

## **“This Remote Field of Missionary Toil”: Christianity at the Pic, Lake Superior to 1900**

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“Indian demonology,” wrote the Rev. Thomas Hurlburt in 1840, has a “strong hold on their [Indian] feelings.”<sup>1</sup> He and his fellow proselytizers worked long and hard to introduce Christianity to the peoples of the Superior North Shore. Such “Christian assistance” proved in its own way as disruptive an influence as the resource seekers and officials drawn to the real and imagined riches of that rugged land. Indeed, clerics all along the North Shore, however well meaning, were prime contributors to change, for they were among the most vigorous of the new arrivals. Even as they decried the “evils” of the fur trade, missionaries like those at the Pic failed to perceive that they were attacking the very tenets of Indian life.<sup>2</sup> Thus their “successes” reshaped the North Shore Indian culture just as surely as secular forces.

### ***Beginnings***

The missionary presence on the North Shore rivalled the fur trade for longevity for the first missionaries to work among the North Shore Indians, though few in number, were indefatigable. In 1636 Father J.A. Poncet established the Mission du Saint Esprit at the site that 32 years later was renamed Saint-Marie-du-Sault. That Mission served as a base for work along the northern coast of Lake Huron until at least 1696. Progress over the great expanse of Superior was slow, notwithstanding Father Claude Allouez’s journey to Lake Nipigon in 1667. The North Shore effort

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declined with Cadillac’s emphasis on Detroit and Michilimackinac: a nominal “mission among the Outaouais” persisted until at least 1756, but the North Shore effort was “silent” from about 1704.<sup>3</sup>

British control and the ensuing withdrawal of the Jesuits left the northern Great Lakes with little Christian missionary work apart from the occasional visit to Mackinac and Sault Ste. Marie by Roman Catholic priests working within the (later) Diocese of Detroit.<sup>4</sup> More specific North Shore work resumed about 1818 when Bishop J. Octave Plessis directed two priests, Fathers Pierre-Antoine Tabeau and Joseph Grevier, to undertake missionary activity on the Upper Lakes. Missionaries intent on travelling farther west provided brief services during their lake shore travels. Bishop Joseph Nibert Provencher, for instance, journeyed along the North Shore in 1822; he wrote to Bishop Joseph O. Plessis of having

baptized seventy-seven children en route . . . Twenty-three at Drummond Island, forty-one at the Sault, twelve at Fort William, and one at the Pic. It is very necessary that a priest should be sent to the Sault, Drummond Island, and Michilimackinac. Instruction is needed there, which one who is merely passing by is never able to give. The Americans are going to build a fort at the Sault, which will attract many people. I suppose that you can authorize a priest for both sides [of the river] . . . It is necessary to have a Canadian; a priest speaking both French and English would be better still.<sup>5</sup>

Provencher’s hopes were partially realized for the extension of Detroit-based Catholic work won a permanent, if thin, presence on the North Shore. Re-established Roman Catholic endeavour at Sault Ste. Marie (1834) provided an operational base for Father (later Bishop) Frederic Baraga. Further west, Father Franz Pierz, travelling Roman Catholic missionary at the Grand Portage Mission, began providing services for the Indians of the North Shore.

In June, 1838, he [Pierz] started out on a missionary trip . . . After instructing and baptizing twenty-five natives [Michipicoten], he travelled to Okwanikisinong, a large pagan settlement forty-five miles farther north. Here a group of seventeen received Christianity and were baptized on the picturesque shore of the lake.

By 1839 Pierz had established mission substations at Fort William and the

Pic.<sup>6</sup>

Roman Catholic “successes” spurred Protestant missionary work on the North Shore. Inspired by a spirit of evangelism in Great Britain, both the Church of England and the Wesleyan Methodists moved to provide “spiritual assistance” to the Indian populations of the Great Lakes. Of course, such “assistance” was directed against traditional native values and the especially the “men of medicine . . . practitioners [who the missionaries complained] make a great mystery of their decoctions and when administering them, conceal them with the greatest care.” The various pressures of European contact saw traditional modes “much neglected” as the missionary effort worked toward Fort William and points beyond.<sup>7</sup>

### *Methodism Ascendant*

First in line stood the Methodists who were already working among the Indian populations farther south. In 1838 James Evans (1801-1846), Thomas Hurlburt (1808-1873), and the Native catechist Peter Jacobs [Pah-tahsega] (c. 1807-1890) were appointed to missionary work about Lake Superior.<sup>8</sup> Arriving at Sault Ste. Marie in early August 1838, they journeyed on to Michipicoten where the immensity of their task and the relative lateness of their arrival – fall was at hand – surely compounded personal tensions between Evans and Hurlburt.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, they set about their work: Evans took up a post at Michipicoten while Hurlburt, on 23 October 1838, continued west to Fort William stopping briefly at the Pic.<sup>10</sup>

Vast distances and a formidable environment were challenge enough; but the Methodists also faced rival clerics. The Baptist James Cameron was working Michipicoten and Pic:

The Rev. Mr. Cameron, nephew of the late secretary, is about 45 miles from this place on the N.E. He is under the direction of the American Baptist Missionary Society; he is connected with the Indians of these parts by ties of blood, his uncle being regarded as the head man of this region. He is connected with them also by marriage, having taken a pure native woman. He speaks the Indian well, and his influence among the Indians is great.

