Black Robes at the Edge of Empire: Jesuits, Natives, and Colonial Crisis in Early Detroit, 1728-1781

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BLACK ROBES AT THE EDGE OF EMPIRE: JESUITS, NATIVES, AND COLONIAL CRISIS IN EARLY DETROIT, 1728-1781

By

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This thesis examines the Jesuit missionaries active in the region of Detroit and how their role in that region changed over the course of the eighteenth century and under different colonial regimes. Jesuits Armand de la Richardie, Pierre Potier, and Pierre du Jaunay influenced imperial decision-making and policy in the eighteenth-century *pays d’en haut* through their notable influence within certain indigenous communities. The priests were deeply influential during the French regime as demonstrated by their impact on several colonial crises discussed in the text. The Seven Years War and the conquest of New France by Great Britain gradually eroded Jesuit influence as the distrustful British were reluctant to utilize the French Catholic priests as imperial assets. As a result, the indigenous communities began to cut out the middlemen and deal with imperial Britain directly rather than through a proxy. Despite these changes, the Jesuits still shaped imperial realities through methods deployed under the French and new means made available by the conquest. Pontiac’s War brought about a conclusive end to Jesuit political power
in the pays d’en haut as the British, ever suspicious of the French Jesuits, completed their political ostracization.

Historians typically focus on the Jesuits of the seventeenth century when examining colonial North America and rarely examine how the role of the Jesuits changed during the eighteenth century and in different colonial contexts. This thesis seeks to demonstrate the value in examining this neglected aspect of colonial-indigenous alliance and diplomacy by examining how the Jesuits influenced several colonial crises that arose from the strategic colonial entrépot of Detroit.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From its establishment in 1701 through the British conquest of New France in 1760 and the early nineteenth century, Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit was perhaps the most important imperial outpost in the pays d’en haut, the preeminent staging ground for the western fur trade, and an important site for Euro-Native alliances and negotiations far beyond immediate oversight by colonial officials at Quebec or Montreal. Hundreds of Odawa, Ojibwa, Potawatomi, and Wyandot settled along the banks of the Detroit River between Lakes Superior and Erie in close proximity to the fort and the resident French habitants, French and British soldiers, and missionaries. Maintaining Native support for and attachment to the French, and later the British, required constant diplomacy and an uninterrupted flow of gifts and supplies to grease the wheels of cross-cultural alliance. Many of the pays d’en haut’s most serious crises, most notably a 1747 plan organized by Wyandot dissidents led by Nicholas Orontony to destroy the fort and expel the French and Pontiac’s siege in 1763, erupted at this joint settlement.

Key to Detroit’s operation as a critical nexus of diplomacy and cooperation was the presence of several Jesuit priests, most importantly Armand de la Richardie, Pierre Potier, and Pierre du Jaunay, who played significant roles in wide-ranging relationships and events that arose in the west in the eighteenth century. Histories of the Jesuits as pivotal agents of empire are numerous and comprehensive for mid-seventeenth-century New France, but relatively unexplored beyond the temporal and geographic scope of Quebec’s “heroic age.” The nature and extent of French North America changed enormously during the eighteenth century.¹

¹ For an overview of seventeenth-century Jesuits and their actions among the Huron/Wendat, see Bruce G. Trigger, Natives and Newcomers: Canada’s “Heroic Age” Reconsidered (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1985), especially 226-297. For the importance of Jesuits to alliance in the seventeenth-century, see also Denys Delâge, Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600-64, translated by Jane Brierly (Vancouver:
As French military and commercial endeavors pushed into the *pays d’en haut*, the colonial project changed dramatically in a geographic, cultural, and political landscape far-removed from the St. Lawrence River. The French increasingly committed to their role as mediators in alliances with and among the disparate sovereign tribes of the western Great Lakes. Most historians examining the eighteenth-century *pays d’en haut* acknowledge the Jesuit presence, of course, but the priests’ political significance and day-to-day operations as ambassadors has not been closely analyzed. Studies have typically focused on military officials, secular diplomats, French fur traders, indigenous women, and tribal headmen while neglecting the ever-present missionaries. Jesuits adapted to political realities far removed from the St. Lawrence River as they pushed into the west. Due to the weakness of French military and commercial presence in North America, the Jesuits of the early seventeenth century virtually unchallenged by rival Frenchmen could monopolize French interactions with the Iroquois and Wendat tribes, but the presence in the eighteenth century of rivals like French military officers and an imperial program that often conflicted with the Jesuits’ priorities changed how they interacted with French colonial authorities and the sovereign tribes. The Black Robes’ missionary goals frequently interlocked with but often contradicted French imperial and colonial goals (themselves often at variance with one another), and it was in the intersection of a disjointed colonial project where the Jesuit engagement with indigenous communities and individuals was most important.²

² Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 36-37, 60. Gilles Havard also acknowledges the role of Jesuits as diplomats, but does not examine how they influenced events or why they were used as diplomats. See Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal of*
The Jesuits are in no danger of being forgotten or neglected in present-day historical narratives, but historians of eighteenth-century New France, Native history, and French colonialism elsewhere tend to narrowly assess the Jesuits as cultural arbiters in the context of their objections to indigenous practices and attempts to impose their moral vision onto the colonial and indigenous communities. The bulk of the historical literature about the eighteenth-century Jesuits of French North America explores how they attempted to alter the sexual practices of the French and Native women and their vehement opposition to selling liquor to indigenous communities.

The Jesuits are rarely the meaningful subjects of British Atlantic and colonial histories except as outlandish villains. Francis Parkman exaggerated their role as the lynchpin of the French colonial empire and modern scholars recoil from his pronounced prejudices. Yet, British colonial officials clearly despised the French missionaries who supposedly instigated Native


attacks on British traders and settlers. Recent early American historians typically mention Jesuits either to explain the mindset of French officialdom or to contrast the Jesuits with their less successful British missionaries. As a result, Jesuits are surprisingly marginal to assessments of eighteenth-century colonial North America. Relying upon the exaggerated suspicions of British colonial officials, some historians have granted them a lofty but misleading station within the French colonial empire. Several histories of Pontiac’s War have acknowledged Jesuit influence in that specific event, but have not contextualized that influence with their earlier role in the French colonial project and discussed them as avatars of the Catholic faith that sometimes affected indigenous worldviews. The eighteenth-century Jesuits have fallen into scholarly purgatory where they are noted as powerful but their actual day-to-day actions in alliance-building and diplomacy remain unassessed.

The Jesuit diplomatic efforts functioned within (and helped to create) the structures elaborated upon in Richard White’s influential treatment, *The Middle Ground*, which explored how the indigenous peoples of the *pays d’en haut* and the French colonial government negotiated a space of mutual accommodation. This middle ground was maintained by a series of permanent forts, outposts, settlements, and kinship and commercial networks that supported regular communication and trade between French military and political authorities and the multitude of indigenous communities operating in the Great Lakes region. This mutually beneficial alliance

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system arose from an understanding of necessary obligations between the French and the
sovereign tribes to support one other against external threats, especially from the British and the
Iroquois, as well as internal ones, such as schisms among the groups who constituted the middle
ground.7

The Jesuits of French North America are most notable for their actions during the French
regime and it is between the years 1728 and 1752 that their influence at Detroit was most
powerfully felt. The first chapter of this thesis will explore Jesuit Father Armand de la
Richardie’s tenure at Detroit during this time frame. The preceding introduction will first
investigate several Jesuit-held principles and philosophies that guided their actions in the
eighteenth century, explain the general role of the Jesuits in the French alliance system, and
examine the order’s history at Fort Detroit before 1728. By examining the Wyandot relocation
and Nicholas Orontony crises that occurred between 1738 and 1751, the next chapter will clarify
the essential role that Jesuit diplomatic initiatives played in shaping events and imperial
functionality in the colonial pays d’en haut.

Jesuits did not immediately disappear from the pays d’en haut after the British conquest
of New France and Britain’s subsequent absorption of the French-Native alliance system. The
conquest did, however, eradicate the French institutional support upon which the Jesuits relied
for funding and political and social influence. The remaining Jesuits opted to adapt to British rule
and worked towards stabilizing the region and demonstrating their loyalty to the new regime.
Though severely curtailed, Jesuit clout persisted in the early years of British rule at Detroit. The

7 White, The Middle Ground, xiv-xv, 36-37, 60; Richard White, "Creative Misunderstandings
McDonnell, Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America (New York:
Hill and Wang, 2016), 58. See also Melvin G. Holli, "The Founding of Detroit by
final chapter examines how Pierre Potier and Pierre du Jaunay, the Jesuits of Detroit and Michilimackinac, adapted to the changing imperial realities of the Seven Years’ War, strove to carve out a place for themselves during British rule, and collaborated with the British during Pontiac’s War both through the methods they employed during the French era and new methods developed as a result of British claiming Detroit and the pays d’en haut.

