



St. Ignace claims a heritage that reaches back to the earliest inhabitants of the Great Lakes. Our heritage has grown over the centuries to include missionaries, French explorers and trappers, fishing and lumbering by an English-speaking population, and the development of transportation from sail to railroad to the Mackinac Bridge. What is unique about St. Ignace, however, is that the ethnic groups, languages, religions, and activities of our ancestors are still a vital part of our community today.

The Anishinabeg, a word that simply means “people,” were the first citizens.



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A National Historic Landmark in downtown St. Ignace, the city owned museum interprets the rich archaeology and history of the 17th century Huron Indian village, Father Marquette’s French Jesuit Mission, and local Ojibwa (Chippewa) Indian traditions and culture through innovative exhibits and continuous running videos.

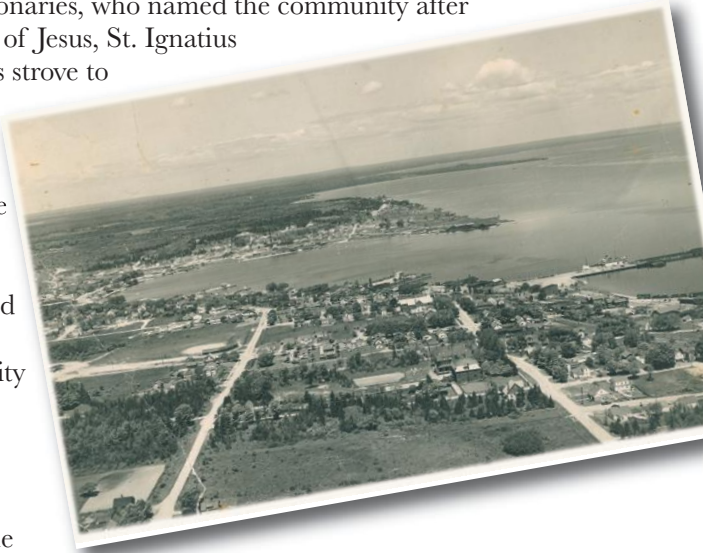
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Oral tradition and archeological research suggests that occupation of the Great Lakes Basin dates from forty to fifty thousand years ago. The natives of the St. Ignace region generally migrated with the seasons. In the spring, the Anishinabeg made maple sugar or fished runs of sturgeon or smelt. Summer found them in settlements surrounded by crops of corn, potatoes or squash, and near to abundant supplies of fish or berries in the forest. They developed efficient housing, watercraft, hunting and farming tools, as well as metalworking, among other technological advancements. The land formations, water, and wildlife near the Straits of Mackinac played an important part in their religious beliefs.

Missionaries, fur traders, explorers, and soldiers mark the French rule of St. Ignace. The very name St. Ignace



came from the Jesuit missionaries, who named the community after the founder of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius Loyola. These missionaries strove to find Jesus Christ present in the north woods, while at the same time fighting desperately to curb the sale of alcohol to the Anishinabeg. Jesuits like Marquette, Charlevoix, and Allouez have name recognition, but the majority of priests have been forgotten over time.



The merging of Lakes Michigan and Huron at the Straits meant high water traffic, and during the time of French occupation, a fur-trading outpost became necessary. Fort de Buade became the seat of King Louis XIV's authority from St. Ignace, and saw officers such as LaSalle and Cadillac pass through its gates. St. Ignace was among the largest settlements in New France for the last decade of the 15th century until the establishment of Detroit in 1701. The British arrived in the St. Ignace region with the defeat of the French in the French and Indian War. The local garrison was Fort Michilimackinac, on the southern shore of the Straits, and then it was dismantled and relocated to Mackinac Island and renamed Fort Mackinac. St. Ignace continued to play a role in the fur trade, but by the mid-1800's, commercial fishing grew to become more important. St. Ignace's fishing industry included not only catching, but also curing, packing, and shipping. It was during this period that the well-known mackinaw boat was a common sight in the waters. As the Michigan lumber industry grew, St. Ignace

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also became a center for mill yards and its proximity to the shipping lanes made it a hub for Northern Great Lakes commerce. Iron production began at the Martel Furnace, located near the present day Coast Guard station, and by the 1890's St. Ignace was a boomtown. Its location on the southern point of the Upper Peninsula was a blessing as well as a curse for St. Ignace. While it was an important maritime crossroads, it was also the end of the line for the Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic Railroad. The barge *Betsy* first transported railway cars, but by 1888 a railroad ferry named *St. Ignace*, after the town itself, went into service. This started a hundred years of railroad ferries that included two named after *Sainte Marie*, and one after an early Chippewa leader, *Chief Wawatam*. The advent of the automobile further complicated transportation between the two peninsulas and in 1923, the *Ariel* arrived as the first car ferry. Eight different car ferries plied the Straits at various times from 1923 until 1957, when the Mackinac Bridge opened.

At the start of the 21st century, St. Ignace stands among the oldest settlements

in our nation, yet its past is still with us. The Anishinabeg people are present in the local tribes, and one is just as likely to see a Native American hunting, fishing, or going about daily life today as generations ago. The faith of the missionaries' lives in the area's Christian congregations of today, and a glance at a St. Ignace phone book, will reveal the continued presence of French





names. A drive through town shows that smoked fish is still for sale and many winter homes find heat through the logs of nearby forests. The car ferries and railroads are gone, yet the traffic on the Mackinac Bridge proves that St. Ignace is still the gateway to the Upper Peninsula. We citizens of St. Ignace are proud of our past, and feel fortunate to live here today. We're confident that you will also discover why St. Ignace is such a wonderful place when you visit our historic city.

*- Historical commentary courtesy of
Brother Jim Boynton, S.J.*



MACKINAC ISLAND

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