest with whom they could converse in their own language.

Father Šalamon arrived on October 4th, 1945 and was officially installed on October 7th, by the Dean, The Very Reverend Father Armand Moresu. Father Šalamon inherited from his predecessor a staff consisting of Father Denys Audette, assistant and Maurice Bélanger, missionary. It was during Father Šalamon's administration that Ukrainian priests came more and more frequently to minister to their fellow-countrymen. Father Šalamon offered them gracious hospitality which was readily accepted and greatly appreciated.

It was Father Šalamon's lot to attend to the material needs of the parish buildings, without, of course, neglecting his spiritual duties. The gradual deterioration of the old church and rectory required continual repairs. The elements caused additional damage. On June 24, 1946 a miniature tornado struck Fort Frances. Many trees were blown down, two little turrets on the church belfry were torn off and one of the church windows was blown-in. The neighboring hospital lawn was littered with the debris of the river-shore boathouses. Had the wind carried these just a little further, serious damage would have resulted to the rectory and the church.

So repairs had to be made. The church and the rectory were rewired to conform with modern electrical requirements. The rectory kitchen and the housekeeper's quarters were completely remodelled. The Ladies of the Altar Society provided the kitchen with a new electric stove, new kitchen cabinets, a set of kitchen chairs, dishes and linens. The dilapidated kitchen porch was torn down and replaced by a combined closed-in porch and storage-room. The crumbling stable-chicken coop which had been converted into a makeshift garage was demolished. But the lumber and even the nails

were carefully salvaged owing to a shortage of building materials at the time. A neat little garage was built just east of the rectory. Through the generosity of Tom Mathieu all the natural birch flooring laid on the second storey of the rectory and most of the new lumber used in these various projects, was donated by the J.A. Mathieu Company.

Another of Father Salamon's preoccupations was the acquisition of additional burial space for Catholics in Fort Frances. In 1932 the parish had purchased a lot just east of the cemetery, but most of this was a deep ravine and would have required filling-in. During the winter 1946-47, the Town of Fort Frances made an open sewer through this lot and ruined it for cemetery purposes. The parish cemetery committee, consisting of Mr. Harry Bruce, Mr. A. Bernardi and Father Salamon, met with the Town Council to protest the action of the engineering department. The parish was not consulted, not even notified of what had taken place.

After offering apologies, the Town was ready to pay the purchase price of the lot (\$130.00) and the amount paid in taxes (\$111.96). The total, \$241.96 was to be deducted from the cost price of \$520.00 for 2.6 acres in the new cemetery. But before these transactions were completed, the Town of Fort Frances made a new offer. Considering the fact that the new cemetery was bought by all the taxpayers, among whom were many Catholics, it was deemed unfair to make Catholics pay once more for a cemetery of their own. So the Town agreed to pay the parish one dollar for Lot 1, Plan S.M. 115, and in turn would sell to the parish 2.6 acres in the new cemetery for one dollar. Needless to say, this latter offer was promptly accepted by the parish. This happy outcome was due to the devoted efforts of Mr. A. Laforest, who pleaded our cause with the Town Council. The parish owes Mr. Laforest a debt of gratitude for having helped it to provide space for about 3,000 graves at so reasonable a price. This new cemetery was later called "Holy Cross Cemetery".

Outside of this nothing extraordinary transpired during Father Salamon's incumbency. On August 30, 1946, Father Henry Conneville, an elderly priest came to help out with the work in the parish. But a serious asthmatic condition obliged him to spend most of his time in hospital. On December 17, 1946, Father Salamon celebrated the silver jubilee of his

ordination. On this occasion he received many tokens of appreciation.

On March 12, 1947, Mr. James Paul, a real pioneer, breathed his last. Although not a Catholic, he encouraged his wife and daughter (Mrs. Rita Cousineau) in their church activities. He became a Catholic on November 19, 1946 and was buried with the full rites of the Catholic Church on March 15, 1947.

Sister Isabelle R.N.D.M. celebrated her silver jubilee of religious profession on June 30, 1947. Later, that same year, on September 2nd the parish was saddened by the death of Sister Emmanuel R.N.D.M. She was the first sister to die in Fort Frances and the first sister buried in the parish cemetery. Death struck again on December 18th when two prominent parishioners, Mr. Frank Hart and Mr. Ben Tighe, were smitten suddenly.