Lastly, the Jesuits of North America derived their influence in imperial and political affairs by way of their deep relationships with indigenous communities. It is impossible to present a meaningful history of the Jesuits and empire in North America without also examining the indigenous communities within which they lived and worked. While the Wyandot, Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi all called the Detroit River home during the eighteenth century, Richardie and Potier interacted chiefly with the Wyandot. This thesis will attempt to meaningfully engage with Wyandot history, lifeways, and social hierarchies for this reason.
CHAPTER 2: JESUIT POWER AT
FRENCH DETROIT, 1728-1754

The Jesuits of Detroit were at their most powerful under the auspices of the French regime. Funded by the French Crown, deeply connected to the colonial government, and possessing a more intimate relationship with indigenous communities than almost anyone else, Jesuits like Father Armand de la Richardie were poised to direct the manner, for better or worse, in which the French colonial government interacted with the indigenous allies upon which its imperial clout relied. The manner in which the Jesuits inserted themselves in indigenous communities and affairs also gave them sway within those communities in such a way that could affect how they responded to political changes or tensions. Jesuit power was never absolute and could not totally subvert the actions or goals of either the French or the Natives, but observing periods in which the French-Native alliance underwent severe stress demonstrates that Jesuit power in the pays d’en haut could and did significantly affect historical outcomes.

LES ROBES NOIRES AND CONTINENTAL INFLUENCE

The priests of the Society of Jesus occupied an opportune position to influence the course of empire in the French New World. Their missions created an important foothold for future relations between Natives and other European entities. French authorities typically established fortified outposts and magazines to facilitate commercial and military operations where a Jesuit mission already stood. Fort Michilimackinac, one of the most important French military and commercial outposts in the west, was established at St. Ignace on the site of the Jesuit mission to the Odawa. It became central to French participation in the fur trade and to their interactions with
the Odawa. Jesuits were present at every treaty and stationed near every fort, serving as translators and diplomats in addition to their evangelization duties.¹

Notably, the Jesuits were absent from Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit for the first twenty-seven years after its establishment. Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac founded Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit in 1701 and also served as its first commandant. He sold his vision for Detroit to Count Ponchartrain, the French Minister of Marine, through outrageous exaggeration and flattery accompanied by a grandiose vision of a new Eden nestled between Lake Erie and Lake St. Claire. An outpost on the Detroit River would allow French colonial officials to monitor all canoe traffic heading west on the Great Lakes. This would theoretically prevent the British from contacting any Native tribes in the old Northwest. Cadillac also outlined a plan to invite as many Native peoples as possible to relocate to Detroit, allowing for daily constant communication and trade between the French and the remote communities to the west. Furthermore, Cadillac’s plan to settle French habitants on the river to farm and mix with the Natives would strengthen France’s claim on the region and facilitate a closer relationship with indigenous peoples.²

Any project to establish a settlement or outpost among the Natives necessitated some kind of missionary, but Cadillac and the Jesuits had already developed an intense mutual antipathy by 1701.³ Rather than appeal to the Jesuits for his enterprise, Cadillac instead

³ Father Étienne de Carheil to Governor Louis Hector de Callières, Michilimackinac, 30 August 1702, in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, vol. 65, ed. Reuben Gold Twaites (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers Company, 1900), 189-193, 199-201 (hereafter cited in text as *Jesuit Relations*). Étienne de Carheil, S.J., was the Jesuit missionary stationed at Michilimackinac, which Cadillac commanded in the 1690s immediately preceding the establishment of Detroit. Carheil personally
cultivated a friendly relationship with the Récollet priests, a Franciscan priestly order. The Jesuits accompanied Cadillac during Detroit’s first year despite their animosity, but departed before the end of 1701. Cadillac noted their resentment over a competing missionary order as at least part of their reason for departure, stating, “that the Black Robes do not speak effectively today because they are vexed at my bringing with me a Grey Robe [a Recollet], and because priests are to come who have white collars. This annoys them because they would like to be the only ones.” The Society of Jesus would not establish itself on the Detroit River until 1728.4

Cadillac sold his vision for Detroit on two main pillars. Firstly, the settlement would be strategically significant for boxing British diplomats and fur traders out of the western Great Lakes and for monitoring Native travelers moving into British or Iroquoian territory. It also facilitated access and control over western trade, as all goods entering or leaving the pays d’en haut had to pass through or near Detroit, theoretically making smuggling or clandestine trading impossible.5 Secondly, Cadillac marketed Detroit as an experiment for future colonization efforts. He invited the Wyandot, Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi tribes living in the upper country to settle alongside the incoming French settlers and create an integrated settlement. This plan harkened back to France’s imperial expectations at the very beginning of its colonial enterprise. Officials at first looked to the francization, or “frenchification,” of the Native peoples already living there to offset the small number of Europeans relocating to New France. Officials blamed Cadillac for the failure to cultivate Christianity among the Odawa because of Cadillac’s unrestricted sale of brandy to the regional tribes.


and clerics believed they could frenchify the continental interior by incentivizing Native communities to adopt French agricultural, linguistic and religious practices. In doing so the French could stake their claim to the North American interior with a negligible European population and secure the interior against inroads from other European rivals.\footnote{Saliha Belmessous, "Assimilation and Racialism in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Policy." \textit{The American Historical Review} 110, no. 2 (2005): 322-49. France did not consider racial differences a barrier to becoming loyal subjects of the Crown. Concepts of race and nationality in the pre-French Revolution world were far more fluid than they would later become.}

The Jesuits had rejected \textit{francization} as a viable missionary strategy by the 1650s. Rather than bring the Natives into a closer relationship with Christianity, the Jesuits saw the close contact with the French necessary for \textit{francization} as harmful to Native communities and especially harmful to Christian living. The union of French men and Native women in the \textit{façon du pays} was seen as an illicit sexual relationship outside the bounds of proper marriage, an irregularity the priests decried often and loudly. Perhaps their biggest concern was the threat European alcohol posed to Christian morality. Jesuits complained of years of missionary work and steadfast Christian faith lost in the excesses of a single night of drunken revelry. Jesuit rejection of \textit{francization} does not, however, represent a rejection of colonialism or empire. The Jesuits felt that this method of colonization undermined their missionary efforts and instead pursued methods that they felt could facilitate alliances with the French without exposing the Natives to the bad moral example of the French.\footnote{Carheil to Callières, Michilimackina, 30 August 1702, in \textit{Jesuit Relations} 65: 191-193. Carheil considered French sexual liaisons with Native women to be the other most damaging activity towards his mission; See also Robert Michael Morrissey, “The Terms of Encounter: Language and Contested Visions of French Colonization in the Illinois Country, 1673-1702,” \textit{French and Indians in the Heart of North America, 1630-1815} (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 47-49.}
Jesuits of the eighteenth century pursued an unorthodox and aggressively syncretic mode of evangelization to secure the future of North American Christianity. Syncretism in this context refers to how the Jesuits adapted their message to more cleanly fit within Native structure and spirituality rather than impose a strictly Eurocentric Christianity. They largely rejected the state as a Christianizing tool and instead tried to cultivate their own personal Christian garden among the Natives. Their vision for Native Christianity placed the Jesuits themselves as the sole Europeans present among the sovereign tribes as the primary conduit through which Christian revelation and European civilization flowed. This also entailed chasing away the wolves that threatened their flock, often manifested as other Europeans whose drunkenness, sexual impropriety, and reckless pursuit of wealth, the priests alleged, undermined their Christian nurseries. The Jesuits would have ideally submitted all congress between Natives and Europeans to their purview and act as the ultimate arbitrators of frontier civilization in their authority as North America’s ordained moral guardians.8

The Jesuits firmly believed that their divine prerogative to bring the New World into the Catholic faith superseded all other European colonization goals. They protested loudly at any intrusion that they felt jeopardized their mission. They did not, of course, oppose colonization or European settlement at all times or even most of the time, but the Jesuits saw themselves as

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primarily interested in their indigenous flocks’ spiritual well being and took to their task with this goal in mind. They supported and praised French settlement and colonization when they believed it would aid them and opposed it when they saw European involvement as a liability.9