Cameron, apparently son of trader Dougald Cameron, was at Black Bay during the winter of 1839-40 and at Fort William during May and June

1841.<sup>11</sup>

Far more serious was the “Papist” challenge: on 1 January 1840 Thomas Hurlburt wrote the Wesleyan Missionary Society calling for aid in his North Shore work:

The call for Missionaries is great. Many of the poor Indians have come to a stand, and are now ready to receive the word of life. This inquiry was caused by the work in Upper Canada, and it has now spread far and near among the tribes speaking the Ojibewa and kindred dialects. The Catholic Priests are taking advantage of this state of things, and are running through the country and baptizing all they can persuade to receive a brass crucifix and a string of beads, with a few pictures of saints; very frequently the Indian is not at all instructed, only he is told that, in times of danger and want, he is to look at the pictures, and he shall have all he desires. A Priest, last summer, on this Lake, baptized an Indian and his *two* wives. These are all provable [sic] facts. Thus the poor Indian casts away his otter skin with his instruments of magic, and substitutes other things of less value; for some of his medicines were really good. Thus he changes the objects, but not the nature, of his worship.<sup>12</sup>

The evident displeasure with Jesuit efforts extended beyond the Methodist clergy to the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) administration, for Governor George Simpson, after initially opposing all missionary presence had by 1840 taken a determined pro-Methodist stance. As Evans noted “we have, through the Divine blessing found favour in the eyes of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s factors and as they command the entire influence of the Indian country, our prospects as far as they are concerned are good.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Developments at the Pic*

Aid from the HBC was certainly important at the Pic: company support gave Evans an early advantage over such rivals as Cameron and Fr. Pierz. After Evans’ and Jacobs’ brief stop in early May 1839 they reported much enthusiasm for the planned establishment of a Methodist mission. A second stopover (13-15 July) reinforced Evans’ determination not least because more than 20 children were baptized on the visit.<sup>14</sup> The success saw a permanent mission established, with Hurlburt assuming the station thus fulfilling his earlier plea for a mission at that spot.<sup>15</sup>

Accompanied by his wife Betsey Almira and two young children, Hurlburt arrived at the Pic “the last of August” 1839, the journey from Toronto having taken nearly two months. Welcomed by post manager Thomas McMurray with “much cordiality,” Hurlburt and family lived in one room within the post while proceeding, largely on their own, to build a home. In the autumn of 1839 Hurlburt dug a cellar and built a foundation for the dwelling; the onset of winter saw his attention shift to the cutting and hauling (up to 2 miles) of some 50 logs for its construction. The resulting home was

a little removed from the trading establishment and pleasantly situated near the river, but still in view of the lake. Our house is 24 feet square, with a cellar 12 feet square and 5 1/2 feet deep. I have the house divided into five rooms. The best room is 14 feet square; this is finished, and the floor painted. One bedroom, 10 by 12, and kitchen the same, both finished. Of the rest I design to have another bedroom 8 by 12, and a study 6 by 10. I have six doors, of six panels each, already made. The sashes for the four of the six windows are made; but as I have but 24 lights of glass, I got a large strong white paper and pasted it over the whole sash on the outside, and then oiled it. This admits a considerable light, and has a very beautiful appearance when the light shines upon it. Even when I get glass, I shall be loath to spoil my paper windows . . . We have had one serious storm of rain, hail, and snow since we came, and still they are as firm as ever. The want of boards has put me to much labour to get a substitute. The whole of my upper floor is made of poles and clay. When I put up the beams I put in cross pieces, upon which I put the small poles, and spread the clay mixed with straw over. I can still put up a ceiling underneath and a floor above without interfering with my mud floor, as it is between the beams. The roof is a temporary one made of cedar bark. The logs are all hewed on the outside, and on the inside I drove in about 2,000 small pegs, and put upright pieces all around to make the walls of equal thickness. The plastering was a heavy job, as the clay was obtained at a distance, and the walls are from one to four inches thick. The clay now appears very solid; the pegs will keep it from falling . . . The whole expenditure . . . will be about L 9 10s 0d.<sup>16</sup>

The Hurlburt’s home also featured practical additions including sheds and a garden. Spiritual concerns led to rapid work on a chapel. Timber was

being cut for that purpose by April 1840, and a 21 x 18 foot building was erected “composed of logs flatted, and laid horizontally, with the ends secured in the posts upon which the plates of building rest.”<sup>17</sup>

Hurlburt, not surprisingly, proclaimed the buildings “decent for the style of the country, as well as comfortable and commodious.” Betsey’s letters home hint at greater misgivings:

This is the holy Sabbath evening; the duties of the day having been performed, I now sit down, with an overflowing heart, to make you acquainted with our prosperity. We can say of a truth the Lord is with us; we feel his divine presence on our little meetings, warming our hearts and the hearts of the poor Indians, who have but lately passed from darkness into light, and from bondage to the liberty of God’s people. There are four of these who give good evidence of a change of heart – one Indian man, the Trader’s wife (Indian woman), and two of her daughters; and there are several more, who, we have good reason to believe, are anxiously seeking. We have every thing to encourage us in the pursuit of duty. There were two adults baptized this evening, making sixteen in all, besides twenty-nine children. O this is a blessed cause that we are engaged in! I don’t lament my situation; I never have done so, nor do I ever expect to, although I highly prize, and often sigh for Christian and civilized society and privileges, both for myself and my dear children. But what are these when compared with the salvation of precious immortal souls!! . . . O pray for us that we may be faithful, humble and thankful!