On May 30, 31, 1948 Archbishop Cabana came for the pastoral visitation. When he saw the large number of children to be confirmed he wondered whether it was not time to divide the parish and erect a new church in the western portion of the town. He thought that there was too much work in the parish for two priests and stated that the appointment of a full-time hospital chaplain was in order.

Toward's the end of Father Salamon's pastorate, Father Maurice Bélanger began making plans to establish permanent residence at Atikokan. The iron mine was opening up and the population increased rapidly. True enough, Atikokan became a parish in the fall of 1948 and Father Bélanger was its first resident parish priest.

Father E. Ballesty O.M.I., a native of Ireland was appointed assistant and came to Fort Frances on September 2, 1948. Seven days later, Father Salamon received notice that he was transferred to International Falls. So, on Sunday September 12th, he took leave of his parishioners and left for his new post on September 16, 1948.

The new pastor, Father Denys Audette, who had been the assistant for over seven years, was officially installed on September 12th, 1948 by the Very Reverend Dean, Father A. Moreau. He was fully conversant with conditions in Fort Frances and well prepared to assume the responsibilities of a parish priest. The following priests collaborated with Father Audette during his pastorate. Father Henry Gonnevillle O.M.I. was listed as an assistant but a serious indisposition prevented him from taking part in

parish activities. He died in LaVerendrye Hospital on April 5th, 1952. Father E. Ballesty O.M.I. was assistant from September 2, 1948 to November 9, 1949. Father Herve Delisle was here from September 28th to November 13th, 1951. Father Lomer Laplante O.M.I. served on two occasions: September 13, 1949 to August 18, 1950 and from August 25, 1953 to September 5th, 1955. Father Leonard Charron was assistant for six and a half years (July 6, 1950 to January 2, 1957). Father Edward Maurice (November 14, 1951 to August 17, 1953) rounded out the list of Father Audette's assistants.

Shortly after assuming charge of the parish, Father Audette began taking a census of all his parishioners. Then he endeavored to improve the position of St. Mary's Parish Credit Union and to increase its beneficial influence. Additional impetus was given to Catholic Action activities. But the most important problem tackled by Father Audette at the outset of his administration, was that of providing the parish with a new church.

This matter had already been discussed while Father Salamon was the pastor. A building fund had been started since January 1947, with Rainy Lake Hotel, through Carl Gray, contributing \$20.00 per month for this purpose. The church trustees suggested that the contents of the red portion of church envelopes be applied to the Church Building Fund rather than be handed over to the Separate School Board. By this time the financial situation of the Separate School had improved considerably. When, at long last, the Separate School Board began to pay off its indebtedness to the parish, the church trustees requested that all moneys thus received be put in the Church Building Fund.

Father Audette made sure that all the parishioners realized the need for a new church. He likewise reminded them that it would be necessary to contribute generously so that this project might be carried out without delay. On Father Audette's invitation Archbishop Cabana came on December 12, 1948 to discuss the matter with the church trustees.

The Archbishop thought of founding a new parish in the western portion of the town. He suggested that the old church be transported there and that in the meanwhile the school auditorium could be used as a church. But some thought that it was more urgent to have a church for Ukrainian Catholics. Hence they recommended the sale of the old church and rectory to the Ukrainians. The Ukrainian Catholics would have accepted the old church as an outright gift and the rectory too, but they did not have the necessary

funds to purchase the church or the rectory. Later on the Archbishop suggested that the old church be sold to the Ukrainians and that a new church be built just south of the rectory. This proposition was not accepted. The next proposition was this: Let the Ukrainians move the church away and pay for it later, but build the new church on the site of the old one. The Ukrainians were not ready to move the old church and as discussions with them began to lag, the idea was abandoned. Eventually, the parish purchased two lots from the Sisters of the Missions, and there, just across the street from the old church, the new one was built.

On January 9th, 1949 a general meeting of parishioners was convoked to organize a special Church Building Committee. Shortly after an intense door to door canvassing campaign began. The Archbishop had stipulated that before construction could commence, it would be necessary to have on hand some \$40,000.00 to \$45,000.00. This amount was not collected on the first attempt, but later on, additional pledges brought the fund above the prescribed minimum.

