

# Shrine at Waubaushene

On Site of Jesuit Massacre.

Subject of Much Discussion.—Letter in an Orillia Paper in which Rev. A. E. Jones, S. J., and other distinguished Scholars are Critized.—Refutation by the learned Archivist of St. Mary's College this City.

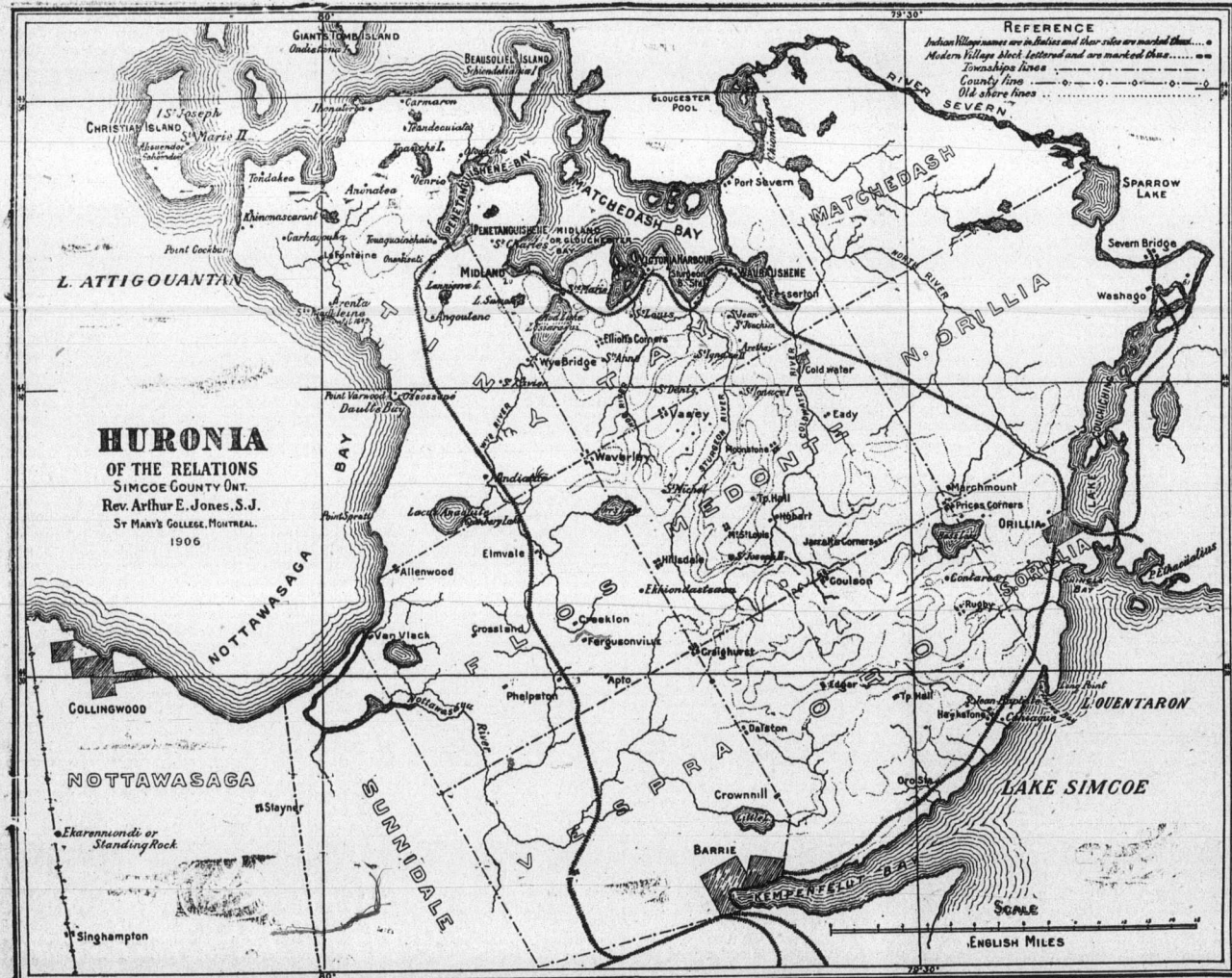
Editor of The Times:

Sir,—As your columns gave an account of the dedication of a memorial shrine near Waubaushene, built upon what was claimed to be the scene of the massacre of the two Jesuit missionaries, Brebeuf and Lallemant, in 1649; may I ask space to correct a mistake in regard to its position, which the wide announcement of the event will be apt to convey. Many persons are familiar from their school-days with the opening chapter of the history of Europeans in Ontario, particularly with the massacre of the missionaries, and would naturally be interested to know that some spot has been established as the place of the massacre without admitting of any doubt. As most of those who might have read the account of the shrine in the newspapers cannot get their knowledge of the locality and the circumstances at first hand, and

the patch in question no Indian village ever existed, and the Indian village claimed to have once been there had no existence outside the imagination of a few of the immediate promulgators of the theory. Pottery fragments, as also ashbeds, found on a patch of ground are good and reliable evidence that a village once was there, especially where Huron Indians dwelt. If either kind of evidence cannot be found (and such appears to be the case here), the enquirer had better go slowly with his theories about the spot ever having been the site of the habitations of red men. The thickness of such deposits at a real site depends chiefly on the length of time the village contained inhabitants. In some cases where the occupation extended over several years, these deposits attain to depths of a few feet. It is impossible that a site could be occupied by several hundred Indians for even a single week without leaving

ted by unauthenticated articles of anonymous authorship in the newspapers, in which the writers can escape the responsibility for their statements, and cannot be called upon individually to vouch for the correctness of what they allege. In some degree the reader has been at the mercy of such writers, because he has had no way of testing the claim for himself. It is not necessary to go further than the published statements of the first person who put himself on record in support of the site, viz, the Rev. A. E. Jones, S. J., of Montreal, to whom the "Identification" in question is said to be due in order to see the lack of substantiality in the case. In his lengthy article on "The subject he says: "I left ashbeds the most reliable indication of Indian occupation, out of court." Further he says: "We were so thoroughly convinced that the spot found was in reality St. Ignace II., that we did not even alight." And again he

bris and palisade lines, and the presence of anything of this kind is too ridiculous to merit any serious attention. It looks like a device of a theorist who foresees the collapse of his dream and prepares a refuge for his escape accordingly. Some five hundred authentic Huron sites, or perhaps more, large and small, exist between Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay, and all yield pottery fragments and other village debris in abundance, and there is no excuse for supposing St. Ignace was different from any others. I am aware of the further excuse or afterthought, that even if the shrine be not in the right place it has at any rate been erected as a memorial on general principles. The Memorial Church at Pontenaguishene had already been erected in this way, and there is no particular advantage to be gained by exploiting a forest of memorials, especially as the records left by the



are thus unable to judge of the merits of the published accounts (all of which claimed actual identification of the spot), there is all the greater need for asking the use of your columns to give some authentic facts.

It showed the practical sagacity of the Rev. Th. F. Laboureaux when he saw many years ago how the question rested upon individual opinions, and he set about building the Memorial Church at Pontenaguishene in a centre of population rather than out on some spot seven or eight miles from town, and always open to some doubt of its identity with the place of the massacre. No sooner did the Rev. Father Laboureaux through ill health abandon the scene of his arduous parish labors than the promoters of this new, and, as it were, rival memorial, began operations last summer. The position of the new shrine is on the east half of lot number four, concession seven, Township of Tay, and is claimed that it stands upon the site of the Indian village of history, called St. Ignace, where the missionaries suffered death. A few months before I examined the ground on the hill top where the shrine now stands, the land had been mostly ploughed for crop, and turned up to a depth of six or seven inches, thus exposing what it contained; so that when I saw it, conditions were favorable for showing some evidences of Indian occupation, had any such existed there. Under similar conditions pottery fragments and other debris never fail to appear on a veritable village site. But I could find no trace of any on the ground at this place, nor anything of the blackened soil which invariably is to be seen upon a place once occupied by Huron Indians. Not one sign was to be seen of any such remains, and I have not been able to find that anybody claims such evidence exists at the place. To state the case in more definite words, on