The tribes at Detroit remained without a missionary to minister to their spiritual needs until the Wyandot specifically requested one in 1728 as a result of their objections to the post commandant, Alphonse de Tonty. Tonty had been appointed in 1717 and immediately abused his authority, exploited the French settlers, and drove up prices to line his own pockets. By 1727 the Detroit tribes had had enough. The Wyandots petitioned the governor of New France to remove Tonty and open up trade at Detroit to afford them better prices and better aid to the French. Though their request to remove Tonty was made moot by his death, the governor recognized their grievances and took pains to assuage them. Notable among these grievances was the Wyandot request for a Jesuit missionary to be permanently stationed among them. The governor responded immediately and Armand de la Richardie, who had previously ministered to the Wyandot’s kin in New France, was dispatched to the Detroit River in 1728.10

Why did the Wyandot respond to Tonty’s abuses with a specific request that a missionary be stationed among them? One cannot discount that some of the Christian Wyandot simply wanted a priest to minister to their spiritual needs, much like any French parish without a pastor. But there were additional benefits to entertaining a missionary that the Wyandot’s early experiences with European religion had taught them, even for the Wyandot who preferred their

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10 For Tonty’s abuses of power, see “Petition from Detroit Citizens to Recover Their Rights,” Detroit, 1727, in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections*, vol. 34, ed. The Society … (Lansing, MI: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., 1905), 38-40 (hereafter cited in text as *MPHC*). For the Wyandot petition, see Huron tribe to Beauharnois, Detroit, 9 August 1727, in *MPHC* 34: 49-51. See also White, *The Middle Ground*, 177-178.
own spiritual customs. The Wyandot had encountered Christianity before almost any other sovereign tribe and had enjoyed close relations with the Jesuits long before their relocation to Detroit. Jesuits interacted with their assigned communities on a face-to-face basis, and thus possessed intimate details of the inner workings of the tribes. The respect that Jesuit priests received from French officials made them excellent liaisons through which the Wyandot could strategically transmit their grievances and expect a rapid response.

MISSIONARY IN THE MIDDLE GROUND

Father Armand de la Richardie learned valuable lessons in Native customs and reciprocal power relations in his early years at the Detroit settlement that he later applied during the upheavals and crises of the 1740s. His efforts to win sway among the Wyandot and to convert them to Christianity are particularly important because they demonstrate exactly how a missionary’s methods could affect the entire tribe. Richardie would later apply the lessons learned in his early years of evangelization to influence the Wyandot during and after the Orontony crisis.

Richardie characterized his initial time spent among the Wyandot as frustrating and fruitless:

When I arrived here I found not a single savage professing the Christian faith, although some of the older ones, while suffering from sickness, had formerly been washed in the sacred waters by the first missionaries. About forty years ago, shaking the dust from their feet, they had abandoned that nation, which was uncircumcised in heart.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^\text{11}\) Richardie to Retz, Mission de l’Assumption, 21 June 1741, in Jesuit Relations 69: 49. The phrase ‘uncircumcised in heart’ would mean that the tribe had closed itself off from God’s influence. Circumcision was a physical representation of the Israelites’ covenant with God. To be “uncircumcised in heart” thus represents the Wyandot’s supposed refusal to participate in the covenant between God and the Catholic Church. The phrase is common in both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible. Richardie also quotes the Gospel of Matthew with the phrase “shaking the dust from their feet,” an act Jesus commanded his apostles to do when a home or
In this account, written in the midst of French-Wyandot tensions in 1741, Richardie exaggerates their situation to make the case for his own exemplary behavior as a missionary. Earlier visitors to Detroit like Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix in 1721 had characterized the Wyandot as Christian but lacking a missionary. The Wyandot had been the first large indigenous confederacy in the Northeast to accept Christianity and, judging by their specific request for a missionary in 1727, they wished to continue in their practice of that faith. Charlevoix’s reports on Detroit in 1721 noted that the majority of the Wyandot professed at least some form of Christian faith, with only a few of the elders resisting conversion. Richardie did not start with as infertile a garden as he would have had his superiors believe. The challenges Richardie faced instead seem to stem from his struggle to be accepted by the Wyandot as a spiritual leader. Richardie interpreted the tribe’s reluctance to accept his spiritual authority as paganism writ large.12

Despite these exaggerations, Richardie still managed to deepen his bond to the tribe and its power structure. Wyandot society organized itself into three main groupings called phratries and subdivided into nine clans. The phratry chiefs acted as the principal chiefs of the Wyandot with the clan leaders acting as auxiliaries. The clans further subdivided into cabins that could hold anywhere between four and forty tribespersons. Wyandot elders and the leaders of individual longhouses were influential in their clans and a valuable foothold for any European entity hoping to establish itself within the community. Richardie approached these powerful
town refused to welcome them or pay heed to their words. Richardie thus compares his Jesuit predecessors to the apostolic founders of Church and expresses contempt for the “uncircumcised of heart” that supposedly rejected their message.
tribal leaders to strengthen his position within the tribe and hasten their acceptance of him as their spiritual guide.\textsuperscript{13}

The Jesuit priests, in the \textit{pays d’en haut} as in the Wyandot homeland of Wendake, often depended on Native women to influence the men of the tribe to adopt Christianity. Wyandot women did not hold official positions of power or speak at councils, but items and proposals could not be addressed unless a woman, typically an elder, chose a man to act as an advocate and present her concerns before the tribe. Jesuits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tried to convert the tribes they visited and did so by winning over particularly powerful orators, elders, and chiefs. This first required the Jesuits to win over an influential woman who could then convince a headman to advocate for conversion on her behalf. By acting through the female elders and their male proxies, Jesuits attempted and often succeeded in converting a tribe by way of its power structure rather than trying to specifically win over the people on an individual basis.\textsuperscript{14}

Richardie won great influence with the Deer clan, the preeminent Wyandot clan led by the Wyandot principal chief, Sataretsy. He was formally adopted into the Deer clan and enjoyed a successful streak of baptisms in his early years among them. Wyandot women played a central role in his acceptance within tribal confidence as only the women could request an outsider be


\textsuperscript{14} Women were often the Jesuits’ fiercest advocates. Wyandot men assumed more power and influence in the colonial age, but Christianity, and thus the Jesuits, offered new avenues for women to influence the tribe. Wyandot women were often a conduit through which the men of the tribe converted to Christianity. For information on the importance of women in tribal council procedure, see Labelle, \textit{Dispersed but Not Destroyed}, 162-165.
adopted as fictive kin. While Richardie exaggerated his own success among the Wyandot, he still managed to secure an influential position in the tribe by way of its embrace of Christianity.\textsuperscript{15}

Beyond his capacity as a spiritual emissary for the Catholic Church, Richardie also played a noteworthy role as an emissary for the French colonial state. In serving as an emissary for the French, Richardie acted as both the arbiter of French imperial goals and a constant negotiator for the nature of the father-child diplomatic obligations of the French-Native alliance.\textsuperscript{16} Richardie’s daily interactions with the Wyandot and strong ties to its power structure made him a one-man consulate through which the French could both transmit and receive requests to and from the Wyandot. The French waged war against the Mesquakie tribe, whom the French called the Foxes, through the 1730s and depended on the allied tribes settled at or near Detroit to pressure and attack them. Pierre Jacques Payen de Noyan depended on Richardie to gauge tribal sentiments during the Fox Wars, writing to the French colonial minister, “The hurons and the Outawas [Odawa] of detroit, whom I Commanded, have caused father de la richardie to write to me several times that they Were ready to follow me.” De Noyan’s communications with the Ministry of Marine cite Richardie as the French informant on tribal attitudes and as the medium for expressing military commitment to the French alliance.

\textsuperscript{15} Steckley, \textit{Eighteenth Century Wyandot}, 77-78. Adoption into a tribe allowed a missionary greater access to the people and a heightened degree of acceptance amongst the tribesmen. The pursuit of formal adoption had become standard practice for Jesuit missionaries by the mid-seventeenth century in New France. For more information, see Axtell, \textit{The Invasion Within}, 83-85.

