

The Lac Ste Anne Pilgrimage

The Founding Years

First called Wakamne or God's Lake by the Nakota First Nations who live on the west end of the Lake and Manito Sahkahigan or Spirit Lake by the Cree, the lake was renamed Lac Ste Anne by Rev. Jean-Baptiste Thibault, the first Catholic priest to establish a mission on the site. The pilgrimage grounds had been sacred for generations of peoples and had become widely known as a place of healing. Aboriginal peoples camped on the site prior to contact with European fur traders and settlers.

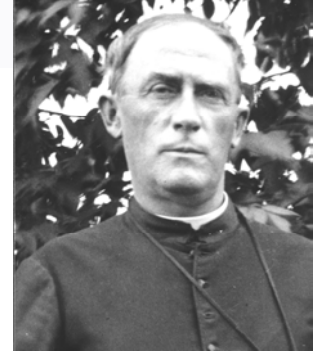
A permanent mission was established in **1844** by Rev. Thibault and Rev. Bourassa. Father Remas and Father Lacombe began the service by Oblate missionaries in **1855** and the Oblates have continuously served the area ever since.

Father Lestanc organized the first annual pilgrimage to St. Anne in July, **1889** after an inspirational visit to St Anne d'Aurey shrine in French Brittany the previous year. Over the years the Lac Ste Anne pilgrimage has continued on an annual basis and always during the week of July 26 (the feast day of St. Anne mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary). The grandmother figure has a very strong image within aboriginal culture.

In the early 1900's the pilgrimage was attended by about 1000 pilgrims each year. Many came from St. Albert and Morinville area.



From an oil painting by Miss Onesime Dorval. Shows the mission as it appeared around the time of the first pilgrimage.



Zephirin Lizee, OMI. From 1896-1928, he was pastor at Lac Ste. Anne and surrounding area. While at Lac Ste. Anne, he founded a Cree Journal in Syllabics.

Early Years - The Building Years

The pilgrimage was now a two day event. One day for Indians and Métis with the sermon preached in Cree and the second day for the white population with services in English, French and often vespers in Polish.

The white population included large groups from the French, English, Polish, and German communities and parishes.

Many priests attended the pilgrimage during these years. Upwards of 20 Oblate priests (most or all who spoke Cree) and often several Redemptorist and Diocesan priests as well.

Father Patrick Beaudry, OMI, a Cree-Métis priest from St. Albert and a gifted speaker was a familiar figure at LSA and from the time of his

ordination in 1902 to his death in 1947. In charge of ministry to Cree reserves in Northern Saskatchewan from 1929-1944. He also visited missionary posts along the Grand Trunk Railway preaching in French, English, and Cree while building churches and rectories. He was in great demand to preach retreats and missions.

Father Pierre Lebre, OMI, a contemporary of Father Beaudry 1906-1947 is known as Ste Anne's greatest apostle and builder, serving 15 years as director of the LSA parish as well as 33 years in the adjacent parish of Rivere Qui Barre and St. Albert.

In 1918 Father Beaudry, OMI, a frequent traveler on the Grand Trunk Railway, obtained a special train from Edmonton and other points. One day was set

1900-1950

aside for all other nationalities a special train brought a number of pilgrims from Edmonton (WCR 1925) and another train ran from St. Albert, Morinville and Legal. This train service continued until 1936. The trains brought over 2,000 pilgrims to LSA.

A road was built in 1926 making it possible to come by car. However, even into the 1940's, the road can turn to mud and become impassable.

The first sanctuary/shrine was built in 1925 and expanded in 1926.

In 1930 a hurricane demolished the building and LeBre again took on the tasks of rebuilding.

1932 - 1937 the Stations of the Cross are first built.



July 1933 - Father Philippot, OMI, saying mass in the second shrine.

In 1926, 2500 Indian and Métis plus 3000 white pilgrims attended the pilgrimage. Pilgrims come from Lac La Biche, Cold Lake, Lesser Slave Lake, Fort Vermillion, Wabasca, Grand Prairie, Ile a la Crosse, Peace River, Fond Du Lac, Wainwright, Southern Alberta, Onion Lake,

and Meadow Lake in Saskatchewan.

The pilgrims included Cree, Montagnais, Assiniboine, Chipewyans, Beaver, Sarcee, and Blackfoot. They traveled mostly by trail in a traditional manner. Often the journey to the pilgrimage and back home

took two months. A mass is held in Cree.

By the 1950's, pilgrims were starting to come from as far away as Wabasca, Frog Lake, Prince Albert, Beauval, Buffalo Narrows, Cluny, Cardston, Montana, California, and Southern Carolina.

The 1950's - 1970's

In order to bring even more pilgrims, it was decided to change the date of the pilgrimage for the white population from a Thursday to a Sunday afternoon.



April 1956 - Second Shrine - enclosed. Also new church and rectory.



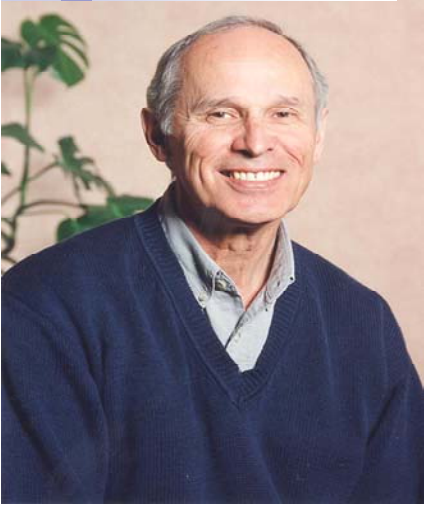
Father Patrick Mecredi, OMI. Métis priest who assisted at many pilgrimages from 1934-1980. He composed many Cree Hymns.