Things progressed rapidly from there on. The plans for the new church were approved on June 5, 1950 and four days later, permission was granted to build a \$70,000.00 church. This church was to be a brick building of modern design with a seating capacity of 450 with additional space in the transepts and choir-loft. Work on the new church started on June 16, 1950 and on October 22, 1950, the cornerstone was blessed by the pastor. Although not finished, the church was used for Midnight Mass on December 25th 1950. In March 1951, pews, vestments and other church equipment were moved from the old into the new church. On March 11th 1951, the church was opened for general use. On May 26th the Church was blessed by Archbishop Cabana and on the following day it was officially dedicated to the worship of God. As the church basement was not yet ready for use, the old church served as the parish hall. Subsequently it was rented by the Knights of Columbus, who used it for their council meetings and social activities.

Another building project started on April 22, 1951. The Gray Nuns decided to add a new wing to LaVerendrye Hospital. The addition, larger than the original building, would raise the capacity of the hospital to 100 beds and provide space for other needed services. The cost of this edifice was estimated at \$700,000.00, exclusive of the \$80,000.00 required to equip the hospital. The cornerstone of the new wing was blessed by Archbishop Cabana on December 2nd, 1951. Owing to inclement weather and

delays in obtaining building materials, it was not until December 16, 1952 that the new wing was opened. On that same day, His Excellency Edward Jennings, Bishop of the recently erected diocese of Fort William blessed the magnificent edifice.

A building of much smaller proportions, the new convent chapel, was blessed on November 15th, 1953 by Father Audette.

Here, now, is a running account of some of the other events which took place during Father Audette's pastorate. Bishop Isidore Borecky of the Ukrainian diocese of Toronto came to visit his Ukrainian Catholics of Fort Frances on November 14, 1948. It was the first time that they had the privilege of having a bishop of their own rite among them. On that occasion, Bishop Borecky thanked Fathers Audette and Salamon for their interest in the spiritual welfare of Ukrainian Catholics and for the hospitality shown the Ukrainian priests.

Father Stephen Myrchenuk S.J. was ordained on June 27th, 1949 and came to celebrate his first solemn Mass in his home church on July 3, 1949. During September and October 1949 there was a very successful Rosary Crusade with 1270 persons signing the Family Rosary Pledge. Two Oblate Seminarians arrived in July 1950 to help conduct summer camps for the children of the parish. These camps were held for another ten years or more. Mr. Maurice A. Malone died on April 24, 1950. Although a resident of International Falls at that time, he had been, for many years, a prominent citizen, a well-known businessman and a devoted school and church trustee in Fort Frances.

Another outstanding event took place in the spring of 1952. On April 29th, the new diocese of Fort William was erected. Incorporated into the area of this diocese, was the entire Ontario portion of the St. Boniface Archdiocese. So Fort Frances and the surrounding districts severed their ties with the Archdiocese of St. Boniface. On May 14, 1952, His Excellency, Edward Q. Jennings D.D., Bishop of Kamloops B.C., was named the first bishop of Fort William. He was officially installed on August 26th, 1952, by His Excellency, Ildebrando Antoniutti, the Apostolic Delegate.

It was the summer of 1952, that the parallel French course was abandoned in St. Mary's School. This course had been introduced in 1928 for the benefit of those children who were of French extraction. By the

year 1948 the French class had dwindled to its low ebb of only 16 pupils in grades I to VI inclusively. This class was the source of much inconvenience to both the teacher and the pupils. It was well nigh impossible for one teacher to teach pupils of six grades in the one classroom. And the pupils did not receive the instructions they needed. Often when being integrated into the regular course in Grade VII they lost one year, because they had not covered all the subjects required. There was some dissatisfaction when the Separate School Board decided to cancel this French Course, but it was a case of sad necessity.

Mr. Alphonse Laforest, a distinguished member of the parish was called to his reward on January 23, 1953. He had been closely associated with civic, school and church activities, for many years. On April 19, 1953, a local court of the Catholic Women's League was organized with Father Leonard Charron O.M.I. as its first spiritual director. Another prominent parishioner, Doctor John E. O'Donnell died on August 17, 1953. On the day of his funeral, the church was filled to capacity. Never in the history of the parish had so large a congregation assembled for a funeral. This was a splendid tribute for a man who had devoted himself to his church, his community and his patients with an usefulness that was a complete dedication. A final event for 1953, was the consecration of a newly erected marble altar in the church. Bishop Jennings officiated at this solemn ceremony on December 21, 1953.