\textsuperscript{16} Andrew Sturtevant touched upon Richardie and his successor’s ability to influence the Wyandot tribe in brief, though he was mostly concerned with the Wyandot themselves. See Andrew K. Sturtevant, “Jealous Neighbors: Rivalry and Alliance Among the Native Communities of Detroit, 1701-1766,” PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 2011, 185-186; Michael Witgen, \textit{An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 52; White, \textit{Middle Ground}, xi, 40.
Wyandot and Odawa are specifically noted as dispatching Richardie to transmit messages on their behalf.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{WYANDOT RELOCATION}

Intertribal disputes on the Detroit River disrupted the relative stability the region had enjoyed since the end of the Fox wars in the early 1730s. Conflict erupted between the Wyandot and Odawa that threatened to throw the entire Detroit enterprise into disarray. The Odawa implicated the Wyandot for leaking information about an Odawa raid against a southern tribe that resulted in several Odawa deaths. The Odawa held the Wyandot personally responsible for their losses, claiming to have witnessed a Wyandot warrior at the battle killing a close relative.\textsuperscript{18}

Tensions became so heated that the Wyandot feared for their safety at Detroit and beseeched the French to intercede on their behalf. The official commandant, Jacques Payen de Noyan, was not actually present at Detroit at this stage and operated primarily through a proxy, seasoned colonial officer Nicolas-Joseph Denoyelles. Governor Charles de Beauharnois, De Noyan, and Denoyelles attempted to pacify the two tribes with gifts and protection, but these promises did little to assuage Wyandot fear or Odawa anger. The Wyandot had maintained a small clearing near Sandusky Bay on the southern shore of Lake Erie as a winter settlement. Against their usual customs, the entire tribe left for Sandusky during the 1738-1739 winter for fear of attack by the Odawa. Richardie, asserting that he understood the Wyandot mind, wrote to

\textsuperscript{17} De Noyan to Maurepas, Minister of Marine, 1731, in \textit{Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin}, vol. 17, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Madison, WI: The Society, 1906), 122 (hereafter cited in text as \textit{WHC}).

\textsuperscript{18} Beauharnois to Maurepas, Quebec, 11 October 1738, in \textit{MPHC} 34: 151-154. See also White, \textit{The Middle Ground}, 193. Other tribes in the west in the eighteenth century were also identified as “Flatheads” or the French “Têtes-plates.” Richard White identifies the Flatheads of this scenario as the Catawba, a tribe from the Carolina Piedmont region.
Beauharnois that, “the Huron [Wyandot] will not be easily reassured and that [Richardie] has a compelling reason to think they may defect to the Sonontouans [Seneca] or flee to the belle Rivière [Ohio River].”19 Denoyelles went to Sandusky Bay in February 1739 and promised complete Wyandot safety at Detroit. Nicholas Orontony, an early and active Wyandot convert to Christianity and leader of the Porcupine clan, met with Denoyelles upon his return to Detroit and requested on behalf of the tribe that the French allow the Wyandot to relocate and settle closer to the French.20

Interim Commandant Denoyelles demonstrated a general ignorance of Wyandot tribal structure and internal power dynamics. Firstly, he identifies Orontony as “the great chief of that tribe,” when that title belonged to Sastaretsy. Orontony was a minor leader and directly subordinated to a man named Anguirot, who headed the Turtle phratry. Orontony was prominent among the Wyandot, but he acted only as an emissary and had no standing to make decisions for the whole tribe at this time. Denoyelles and Commandant De Noyan, when he finally arrived to assume his post, would repeatedly refer to him as one of the three great chiefs of the Wyandot. This misunderstanding of Orontony’s authority within the tribe, when coupled with successive weak attempts to placate Wyandot fears and Odawa anger, marks a recurring pattern of French ignorance of Wyandot politics and concerns. Beauharnois, Denoyelles, and De Noyan subsequently deferred to Richardie and other Jesuit priests for their information regarding the tribe and to relay their concerns.21

19 Beauharnois to Maurepas, memorandum, Quebec, 1741, in WHC 17: 279-280.
20 Denoyelles to Beauharnois, Detroit, 1 February 1739, in MPHC 34: 163-164. “Orontony” was a Wyandot title meaning “Warpole.” He was baptized by Richardie in 1732 and received “Nicholas” as his baptismal name. Texts refer to him using either one name or the other, rarely both.
21 Ibid.
Losing faith that the French would come through for them, some among the Wyandot began to scout other options. Richardie struggled to assert control over these discussions, ultimately relying on his Native supporters and friends. He relied upon the female Wyandot elders on at least one occasion to prevent a flight to Seneca territory in western Pennsylvania. At some point during the retreat to Sandusky, the Wyandot dispatched an emissary to make overtures to the British and exchanged a wampum belt as a form of semi-official treaty. Departing Detroit and arriving at Sandusky brought the Wyandot further away from French observation and closer to potential British overtures. Thus, their flight to Sandusky indicates both misgivings about French protection and an openness to ally with the British. While the Wyandot did not reject the French, they sensibly played the field to negotiate for a better option.  

Though Richardie initially supported relocating the Wyandot closer to Quebec or Montreal, he began to steer events on a course of his own choosing by 1740. His letter to Father Saint-Pé, the Jesuit Superior of New France, in 1740 demonstrates a meaningful if patronizing and disdainful understanding of Wyandot customs. The Wyandot daily asked Richardie to write to the governor on their behalf in the hope that he would aid them in their relocation. Though Beauharnois and De Noyan, having finally assumed his post, were both at this point ready to relocate the Wyandot to Montreal, they had neither satisfied Wyandot tradition nor their actual desired place of relocation. Richardie wrote:

There is no Change in their project of going to Settle near you. The only thing that Hinders the Carrying out of the project, is Savage vanity that does not wish to appear to flee, and seeks to Conceal its fear, by saying to the neighboring Nation, that they are being taken from their fire, in order that another may be kindled for them. I am urged daily to Induce Monsieur the General to send a message by which he will Remove them

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22 Sturtevant, “Jealous Neighbors,” 184-185; “Conrad Weiser Journal,” in *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, vol. 5 (Harrisburg: Theo. Fenn & Co., 1851), 351 (hereafter cited in text as *PCD*). The precise details of this overture are uncertain, but it was certainly initiated by either Anguriot or his lieutenant, Orontony.
from here and settle near him. This is but a pretext. The Truth is that they wish it to be the people of the Sault or of the Lake [Sault St. Louis and Lac des Deux Montagnes, both near Quebec]. The latter are no friends of mine as you might imagine. Thus, if Monsieur the General wishes to Grant their prayer, the people of the Sault must be their agents and their deputation must come here next spring to exercise the gentle pressure that is desired.23

This letter between Richardie and Saint-Pé reveals both Richardie’s goals and motive during the crisis and his willingness to act against French designs in order to pursue his own purposes. The tribe refused to relocate for fear of showing weakness of submission. Relocation would permanently mark them as French dependents and cripple their ability to negotiate autonomy in their new location. They would lose face to the other tribes allied with the French, especially the Odawa.24 In order to preserve their elevated standing with the French-Native alliance, the Wyandot insisted on relocating only for the well-being of their wives and children with proper decorum and only if a good place was prepared for them beforehand among their kin. Richardie recognized these designs to maintain their tribal sovereignty, derisively decrying their “savage vanity.” Though he understood Wyandot motives, he saw their attempts to maintain ritual sovereignty as disobedient. Realizing that the Wyandot would only relocate on their own terms, Richardie recommended that emissaries from the Laurentian Iroquois settlement at Sault St. Louis, also called Kahnawake, would be necessary to induce the tribe to relocate.25

The letter to Saint-Pé further reveals Richardie’s agenda in these affairs: to monopolize access to the Wyandot for evangelization. He concluded his missive to Saint-Pé by writing:

23 Richardie to Saint-Pé, Mission de l’Assumption, 26 August 1740, in WHC 17: 328.
24 Neta Crawford, “A Security Regime among Democracies: Cooperation among Iroquois Nations,” International Organization 48, no. 3 (1994): 357-359. These fears of lost status were not unfounded. When the Haudenosaunee [Iroquois] Confederacy formally adopted the refugee Tuscarora tribe as its Sixth Nation, it did so without granting them an equal voice in the Confederacy’s decisions. They did not have a seat on the Great Council and were not allowed to elevate sachems. They were granted nominally equal rights, but not equal power.
It is that, to allay their continual alarms, [the governor will] allow them to establish themselves three leagues from here on an island called grosse isle. There, they say, as they will see no more Outaouacs [Odawa], they will be a little more in peace. Notwithstanding the Labors entailed by a New Establishment I am in accord with their desires, convinced as I am that their destruction is manifest, and will never be due to anything but their proximity to and their mingling with the French and faithless nations.\textsuperscript{26}