Whatever her inner doubts, Mrs. Hurlburt did her part in both missionary and practical endeavour: caring for three young children, as well as the garden, a cow and poultry, demanded her (and an active Indian) assistance.<sup>18</sup> Educational tasks, including teaching some of the Indian women to spin and knit the wool from sheep kept by the HBC for mutton, were a further demand on her time.<sup>19</sup>

The work was surely relentless, and conditions difficult, yet by Hurlburt’s standards there was progress. In 1840 the British Wesleyan Missionary Society began supplying Hurlburt’s work, and a number of the Pic band expressed some interest in his message.<sup>20</sup> Fourteen baptisms and four conversions – “peace through believing” – were achieved rather quickly; a number of other Band members were “anxiously seeking” or “taking up the cross” at prayer meetings. The “successes” reflected the

Rev. Hurlburt's relentless endeavour, including leading at least five services a week.<sup>21</sup> He also instructed some twenty children by day, several adults during the evening, worked on a lengthy "Chippewa grammar" text, and supplied food and clothing to those in need. All this was not enough: Hurlburt sought out the Long Lake Band, travelling inland in August 1840 and in the spring of 1841.

Such journeys reinforced Hurlburt's conviction that more workers were needed to bring not only Christianity but also practical aid to the population. Hurlburt's greatest impact may have been the introduction of both European-style education and especially agriculture among the Pic Indians – within two years a number were planting potatoes and turnips, the seed provided by the HBC.<sup>22</sup> Despite the climate and topography he felt agriculture was the only hope for a population that lived in "about the poorest part of the Indian country." The "affairs of the Indians are growing worse every year," he wrote, pointing especially to the Long Lake Band as among "the most wretched beings that inhabit our world. They suffer very severely from hunger; two or three died last winter [1840-1] purely of hunger. Indeed it appears to me that death from starvation is so common in this country that it does not produce that sensation that it ought."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the challenge loomed too large, for HBC Postmaster Cuthbert Cumming wrote in February 1842 that the local Indians "seem perfectly indifferent about him [Hurlburt] and the Christian religion."<sup>24</sup> This assessment was in sharp contrast with Hurlburt's claim that about 50 Pic and Long Lake Indians had been converted during his stay. In any event, Hurlburt's work at the Pic was done: he departed late in 1842 due to a combination of circumstances. First, likely, came his wife's poor health; conflict between the Canadian Conference of the Wesleyan Church and the Wesleyan Methodist Society of England cost Hurlburt financial support, sealing the mission's fate.<sup>25</sup>

Those Indians converted to Methodism at the Pic, led by Atickonse, made repeated calls for a new missionary. But a lack of funds saw long years pass before the placing of native missionary George Blaker in July 1854.<sup>26</sup> Blaker, accompanied by his wife and four children, arrived at the Pic early in August 1854; a shanty was erected near the site of Hurlburt's home, which by then was "entirely demolished." The chapel, meanwhile, was a "rotting skeleton," a reminder of earlier failures.<sup>27</sup> It was a tenuous beginning: visiting missionaries, including Hurlburt, joined with

one of the natives of that place . . . to gather materials to make a house, and before night it was completed, near the ground where the Mission-House had stood. It was, even when finished, a frail affair, but was designed only to answer the purpose till a suitable one would be made, to secure them from the inclemency of the long and dreary winter, which, I have no doubt, Br. Blaker will accomplish before the winter sets in.<sup>28</sup>

Raising new buildings was just one element of Blaker’s service to the 40-member Pic River Mission Station, part of a Michipicoten-based circuit. HBC Governor Simpson, for one, found it a peculiar posting.

The Wesleyans have another station, at the Pic in Lake Superior under the charge of Mr. Blaker: that station was occupied several years ago by Mr. Hurlburt but abandoned in 1842 and I hardly know what inducement there was for its re-establishment, the Indian population being very small while there are not about 5 or 6 servants at the Company’s post; but it was probably considered impolitic to abandon a station that had once been occupied lest it might lead to an inference that the Society was unsuccessful.<sup>29</sup>

Naturally enough, the Rev. Blaker saw the posting in a more positive light:

This new Mission is established at the mouth of the Pic . . . When I received my appointment to this remote field of missionary toil, it was with considerable reluctance and trembling I entered upon it. But I came hoping it was my providential path. Trusting in the Lord, I determined to do all I could to advance the good cause, and for this I have laboured day and night in my weak way. During the year I have visited the Indian in his wig-wam. Last winter, I spent four or five weeks in search of the poor benighted Pagan on his hunting-ground in the interior of this cold country, and have laid night after night on the top of the snow, without shelter; sometimes I have found a foot of snow on top me in the morning . . . At this Mission we have a few that enjoy the comforts of religion, and meet in class regularly. In all, nineteen have renounced paganism, given up their images, and are striving to serve the true God. One who was converted last fall, continued faithfully during the winter, and this spring while on a hunting excursion he died in the triumphs of faith. Three families have

promised to build houses at the Pic and remain; which we hope will induce others to do the same. My first effort was to build a house with my own hands, 14 feet square, with a cellar, which I completed in September last. I had no shingles, so I made the roof of timbers laid close together, then plastered and covered it with cedar bark. The Hudson's Bay Company kindly furnished me with plank for the floor, and several other materials without charge.<sup>30</sup>

Blaker won praise in the Methodist Reports as local membership rose to over 60 persons. Thus a renewed Mission greeted the Rev. Hurlburt, who visited his old station in 1858:

Pic, July 16 . . . Towards evening . . . Our boat was seen entering the [Pic] river, and we saw a boy go into a wig wam, and soon three running hither and thither; and when we landed there was a group collected to receive and greet us . . . Here are the foundations of the house I built 18 years ago . . . and still I see remnants of my work, in a table, chair, doors and windows of the present mission-house . . . From this mission has gone forth an influence that has battled the influence of the priests in some considerable degree all along the north shore of the lake, and in the interior also.

Bro. Blaker needs aid to finish his mission-house and to build a little church. He also should be empowered to travel and visit the surrounding bands. I learn from Bro. Blaker that thus far the Company have charged nothing for freight and passage in their vessel. This is a great favour to us, and should not be forgotten.

