

BULLETIN OF THE SIMCOE COUNTY PIONEER AND
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November, 1911

HISTORIC SITES OF TAY

By

Andrew F. Hunter, M. A.

Reprinted from the Author's "Notes on Sites of Huron Villages
in Tay," with additions.

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PRESS OF BARRIE "SATURDAY MORNING"

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Present Appearance of the Environs of Ste. Marie.

(Looking across the Wye River).

The illustration shows the outlet of the main trench in the river bank, at the extreme left.

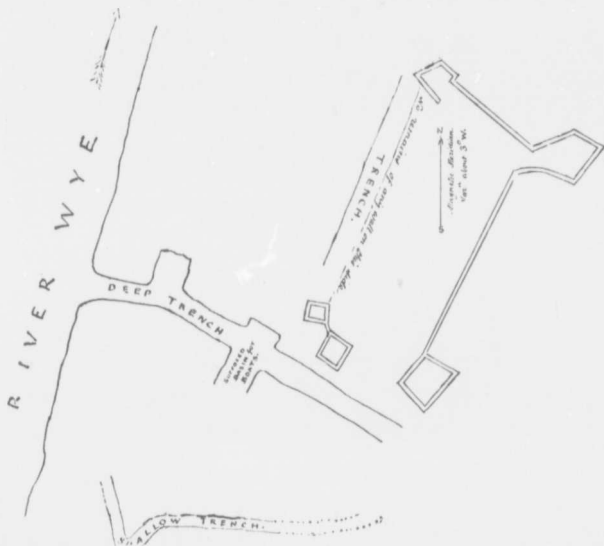
STE. MARIE ON THE WYE.

The remains of Ste. Marie, the fortified mission built by the Jesuits in 1639 and occupied by them for ten years, are on lot 16, concession 3, of Tay. Near the ruin flows the Wye River, about 100 yards in width but about twelve feet lower than when it filled the empty moats or trenches which may still be seen. This fort is the most noteworthy object of historic interest in Simcoe County, though in its present crumbled condition it is only a ruin of a ruin. Indeed, it is the oldest stone ruin (of European construction) in America, because, while the native ruins in Central America and Mexico may antedate Ste. Marie, no other building of white men does.

One of the features of the ruin is the system of artificial trenches made for the protection of the place when it was in use, or what the English translator of Isaiah would call its "brooks of defence." The fort stands on a corner formed by two of these trenches, one branching off at

a right angle from the main trench. These may still be seen, although they show less clearly than when the first settlers came, especially the parts at the southwest corner of the fort. It was at this corner where one could see the archway or passage for canoes and for getting water, of which the old settlers used to speak, but it has long since collapsed.

A plan of Ste. Marie in 1852 by the Rev. Geo. Hallen, furnishes the accompanying engraving made by photographic methods. This will be of more value to students of history than any plan in recent years, as the



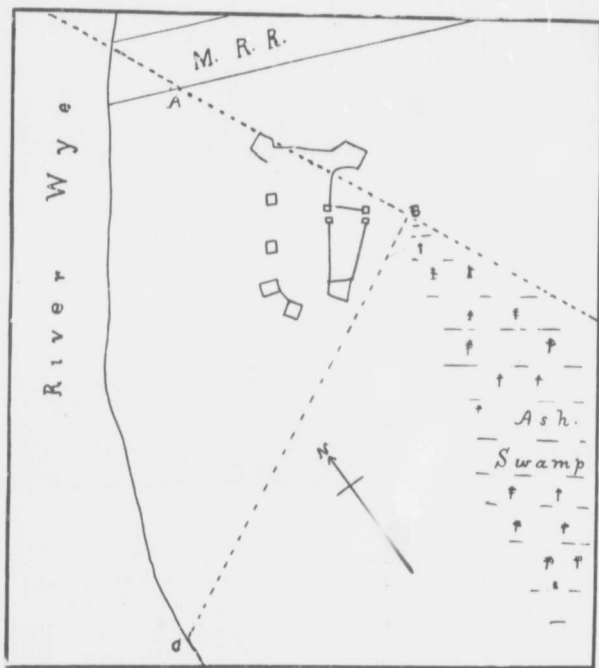
Plan of Ste. Marie on the Wye. By the Rev. Geo. Hallen (in 1852).

present condition of the fort scarcely admits of the making of a sketch showing its original profile. Although the small tracing of the fort in the Rev. Felix Martin's Montreal edition of Bressani's Relation was copied from this plan of Mr. Hallen's, it lacks a number of the details of this original sketch, especially the moats.