On June 27th, 1954, Father Hugh O'Connell, son of the well-known and universally respected, Doctor O'Donnell, celebrated his first solemn Mass in his home parish, one week after his ordination by Cardinal James McGuigan. Mrs. Louis (Ellen) Christie, a devoted parishioner and a genuine pioneer of the community, departed this life on October 28, 1954.

On November 7th, 1954, Father Audette announced his transfer to Kenora and said good-bye to his flock. He left for his new post taking with him the love and esteem of each and every parishioner and the respect and confidence of all citizens of Fort Frances. Pending the appointment of a new parish priest, (November 11, 1954 - March 13, 1955) Father Lomer Laplante O.M.I. and later (November 16, 1954 - March 13, 1955) Father Noel Lazure O.M.I. assisted Father Leonard Charron O.M.I. who was the acting pastor.



Father J.M. Louis Aubin, O.M.I. assumed the duties of parish priest on March 13, 1955. Fathers L. Charron and L. Laplante remained as his assistants. The following priests served as assistants during Father Aubin's term of office: Father Leonard Charron, O.M.I. (July 6, 1950 - January 2, 1957); Lomer Laplante O.M.I. (August 25, 1953 - September 5, 1955); Alfred Beaudin O.M.I. (September 9, 1955 - January 17, 1958); Paul Aubin O.M.I., brother of the pastor, (November 24, 1956 - September 8, 1963); Marcel Rio, O.M.I. (January 17, 1958 - August 5, 1958 and again November 28, 1962 - September 19, 1966); Fidèle Beaulieu, O.M.I. (March 3, 1958 - April 5, 1962); Emilien Dorge O.M.I. (August 2, 1958 - April 20, 1959); Father Antonio Kerdack (April 21, 1959 - July 7, 1964); Henry Desrochers, O.M.I. (Sept. 9, 1963 - June 29, 1965), and Marc Monforton O.M.I. (July 27, 1964 - Aug. 1, 1969). Other priests came for shorter periods to replace priests on prolonged leaves of absence due to illness or post-graduate courses.

One of Father Aubin's first tasks was to be host pastor to the diocesan meeting of the Catholic Women's League, on May 11, 1955. Over 200 delegates and several priests were present. His Excellency, Bishop Jennings presided at all the sessions. On the following day, Bishop Jennings assisted at the official opening of the LeVerendrye Hospital Nurses Home.

A new Hammond organ was installed in the church just on time for Christmas 1955. On March 23, 1956, a telephone message from St. Boniface announced the death of Father Edward Paquette O.M.I., who had been pastor from 1934 to 1943. The Catholic Parent-Teacher's Association was established on April 9, 1956. The speaker on that occasion was Father Arthur Lacerte, Rector of Gravelbourg College. With 135 parents present the C.P.T.A. had an auspicious launching. Fathers Leon, Julian and Marcel Jalbert O.M.I., came on April 27, 1956 to officiate at the funeral of their brother-in-law, Louis Poirier whose death occurred on April 22nd.

There was a general meeting of parishioners on January 23rd, 1957, to discuss the matter of building a new rectory. The bishop refused to permit any more patch-work on the old one. He wanted a new building large enough to house the staff of priests in comfort and in harmony with modern standards. On May 25, 1957, for the first time in the history of the parish, a priest, Father Alfred Beaudin, O.M.I., celebrated the golden jubilee of his ordination. During the summer of 1957, an additional Separate School was built in the western part of the town. The solemn blessing of the new Saint Francis

Separate School took place on October 27th, with Bishop Edward Jennings officiating. A new wing including an auditorium was added to St. Francis School in 1960, but was inaugurated only in January 1961.

Solemn ceremonies were held on May 3rd, 1959, to celebrate the beatification of Marguerite O'Youville, foundress of the Gray Nuns. Pioneer parishioners recalled that she had been chosen patroness of the parish in 1893 by Archbishop Langevin O.M.I. The present patronal feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was substituted for the former one in 1895, when the church built in 1895 was blessed on the feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (July 28 - 1895). On November 18, 1959, the parishioners heard of the death of a former pastor, Father Arthur J. Labonté O.M.I. (1928-1934).