Hurlburt provided more graphic evidence of the challenges faced by Blaker, noting that he and his family were "entirely destitute of flour, meat, &c., and subsisting for the present almost entirely on fish." Spiritual challenges were as daunting: in the excitement surrounding Hurlburt's visit several new "conversions" were made but their permanence was surely suspect.<sup>31</sup>

Nor was the isolation of the Pic a minor issue: by 1862 Blaker had relocated to Michipicoten, making only irregular visits farther west. In yet another visit, Hurlburt reported on a population hard-pressed to make old ways suit new times:

The place [Pic] should be occupied by a missionary in the summer for

the present, as there is no land here suitable for settlement, and the place is not a very good one for fish. Something however should be done for these Indians, or they will more or less of them starve: the country being burned over, much of the game is destroyed, and they have made no preparation either by planting potatoes or by securing a supply of fish to provide for the winter. Their prospects are gloomy. It is of but little avail to come to them and bring them partially the light of the Gospel, and then leave them after a little oral instruction. We have the New Testament, Psalms and Hymns in Indian, and our first and great effort should be to give them access to these. In tribes like those on these great lakes, schools to teach the children English are only productive of evil. If they are kept long enough to acquire the English, they will have become so far accustomed to our modes of life as to be entirely unfitted for the hunter life, and there is nothing besides this for them in this region. But by giving them access to the Scriptures in their own language, we may impart enough of Christian instruction to save their souls.<sup>32</sup>

### *A Faltering Few*

By the early 1860s, then, the challenge of Lake Superior had nearly overwhelmed the Methodists despite the continuing work of the Revs. Blaker and his successor Erastus Curry, or, more often, “Native Assistants” such as Thomas Wahboose and Thomas Sky. In 1873 Curry bemoaned the Methodism’s local state:

Our meeting closed on Tuesday, to meet again at Point Irisquois on the 12th July, 1873, and at Michipicoton on 23rd July, 1873. We purpose to get the Indians from Nippigon, Pic, Batchawana, L’Ance, Grand Island, and Waiskey Bay to attend the latter. If we could secure a small grant from the Missionary fund to provide provisions, and extend our meeting over several weeks, it would accomplish more for these wandering bands than we could in six months’ visiting them at the Posts. This would be a saving to the Society in lessening the travelling expenses. We should have an Indian preacher travelling among the five hundred on the Nippigon; another at the Pic, and surroundings, labouring with the three hundred there; a third at Michipicoton, ministering to the wants of three hundred more; a fourth at Batchawana, with Goulais Bay and Ogewaung in his boundaries, partially supplying the wants of the two hundred and

twenty Indians and whites . . . Then, there should be a missionary at Fort Francis, and another at Lake Saul . . . Nearly all of the above-mentioned posts are asking for a school.<sup>33</sup>

The Rev. Curry concluded his plea with an attack on a persistent rival noting that Jesuits were visiting the various Bands and urging them “to become Papists.”

The “Papists” (Jesuits) were no more popular with the backers of the Church of England who even more than the Methodists found the North Shore a challenging frontier. Indeed, the “English Church” long overlooked the North Shore because a flawed administrative structure left it lost between that Church’s Rupert’s Land and Canadian Dioceses. Church of England missionaries finally found their way onto the North Shore in the late 1850s, with a Rev. “Chase” preaching at the Pic in 1859. This may have been Canon J. Chance, who certainly travelled northwest from Garden River in July 1869; he later reported a stopover at the Pic:

A few miles south-east of the Pic we found a small encampment of Christian Indians who gave us a hearty welcome. They subsisted chiefly on fish, but they were less fishy and surly looking and more happy looking and cleanly than some other we had previously met with. We had a religious service and ministered to their spiritual wants, then proceeded to the Hudson [sic] Bay factory at the Pic, where we met with a most cordial reception. Most of the Indians were preparing to go away into the interior on a hunting expedition, but waited for Divine service and the administration of The Holy sacrament of Baptism and The Supper of the Lord. We held services in the Fort and in the open air.<sup>34</sup>

Charles Begg, in charge of the Pic post, made sure that the good Reverend formed a favourable impression: “I treated the gentleman well – which will leve [sic] him no room to say anything about the company.”<sup>35</sup> The Rev. J. Frost made a longer stay at the Pic a few years later; he reported the majority of the Indians “pagans, and the others only nominally Christian, not having been instructed in the teachings of the Christian religion.”<sup>36</sup> Thereafter Anglicanism was without local impact: *Algoma Missionary News* reveals little concern for the by-then wholly native population at Pic river. Only the few whites along the CPR line drew any missionary attention.<sup>37</sup>

***The “Papists” Triumphant***

Protestant weakness reflected the successes of the Jesuits whose North Shore work benefitted from the strong organization and personal commitment of the Order, their historical seventeenth-century contacts with the region, and especially the sophisticated interpretation of the gap between the sacred and the secular. Put briefly, the Jesuits – unlike the Protestant missionaries – were content that the Indians maintained their long-established lifestyle so long as they accepted baptism.<sup>38</sup>

These circumstances were beneficial to the efforts of individual Jesuits who, in their travels around Lake Superior, provided occasional religious services at the Pic. Pioneering work out of Sault Ste. Marie and Grand Portage was supplemented from 1838 by travellers from the new Wikwemikong Mission (on Manitoulin Island). From 1848 a thin but steady stream of men served the Pic out of the Jesuit mission at Fort William; meanwhile Father Auguste Kohler led the way for priests working the eastern half of Lake Superior by way of Sault Ste. Marie, by 1849 penetrating westward as far as the Pic where he baptized seven adults.<sup>39</sup> The Priests serving in these various locations travelled extensively: Father Fremiot, for instance, ranged from a base at Lake Nipigon to Long Lake, Pic, Michipicoten and elsewhere. Father Fremiot was succeeded by Father du Ranquet who spent a quarter-century at this arduous station.<sup>40</sup> Through untiring and increasingly structured efforts – du Ranquet began regular visits to the Pic River Mission no later than 1862 – and a comparative decline in Protestant activity, the Pic Indian population abandoned its Methodist leanings in favour of Roman Catholicism.