On the original sketch Mr. Hallen wrote a note that is worthy of attention—"In the (easterly) Bastion is an instance of the flank of a bastion being curved with its convexity towards the interior of the work, instead of being rectilinear." The original sketch also furnishes us with means for the measurement of the dimensions of the fort. The curtains on the two sides fortified by stonework are approximately 110 and 57 feet in length; while the extreme measurements in straight lines along the same sides (i. e. including the widest reaches of the bastions) are about 165 and 110 feet. The distance from the fort to the river is 44 yards. The trench along the southerly end does not continue in this diagram beyond the

stonework, but it did actually continue in a southerly direction to Mud Lake, thus giving double access for water coming into the trenches.

As every observer records features that do not "strike" another observer, it may be interesting to compare Mr. Halten's plan with one made by Peter Burnet, P. L. Surveyor, who sketched the place in 1876. The latter



Plan of Ste. Marie on the Wye. (1876)

By Peter Burnet, P. L. Surveyor.

*AB is the line between east and west halves of Lot 16.
BC is the northerly line of demarcation of an acre in the west half, having a separate ownership.*

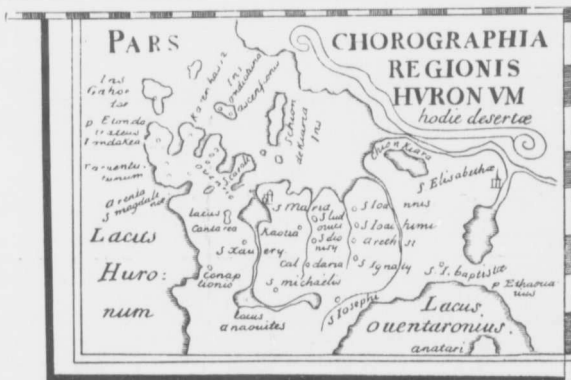
plan includes all the environs on the west half of lot 16, but we reproduce therefrom only the fortification itself. The structures marked by Mr. Burnet along the western side are still extant.

The visitor to Ste. Marie at the present day will observe how the trenches are now entirely destitute of water, the river being many feet below, and incapable of filling them. On the day the writer first measured the amount of this drop (September 13, 1901), it was ten feet from the

surface of the river to the top of the bank, where the main trench enters. The brow of this bank has probably suffered from denudation, and the fort itself is now more than forty yards distant on slightly higher ground. So it would appear to require at least twelve feet of a rise to completely fill all the empty trenches.

The surface of the Wye in this part of its course, viz., between Mud Lake and Georgian Bay, a distance of about a mile, has the same highth as that of the Bay itself. When the surface of the water rises or falls with any change in the direction of the wind (and here the wind exercises a great influence over the highth of the water in the long arms of Matchedash Bay), there arises a current which flows inward or outward according to circumstances, and when in flow it is here called a "tide." Accordingly, our estimate of the fall of the river by twelve feet since the abandonment of the fort in 1649, as shown by the empty trenches, also holds good of the surface of Georgian Bay itself. The value of the ruin as a gauge of the water level is thus considerable, and it adds emphasis to the need for its careful preservation. One can obtain similar measurement of the drop of the water from Ste. Marie on Christian Island, which was also upon the water's edge in 1649, but is now quite high above the present shore.