A big drive to amass funds for a new rectory took place during the autumn months of 1959. The campaign was successful and the desired objective was reached. The year 1960 found Father Aubin and his assistants studying plans for a new manse. Father Aubin had visited several modern rectories in Canada and in the United States, and came back with many excellent ideas. After further consultation with the Bishop and architects, a decision was finally reached in March, 1960. The new rectory and parish center would be a "L" shaped, two storey, split level brick building, 74 feet by 78 feet. It was to be fire proof throughout, housing the rectory on the south side, while the north wing was to serve as office, reception and committee rooms. The estimated cost was \$111,856.70.

On March 26, 1960 carpenters started making partitions in Columbus Hall (former church) to provide temporary living quarters for the priests. Later the old rectory was torn down and the lot was levelled-off. Work on the building started on August 12th, 1960 and on September 29th, the cornerstone was blessed. It took all winter and spring to finish the rectory. June 7, 1961, was moving day for the priests, who, with the help of some willing parishioners, transported their belongings, furniture and sundry equipment to their new home. Ultra modern in every respect, it was the first rectory and parish center of its kind in the diocese. On June 18th, 1961, Bishop Jennings blessed the new edifice and congratulated both pastor and parishioners on their latest accomplishment.

Work on a new vestibule at the entrance of the church started on September 13, 1961 and by the end of November it was completed. While this work was going on, the old church was demolished. The razing of the church

in which pioneers had worshipped for many years, was witnessed, by some of them, with feelings of sadness and regret. Thus the second of two landmarks of olden days disappeared from the scene.

The parish joined with the Sisters on October 22, 1961, to celebrate the centennial of the founding of the order of Our Lady of the Missions. There was a missionary exposition in connection with this festival. Bishop Paul Dumouchel O.M.I. of Keewatin, who was the guest speaker at the various activities, spoke of the wonderful work accomplished by the Sisters in mission countries and pleaded for more vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

The year 1962 was ushered in on a sad note. Mr. Harry Bruce, a fine gentleman, a member of the Cemetery Committee and construction supervisor of the new rectory died on January 15th. April 5th, 1962 was another day of mourning in Fort Frances and Kenora, for on that day, Fathers Fidèle Beaulieu, O.M.I. and Elie Savoie died suddenly. On April 9th, funeral services were held in Fort Frances for Father Beaulieu and at Kenora for Father Savoie. On the following day there was a joint funeral at St. Boniface for the two deceased priests. A brighter note was struck when on October 4th, 1962, the parish celebrated Father Paul Aubin's silver jubilee of priesthood.

As the school population kept on increasing, a third Separate School, St. Michael's was built, during the summer of 1963, in the eastern portion of the Town. The blessing of the school may have been overlooked for there is no extant record of such an event and those who were interviewed on the subject, could not vouch that it had ever taken place.

In 1964, Father Aubin invited his parishioners to help him in the administration of the parish. This they could do by attending to the material needs of the parish and by assuming charge of parochial social activities. They could likewise participate more actively in the lay apostolate and thereby help to foster spiritual life in the parish. The answer to the pastor's invitation was the formation, in February, 1954, of "Saint Mary's Parish Advisory Board" which comprised twelve members. In September the name was changed to "The Board of Directors of St. Mary's Church" and the membership was increased to fifteen. In October it was decided to divide the board into four committees, under the direction of a General Committee Chairman. (Mr.

Ernest Charlebois was the first General Committee Chairman).

The first official meeting of this Board of Directors was held on November 9, 1964. At this session, a special committee was appointed to draw up a code of bylaws for the Board. The chairman of this committee, Mr. A.D. McLennan, submitted these bylaws for consideration at the first two meetings in 1965. After a few modifications these bylaws were duly approved. The Board was thereby fully constituted but it was more advisory than executive in capacity.

A happy anniversary occurred on July 27, 1964, but its solemn commemoration was postponed to October 11th when the entire community celebrated the golden jubilee of the Sisters' arrival in Fort Frances. Two of the four sisters who came in 1914, were present at the ceremony: Sister Marie Ste. Reine and Sister Edana. As a memento of this happy day, the Sisters were presented with a fine television set.