A Sulpician missionary named François Piquet, whose order Richardie referred to as “no friends of mine,” ministered to the Natives of the Lac de Deux Montagnes. The Jesuits resented any interference in their mission, even from other Catholic missionaries, and rejected any arrangement that they felt would endanger their vision for a garden of Christianity shepherded by the \textit{robes noires} alone. Richardie felt that close proximity to the French’s bad example and, perhaps more importantly, their alcohol, would become a lethal blight for the Christian harvest. On the other hand, relocating the Wyandot to the Lake of Two Mountains would remove them from Jesuit authority. Staying at Detroit was equally unacceptable, both for the danger it represented and its proximity to the “faithless Nations” of the Anishinaabe. Grosse Isle represented a novel solution for the priest. The island was close enough to Detroit to supply Richardie’s mission, but theoretically distant enough to guarantee Wyandot safety. The Wyandot would stay removed from the French without moving them closer to the British by way of Sandusky Bay. Any French authority figure other than Richardie would be at least a day’s canoe ride away, allowing Richardie to monopolize access to the tribe. Richardie had more sustained daily contact with the Wyandot than any other Frenchman, having spent seven months during the previous winter at the Sandusky Bay village, and had more opportunity to campaign for his own vision for the Wyandot than any other European. Because most petitions the Wyandot made of

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}
the French were communicated through the priest, his control of the message allowed him to undermine certain authority figures.27

As this dispute persisted, fissures opened up within the Wyandot tribe itself. The quarrel elaborated the conflict between Anglophile and Francophile elements within the tribe. The three phratry chiefs disagreed on whether or not to relocate. Sastaretsy and Tayetchatin, leaders of the Deer and Wolf phatries, favored relocating to be closer to the French. Anguirot, leader of the Turtle phratry, supported remaining in Sandusky. Anguirot was the phratry leader who initiated the first retreat to Sandusky Bay after the initial tension with the Odawa. Richardie despised “The Drunkard Angouirot” and tried to exclude him from councils and tribal decision-making as much as possible. He further isolated Anguirot by building stronger ties with Sastaretsy and Tayetchatin and siding with them as they faced growing dissent from the young men of the tribe.28 It often fell to Nicholas Orontony, as Anguirot’s most prominent subordinate, to fill the gap left by the exclusion of the phratry’s leader.29 Despite Richardie’s attempts to exclude him, Anguirot remained an influential voice within the Wyandot with whom the French had to reckon. When Governor-General Charles Beauharnois sent his nephew, Claude-Charles de Beauharnois,

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27 For antipathy towards the Sulpicians, see Richardie to De Jaunay, Sandusky, December 1741, in WHC 17: 371; For primitive Christianity, see Goddard, “Canada in Seventeenth-Century Jesuit Thought,” 194; For “faithless Nations,” see Richardie to Saint-Pé, 26 August 1740, WHC 17: 328. For seven months at Sandusky Bay and Richardie as a conduit for Wyandot petitions, see Beauharnois to Maurepas, Quebec, 1 October 1740, in MPHC 34: 180-184.

28 For “Drunkard,” see Richardie to Saint-Pé, Mission de l’Assumption, 26 August 1740, in WHC 17: 328. For Richardie’s support of the Wyandot elders against the young men, see Richardie to Saint-Pé, 10 June 1741, in WHC 17: 339.

29 Steckley, Eighteenth Century Wyandot, 83-85. Steckley theorizes that Richardie intentionally elevated Orontony as the voice of his phratry as a way to undermine Anguirot’s position to the French. Orontony was an early convert and an active godparent in the Wyandot baptismal records. Ultimately, the records are insufficient to make a definite statement over Richardie’s intentions for Orontony, but the younger Wyandot definitely looms larger in the records, even before 1747. At the very least, Richardie undercutting Anguirot gave Orontony more opportunity for prominence and influence within the tribe.
to negotiate relocation with the Wyandot, he transmitted an order to Richardie to stop
undermining the chief:

Several persons have told me that you did not like him[Anguirot]; that you would not
admit him to any Council; that his people had spoken and he had said nothing; and that
when he saw me he would show me that he has reason to complain because you represent
him to me as a dangerous and pernicious individual. On an occasion like this it is
advisable, rather, to appear to have confidence in him, so as not to disgust him, and thus
to induce him not to thwart my purpose.\(^{30}\)

Beauharnois dispatched his nephew to Detroit to organize a secret council with the
Wyandot followed by a general council of the Odawa, Potawatomi, and Ojibwa to finalize
Wyandot relocation. He was tasked to relocate the Wyandot as soon as possible, either before
winter fell or immediately after it ended. Governor Beauharnois also requested that Richardie
assist his nephew, Chevalier Claude-Charles de Beauharnois to the best of his ability to finalize
the relocation. Though the governor had expressed misgivings regarding Richardie’s dealings
with Anguirot, he expressed explicit trust that both the Chevalier de Beauharnois and the Jesuit
would carry out the task as envoys of New France.\(^{31}\)

The mission did not go as planned. A nearly empty Wyandot village greeted the
Chevalier de Beauharnois upon his arrival in late June, with only Anguirot and a few other elders
remaining. His initial prognosis was grim. The Wyandot seemed almost entirely demotivated to
relocate to the east. The Chevalier attempted to loosen Anguirot’s lips with liquor in keeping
with his reputation, but the old chief moderated himself and acted with “a cunning and subtle
mind, the ability of an accomplished politician.” The Chevalier spent a month on the Detroit
River visiting the other tribes and the few Wyandot who remained before departing to Sandusky

\(^{30}\) Beauharnois to Richardie, Quebec, 14 June 1741, in *WHC* 17: 349.

\(^{31}\) For the Chevalier’s orders, see Charles Beauharnois to Claude-Charles Beauharnois, Quebec,
12 June 1741, in *WHC* 17: 346. See also Beauharnois to Richardie, 14 June 1741, in *WHC* 17: 349.
Bay to treat with the bulk of the tribe. A new idea to settle at the nearby Grosse Isle had grown to such a level that the Chevalier saw it as another major obstacle by the time he departed for Sandusky Bay in August with Richardie in tow.\(^{32}\)

Suspicious of the Chevalier’s friendship with the Sulpician missionaries, Richardie appears to have done all he could to sabotage his mission to relocate the Wyandot. Swearing, “the hurons will never wish to have any other Missionaries than us,” Richardie quarreled with the Chevalier for fear that he might threaten the Jesuit hegemony on missions to the tribes. In his letters to a fellow Jesuit, Father du Jaunay, Richardie criticized both the Chevalier and the Governor’s incompetence in dealing with the affair. Though the Chevalier returned to the Governor with Sastaretsy, Tayetchatin, and Orontony in tow, Richardie was convinced these negotiations would go nowhere. Richardie also lied about non-existent orders from Beauharnois to reestablish his mission on Grosse Isle.\(^{33}\)

The disarray sewn by Richardie, combined with the internal discord among the Wyandot elders and young men, scuttled the tribe’s motivation and the French ability to relocate them. The disagreement between the elders and the young men of the tribe as well as the swell of contradictory rumors confused and paralyzed the relationship with the Wyandot. Beauharnois, having by September 1742 procured some of Richardie’s letters to his fellow priests, laid the blame squarely on the Jesuit:

The conduct of the Chief’s toward my nephew, did not originate with them, but Was inspired by their Missionary, and I can give you no better proof of this, Monseigneur, than to Send you an Extract from his Letter Written to Father Du-jaunay in the month of December, 1741, wherein the whole Mystery is unveiled, and the proof thereof results from Information I have Had.\(^{34}\)

\(^{32}\) Claude-Charles Beauharnois to Governor Beauharnois, Detroit, 2 August 1741, in \textit{WHC} 17: 353-355.

\(^{33}\) Richardie to De Jaunay, December 1741, in \textit{WHC} 17: 371.

\(^{34}\) Beauharnois to Maurepas, 15 September 1742, in \textit{WHC} 17: 413.
Forced to abandon his plan for Grosse Isle, Richardie petitioned the Wyandot to settle at Bois Blanc Island and the adjacent coast a few miles south of Detroit. He reestablished his mission on Bois Blanc Island and, by 1744, had succeeded in attracting a large portion of Wyandot Christians to settle nearby. But Richardie’s success in attracting members of the tribe to Bois Blanc Island came at the expense of tribal unity. While Sastaretsy, Tayetchatin, and their cohort relocated to Richardie’s mission at the mouth of the Detroit River, Anguirot, Orontony, and their cohort for the most part remained at Sandusky Bay. By 1744 Governor Beauharnois could report that an uneasy peace had fallen on the Detroit River.35

Richardie played a significant but sometimes subtle and complex role in the relocation from 1738 to 1743. He was the primary and most prolific conveyor of Wyandot anxieties and grievances to the French and was trusted by both the tribe and colonial officials to communicate the goals and intentions of all involved. Yet even at his most earnest he represented the Wyandot in a way that isolated one of the three major chiefs as a bad moral influence. He undermined the plans for relocation desired by both the French and the bulk of the Wyandot when he came to believe it would threaten both their Christian morality and Jesuit spiritual hegemony on the Detroit River.