It seems this lowering of the water did not occur suddenly. Fully one-third of it took place within the nineteenth century, and persons who lived until recent years, and who remembered the time when the Georgian Bay was above four feet higher, have verified the fall independently of each other. Due allowance is necessary for the direction of the wind and for the time of the year at which the observation is made, as it appears to be subject to greater fluctuations with the seasons since the surrounding land was cleared. But, making every allowance, the evidence establishes a distinct decline of the level within the nineteenth century. Since Bayfield's survey of Georgian Bay, about 1820, the fall of level to the present time has been four feet six inches, as various portions of land, which were islands then, are now at all seasons parts of the mainland.



The Huron Map in Father DuCreux's "Historia Canadensis" (1660).

The higher shore line of 1649 would be, in many places, more deeply serrated with long bays than the present shoreline; and this circumstance gives an explanation of some features on the map of this territory in the Rev. Father Ducreux's History which represents the shores as they were about 1640-5, but the map itself was not issued until 1660. (The reproduction of this map, shown herewith is an exact copy from the original by photographic methods). It is really a map of the old shore line, and it would be difficult to identify it with the existing shore line of to-day, even after making due allowance for the lack of any actual survey by its makers. There is a wide discrepancy, for example, between the long Coldwater Bay, as shown on the map, and the actual Bay on maps of our day. (See engraving).

As descriptions of Ste. Marie have often appeared in books and pamphlets, a list of some of these will perhaps be useful, with a few bibliographical notes for the guidance of those who may wish to pursue the subject further. The description by the Rev. Felix Martin, published in his *Life of Jogues* and in his various other writings, is the earliest account and is worthy of the reader's attention, as he visited the fort in 1855, when it was in a more complete condition than it is in at present.

Bibliography of Ste. Marie.

Adam, G. Mercer. Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes. (Picturesque Canada, Vol. II, Toronto, 1882).

At page 582 there is an account of Fort Ste. Marie on the Wye and the Hurons.

Bain, Jas., Jr. The present condition of the old French Fort at Ste. Marie. (Proc. Canad. Institute, 3rd Series, Vol. III., 1886, p.p. 278-279).

This contains the substance of a paper read before the Institute in 1885.

Boyle, David. Ste. Marie. (Fourth Archaeological Report, Toronto, 1891).

This was issued as an Appendix to the Report of the Minister of Education for Ontario. The notes on Ste. Marie at pages 18 and 19 deal chiefly with its condition in 1890-1.

Bressani, Rev. F. J. Relation Abregee. (Montreal, 1852. Edited by the Rev. Felix Martin).

This is a French translation from the Italian of Father Bressani's "Breve Relazione." It has various references to Ste. Marie, and contains also at page 333 some notes on the ruins by the editor, with a small plan of the fort.

Charlevoix, Francois X de. History and General Description of New France.

In Book VII. there is a description of Ste. Marie.

Harvey, Arthur and Alan Macdougall. Forty-third Annual Report of the Canad. Institute. Transactions, 4th series, Vol. III., 1892.

This contains a reference to the excursion to Ste. Marie by the Canadian Institute on Sept. 28, 1891, and mentions some features of the fort, including the "water gate," recognized during the visit.

Hunter, A. F. Ste. Marie on the Wye. (Burrows' Reissue of the Jesuit Relations, 73 vols. Cleveland, 1896-1901).

Vol. 19 contains a note on Ste. Marie, at page 269, with sketch map at page 270.

James, C. C. The Downfall of the Huron Nation. Trans. of the Royal Society of Canada, Vol. 12, (1906).

This has the photo of Ste. Marie made by Dr. W. H. Ellis in 1891. Also a reprint (p. 343) from Rev. F. Martin's notes on the fort in "Autobiographie du R. P. Chaumonot."

Jones, Rev. A. E. Sandake Ehen, or Old Huronia. (Fifth Report of the Ontario Bureau of Archives, 1908).

This contains (p.p. 9-11) Rev. Felix Martin's description (from the MS.) of Ste. Marie in 1855, with the colored sketch.

Lalement, Jerome. Relation de ce qui s'est passe en la mission des Hurons (June, 1639 to June, 1640).

Chap. IV. contains an account of the founding of Ste. Marie.