March 7th, 1965, was a memorable day in St. Mary's Church. On that day, many of the prayers at Mass were said in the vernacular, -English in this case. A temporary altar was placed at the entrance of the sanctuary and priests said Mass facing the people. All parishioners were invited and taught to take a more active part in church ceremonies. At first, there was a bit of clumsiness in effecting the adaptation to the new liturgy. But soon, things went more smoothly and the changes were enthusiastically accepted by the vast majority of the parishioners.

Father Alfred Beaudin, who had been pastor from 1943 to 1945, and assistant from 1955 to 1958 was called to his reward on May 9th, 1965. Less than a month later, on June 6th, Father Aubin announced that his pastorate had come to an end. In a few weeks he was to go on sabbatical leave to Europe for postgraduate studies. He expected to leave as quickly as possible, but things took an unexpected turn.

Father Henry Desrochers O.M.I., who had been an assistant in the parish since September 9th, 1963, was appointed pastor in June, 1965. He was well known and loved for his qualities of mind and heart and prospects for a splendid career seemed bright. But Father Desrochers' health was not up to par. Yet no one seemed to realize the seriousness of his malady. On June 28th, he felt indisposed and went to LaVerendrye Hospital for treatment.

On the following day he had a serious heart seizure which proved to be fatal. Two days later, on July 1, 1965, a funeral Mass was celebrated for Father Desrochers and on the morrow interment took place in St. Boniface.

Circumstances forced Fr. Aubin to delay his departure, but since all travelling reservations had already been made, he left Fort Frances on July 22, 1965 after a fruitful administration which had lasted ten years.

Father Jean Claude Philippe arrived on July 25, 1965, and a few days later took possession of his charge. He was the third Frenchman to become pastor in Fort Frances, having been preceded by Father Ernest <sup>Crozier</sup> Costiou O.M.I. (1905-1908) and Father Francis Costiou O.M.I. (1908-1916). Born in France, Father Philippe had spent a part of his boyhood in Vietnam where his father was an officer in the French Army. On his return to France, Father Philippe completed his military service and scholastic studies. After ordination he volunteered for foreign missions and was sent to northern Canada to labor among Eskimos. After eighteen years in this ministry, he was appointed chaplain in the Royal Canadian Airforce where he served for twelve years.

By the time Father Philippe arrived in Fort Frances he was a much-travelled man with a vast experience and a first-hand knowledge of conditions in the countries through which his travels had taken him. Endowed with a jovial disposition and genuine French wit, he soon made friends, not only among his parishioners, but also in the community at large. Having collaborated with non-Catholic fellow-chaplains, he acquired a spirit of ecumenism which quickly manifested itself after his arrival in Fort Frances. Being a strong believer in sharing authority with his assistants and officers of parochial organizations he encouraged personal initiative, stimulated those who were hesitant and prodded along the laggards. His flock has responded to his competent guidance and able leadership. Hence there is a healthy spiritual atmosphere in the parish.

In achieving this result, Father Philippe had loyal co-operation from the following priests who were, or, are his assistants: Father Hervé Delisle O.M.I. (July 15, 1965 to August 30, 1966); Father Marc Monforton O.M.I. (July 27, 1964 to August 1, 1969); Father Marcel Rio O.M.I. (November 28, 1962 to September 19, 1966); André Florentin O.M.I. (September 15, 1966 to March 10, 1967); Father Lionel Benoit O.M.I. (March 9, 1967 to the present day) and Father Julien Morin O.M.I., since September 3rd, 1969.

An outstanding feature of Father Philippe's administration is the re-organization of the Board of Directors. At the request of the pastor the by-laws of the Board were thoroughly revised. The object of the new Board of Directors was defined as follows:

- 1) to direct and manage the financial affairs of the parish;
- 2) to promote and encourage activities within the parish for the purpose of uniting the members of the parish in a bond of fellowship for the promotion of religious, intellectual, social, community and patriotic interests;
- 3) to encourage and further the cause of Catholic education on all levels and particularly to encourage and aid in the formation of an active lay apostolate.

"It is understood that the Board of Directors shall have full responsibility for the financial and material administration of the affairs of the parish, and that in religious, social or educational matters it shall act in an advisory capacity to the pastor or his assistants or to any properly recognized organization which may request it to act in that capacity."

The bylaws of "The Board of Directors of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Parish" have been officially approved by His Excellency, Bishop Edward Jennings. It may be of interest to add that these bylaws have served as a norm for the bylaws of several other parishes in the diocese and elsewhere.

