

- Ignace de Paris, excerpt from “ Letter from the Capuchin Father R. P. Ignatius ” in PH. F. Bourgeois, *Les Anciens Missionnaires de l'Acadie Devant l'histoire* (Shédiac, Presses du moniteur acadien, 1910), p.88-97.

(This document is the translation of a translation of the original Latin letter. Note that the word *sylvestres* which is usually translate as *Sauvages* appears in the French translation as “habitants des bois” inhabitants of the woods and conveys the genuine meaning)

A clear and brief statement of the current state of the mission of Acadia, in New France, which was asked of me, Brother Ignatius of Paris, unworthy Capuchin, a worker in the city of the Lord, outside the walls of the Eternal City, by the Illustrious Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

Acadia, in New France, bordering the land usually called Canada, is part of North America. It includes all this region where several peoples engage in fishing for fish that produce isinglass, commonly called cod, which they then transport on their ships throughout Europe. It is three hundred leagues long and a hundred wide: it extends from Cap de la Malbarre (Cape Cod?) in the south to the port of Gaspé in the north near the mouth of the great fleuve Saint-Laurent. A large number of French people, all Catholics, live on the banks of this river and receive from the RR.PP. Jesuit Missionaries all the spiritual help useful for salvation.

Throughout Acadia are three main bays: the grande baie, the baie française et the baie des Chaleurs. The grande baie, six leagues from Cap de la Malbarre, is inhabited today by at least twenty-seven thousand English, all heretics. The baie française, (Bay of Fundy) distant from the first one by eighty leagues, is very large; it measures seventy leagues in depth, its width is 30 or 40 leagues at its origin, 12 leagues at its last limit. In the middle of this bay, is a large island (Grand Manan Island), 3 leagues distant on one side, and 9 on the other from the mainland. In the three main ports of this bay, the very Christian French stayed from 1632 to 1654. On this last date, the heretical English, their neighbours, with the help of the forces sent by Cromwell, protector of England, seized the three main places, the ports mentioned above, namely: the fort of Pentagoet or St-Pierre, the fort of the fleuve St-Jean and Port-Royal. In the first two, they left no other Frenchman than one or two traitors. As for Port-Royal, they drove out all the soldiers and sailors, leaving with them only the widow and orphans of the very Christian governor, who died in 1650, and the few French settlers who had been established on the land for several years. However, they deprived them of all spiritual help by putting to death the superior of the mission, the T.R. P. Léonard de Chartres, a Capuchin, and driving out the other missionary, the V. P. Yves de Paris, with two very pious brothers of the same order, Brother Jean from Troyes and Brother François-Marie, from Paris who lived in Port-Royal to help the missionaries and the work of the seminary, founded for the converted Abenakis or those preparing for baptism.

I must say that the same heretics sent away another missionary, the ven. Father Bernardin de Crépy when they seized Fort St Pierre, in the region of Pentagouet. They embarked him on their ships and took him to Cromwell in England, and then he returned to our province of Paris, his place of origin. This father made many conversions in the region of Pentagouet.

There were still two missionaries in the country.

The first was in a fort or a small habitation, also called St-Pierre, and located further north in a region called Canceaux. This residence is one hundred and twenty leagues from Port-Royal. All the ports of this region are inhabited by French fishermen for six whole months of the year. These fishermen are found especially from Cap des Sables, a site so well known to navigators, is fifty leagues distant from Port-Royal, and is located at the end of one side of the baie française. The fishermen leave France at the beginning of spring and spread all along the coast to engage in very active cod fishing. They finished at the end of September or October, and then return to France with their vessels loaded with fish.

The first of the two missionaries who remained, brother Augustin de Pontoise, lived with two other brothers Félix de Reims and Elzéar de St-Florentin, in this residence of St-Pierre, in the country of Canceaux. However, last year, in 1655, pressed by misery, all three returned to France. Brother Elzéar had spent 9 or 10 entire years in Fort St-Pierre, in the Pentagouet region.

He spoke the foreign language of the Abenakis of this territory, and by his great virtue, by his religious conversations, he prepared many infidels for the faith; he even converted many of them by teaching them the articles of our faith in a simple but effective way.

The previous year, in 1654, the second of the two missionaries, the most venerable Father Balthazar of Paris had already returned to France. This father speaks the language of the natives of the region where he lived, as well as the French language, and with the help of God, he converted more Abenakis than all the other missionaries. Seeing the whole of l'Acadie almost entirely occupied by heretics, he came to France to inform the RRs. PP. of the Province of Paris of the state of the mission entrusted to them by the authority of the Holy See and being in such great perils of ruin, invite them to provide for its needs.

The very venerable Father Balthazar of Paris, this missionary truly worthy of all praise, exercised his ministry for six whole years, in a place commonly called Népigigouit, on this side of the limits of Acadia, and towards the north. This territory of Nepigigouit is located approximately in the middle of the baie des Chaleurs. La baie des Chaleurs takes its name from the frequency of thunder and the heat, which in summer, are very intense there due to the high mountains which surround this arm of the sea; I say in summer because this country being at 48 degrees, the winter is colder there than in any other part of l'Acadie. Father Balthazar did not exercise his ministry in this place only but also in almost all the territories which extend from the baie of Chaleurs to the residence of St-Pierre, in the country of Canceaux, within a radius of at least a hundred leagues.

He crossed the lands and the forests, the lakes and the rivers, enduring hardships, colds, labour, and illnesses that we cannot imagine. In these travels, he converted to Christ at least twenty entire Abenaki families of this country. The desire for the salvation of these new converts inflamed him, or better intoxicated him so that last year he did the impossible to come back to them; he took to the sea, but instead of landing on their beaches, he was thrown on foreign lands and was finally obliged to return to France. Again, this year, in 1656, from the first days of spring, he set out to go directly to that part of Acadia of which we have spoken and there visit his disciples in Christ, confirm them in the faith, administer to them the sacraments and all the spiritual help of which they have been deprived for two years. I say nothing of the innumerable (*sylvestres-Sauvages*) inhabitants of the woods, who, thanks to his ministry and other missionaries throughout Acadia, have gone to heaven in the preceding years. This is the present state of the Mission of Acadia, which has been

administered by the Missionaries of the Order of Capuchin Minors of the Province of Paris for several years.

The present state of the mission of Acadie makes us foresee, with certainty, the destruction of religion if it is not offered the best, the promptest and the most effective aids and remedies. No, nothing is as obvious: isolation will bring the near ruin of religion. If indeed we abandon the French Catholics now at Port-Royal and the converted Abenakis scattered in the spacious region around the baie française under the domination of heretical Englishmen, and if we no longer give them spiritual help to strengthen them in the holy and apostolic faith, how will they be able to resist the powers of darkness? Moreover, the other French people who live at the mentioned above residence of St-Pierre in the country of Canceaux and Népigouit, and all the faithful Abenakis of these latter regions are also in danger of losing their faith, especially if the heretics advance further and forcefully occupy all these territories. Moreover, even if they come to that, I dare say that they will destroy and ruin our most holy faith up to the great fleuve Saint-Laurent on the banks of which live, I believe, two thousand Christians under the direction of the RR. PP. Jesuit missionaries. Thus, true faith will disappear from both countries, Canada and l'Acadie.

How can we prevent such a great misfortune? We must urge again the most Christian king, Louis XIV, to claim from Cromwell, protector of England, the three places in the baie française which were occupied by his order in 1654. I say "again" because the RR. PP Capuchins of the Province of Paris, administrators of this mission, have already presented themselves before the very Christian king, and begged him to claim the places in question. The claim, was made, as seen by the peace treaty...