Martin, Rev. Felix. Life of Jogues. (Second edition, Paris, 1876).

Appendix A. contains a carefully written description of Ste. Marie, which Father Martin visited in 1855.

Parkman, Francis. Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century. (Various editions).

In Chap. 25 there is a description of Ste. Marie, based mainly upon the Jesuit Relations.

Ragueneau, Rev. Paul. Relation de ce qui s'est passe en la Mission des Peres de la Compagnie de Jesus Aux Hurons, es annees 1648, et 1649.

This contains accounts of the destruction of the Huron villages by the Iroquois, with numerous references to Ste. Marie.

ST. LOUIS IDENTIFIED WITH THE McDERMITT VILLAGE SITE.

Our next step in these Notes will be to throw some light upon the positions of the Jesuit missions among the Hurons, of which Ste. Marie was the centre; more particularly to find the village they called St. Louis, where the missionaries, Jean de Brebeuf and Gabriel Lalemant, were captured, and also the other called St. Ignace, where they were put to death.

At a part of the farm of John McDermitt (lot 15, concession 4) there are accumulations of blackened soil and ashbeds, mixed with Huron relics. This village site is near the line between the west and east halves of the lot, but a little way into the east half. It is situated on a conspicuous hill, almost surrounded by low ground, (see illustration); and on account of occupying such a position, it is evident (*prima facie*) that the village had been palisaded. But in addition to this evidence, the light iron crowbar I have usually employed in this work, readily showed the position of the palisade line around the village site. From this place to Ste. Marie the distance is about a mile. Just west of the site rise some springs from which the village had a plentiful supply of fresh water. A workman, while ploughing on the site some years ago, found an earthen pot (which broke on being disturbed), and in it were six iron tomahawks. Northward from the village there was a graveyard containing a few burials, which, so far as observed, were of the isolated or single type. Among these, one of the workmen found the skeleton of a person of large proportions. Angus McDermitt, brother of the owner, counted twenty lodges at the site, the ashbeds of the camp-fires being in some places as much as three feet in thickness when the forest was first cleared away.

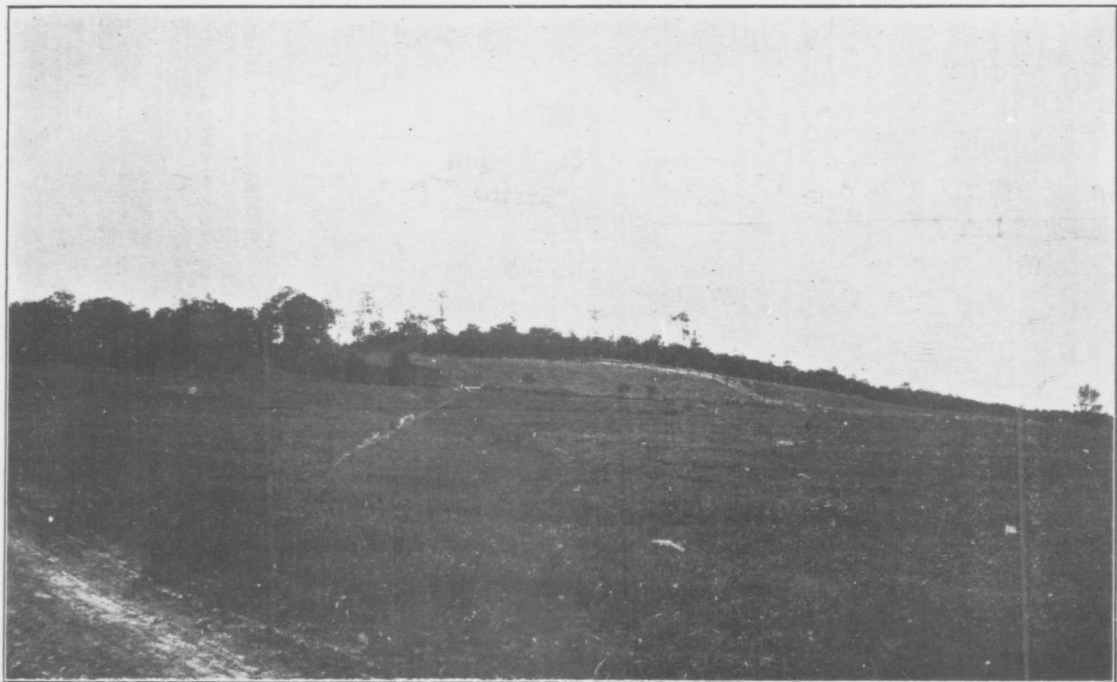
It is most probable the site is that of St. Louis, one of the Huron villages taken by the Iroquois, March 16, 1649,—the one at which they captured the Jesuit missionaries, Brebeuf and Lalemant, and thence took them to St. Ignace, where they put them to death. Among the considerations that lead up to this conclusion are the following:—