Despite Richardie’s significance in this affair, the priest was not a leader in the events that transpired. He wielded power to influence but never to control their outcome. He likely projected much more influence on French actions than on the Wyandot ones because of his control over the information the governor received. His representations of Wyandot petitions, both honest and deceitful, confused and ultimately paralyzed French officials when his undivided

35 Beauharnois to Maurepas, 9 October 1744, in WHC 17: 440-441; See also White, The Middle Ground, 194-196.
support could have made the relocation efforts far more effectual. The French actors, governmental and religious, typically reacted to initiatives and movements originating from either the Wyandot or one of their neighbors and could never direct the happenings around Detroit. The paralysis of the French in turn strained the Wyandot and opened cracks in tribal unity as anxiety over their safety and future pulled the tribe apart. The priest never controlled the tribe, but his actions helped to create the context within which they had to act. Undermining Anguirot created the opportunity for the younger Nicholas Orontony to fill a power gap and establish both clout and credibility within the tribe. Though Richardie’s efforts to move the Wyandot to a more remote location on the Detroit River partially succeeded, his actions contributed to a tribal schism and set the stage for events he could not have anticipated.

**KING GEORGE’S WAR AND THE EVE OF CRISIS**

While the French blundered about in their negotiations in the *pays d’en haut*, tensions with the British escalated into King George’s War in 1744. Though the early fight was confined to the Atlantic coast, British colonial officials sought to expand their influence by inducting new member tribes into their Covenant Chain, or the Anglo-Iroquois alliance system. Orontony had led a delegation from the Sandusky Wyandot to Albany and established a trade relationship with the British in 1743. Despite these overtures to the British, Orontony and the Sandusky Wyandot gave no indication they were willing to go to war against the French or permanently break with their brethren. Richardie, with the aid of a newly arrived Belgian Jesuit named Pierre Potier, still
ministered to the tribe at the Sandusky settlement and split his time between the Detroit River and Sandusky Bay.\textsuperscript{36}

Nicholas Orontony took the reins as effective leader at Sandusky and forged a more formal alliance with the British and Iroquois by 1745. Sandusky hosted the westernmost British trading house for furs and liquor where Wyandot and British traders travelled freely between Sandusky Bay, New York, and Pennsylvania. By Orontony’s own words, many of the Wyandot had become disaffected with the French, resented unequal power balance with the French, and saw the opportunity for cheaper goods offered by British traders. He outlined this disaffection in his meeting with the British agent Conrad Weiser in 1748, who wrote:

\begin{quote}
their coming from the French was because of the hard Usage they received from them; That they would always get their Young Men to go to War against their Enemies, and wou’d use them as their own People, that is like Slaves, & their goods were so dear that they, the Indians, could not buy them.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

The French, with Father Richardie’s aid, took steps of their own to secure an edge in Native alliances. Together with some allied Mohawks from Kahnawake, the French launched a devastating raid on the British and Iroquois settlement at Saratoga in November of 1745 as an exhibition of French might and to dispel British rumors that the French would soon be expelled from the Great Lakes.\textsuperscript{38} Richardie prepared a speech for the Wyandot near Sandusky to assure them that the French would be the winning horse in the coming conflict and that the Wyandot should beseech their kin to reject the British and stay loyal to France. Longueuil, the Detroit commandant at this time, depended on Richardie to convey his message for the tribe, as

\textsuperscript{37} “Conrad Weiser Journal,” \textit{PCD} 5: 350-351.
\textsuperscript{38} Longueuil to Beauharnois, 28 July 1745, in \textit{WHC} 17: 446-447.
Longueuil could not speak Wyandot. Richardie translated Longueuil’s message and sent it to Potier to be delivered near Sandusky with a personal postscript. As much as Richardie clashed with colonial authority during the relocation affair, he disliked the idea of the Wyandot allying with Protestant England even more. He affirmed all of Longueuil’s statements and appealed to their love for the missionary to return to the Detroit River, saying:

   My children, all that was said is true. Be his [the governor’s] children again where he is found. Take courage and return to this country [Detroit], where there are no bad tidings. Undertake this endeavor that we may see each other again soon, my brothers and sisters of blood. I love you all with all my heart, without exception, and I salute you.

   The elders responded immediately after hearing this speech, promising that all would soon return to join the Wyandot of Bois Blanc Island on the Detroit River. They included a personal response to Richardie himself that they would return to him to the place “where there is no bad news.” The old priest collapsed from a stroke soon after dispatching Potier, was stricken by paralysis, and forced to depart for medical treatment to Quebec, leaving the inexperienced Potier in charge of the mission as tensions swelled in the pays d’en haut.

   Though Potier ministered briefly to the Wyandot settlement at Lorette prior to his arrival at Detroit in 1744, he had little direct experience with tribal and colonial negotiations. Potier spent the winter at or near Sandusky but reported his work slow and ineffective. Potier’s mastery

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40 “Mes enfants, tout ce qu’il a dit, c’est bien la vérité. Soyez de nouveau ses enfants là où il se trouve. Prenez courage pour de bon et repartez pour ce pays où il n’y a plus aucune mauvaise nouvelle. Faites cet effort afin que promptement nous puissions nous revoir mes frères et sœurs de sang. Je vous aime de tout mon cœur, vous tous, sans exception, je vous salue.” *Pierre Potier*, 591. Translation by the author.

41 The Huron to Longueuil, 5 Avril 1746, in *Pierre Potier*, 594.
of the Wyandot tongue extended only to writing and delivering prepared speeches, stunting his ability to connect with the tribe.\textsuperscript{42}

Meanwhile, tensions continued to escalate due to King George’s War. The assault on Saratoga enragèd the Iroquois who retaliated and went to war against the French. The Wyandot at this point had strong ties to the Iroquois, ties strengthened and formalized during Orontony’s diplomatic overtures in 1745. Fearful that the Wyandot would side with the Iroquois and bring the fight to Detroit and perhaps doubtful of Potier’s ability to smooth things over, Richardie penned an address to the tribe from his sickbed. He beseeched the tribe both as a representative of the French and as their spiritual father, “Again I say obey, my children. Remember the way of the elders who continually encouraged one another to say: ‘We will be strengthening this country for a long time when we will attach ourselves to the governor.’”\textsuperscript{43}

Potier was well aware of both the escalating tensions and his own shortcomings in dealing with them. He appears to have arrived at the novel solution to kill two birds with one stone by collecting the first ever census of the Detroit and Sandusky Wyandot. Compiling such a census would have brought Potier into contact with nearly every person in the Wyandot tribe. Potier would have had ample opportunity to practice the tribal tongue and would familiarize himself with the tribespersons on a personal, face-to-face level. Because he compiled this census in the first months of 1747 Potier created a glimpse of the tribe and its dispersal immediately prior to the breaking point of Orontony’s plan.

\textsuperscript{42} Potier to Saint-Pé, March-April 1747, in Pierre Potier, 624. Despite time in Lorette and two years at Detroit, by 1747 Potier was only beginning to “stammer out a bit of Huron (Je rougis de honte de voir qu’après 2 ans et demi, à peine commençai-je à bégaié q[uelque] peu de huron.)” For Potier’s bookishness and unsociability, see Paré, “Pierre Potier,” 51.