***Religious Orientation of Native Pic Population, 1861-1897<sup>41</sup>***

YEAR	TRADITIONAL	METHODIST	ROMAN CATHOLIC
1861	—	146	25
1871	184	48	132
1881	—	—	530
1891	—	—	133
1897	—	—	233

Easier access to the North Shore changed the nature of the Jesuit work by adding a non-native element, the so-called *apostolat chez les blancs*, with nearby Peninsula drawing some attention. But in the main, Jesuits like Fathers Hebert, Specht, Chambon and Gagnon continued their work with the native population. Change brought challenges: Father Specht noted in 1883 that the arrival of the CPR – while easing travel on the North Shore – coincided with a much increased incidence of disease among the Indian population along Superior’s North Shore. New physical and demographic circumstances had a local impact: Bishop Francois Jamot (1877) urged the construction of a church at the Pic. Progress was slow, but under the urging of Fathers Joseph Hebert and Fr. Gagnon a small building, though a year from completion, was used for Christmas services in 1880. Two large crosses were raised five years later.<sup>42</sup> With a church in place, the Pic mission assumed a larger role among the native missions of the North Shore, and the number of “converted” steadily increased: in 1879 the Fort William Mission claimed all local Indians converted. These conversions included the much-approved-of conversion of Protestant Band members to the Roman Catholic faith. In 1879 Fr. Hebert applauded the “return” of the Pic River Indians to Roman Catholicism; the new church seems to have been an important catalyst in this regard.<sup>43</sup>

But not all was well by Roman Catholic standards, for the CPR (and the liquor sellers and others who followed the line) brought continuing pressures to bear. Population movement was a further complication:

The heretofore prosperous mission of Le Pic has received a set-back by the division of its 250 Catholics in three groups. The Hudson’s Bay Post was removed four miles away to the CPR Station at Heron Bay, and was followed by a good portion of the congregation. Later another migration took place to another point on the CPR called Montizambert, of a number of hunters, to be closer to their hunting grounds. They form with their families a little group of 62 souls; they have their own cemetery, but no church as yet, and are much exposed to the perversion of an active Anglican minister. There is another small group of Indians at White River, who attend services with the Whites in their Church, and are visited in connection with Montizambert.<sup>44</sup>

At the Pic, change became inevitable: by 1888, the chapel was one of just two buildings at Pic post reported in a useable state.<sup>45</sup>

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the Jesuit influence was by now seen by the Indian Affairs Department as having a “wholesome influence” on the Band, a far cry from the attitudes of a half-century earlier. Approved of by the authorities, and providing some services which the band members welcomed, the St. Francois Xavier mission seemed an important factor in local society as the new century took firm hold. Indeed, a new church was built at Heron Bay just after the turn of the century under the watchful eye of Fr. Louis Napoleon Dugas.<sup>46</sup> But appearances could be deceiving: while all but one local Indian professed Catholicism, participation was somewhat spotty. Indeed, the “Status Animarum” for 1897 suggests that of some 233 persons in the Pic mission, only 136 were regular communicants.<sup>47</sup> Maintaining the local commitment to Roman Catholicism in the face of both spiritual competition and secular change would be a continuing challenge for the priests of the St. Francois Xavier mission.

### *To the Twentieth Century*

Change – the CPR brought it in with a rush – proved too much for the lifestyle which had been followed at the Pic for about a century. The Jesuits who served Pic were at once part of, and critics of, that change.<sup>48</sup> In 1886 Chief HBC Factor Peter Bell of Michipicoten, a veteran of the Lake, bemoaned the changes sweeping over the Indian people:

The Indians are gradually decreasing in numbers. The only change is, in their becoming more corrupted according to their intercourse with the *Whites* and the roving *Missinnaries* [sic] The only *true Indian* is the *Simon pure* (so called) *H. Bay Infidel*; who, has intercourse with the *Company alone*, and, only at *stated periods*.<sup>49</sup>

According to Bell’s seemingly bitter assessment, the Pic Indians were unlikely to flourish in the new atmosphere which intermingled the isolation of the North Shore with the “modern age.” While HBC officials alternately condemned the Pic Indians as a “bad lot” or worried that the Indians, “having their Church at the ‘Pic’ will stand by the old place,” practical considerations mandated a move, first to track side and, soon afterward, to Montizambert.<sup>50</sup> At that location, farther from the “white” settlements along the railway line – the local white population had fallen below fifty by century’s end – the practices of a century and the skills earned over a

millennia could continue for many years to come.