(a) The size, as reckoned by Mr. McDermitt when it was freshly cultivated, viz., twenty lodges, (and counting the usual number of four or five families to every lodge), would give nearly the size of St. Louis as recorded by the Rev. Paul Ragueneau, who wrote the first account of it. According to that chronicler, about 500 Hurons had forsaken the place at the first alarm, leaving 80 warriors only to fight the Iroquois.

(b) It was on the only route from Ste. Marie eastward to Victoria Harbor, which was the centre of the Huron population then living in this locality, as remains clearly show. The ground immediately south of this trail was, in Huron times, unsuitable for much travelling, its surface consisting of hummocks surrounded by thickets and by small streams flowing into Mud Lake. And so far as this southerly ground has been examined, it yields no traces of villages or trails.

(c) The relics found at this site are of such kinds (French iron tomahawks, etc.,) as to show that this was a village of the very latest period of the Huron occupation of the district. The existence of palisading also tends to prove the same, because, farther back in the country, the Huron villages of earlier date seldom had palisades. Of all the fortified villages belonging to that latest period yet found, this is the nearest to Ste. Marie.

(d) As to the distance of St. Louis from Ste. Marie, a little apparent



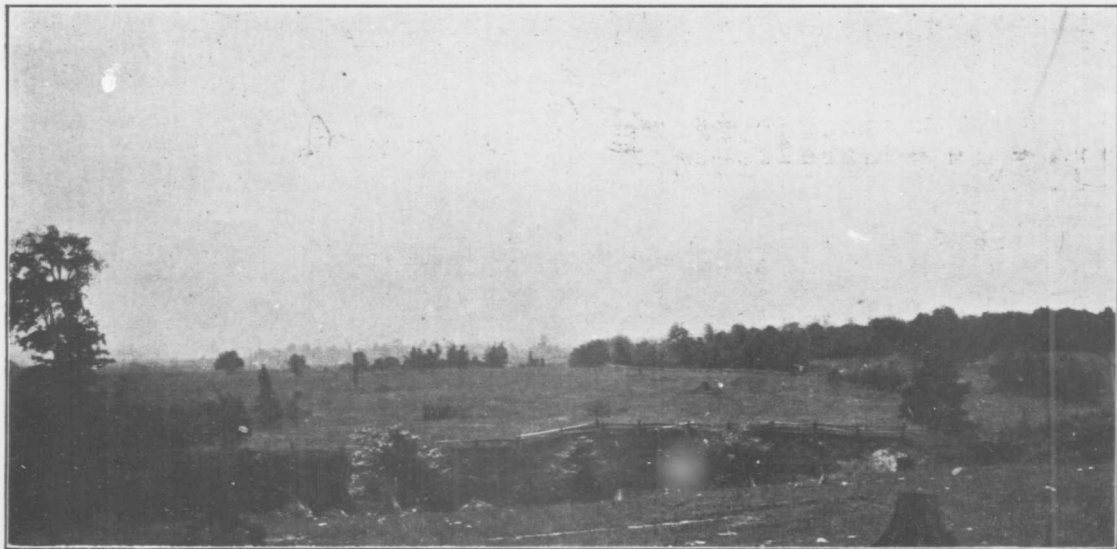
The Probable Site of St. Louis.