Of concern to the entire diocese of Fort William was a dispatch on September 25th, 1969, announcing the resignation of His Excellency, Bishop Edward Q. Jennings. Pending the appointment of his successor, Bishop Jennings will serve as Administrator of the diocese. In conformity with the recommendations of Vatican Council II, priests, sisters and prominent laymen have been invited to express their opinions on the choice of the future bishop. It is the first time this has happened and it is a definite sign of the times.

With this item, the story of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (or St. Mary's) parish is brought up-to-date. Before closing the narration it would be proper to pay a tribute to the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions who have taught in the schools since 1914 and to the sisters of Charity (Gray Nuns) who have tended the sick of the community since 1941. And it would not be amiss to speak of the vocations originating in the parish.

The Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions since 1914 are:

1. Principals:

Sister M. Ildeberge - 1914 to 1916; Sister M. Thérèse 1916 to 1936; and again 1943 to 1944; Sister M. Séraphie 1936 to Dec. 1938; Sister M. Louise

Jan. 1939 - 1940; Sister M. Louis 1940 - 1941; Sister M. St. Constantine 1941 - 1943; Sister M. Incarnation 1944 - 1948; Sister M. Jerome 1948 - 1951 and again 1967 - 1968; Sister M. Catherine 1951 - 1955; Sister M. Eusebie 1955 - 1958; Sister M. Kevin 1958 - 1960; Sister M. Monica 1960 - 1962 and Sister M. Gerald 1962 - 1967.

2. Sisters (listed in the order of their arrival)

M. St. Reine; M. St. Marcel; M. St. Edana; M. St. Isabelle;  
M. St. Emmanuel; M. St. Majella; M. St. Thérèse; M. St. Gabrielle; M. St. Margaret Marie; M. St. Cyril; M. St. Roseline; M. St. Zita; M. St. Cecilius;  
M. St. Alexandre; M. of the Holy Angels; M. St. Northburga; M. St. Léandre;  
M. Anne de Jesus; M. St. Regina; M. St. Laura; M. St. Antonine; M. St. Anatolie; M. St. Pierre; M. St. Albert M. St. Aselle; M. Henriette de Jesus;  
M. Noëlla; M. Reine de Jesus; M. St. Séraphie; M. St. Isabelle; M. St. Barnabé; M. St. Peter; M. St. Ledwine; M. St. Pharailde; M. St. Eusebie;  
M. St. Cassius; M. Kevin of Jesus; M. St. Clemence; M. St. Alodia; M. St. Hubert; M. Veronica of Jesus; M. St. Louise; M. St. Constantine; M. St. Wilfrid; M. St. Louis; M. St. Gabriel L; M. St. Lucille; M. St. Jerome;  
M. St. Clare; M. St. Joseph; M. Incarnation; M. St. Norbert; M. St. Thaddeus;  
M. St. Eunice; Mary Imelda; M. St. Alexius; M. St. Mathilde; M. des Séraphins;  
M. St. Andre; M. St. Allan; M. St. Gerardus; Mary Marguerite; M. St. Ermentrude;  
M. St. Catherine; M. M. Eugene; M. Soline; M. St. Lawrence; M. St. Celine;  
M. St. Adele; M. St. Monica; Mary Brigid; Marie Rene; Mary Gerald; Mary Agnellus; Mary Stephen; M. St. Verda; M. St. Suzanne and Mary Madeleine

To all these Sisters and to the many other teachers in the Separate Schools, the parish owes a debt of gratitude.

The same is true of the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns).

1. Superiors:

Sr. St. Emilienne 1941 to 1946; Sr. Noemi Dion 1946 to 1949;  
Sr. M.A. Poliquin 1949 to 1955; Sr. M.J. Tougas 1955 to 1957;  
Sr. Delia Clermont 1957 to 1959; Sr. Lucille Gosselin 1959 to 1961;  
Sr. Cécile Maurice 1961 to 1963; Sr. Marguerite Michaud 1963 to 1966 and Sr. Alice Gélinas 1966 -

2) Sisters:

A. Gauthier; T. Lefebvre; M. St. Pierre; L. Blais; J. Choiselet;  
S. Gervais; R. Desilets; Sr. Constance; A.M. Lefebvre; D. Mondor;  
A. Boulet; E. Bilodeau; C. Maurice; I. Gillinski; A. Bohemier;  
T. Paillé; R. Gettis; C. Sabourin; C. Milette; L. Gaboury; J. Landry;  
C. Levaque; M. Harty; H. Harbec; A. Hébert; Sr. Ste Irène; O. Descelles;  
Sr. Ste Eugénie; C. Pelletier; D. Ferland; F. Roy; M. Métail;  
O. Vigoureux; M. Tougas; I. Bilodeau; G. Moreau; H. Larose; R. Rossier;  
J. Drouin; B. Robert; M. Pilon; E. Hamon; E. Bordeleau; R. Bourbonnière;  
R. Perrin; V. Lanoix; A. Robinet; J. Valois; H. Bellec; A. Marcoux;  
E. Massicotte; L. Lanthier; R. Trottier; R. Lupas; G. Chamberland;  
P. Lalonde; A. Gélinas; A. Sicotte; J. Gagnon; G. Dubois; R. Topping;  
M. Laforce; A. Gaudette; J. Gosselin; R. Lagassé; G. Desjardins and  
G. Plourde.

To the Sisters who helped some negligent parishioners to come back to their religious practices and prepared others for a happy death, the priests of the parish give a hearty "Thank you". To all the Gray Nuns who provided the municipality with a first class hospital and who nursed back to health many of its citizens, the entire community is indebted.

The vocations from the parish are the following.

1) Priesthood: (the date of ordination follows the name).

Father Leo Bartley O.M.I. (September 2, 1923); Father Leon Jalbert O.M.I. (July 1, 1928); Father Julian Jalbert O.M.I. (June 29, 1935); Father Marcel Jalbert O.M.I. (June 12, 1938); Father Stephen Hyrchenuk S.J. (June 27, 1949) and Father Hugh O'Donnell S.J. (June 20, 1954).

2) Religious life:

(a) Brothers:

Paul Robin S.J. and Henry Robin S.J.

(b) Sisters:

Louise Jalbert - Sister Octavien du Sacre Coeur, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

Adelaide Jalbert - Sister Mary Louise, Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.

Betty Iris Bartush - Sister Mary Adele, Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.



Sisters - Cont'd

Marie Bartush - Sister Mary Louise, Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.

Eva Marie Turgeon - Sister Gilbert, Sisters of Loretto

Edith Turgeon, - Sister Blanche, Sisters of Loretto

Diane Cousineau - Sister Corona, Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood.

Another vocation to the sisterhood was Miss Greta Fahey who taught school here in 1909-10 and 1910-11. At the end of her second year Miss Fahey entered the order of the Sisters of Loretto. There may have been other vocations among the former parishioners. If so, their names are not entered in the records of the parish, (see Page 40, 9 lines from bottom.)

With this item, the chronicle of the parish will end, at least, for the time being. There were, no doubt many other interesting events in the history of the parish throughout the many years of its existence. But those in charge were either too busy or too modest to record their good deeds. Even the meagre relation contained in these pages required a vast amount of research. When former pastors kept a regular chronicle, it was easy enough to select items for the present sketch. But, more often than not, it was necessary to consult old newspaper clippings, records of Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals, minutes of meetings and any other available source of information. Personal interviews with surviving "old-timers" yielded many interesting details.

There is no pretense here that the information obtained is complete and the dates given absolutely correct. The narrative does not claim to be exhaustive and the dates supplied are as exact as could be ascertained. What is offered here is an honest effort to save the early history of the parish from oblivion. The purpose of this sketch was to link the known present with the distant, the unknown, the forgotten past. Readers will find in this essay, a substantial review of the Catholic Church in the Rainy Lake region, from the earliest days to the present time. Any additional information will be gratefully received and dutifully considered in a final draft of this sketch. It is the fond hope of the author that this attempt

at reconstructing the chronicle, will help some future historian to give a complete story of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (St. Mary's) Parish.

It is now my pleasant duty to thank all those who have helped with this sketch. "Gather up the fragments that remain lest they be lost" (John VI, 12). "Forsan et Haec Olim Meminisse Juvabit" (Virgil's Aeneid). "Perhaps, some day, it will help to have remembered these things."

L.D.S.

G.C. Salamon, O.M.I.

Fort Frances, Ontario.

Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary,  
October 7, 1969.