Father Patrice Mecredi, OMI, a Métis-Cree from Fort Chipewyan continued in the footsteps of Father Beaudry, visiting and preaching in the communities situated along the Northern Alberta Railway: Fort McMurray, Philomena, Conklin, and at LSA. A gifted speaker he

also composed Cree hymns and directed the choir at LSA.

During these decades, favoured by good roads, approximately 10,000 people attended the annual two day event. This was the result of the building of good roads in the 1950's.

The 1980's a Renewal Focus Site Expanded as Well as the



Father Jacque Johnson

Father Jacque Johnson assisted by Colin Levangie and Father Fred Groleau and Father Gilles Gauthier assumed the leadership of the pilgrimage. The program was changed from the two day to a five day event. The pilgrimage now opened on Saturday afternoon, programming was added to the Monday and Tuesday and the closing ceremony was added on the Thursday.

Cree, English, and French — the languages used from the very beginning, were enhanced by other aboriginal languages, added over the years as

participation became broader and wider. A new shrine which could seat up to 4000 people was built in the early 1980's.

Significant improvements were made to the grounds, sidewalks, washrooms. A shower building was added and new stations of the Cross were built with paintings by Alex Twinn.

A volunteer center (added in 1990) and a sleeping complex (added in 1997) for volunteers were brought from the closed Kitsamanito center in Grouard.



The Jubilee Year

The Oblates of Grandin under the leadership of its Provincial Father Camille Piche began in 1999 to seek new ways to operate the pilgrimage in full communion with the baptized lay Catholics. There were several discussions and dialogues about what that new partnership should look like.



Father Camille Piche

On July 26, 2000, in the year of the great Jubilee, the Missionary Oblates made a public declaration of intention to enter into a new partnership with the aboriginal people to

own, direct, and operate the Lac Ste Anne Pilgrimage. The Oblates invited individuals who share these beliefs and who supported the mission and vision of the LSA pilgrimage to ensure that the legacy and sacredness of the pilgrimage site continue for generations yet unborn.

To this end, lay individuals were added to the Board of the LSA Company to help organize and plan the annual pilgrimage.

The LSA Trust was established in July 2003. (A trust is a legal structure whereby the Trustees are obligated to manage the assets within the objects of the Trust documents). The Oblates transferred the lands and the operating company to this Trust. The Trust is composed of The Provincial of the Oblates (or his designate) the Archbishop of Edmonton, three first Nations Catholics (from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territory) and one Catholic Métis. The objects of the trust are to:

- Encourage and support aboriginal people to direct and operate the Pilgrimage
- To preserve, enhance, strengthen, and facilitate the spiritual nature of the Pilgrimage, its site and facilities
- To provide an environment where all peoples may express their Catholic faith
- To promote growth and healing in all stages of life
- To invite individuals, who share the beliefs and who support the mission and vision of the Pilgrimage, to ensure that the legacy and sacredness of the Pilgrimage site continues for generations yet unborn

The Board and the Trust have often been called a remarkable phenomenon by many aware of non-profit charitable governance structures. It is the only known Board in Canada where several First Nations, Métis and Catholic volunteer Board members and Trustees meet as equal partners toward a common event.

The Pilgrimage Today

One of the first actions of the Board and the Trust was to apply to have the pilgrimage grounds declared a **national historic site** by the Government of Canada. This approval occurred in 2004. A plaque unveiling is being planned for 2007.

Today, over 4,000 individuals camp on the site and up to 30,000 pilgrims attend the weekly events. The program includes three daily Eucharistic Services each hosted by different Communities. These communities usually include: The Lac Ste Anne parish, The Alexis and Paul Bands, Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples (national aboriginal parish – Edmonton), the Métis Nation of Alberta, The Blackfoot (rotated among the various parishes), the Cree of Northern Alberta (e.g. Wabasca), the Dogrib from the Northwest Territory and often an aboriginal community from Northern Saskatchewan.

Spiritual Director since 2002



Father Garry Laboucane, OMI

Father Garry, born in Red Deer, Alberta, was ordained in 1984 at Lac Ste. Anne. He is the Chair of Program member of the Lac Ste. Anne board. Previous to this, he was a pastor at Grouard, Joussard, St. Albert Parish, Sacred Heart Parish in Edmonton, and in Saddle Lake. He is currently the Pastor at St. Peter Celestin, Slave Lake. He is the oldest of six children in his family and has attended the Pilgrimage since he was a baby.

Plaque with the following text to be erected

Lac Ste Anne Pilgrimage National Historic Site

A long established annual meeting place for Aboriginal peoples, this lake became a Catholic pilgrimage site in the late 19th century. Since 1889, First Nations and Métis have travelled here in July to celebrate the Feast of Saint Anne. This Saint, widely revered as the mother of the Virgin Mary and the grandmother of Jesus, embodies the grandmother figure honoured in many Canadian Aboriginal societies. Lac Ste Anne is an important place of spiritual, cultural and social rejuvenation, central aspects of traditional summer gatherings for indigenous peoples.

Approved by the
Historic Sites & Monuments Board of Canada

Each year, we have chosen a theme for the Pilgrimage. Sometimes, the theme followed an idea from the Holy Father. For instance, when the late Pope John Paul II came to Canada for the World Youth Day, we used the theme of being the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World. That was the theme of WYD in Toronto. Since then, however, we are emphasizing one of the sacraments as a theme for each year. Two years ago, our theme was about the Sacrament of Baptism. Last summer, it was the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. This coming summer, it will be on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. So, when the seven years are up, we will have covered

The week long pilgrimage continues the historic peaceful tradition of Catholic peoples of many nations gathering on sacred ground to pray, visit, and renew their spirit.