On the hill in this illustration are the remains of the palisaded Huron village.

diversity in the evidence furnished by the records confronts us, but it is apparent rather than real. The Rev. Paul Ragueneau (*Relation*, 1649) gives us the distance as not more than a league (2.42 English miles); but Christophe Regnaut explicitly makes it much less. (See Letter, Canadian Archives Report, 1884). The latter writer uses the name "St. Ignace" (really applied to the mission among all these villages, as Ragueneau also tells us) for the village to which the two missionaries had set out, and does not mention the name "St. Louis." Regnaut gives the distance as "about a short quarter of a league" from Ste. Marie. The site under consideration, therefore, is not at variance with the conditions prescribed by either of these writers, or by the Rev. F. J. Bressani, who (in his "Breve Relatione") says the distance was not more than two Italian miles from Ste. Marie. (An Italian mile was 132 yards less than our English mile). The Rev. A. E. Jones, S. J., disputes the testimony of Regnaut as to this distance, on the ground that his narrative is dated 29 years afterward, when he was 65 years old, and so perhaps liable to lapse of memory. (*Ontario Archaeological Report*, 1902, p. 98). I do not see that it is necessary to contradict Regnaut's plain, honest statement; he is entitled to a fair hearing and a fair interpretation of his words. And the significant fact remains of the three men (Ragueneau, Bressani and Regnaut) who mention the distance of the nearest village from Ste. Marie, Regnaut was the only one who actually travelled over the ground itself at the time, viz., a few hours after the massacre.

(e) Wherever situated, it is a fact that St. Louis could be seen from Ste. Marie, as all the writers agree in stating that those in the fort could see the burning of the village. This furnishes a well-authenticated test. From observations made upon the ground, I found that, looking eastward from Ste. Marie, the only place where spectators could see a fire in the distance was at this very site. A small tract of elevated ground, rising out of evergreen thickets, closes the view from Ste. Marie toward the southeast, and disqualifies the sites farther along the trail at the head of Victoria Harbor from being St. Louis.

Port McNicoll, the new eastern terminal of the C. P. R. on Georgian Bay, lies about a mile north-eastward from this village site.

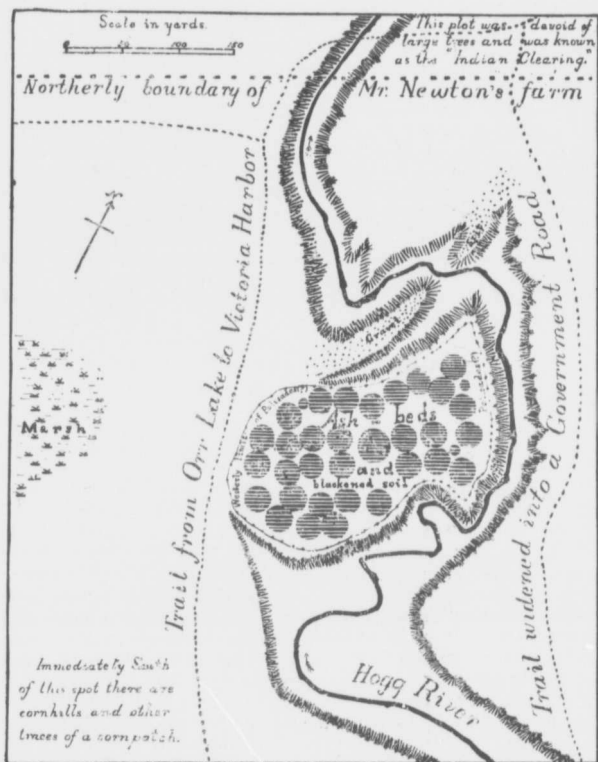


The Probable Site of St. Ignace.

On the plot of ground in this loop of the Hogg River is the site of the palisaded Huron village.

