In the village of Harbor Springs there is a Catholic church and school. The grounds are fenced and children can frequently be seen at play there. They are playing, working, living on the spot where some one-hundred thirty-five years ago the flock of the Indian Mission of L'Arbre Croche gathered each day for morning prayers. And that doesn't mean mid-morning--it means the crack of dawn. The bell was tolled each day at 5:00 A.M.

The L'Arbre Croche Indian Mission was established at that site in Harbor Springs in 1829 by Father Peter Dejean. He was followed two years later by Father Frederic Baraga, who, from the time of his first arrival among the Indians in 1831 to the end of his life, directed his considerable talents to the spiritual well-being of the Michigan Indians. Thanks to the Bishop Baraga Association, a great deal of source material is being collected which will help provide accurate data on this and other missions which Bishop Baraga established or supervised. When all the information regarding the L'Arbre Croche Mission has been unearthed and studied it is the opinion of the Bishop Baraga Association that "it may be regarded as the greatest Indian mission of all time."

L'Arbre Croche was Frederick Baraga's first mission among the Indians of North America. He was a schoolboy in Austria at the time Napoleon was trying to conquer the world. War did not interest him. He kept right on with his classical studies plus five years of Law at the University of Vienna and two more of Theology at the Seminary of Ljubljana. In 1823, at the age of 26, he received the Holy Order of Priesthood and in 1830 left his comfortable situation at home to bring the Catholic religion to the Indians of North America. He first reported to the Bishop in Cincinnati who had charge of the Michigan Territory but came to L'Arbre Croche from there as soon as navigation opened. He arrived on May 28, 1831.

The Belgian priest, Father Dejean, had left him a church, a presbytery and a school but they were only covered with bark and were already

out of repair. On August 22, 1831 Father Baraga wrote to his home organization, the Leopoldine Foundation of Vienna, in part as follows:

"Our church, the schoolhouse and my house are all of wood, roofed with tree bark. All of this the Indians have made themselves; one can imagine how it looks. When it rains I must spread out my overcoat over my table on which I have my books and papers, in order to protect them from an inundation; over my bed I spread my umbrella, and I save myself as well as I can, in a corner of my small room where it drips the least; nevertheless, I am happier in my little room than all the emperors and kings in their glittering gold palaces."

That may give you some idea of what life was like in a barn-covered cottage during a rainy summer in northern Michigan in the good old days. According to reports Father Baraga labored among his new-found Indian friends from sun-up to sun-set and "his village soon resumbled a well regulated religious community." At the risk of seeming heathenish, the thought has occurred to me that he might have donged that 5:00 o'clock bell at least one morning or so for a work detail to put a little fresh bark on the leaky roofs.

At any rate Father Baraga was happy in his chosen work and well pleased with his Indian friends. Another letter, written by him after he had experienced his first winter in northern Michigan is reprinted here in part. It contains some interesting observations on the country and the situation of the Indians at that time.

"The territory of Michigan, which includes the region of Arbre Croche, is a very sparsely settled country, especially in the vicinity of my mission station. The interior of the country is mountainous and entirely desolate, nothing but a forest and entirely uninhabited; only the shores of the ext5emely great Lake Michigan and of Lake Huron are inhabited. This enormous forest, which has a greater spread than the entire Empire

of Austria (for it extends beyond the limits of this territory.) is entirely uninhabited and serves the Indians for the chase. The Christian Indians no longer live from the chase, but from their fields and the yield from their sugar which they produce in the forest near their village. The soil here is not very good, isolated tracts excepted; in general it is sandy. The Indians in this region have small and scrubby fields; they cultivate nothing else but Turkish corn and some legumes and potatoes which thrive here very well. The principal product of the Indians is sugar, which they make here from the large number of existing sugar trees. At the beginning of this month of March, begins the production of sugar, and lasts to about the end of the month of April. Now in this sugar time there is no person at all in our village, with the exception of four individuals who live in the mission house; they are all in the forest where they have their sugar trees at various distant points (one, or at the most, two hours) from here. There they build huts for themselves and remain there all week, but on Sundays they all come to Mass and also remain for the Christian doctrine, and then they return to their sugar huts. They make incisions in the sugar tree, then catch the sugar water which flows abundantly out of them into receptacles of tree bark; boil this water into a syrup, when then, after it settles and cools, makes an excellent sugar, which they sell very well to the merchants in the spring, or rather, exchange for clothing, provisions, utensils and the like; since the Indians have no money, nor do they want to have any, their trade with the whites is only barter. Each of my Indians produces annually from 8 to 10 hundred weight of this sugar.

"The Indians in this country are a happy, peaceful and entirely free people; they have no taxes and no kind of oppression from any side. They also have no laws, because they are entirely independent of the U.S. government. However, the Christian Indians submit themselves faithfully and readily to the law of the gospel, and the announcer

of the gospel is their king. They show great respect for the missionary and an admirable obedience which very often edifies me. What I tell them they do immediately, without grumbling or contradicting. However, they have among them some chiefs to whom they render a voluntary obedience, because the chiefs have no means of compulsion at hand.

"The English, a nation so generous in its rewards, bestows great benefits on our Indians. The Indians were allies of the English in the war with the United States, and because of that, the English government still continues to reward them. They are certain particularly specified places in Canada that belong to the English intended for the annual distribution of presents to the Indians in July and August, and each Indian who comes there receives many presents every year; clothing, utensils, rifles, and the like; and if he comes with his family, his wife and each of his children also receive considerable presents. Nearly all my Indians go annually to Canada; although it is far, nevertheless the journey is not difficult because they ride all the way to there on water in their light canoes.

"The winter is very severe in this desolate country, overgrown with immense forests, as it was at one time in Old Germany before its forests were cleared. Some days in January and February were so cold here that I almost could not finish the Mass that was begun. I brought the cruets, in which I have the wine and water for the holy Mass, warm from the stove into the church, and before I come to the Offertory everything was already so frozen that I had to break up the ice in order to be able to pxxxx pour the wine and water into the chalice. Scarcely had I poured the wine into the chalice when it froze instantly, and when I came to the consecration I had to breathe for a long time into the chalice in order to melt the ice therein a little; I breathed even longer into the chalice before communion in order to be able to consume the sacred Blood. The missionaries of northern and wild countries, where winter rages terribly, are all in the unpleasant necessity of doing this."