\textsuperscript{43} Richardie to the Hurons, 29 December 1746, 1 April 1747, in Pierre Potier, 620-623, translation from French by the author of this article.
The census reveals that over two thirds of the Wyandot resided, or at least maintained a residence, on or near Bois Blanc Island. Though they still wintered at Sandusky, the faction that permanently moved to that area were firmly in the minority. Nicholas Orontony himself maintained a residence on the Detroit River in the same village as Sastaretsy and Tayetchatin. Orontony thus had ample opportunity to coordinate with the Anishinaabeg and Miami tribes in the area and foment discontent with the French among those tribes. It also shows that Anguirot had very recently died, leaving Orontony as the most prominent voice and undisputed leader in the pro-British faction of Wyandot.44

Richardie, even from distant Quebec, could see the writing on the wall. He so feared for Potier’s safety that he tried to have him forbidden from wintering at Sandusky and wrote the Jesuit superior of New France to enforce this desire. Richardie felt he would be healthy enough to return to Detroit by the first snowfall and aid in deescalating the tension. Potier, partially because he wanted to improve his Wyandot and partially from an earnest will to commit to his post, refused to abandon the mission unless the tribe ordered him away.45

CRISIS AND RESOLUTION

Nicholas Orontony devised a plan to destroy Fort Pontchartrain and expel the French from the pays d’en haut. The plan seems to have been to assault the Mission of the Assumption on Bois Blanc Island and either kill or capture Potier. The mission would then have been used as

44 For the census itself and an analysis in French, see Toupin and Potier, “Les Villages Hurons. Bandes. Nations. Places. Noms 1747-1752,” in Pierre Potier, 170-266. Orontony and his supporters lived and mixed freely with the French-aligned Wyandot, suggesting that the later split was more political than personal and perhaps allowed for an easier reconciliation after the tensions simmered down. For an English analysis and breakdown of tribal dynamics, see Steckley, Eighteenth-Century Wyandot, 217-234.

a staging ground to assault and capture Detroit. The plan went awry, however, when a few Wyandot at Sandusky acted too early, killing five Canadian traders from Detroit and ransacking their wares. A Native woman, either a Miami or Wyandot, travelled to Bois Blanc Island and tipped off the missionary, who fled to Fort Detroit as Orontony approached. Longueuil put the post on high alert, first banning all indigenous people from the fort and subsequently prohibiting them from carrying weapons within or near the fort. Sastaretsy and Tayetchatin disavowed Orontony’s attack and swore allegiance to the French before departing for Quebec to confirm their loyalty. Officially disavowed by the two most preeminent leaders of the Wyandot and unable to carry out his initial plan, Orontony burned the Bois Blanc Island mission to the ground and fled with a portion of his followers to Sandusky.46

The other tribes of the pays d’en haut began lashing out in the confusion. The Odawa, Potawatomi, and Ojibwa also killed and robbed several French traders in or near Detroit and Michilimackinac. The Miami chief Memeskia captured and ransacked the French Fort des Miami. The British and their Iroquois allies sent agents to foment discontent among the French allies and broaden the Covenant Chain. Colonial officials saw Orontony as the originator in the greatest crisis of the French alliance system since the Fox Wars. They saw pacifying the perceived originators of the conflict as an essential first step to pacifying the region as a whole.47

Longueuil called a council at Fort Pontchartrain in August 1747 to ascertain from the Wyandot how to pacify the region. Their chief request was that Richardie return to Detroit as soon as possible to aid in the reconciliation process. Both Sastaretsy and Tayetchatin sickened

46 For an account of the initial killings and the exposure of the conspiracy, see “Revolt of the Indians of the Upper Country,” memorandum, 1747, in WHC 17: 458-460.
and died from disease contracted during their diplomatic visit to Quebec, meaning that with
Anguirot’s death in early 1747 and Orontony’s flight, the entire upper hierarchy of the Wyandot
tribe evaporated in less than a year. Richardie also had a history of siding with the elders of the
tribe when disputes arose with the younger members, so Richardie’s return would help the elders
consolidate authority both with the French and the younger warriors at a time when clear
leadership was desperately needed. For all his earlier manipulations, the priest was still respected
and influential to the Wyandot. Richardie himself had wanted to return to Detroit almost as soon
as he departed and agreed immediately, departing from Montreal for Detroit on September 10.48

French authorities, pressured by the Atlantic coast campaigns, relied on Richardie to
bring the dissident Wyandot back into the fold as essential to pacifying the frontier. One officer,
Charles Deschamps de Boishébert, wrote to the French minister:

Should affairs not be arranged by Father Richardie, ancient missionary of the Hurons,
who is going to form a new establishment in that country, Canada would be to be pitied;
we should be in need of great assistance from France to support ourselves here.49

Colonial officials did not place all their hopes on Richardie, however. Orontony received visitors
from the Miami, turned away those answering Longueuil’s call for allies, and continued to
entertain British tradesmen at Sandusky with Longueuil unable to take action against him. The
governor sent a convoy of weapons, ammunition, and 150 soldiers to hold down the fort until

48 For French record of the August council, see “Revolt of the Indians of the Upper Country,”
memorandum, 1747, in WHC 17: 461. For the death of the two chiefs, see Steckley, Eighteenth-
Century Wyandot, 138. For Richardie’s support of the elders over the young warriors, see
Richardie to Saint-Pé, 10 June 1741, in WHC 17: 339.
49 “Report of M. Boishébert on Indian Affairs,” November 1747, in Documents Relative to the
and Company, 1856), 84 (hereafter cited in text as NYCD).
Richardie arrived. If Richardie could not restore the peace, the governor at least hoped the troops and arms would help Longueuil repel an attack.\(^{50}\)

Richardie arrived at Detroit in October with a delegation of French officers, Wyandot elders, and Kahnawake Mohawks to restore peace to the area. He appealed to the Wyandot with ecclesiastical language, assuring that all could be forgiven if the tribe abandoned Orontony but promising excommunication for all who persisted in their rebellion. As even Nicholas Orontony was a practicing Christian, the language of sin and absolution was an especially powerful assertion. Orontony reached out for potential reconciliation and visited Bois Blanc Island himself in November 1747. Richardie was willing to absolve Orontony of his actions and welcome him back into the fold, even officiating a marriage ceremony between Orontony and a Wyandot woman on November 19. Orontony’s overtures of reconciliation may have been genuine, but negotiations had fallen through by March 1748, when the dissident chief burned the village at Sandusky and retreated inland to be closer to the British. He reaffirmed his ties to the British in a meeting with Conrad Weiser in Pennsylvania, ending all attempts at negotiation.\(^{51}\)

Though Orontony permanently split from the French-Native alliance, Richardie succeeded in preserving most of the Wyandot as allies at Detroit. He convinced the French-aligned Wyandot to relocate to La Pointe-de-Montréal in 1748, directly across the river from Fort Pontchartrain, and received 5,000 livres from the government to establish a new mission.\(^{52}\) He and Potier left Orontony to his devices, at least pleased that he stayed away from the rest of

\(^{50}\) “Occurrences in Canada during the year 1747-8,” in NYCD 10: 137.

\(^{51}\) For Richardie’s initial appeals and Orontony’s marriage, see Steckley, The Eighteenth-Century Wyandot, 89. For the meeting with Conrad Weiser, see “Conrad Weiser Journal,” in PCD 5: 350-351.

\(^{52}\) La Jonquiére and Bigot to Maurepas, 5 October 1749, in WHC 18: 32.
the Wyandot while persisting in his alliance with the British. An uneasy silence fell over the pays d’en haut. Orontony maintained a strong diplomatic and trade relationship with the British, but the Wyandot headman never took major action against the French.

Nicholas Orontony died from disease sometime before September 1750, but his followers remained in exile near the Vermillion River. Richardie endeavored to convince the sundered branch of the Wyandot tribe to rejoin their kin in the French-Native alliance. He left in early September of 1750 with a few French porters and Wyandot companions. A flurry of rumor and fear erupted immediately in the tribe. A group of elders left the mission to intercept Richardie and turn him back from his mission. An elder named Babi confessed to believe that Orontony had beseeched the dissident Wyandot to kill any Frenchmen who came to meet them, even the Black Robes. Their fears convinced Potier and the Detroit commandant to send messages of their own, begging Richardie to return for fear of his life, but Richardie pressed on and met the “Nicholites” at a neutral ground a short way from their camp.

Richardie met remarkable success. The Jesuit wintered among the Wyandot for two months, competing for their attention with two British tradesmen stationed who warned the village against committing to the French in order to maintain a trading relationship. The Wyandot ransacked the British trading outpost, pillaged the supplies, and shipped them to

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53 For Richardie working among the Wyandot and Orontony’s distance from the tribe, see Marcol to Potier, in Pierre Potier, 628-629. See also “Léry’s Report of His Journey to Detroit,” 22 October 1749, in The Windsor Border Region, 46-48. Governor-General La Galissonière began encouraging Montreal inhabitants to relocate to la Pointe-de-Montréal, located on the shore of the Detroit River opposite the fort, in 1749 in an effort to secure the country against future upheavals. The Wyandot and French habitants lived in closer proximity than ever before from this point onwards.

