

508GXE

March 7, 1834.

From Rev. Fred. Baraga, Grand River,  
To Leopoldine Foundation, Vienna.

ALF. XIV. VI. #3, pp. 1 to 4.

BBC. Mf. 66-2;25-28.

Page 1 of 3.

Most Reverend Central Direction of the Leop. Found.!

#132

#140

The establishment of the new mission on Grand-River, in this unfavorable season of the year, goes ahead only at a slow pace, nevertheless, faster than I had expected because this year we have an exceptionally mild winter; there was very little snow, and for 3 weeks there has been no more, and we have only some few particularly cold days. My carpenter, (I have now only one,) works constantly on the mission building. Since this mission is only in its beginning, and for that reason still insignificant, therefore for the time being I am having only one building erected, 50 feet long, 30 feet wide and 12 feet high, one half of which will be fitted as a chapel and the other half will be divided into a pair of small school and living rooms. Therefore I have under one roof all the buildings belonging to the mission. I could not manage it more economically, and yet this single, mediocre and entirely wooden building will cost over \$800 dollars before it is entirely finished. (A dollar has about 2 fl. 10 kr., conv. coin.) In the future, when the mission congregation becomes much larger, and the chapel will no longer be able to accomodate all the Christians here, a separate church of the size of this mission building will be built and then the entire present mission building will serve as living rooms and schoolrooms. But should the Indians be removed from here in the future, as it is being said, then this building will still not be lost, because at present there are already very many French Canadians here, all of whom are Catholics, and soon even more will settle here especially now since there is a Catholic mission here. It will always be possible for a priest to be stationed here.

Now we are in the so-called sugar time. Not a single Indian is now here in the village; all are in the forest, in their sugar huts. However, they come every Sunday to church. There are also very many Indians from Arbre Croche a day's journey away from here. They spend the winter there in order to hunt the many deer, bears and other smaller animals, whose pelts are sold at a good price to the fur traders; and at the same time they also make their sugar there. There are Indians in these regions, (especially Indians from Arbre Croche,) who in a single winter slay and catch in their traps so many wild animals that their pelts are worth over 200 dollars, for which then they buy clothing and household utensils for themselves and their families; however, since the fur traders here so shamefully defraud the poor Indians, they nevertheless always receive little for their many pelts.

On Febr. 26 some Indians from Arbre Croche came from their sugar huts to our village, (a day's journey away,)

and asked me to go with them to pay them a mission visit. I went with them. We went in a straight direction through the forest. It is not easy for one to imagine how difficult a journey is through the primeval forests of North America. Now one goes through thickets so that one with both hands, like a swimmer, must part the branches before himself in order to prepare a way through for himself; then one goes for a half hour long through swamps and marshes so that one almost remains imbedded in them; then again one must cross over rather wide streams on a single weak tree, which the Indians chop on the bank and let fall over the stream. On this mission journey of mine I also crossed over a river, among others, which was over 30 feet wide, and very rapid and deep, on such a narrow wobbling bridge. The Indians were much worried about me when we came to the river. However, I started out in the name of God on the dangerous bridge. Scarcely was I in the center when I began to falter and almost plunged into the river. The good Indians raised a plaintive cry; however, I crossed over successfully. The Indians run over these tree trunks like squirrels, often even with heavy boxes on their backs.

However, the sincere welcome of my dear good children of Arbre Croche, and the loyal devotion to the religion which they evince in all their actions compensated me in many ways for the hardships of the journey. They make their sugar close together, in 12 closely grouped sugar huts. I was very pleasantly surprised when, in the center of the district in which they make their sugar, I found a small chapel which these good Indians had erected for the performance of their devotions. It is indeed most touching to find, so far away from settlements, a pious group of recently converted Indians, who, for the short time they stay here, build themselves a chapel to perform their devotions in it. They assemble twice every Sunday in this chapel, before and after noon, and perform their devotions in common. I stayed three days in this holy wilderness and said Mass every day in their chapel with deep emotion and with sincere gratitude to God, who allows these new converts to improve more and more in Christian piety.

During my stay all made their Easter confessions and very many went to communion; among these were 15 who made their first communion. They had learned their communion catechism sufficiently now to be able to receive holy communion in a becoming manner. - I admired their zeal for holy communion. They came to me one after the other and said: "Father examine me, perhaps you will find me qualified to receive holy communion." - On this mission visit I baptized 3 adult Indians. May God grant that they also may always remain such zealous Christians as are by far most of the new converts of Arbre Croche.

From there I went a short day's journey further where again there are some Indian huts. The place is called Mashkigong. Last summer, while on my first mission visit to Grand River, I baptized there 21 Indians. At present there are over 30 baptized Indians at this place. However, this time I found only a few Indians there; they all are already in their sugar

huts. I went there principally with the intention of attending 2 sick Indians who probably will soon die. The already converted Indians in this place have promised me to build a chapel there; and the few whom I met there at this time asked me to indicate to them the place where I wish to have the chapel, which I did with sincere pleasure. - The chapel will stand on a charming elevation, with the most beautiful view of the lake and of Mashkigong River. They wanted to make it rather large, because nearly all the Indians of this place are resolved to accept the Christian religion during the course of this year. I hope that this place will soon be an important affiliate of the new mission of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Grand River. - I am thinking of dedicating this filial mission to God in the name of St. Joseph.

For some time people are again talking very strongly that it is the plan of our government to remove all the Indians from the civilized states and territories of this republic, and to assign to them a district on the other side of the Mississippi for their own common abode. Now if this happens, then also my poor Indians will have to wander. The Christians are very much alarmed about this report; however I console them with the assurance that I shall never abandon them, even if they should be driven into the most inhospitable regions, if they only remain together and will not scatter themselves, and if the bishop will let me move with them. - This is indeed my wish and my resolve. Now that I have, with much effort, learned so fairly well this extremely difficult language of the Indians, and still daily make progress in it, therefore I am inclined to devote the remaining days of my life to the missions of the Indians and to follow them to wherever they may be banished, if only it is the will of God which will be expressed by the mouth of my bishop, ordained for me by the Holy Ghost.

Frederic Baraga, m.p.,  
Missionary.

Mission of St. Mary on Grand River,  
March 7, 1834.

This letter was published, with minor changes, in the Leopoldine Foundation's *BERICHTE*, Vol. VIII, pp 32-6. Ed.