But many members of the Pic band opted to remain. For them the old ways were no longer sufficient; the *Annual Reports* of the Indian Affairs Department provide many illustrations. For instance, in 1879 Amos Wright praised the construction of a “commodious” schoolhouse at the Pic. The Indians, he noted, believed that “in due time the Government will furnish them with a schoolmaster.”<sup>51</sup> More physical improvements followed, with work concentrated some distance upriver from the Pic post. Several wood homes were constructed in 1881, and agriculture won a more prominent role. According to newly-appointed Indian Agent J.P. Donnelly:

The Pic River Indians have settled and built houses on the river bearing their name, and cleared and fenced fields averaging about five acres each, and now under root crop. The land is a rich, sandy loam and yields abundantly. Their improvements commence at the Hudson [sic] Bay Company’s post, about a half mile from the mouth of the Pic River, and extend three miles along that river, being about half a mile in width, bounded on the westerly side by a rocky mountain . . . They have a good school house, but as yet have been unable to obtain a teacher, as the allowance for salary is not sufficient.<sup>52</sup>

Funds from the Roman Catholic Church helped overcome the last; a first teacher arrived about October 1885. E.F. Dessaint was the first of many, for low wages and an isolated location saw a fairly rapid turnover in personnel at the Catholic school. Meanwhile, a newly-appointed Indian Special Constable attempted to counter the sale of alcohol by the CPR crews. The Indian Department, for its part, provided a “fine yoke of cattle” which was housed in a “fine stable” albeit obtained and built at the band’s expense. The cattle aided in hauling timber for more housing, and in the continued expansion of agricultural pursuits.<sup>53</sup> Thus, from the mind set of the Indian Affairs official, so different from that of the HBC man, the Pic Indians were on the correct course, “a thrifty, industrious class” who “from the various resources of which they avail themselves . . . manage to exist comfortably.” Indian Agent Donnelly credited the changes to the granting of a Reserve:

In 1884 your department gave them [the Pic Band] eight hundred acres of land along the east side of the Pic River at its mouth on Lake Superior. Prior to this they had built a few houses with small gardens,

their entire potato crop might be one hundred bushels. After their homes were secured to them, living on their own land was a stimulus to improve. They cleared more land and yearly put more under cultivation, and the settlement increased. Your department furnished them with a yoke of cattle, plough, harrow and other implements. In the winter they leave their families at home with plenty of fish and potatoes, etc., in their cellars and go to their hunting grounds and make some money by their fur catches. They keep their oxen well housed and fed, and this year will have nine hundred bushels of potatoes, six hundred of turnips, two hundred of carrots and fifty of beets, and are building six two story frame houses of a good size, and with fine cellars.<sup>54</sup>

Even as paternal Indian Affairs officials congratulated each other on the supposed demise of “old ways” – smaller and smaller fur returns seemed a case in point – they admitted that despite agriculture, pulpwood and tie cutting, blueberry harvesting, house construction, church and school, many problems remained unsolved. Twenty six members of the Band died of “la grippe” in 1891, leaving many families greatly impoverished and in need of assistance. Local economic options were very limited, because the passing of the CPR boom saw outside economic options dwindle. Some work, usually seasonal, could be found on the railway, in the bush camp or the fishery. Then, of course, there remained the continuing fur trade efforts of the independents, the HBC and, from about 1908, the Revillon Frères. So as the new century dawned, the Pic Indians found themselves drifting uncomfortably between two worlds, trying to use the skills borne of many generations, and belief structures ancient and new, to flourish in a world of a very different order.

### ***Endnotes***

1. *Christian Guardian*, 21 October 1840. Much of this paper is based on work done for my “The Fur Trade History of Pukaskwa National Park and Environs: The Nineteenth-Century Context” (Parks Canada Microfiche Report Series, Environment Canada, 1992). The aid of Parks Canada, and especially Ron Dale, is gratefully acknowledged.
2. The Pic was a traditional native location and a fur trade location since the latter half of the eighteenth century, located at the mouth of the Pic River midway on the north shore of Lake Superior. The modern community of

Marathon lies a few miles to the west.

3. The key source is R.G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (Cleveland: Burrows Bros, 1886-1901).
4. Father Gabriel Richard, for instance, visited the Sault in September 1799 (George Paré, *The Catholic Church in Detroit 1701-1788* [Detroit: Gabriel Richard Press, 1951; reprint, Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1983], chapter 25).
5. Grace Lee Nute, ed., *Documents Relating to Northwest Missions 1815-1827* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1942), 352. The Bishop again held service at the Pic on 6 September 1830 while on his way “to Canada” (John Swanston, “Pic Journal and Official Correspondence 1830,” B.162/a/4, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives [hereafter HBCA]). The Pic Post Journals note other missionaries making brief stops in 1827, 1831 (2), 1833, 1835, 1838 (2), 1841, and more often in the mid-1840s.
6. Sister Grace MacDonald, “Father Frances Pierz, Missionary,” *Minnesota History* 10 (June 1929): 109-111.
7. On local spiritual values see the fairly sympathetic George Keith, “Reply to a List of Questions to me by Governor Simpson,” 29 July 1830, B.129/b/5, HBCA. Father Dominique du Ranquet’s journals also detail various beliefs of the Lake Superior Ojibwa circa 1850-70 (See Yvette Majerus, ed., “La journal du Pere Dominique du Ranquet, s.j.,” *Documents historique de la Societe Historique du Nouvel-Ontario* 57 [1967]). On rare occasions even those involved questioned themselves. Thomas Hurlburt admitted casting aside tradition was not *always* good: traditional spirit bags contained “really good” medicine (“Extract of a Letter from the Rev. Thomas Hurlburt,” *Wesleyan Missionary Notices* 83 [March 1841], 451).
8. For more on Evans and Jacobs [Pahtahsega] see *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press), respectively vol. 7: 275-277, and vol. 11: 660-661. See also Biographical Folders, United Church Archives (hereafter UCA).
9. Evans already doubted Hurlburt: *en route* to Lake Superior he wrote: “Br. Hurlburt joined us the evening before we started – he is still a strong Mississippian, and would prefer going to the States to going up Lake Superior . . . I feel myself associated with a colleague whose heart is not as fully in the work as I could desire” (Rev. James Evans, Goderich, to Rev. Joseph Stinson, Toronto, 18 July 1838, in Fred Landon, “Letters of Rev. James Evans, Methodist Missionary, Written During His Journey to and residence in the Lake Superior Region, 1838-39,” *Ontario Historical Society Papers and*

*Records* 28 [1932]: 48).