ST. IGNACE IDENTIFIED WITH THE NEWTON VILLAGE SITE.

The position of St. Ignace has been an open question for many years. As at least half a dozen places had been suggested, the writer, in 1899, visited all the Huron village sites within reasonable distance of Ste. Marie



The probable site of St. Ignace and its environs.

on the Wye, and after carefully considering the question in all its bearings, arrived at a conclusion substantially as follows.

The physical features of the land governed the courses of the forest trails of the Hurons. The continuous high ground, along which trails could pass, makes its nearest approach to the Georgian Bay at the head of Victoria Harbor. Here then was the commercial centre of the Hurons,

as it has also been of later Algonquin tribes. In other words, the physical features of the district were such that Victoria Harbor naturally became the focus or centre of the Huron population, the trails radiating from the head of the harbor in several directions inland along the higher ground. It appears to have been this very centre, the heart of the Huron confederacy, the Iroquois attacked in 1649; otherwise the Hurons would not so precipitately have deserted their country immediately after the capture of only two of their villages, had these villages been of the ordinary unfortified kinds. (It should be borne in mind that Ducreux's map is a guide for the position of the earlier St. Ignace and not that of 1649).

Through the farm of Chas. E. Newton, Esq., the west half of lot 44, concession 6, Tay, the Hogg River has cut a deep path in the old lake-bed deposits to a depth varying from fifteen to twenty feet. In this part of its course the river makes a loop something like the letter U, which encloses an ideal spot for a village requiring means of defence. (See illustration)

Hurons selected for one of their villages this plot of ground containing about five acres in the bend of the river. This ground is covered with ashbeds and blackened soil, mixed with relics. The latter consisted of iron tomahawks, knives, pieces of metal cut out of worn-out brass kettles, and pottery fragments in endless quantities. All these relics show that the site was one of those occupied down to the very latest period of the Huron occupation of the district. There are empty caches at the site, and a pottery just south of it, where the clay is of such good quality for plastic work, that Mr. Newton experimented successfully in making terra cotta from it. What appears to have been "the village corn-patch" occurs southward near a house on lot 10, and it may have extended as far north as the site itself, although the cultivated ground no longer shows any traces of the corn hills. From this site to Ste. Marie the distance is $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

A trail comes from Orr Lake by the way of Waverley, and just before reaching this village site divides into two strands, one passing down each side of the river. These meet again at the "Indian Clearing" further north on lot 12, as the diagram shows. The trail down the east side as far as the "Indian Clearing," and thence to the mouth of the river, was widened many years ago into a Government timber road, but is now disused. It is probable this so-called "Indian Clearing" is due to the gravelly soil, which would not permit of the growth of trees, rather than to actual clearing by the aborigines. But whatever its origin it was certainly a resort of modern Algonquin Indians, who followed pretty closely the paths of their predecessors, the Hurons.

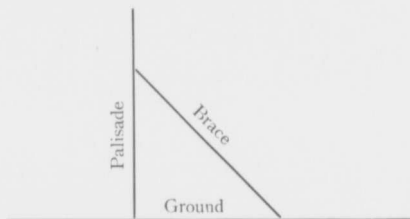
It is most probable this site in the river's bend was St. Ignace, the Huron village captured by the Iroquois in the early morning of March 16, 1649, and the place to which they brought as captives Fathers Brebeuf and Lalemant a few hours later, and there tortured them to death. Its distance from Ste. Marie coincides pretty well with the records, all the writers agreeing that it was less than two leagues (five miles), and about a league from St. Louis, which agrees well with the site at Mr. McDermitt's. But the strongest evidence is in the configuration of the ground. The Rev. P. Ragueneau's account of the place (Relation, 1649) suggests a plan of the village and its surroundings, and tells us beforehand what appearances we may expect to find there. He says:—

"It was surrounded by a palisade of posts from fifteen to sixteen feet

high, and by a deep trench (fosse), with which Nature had powerfully strengthened the place on three sides, a small space alone remaining weaker than the others. It was through that part the enemy forced his entrance."