some traces behind. If any person knows of a single potsherd, or other evidence of Indian occupation, ever found on this patch, I hope, Mr. Editor, you will give a chance to such person to state his facts authentically over his own signature, so as to have the precise location and other items in his statement put on record for the perusal of those who are competent to judge them. Objects of spurious and mistaken origin, should they come into any evidence ever offered to support the claims of this imaginary site, cannot affect it, as such objects can always be readily detected (as to their make and alleged place of finding) by any one expert in such matters. It will not be sufficient to say there are sites in the neighborhood producing evidence of occupation. There is no site on the hill top where the shrine has been built none on the farm itself which was too hastily purchased in behalf of the Corporation of St. Mary's College at Montreal, and no site in its neighborhood corresponds with the description of St. Ignace given by the early Jesuit writers. The truth is, the breezy summit in question consists of boulder clay which holds moisture for a good part of the year and upon which Indians of any sort would not camp even if one would pay them to do so. They always selected lighter and drier soil, with natural drainage, for their villages. And besides, for inserting palisades which we know surrounded St. Ignace, the rude digging implements of the Hurons would make little or no impression on such tough soil. Their case would be very little better even if they had help from the French with European digging tools. The exploitation of this shrine has been advertised so much that the general newspaper reader may be disposed to take for granted as true what is utterly without proof or probability. This has been chiefly effec-

says, "We could not without serious damage to the standing grain attempt to reach the brow of the hill." These specimen statements, showing a total independence of inquiry, and of direct observation to prove his abstract "thesis," and avoiding any appeal to evidence of the usual village debris, actually appeared with many others of a like nature in a Government publication, which was issued to give "Observations" and to be an annual record of work in this line, viz., the Ontario Archaeological report for 1902. These statements alone, without saying anything of a multitude of others, in themselves are enough to arouse suspicions in the minds of right-thinking persons. Such was the proof he advanced to support the imagination. The sole point which led the "thorough convincing" above mentioned, was the shape of the ground, but even in this particular quite mistakenly, for the term used by Ragueneau,—"fosse profonde"—has a distinct reference to a channel or trench surrounding the village, and not to a "peak" in relief, or flat-topped eminence, such as the one he chose. I am well aware Rev. Father Jones suggested that the occupation of St. Ignace was too short to leave any traces of ashbeds behind. This unwarrantable claim is too absurd to need dwelling upon at any length. It is not stated anywhere how old the Indian village was, yet we know it was old enough to have a palisading around it, and traces of the palisade lines ought to be easily discoverable at the present day, if they really existed there, but they do not. At other palisaded village sites of the Hurons in the same township, the palisade lines are easily traceable at this day, and they could be traced here also if it were not an imaginary sight. Even if the village were no older than the beginning of the winter, there would be village de-

early Jesuits distinctly tell us (according to any rational interpretation of their words) that the position of St. Ignace was some three miles nearer than this place to the Fort of St. Marie, on the Wye, and a site at the distance they give answers their descriptions very well. The site of the shrine on the Mohawk town site at which Father Jogues suffered (near Auriesville, N.Y.) was carefully explored by competent men, and its identity established only after the most diligent scrutiny, before the memorial shrine was erected upon it. In the recent case near Waubaushene no person of any experience in archaeological matters endorsed the choice, and more than one warned against being too rash. The article by Mr. Osborne in the Orillia Packet of December 10, 1908, had the compliment paid to it of going unanswered. This is merely a plea in plain language for historic truth and the use of common sense in matters of archaeological enquiry, and is no attack upon a religious order which has never had any ground for complaint of unfair treatment at my hands. I am quite sure that none of the clergymen who took part in the dedication of the shrine last August, by which they set upon it the seal of their endorsement and allowed a broadcast advertising of it in the public press, would willingly misrepresent historical facts if they knew it. I have enough confidence in the reasonableness of these men to believe that they will ultimately square themselves with facts when they come to realize what these are. For the present they have been woefully misled. And even if they do not ultimately realize the facts, the public generally or, at least, all right-thinking men will be sure to do so. No blame can rightly be given to anyone who merely blunders and

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