10. Thomas Hurlburt was born in the Township of South August, Upper Canada; he married to Betsy Almira, eldest daughter of the Rev. Ezra Adams, and remarried during the 1860s. He began work for the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1828 among the Indian population at Muncey, Middlesex County, and during the 1830s worked at Saugeen and St. Clair prior to North Shore work. He moved on (seemingly confirming Evans' doubts) to Missouri through 1851, and then returned to work in Indian villages in Canada West. In 1854 he moved to Norway House remaining there until 1857, and then returned to Canada West. Hurlburt was noted for his linguistic skill, being able to work without interpreters. He continued his work with the Indian population until his accidental death at Little Current (*Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, X: 372-73; and Biographical Folder, UCA).
11. *Christian Guardian*, 15 May 1839; 24 October 1838; 17 April 1839; 15 May 1839; 3 July 1839; and 24 May 1843. See also letters from Cameron to Livingston, 21 February 1840, 25 May 1841, 1 June 1841, J.L. Livingston Letters, American Fur Company Papers, The Sault Ste. Marie Collection, Bayliss Library, Sault St. Marie, MI.
12. Thomas Hurlburt, Pic, to Missionary Society, 1 January 1840, in *Wesleyan Missionary Notices* 26 (February 1841).
13. Evans, for his part, praised the HBC as far superior to independent traders, who he characterized as “villainous fortune hunters” (Egerton R. Young, *The Apostle of the North: Rev. James Evans* [Toronto: W. Briggs, 1900], 74-75).
14. Evans reported 21 children baptized but the records show 23 children received his attention (“Baptismal Register for the Pic Mission, Lake Superior,” in James Evans Papers, Regional Collection, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario [hereafter UWO]).
15. On 9 April 1839 Hurlburt wrote Evans urging a mission at the Pic, arguing that “the Peak would be a comfortable situation for a man that had a family, as every necessary [sic] could be easily procured” (quoted in John MacLean, *James Evans, Inventor of the Syllabic System of the Cree Language* [Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms, 1890], 114). Ironically (or perhaps in Evans' view, predictably), Hurlburt was less than enamoured of the posting: as early as May 1841 he informed Evans of his desire for a posting in the Mississippi valley (Hurlburt, Pic River, to Evans [Norway House], 8 May 1841, James Evans Papers, UWO).
16. *Christian Guardian*, 6 January 1840; and 1 July 1840.

17. Pic Post Journal 1840/41, 12 April 1841, B.162/a/11, HBCA.
18. In 1841 the oldest child, a boy, was seven; his two sisters were five years and just seven months in age.
19. *Christian Guardian*, 3 July 1839, 18 March, 1 July, 21 October 1840, 4 August 1841, 30 July 1862, 2 March 1864 (obituary). Letter from Mrs. Hurlburt to parents, 20 December 1840, in J.E. Sanderson, *The First Century of Methodism in Canada* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1910), II: 23; and Thomas Hurlburt, Pic, to Rev. Robert Alder, General Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Society, 11 January 1841, Letter 2, Box 13, "Methodist Missions, Documents; Papers of the Methodist Missionary Society," MG 17 C1, National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC).
20. In his letters Hurlburt professed considerable satisfaction at being supported by the British rather than the Upper Canadian Missionary Society.
21. He provided two Native language services and one English service on Sundays, and at least two during the week, believing that constant effort and attention would aid the cause.
22. See Hurlburt's letters to the Wesleyan Mission Society, James Evans Collection, UWO; and *Christian Guardian*, 21 October 1840. On agriculture, see "Pic and Long Lake Report Outfit 1840," Pic Post Journal, B.162/a/11, HBCA.
23. Hurlburt to Robert Alder, General Secretary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, 11 January 1841, Letter 2; T. Hurlburt to the Secretaries of the Wesleyan Missions, London, 29 June 1841, Letter 49; and T. Hurlburt to the Secretaries of the Wesleyan Missions, London, 23 June 1841, Letter 50, Box 13, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Records, MG 17 C1, NAC. See also *Christian Guardian*, 21 October 1840.
24. Cumming, Pic Post, to Sir George Simpson, 23 February 1842, Jesuit Archives, Regis College, Toronto.
25. *Christian Guardian*, 28 September 1842; and 30 July 1862. See also Hurlburt to Evans, from the Pic, 11 August 1842, James Evans Collection, UWO.
26. Atickonse was probably taught English as well as the scriptures by Hurlburt. The re-established "Lake Superior North Shore" effort was initially based under the geographically unlikely "Owen's Sound District" before being established as a separate District in 1857 (*The Minutes of the Twelve Annual Conferences of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada from 1846-1857* [Toronto, 1863], 2: 75, 97).