While this description of St. Ignace will suit in some measure almost any palisaded site, because these were as a rule placed on a spur of land, the completeness of its fortification by a trench, effected by Nature in this case, was such as to attract the attention of the chronicler who wrote the description just quoted. (As the destruction of the place occurred in March, when the Hogg River would be covered with ice, its own existence in the gully or trench would not be conspicuous enough to attract a recorder's attention). After a diligent search through all the sites of the locality, I can find none that so exactly agrees with this description of St. Ignace as this site on Mr. Newton's farm.

LATER EXAMINATION OF THIS SITE. The foregoing account is substantially the one the writer prepared after his examination of the site in 1899 and published a few months later. Since that time he has



Cross Section of Palisade and Bracing.

given further attention to the site at various times, and has become even more firmly convinced that it was St. Ignace. The following particulars relate to evidence from examinations since the first account appeared.

At different times, when re-examining the palisading I used a light iron crow-bar (three-quarter inch, four feet long), driving it into the ground repeatedly along numerous lines of tests selected from where the ashbeds and signs of habitation ceased, and passing outward across the margin of the village site. At every stroke the crowbar sinks to the depth of the plowing, but along every line of tests made in this way it shows two places with softer subsoil, by sinking to much greater depths. In most cases these are about five feet apart, and occur at the palisade line, the outer being the palisade and the inner the feet of its line of braces. The spade always shows disturbance in the color of the subsoil wherever the crowbar indicates the line by sinking deeper than usual. The silted sand on this site was good material for the insertion of palisades by aboriginal methods, but not good for preserving traces of the palisades themselves, being too porous. Some traces, however, of the palisading are left, in the blackening of the sandy subsoil below the plow's depth.

A conspicuous refuse heap toward the northwest quarter of the site received our attention. This yielded the usual ashes mingled with potshreds and waste of Huron food supplies, especially animal bones, and teeth, clam shells, etc. But the significant feature was an abundance of traces of bark in the upper part of the heap, evidently debris from a collapsed bark cabin, and in this particular it differed from the former ordinary refuse heaps of my experiences.

On April 28, 1902, the plow turned up a small bronze medal or token at a place near the easterly end of the site. On one side this bears the German motto "Gotthsgaben sol man loh." (God's gifts ought to be praised). The other side has the name of Hanns Krauwinkel, with the letters, "IN NU," i.e. "In Nuremberg," which was famous for its manufactures in bronze, the material in the medal itself. It was not easy to obtain information of the maker, Hanns Krauwinkel, in Canadian libraries, but the writer was able to get a few particulars about him through the courtesy of Dr. Wilberforce Eames of the New York Public Library and Mr. Lyman H. Low, a specialist on coins and medals, 287 Fourth Ave., New York. The medal is what is called a counter, and Hanns Krauwinkel was a maker of these at Nuremberg during the period from 1580 to 1604. These counters were restruck at later periods, in thinner issues, to which class this thin specimen belongs.

Within the northerly side of the palisade, there is a line of whitish substance mixed with the soil, though now faintly defined from having been disturbed by the plough. A fragment of this crumbled deposit, when examined by a chemist at my request, proved to be old mortar. This line of deposit resembles the shape of the letter L as if from two sides of a cabin, with lengths of about 10 feet and 15 feet, the angle of the letter pointing in a northerly direction. Its position is on the highest rise of this somewhat flat site, and at its north side. As the Indians did not make and use mortar, this was doubtless the work of the Frenchmen. (The records contain evidence that the Jesuits maintained a lodge of some kind at St. Ignace.)

Indications, such as the foregoing, tend to show that this was St. Ignace. The Rev. A. E. Jones selected a spot about three miles farther from Ste. Marie since I fixed upon this Newton site, but the more distant place has not even yielded any indications of a Huron village site of any kind, as I have pointed out elsewhere. The proof of the question rests not so much upon theoretical assertions or claims, as upon what evidence the ground itself furnishes. And the authentic evidences at the Newton site, as furnished by the use of the spade, have been gradually increasing.