27. *Christian Guardian*, 18 October 1854.
28. C. Vanduren, "Lake Superior North Shore Mission," *Christian Guardian*, 18 October 1854. As often was the case, the visit prompted "successes": four or more children were baptized while the visitors were at the Pic.
29. Sir George Simpson to Governor and Committee, Fort Garry, 29 June 1855, D.4/75 p.645a, HBCA. On Blaker's arrival see *Christian Guardian*, 18 October 1854.
30. *Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Wesleyan-Methodist Church in Canada (1854-55)*, xxx.
31. *Christian Guardian*, 1 September 1858.
32. *Christian Guardian*, 30 July 1862.
33. *Wesleyan Missionary Notices* (Canada Conference) 17 (November 1872), 271. See also *Christian Guardian*, 25 November 1863.
34. Canon J. Chance, *Our Work Among the Indians* (London: Heal & Fleming, 1898), 28-29; and Elizabeth Arthur, ed., *Thunderbay District, 1821-1892: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1973), 183, n. 22.
35. Charles Begg to J.S. Watt, Michipicoten, 1 May 1859, MU 1385, HBC General Box 2, Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO).
36. Rev. F. Frost, *Sketches of Indian Life* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1904), 112.
37. *Algoma Missionary News* 5 (1 May 1882): 27; 9 (1 September 1886): 34; 4 (June 1907): 67 (new series).
38. The Jesuit outlook is summarized in John Webster Grant, "*Moon of Wintertime*": *Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984), 81, 90-91.
39. Kohler was at the Pic for these baptisms on 15 June 1849 (see extract from letter, Kohler to du Ranquet in "Missions Outside Fort William: Notes taken from Register of Baptisms, etc.," typed copy of St. Andrew's Rectory files, Local History files, Pukaskwa National Park Library [hereafter PNP]).
40. Typically, in the 1860s, du Ranquet stayed at the Pic about a week during the summer (see "Missions Outside Fort William," St. Andrew's Rectory files, PNP; J. Paquin, "The Mission of the Immaculate Conception at Fort William Ontario," unpublished manuscript, PNP; Lorenzo Cadieux, "Fondateurs du Diocese du Sault-Sainte-Marie," Societe historique du Nouvel Ontario, *Document historique* 6 [1944]: 5-35; Lorenzo Cadieux, *Lettres des nouvelles*

*missions du Canada 1843-1852* [Montreal: Editions Bellarmine, 1973], 685, 691, 829, 885-86, 888; Lorenzo Cadieux, "Missionnaires jesuites au Nipigon," *La Societe Canadienne d'histoire de l'eglise Catholique, Rapport* [1957-8]: 91-101; Edward LeCompte, *Les Jesuites du Canada au XIXe siecle* [Montreal: Impr. du Messager, 1920], 1: 229-238; Chrysostomus Verwyst, *Life and Labours of Rt. Rev. Frederic Baraga* [Milwaukee: M.H. Wiltzius, 1900], 25, 259-260, 284, 384).

41. Compiled from the manuscript censuses and the "Status Animarum" of Saint Francois Xavier mission. The census figures include the non-native population, who after 1871 make up the "others." The senior HBC figures and their families were usually Presbyterian; later European populations more varied. The higher figure for 1881 reflects changes in the enumeration boundaries.
42. The church was 30 x 22. Fr. J. Hebert to Fr. Baudin, 4 April 1881, in "Correspondence concerning Pic River Mission," PNP. See also Paquin, "The Mission of the Immaculate Conception at Fort William Ontario," 76; *Recollections*, Ghislaine Lecours Collection, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa (hereafter CMC); and "Pic Post Expenses from 1874 to 1891," B.162/d/6, HBCA.
43. This discussion is based upon various sources, the most important of which are "Missions Outside Fort William," St. Andrew's Rectory files, PNP; and Paquin, "The Mission of the Immaculate Conception at Fort William Ontario."
44. The movement to the rail line, away from the river mouth, was well under way by 1889 (Paquin, "The Mission of the Immaculate Conception at Fort William Ontario," 94).
45. Peter W. Bell, Chapleau, to S.K. Parsons, Montreal, 30 May 1887, A.11/39, HBCA.
46. The old church was later converted to a school (Letterbook, Vol. 1, 22 March 1906, District Office V-5, Lakehead, Field Office Records, Sub Series V, Series C, Indian Affairs Records, RG 10, NAC).
47. By 1897 the Saint Francis Xavier mission included "Pic Indians" at the Pic, Montizambert (Mobert), Bremner, Amyot, and near White River. Dugas was succeeded by Fathers Lamarche, Belanger, Desautel, Desjardins, Couture and others. For local impressions on many of these priests see *Biographies*, Ghislaine Lecours Collection, CMC; Jean Boulton, *Pic, Pulp and People: A History of the Marathon District*, rev. ed. (Marathon: Township of Marathon, 1981), 123; Cadieux, "Fondateurs du Diocese du Sault-Sainte-Marie," 20-22; and John Marsh, "The Human History of the Pukaskwa Park Area 1650-

1975," unpublished manuscript, 1976, Parks Canada, 80-82. Notes in the "Status Animarum" reveal concerns about Protestant "interference" and the continuing hold of both traditional views and the newer, more damaging influence of alcohol. A copy is available in "Indian Genealogical Records," reel 11, MS 871, AO.

48. Among the early twentieth-century priests were the aforementioned L.N. Dugas (Songwebidung/strong voice), Prosper Lamarche (Komistatogus/strong talker) and Charles Belanger (Menoweedung/lovely voice.) Indians names from recollections held in Ghislaine Lecours Collection, CMC.
49. "Michipicoten Post District Reports"; 1 April 1886, HBCA B.129/e/15; emphasis is Bell's. For something of the same, in arguing that the onrush of "white" society was taking a heavy toll on the Indian population of Northern Ontario, see the reports of Stipendiary Magistrate Edward Borron (*Ontario Sessional Papers*).
50. P.W. Bell, Michipicoten Post Records, Report on District, 1 April 1886, B.129/e/15, HBCA. Gilbert Spence agreed with Bell ("Letters from the Pic," Spence to Bell, 7 February 1884, HBC General Box 4, AO).
51. Indian Affairs, 1879, 29.
52. Indian Affairs, 1883, 10.
53. Indian Affairs, 1884, 94; 1885, 94; 1885, 95; 1886, 21, 212; 1887, 288, 303. Later teachers included Angus McDonald (1887-1888), and J.A. Blais (1889-1891).
54. Indian Affairs, 1888, xxvii; 1894, 13.