54 Potier to Longueuil, 28 September 1749, in Pierre Potier, 630-631.

55 Pierre Potier, 636-647. Potier, Céloron de Blainville, and Bonaventure Lienard all sent panicked message to Richardie and each other. Celeron speculated that the uproar could have been caused by fear that the returning Wyandot would launch a coup and overthrow the elders and great chiefs.
Detroit for sale. Richardie convinced several of the elders and young people to depart for Detroit immediately and extracted promises from the rest to return after winter.\textsuperscript{56}  

Richardie went to Detroit in the spring of 1751 alongside most of the Wyandot dissidents. Not all of Orontony’s followers returned to their kin that year, but the French believed their kinship bonds would pull them back together quickly. This proved prescient as all of the dissidents had either returned to Detroit and the French alliance or fled the country to join either the Iroquois or the Miami by the onset of the French and Indian War in 1754.\textsuperscript{57}  

As for Richardie, the priest believed that the first wave of returns in 1751 marked the completion of his task. He departed Detroit in the summer and retired to Quebec and died there in 1758. The mission passed to Potier, who ministered to the Wyandot and the newly arrived French \textit{habitants}. Potier remained at Detroit until his death in 1781, living at a nexus of colonial power during the French and Indian War, Pontiac’s War, and most of the American Revolution. Potier would be a key actor on the contested French, First Nations, and (later) British and American landscape, carrying forward the lessons learned from observing his predecessor.\textsuperscript{58}  

\textbf{CONCLUSION}  

Richardie’s long and influential tenure as a missionary among the Wyandot at Detroit from 1728 to 1751 is representative of the Jesuits’ importance in the eighteenth century \textit{pays d’en haut}. His extensive training and facility with Wyandot language and customs made him a particularly well-qualified and effective envoy for French colonial interests. Moreover, his personal familiarity with almost every local tribal member made him an skilled negotiator and an  

\textsuperscript{56} Richardie to Potier, 10 décembre 1750, in \textit{Pierre Potier}, 653-654.  
\textsuperscript{57} Sturtevant, “Jealous Neighbors,” 175-178.  
invaluable source of information for the French. His efforts to evangelize and minister to the Wyandot were central to his ability to insert himself into Native customs and power structures and to his attempts to further inject his own spiritual and related colonial objectives.

Yet it is essential to understand the limits of Richardie’s influence in the pays d’en haut. He was more influence to French leaders than Native ones. He could communicate indigenous concerns and express grievances to colonial officials, but Wyandot leaders consistently took matters into their own hands their needs were unmet. Though Richardie convinced dissident Wyandots to reenter the fold, he could not trump Nicholas Orontony’s influence while the man still lived. The Wyandot were never pawns subject to orders and requests by the missionary or by French authority. Richardie may have met different results in the winter of 1750 had Sastaretsy, Tayetchatin, Anguilot, and Orontony not all died within such a short timeframe.

Still, it is important to emphasize that Richardie and most Jesuits had their own agenda that often did not align with French colonial aims. He cooperated with the French during the Orontony crisis from 1747 to 1751, but he actively undermined the governor and his agents during the relocation affair. He supported French attempts to keep the Wyandot away from Protestant and British influence, but he scuttled French plans when they interfered with Jesuit intentions. Richardie and his religious order were, first and foremost, concerned with winning souls for Roman Catholicism, not with creating subjects for the French king. They jealously guarded their mission from actions perceived to challenge their spiritual authority. Governor General Beauharnois astutely noted in a letter to the Minister of Marine that, “It will be easy for you to see that those Fathers want to have a share in the Government, which is very pernicious inasmuch as they make the savages act according to their Ideas and their interested views.”59

59 Beauharnois to Maurepas, 15 September 1742, in WHC 17: 414.
CHAPTER 3: JESUIT ADAPTATION AND DECLINE DURING THE BRITISH REGIME, 1754-1765

INTRODUCTION

Richardie could not have known, but his impact during the Wyandot separation crisis would prove to be the high watermark of Jesuit influence in the North American interior for the remainder of the eighteenth century. The tumultuous 1750s would begin a long period of disruption in the pays d’en haut and in the Jesuit missions around the world. The French, with Jesuit aid, were able to contain the dire situation with their Native allies by 1751, but the eruption of hostilities in 1754 with Washington’s attack on Fort Duquesne and the start of the Seven Years’ War marked the beginning of the end for French power in the west. The British conquest of Quebec in 1760 and the cession of Louisiana to Spain in 1762 brought an end to French imperial influence on the North American continent. The consequences and unanswered questions left by this turnover would later spark Pontiac’s War in 1763 and begin the accumulation of tensions that flamed into the American Revolution in 1775. On top of these disruptions, the Jesuit missionaries also experienced an additional crisis when the French Crown announced the order’s expulsion from all French lands, obliterating their institutional support.¹

These important turns of event had major consequences for the Jesuits priests still active in the hinterlands in the 1750s and 1760s. This section will focus on two priests in particular who were active in two of the most important sites of French imperial power in North America before 1760 and for Pontiac’s War and British imperial rule afterwards. Father Pierre Potier, now fluent in the Wyandot tongue, and Father Pierre du Jaunay, the Jesuit missionary to the converted

Odawa at Michilimackinac who ministered to his converts at nearby L’Arbre Croche. Both of these priests saw their mission change when the hardships of the Seven Years’ War and their assigned tribes’ increasing activism diminished their influence in imperial affairs as their diplomatic power decreased. The conquest and departure of French imperial sponsors saw their institutional support evaporate entirely while British distrust of the interior French and especially the black-robed missionaries further removed them from a position of power. Nevertheless, the Jesuits were keenly aware of their vulnerability in the new order and took measures to preserve their positions within their frontier communities and even attempted to reclaim their earlier status as ambassadors for the colonial system. The imperial crisis of Pontiac’s War and the Jesuits’ closeness to the Odawa and Wyandot allowed them to preserve their place despite Britain’s open hostility to their order. They demonstrated themselves to be of some strategic importance as they worked alongside British military officials to pacify the belligerent tribes.  

Despite the potential strategic value Jesuit priests stood to offer to the new colonial regime, British perceptions that they were actively subverting rather than aiding British imperialism and changing political realities within the Anglo-Native alliance system prevailed. This, combined with the Jesuit expulsion from Louisiana in 1763 and the dissolution of the order in the 1770s, brought an end to Jesuit political and diplomatic clout in the pays d’en haut. Though Potier would remain at Detroit until his death in 1781, the Jesuit presence in the west changed from missionary activity and diplomacy to a depowered position as parochial for the French settlers.

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SEVEN YEARS’ WAR

The Orontony Crisis and King George’s War proved pivotal moments in New France’s strategy for the pays d’en haut. The violence of the crisis and British inroads into the Ohio River Valley during the war convinced the French Crown and the New France government to double down on their commitment to the Franco-Native alliance and to their presence in the west. The governor commissioned Chaussegros de Léry to visit and renovate the western fortresses and ordered the construction of new forts at Sandusky, Presque Isle at the mouth of the Detroit River, and, most famously, Fort Duquesne. The commandants saw their budget for diplomatic gifts and supplies to the Native tribes increase substantially. This included financially supporting an expanded Jesuit mission at Detroit to better fund their missionary and diplomatic activities among the Wyandot in order to more strongly secure the tribe’s ties to France.4

This increased commitment also saw a concerted effort to place French habitants in settlements like Detroit and Michilimackinac in the pays d’en haut. The colonial government offered free land and financial support to any families who moved into the western settlements. Dozens of families moved to the banks of the Detroit River to take advantage of this opportunity and settled primarily on the southeastern shore near Potier’s Jesuit mission. Rather than trek across the river every Sunday to attend church at Fort Detroit, the newcomers instead opted to worship at the mission house alongside the Wyandot converts. French and Wyandot worshiped side by side with Potier combining his traditional role as missionary with his new role as a pastor to the French newcomers. Potier endeared himself to these new arrivals, making him an

influential leader within the French community at Detroit that considered him a “saint on Earth.”

Potier’s growing prominence with the French came corresponded to a decline in his influence among the Wyandot. The swell of French settlers into indigenous territory brought with it the traditional problems of frontier colonization. The Wyandot complained that the settlers sometimes staked their claim to land that the tribe had not formally donated to the French. Though Potier attained a stronger command of the Wyandot language, the Wyandot nevertheless began to employ the services of a new translator, one St. Martin. No evidence suggests Wyandot hostility to the priest himself, but Potier’s new responsibilities to the swell of French settlers, in addition to the new tensions the settlers brought with them, contributed to a decline in trust between the French and the Wyandot that saw them less willing to use Potier as a go-between.

These tensions accompanied an even bigger shift in Wyandot politics as the Seven Years’ War took its course. With his death in 1747, Sastaretsy’s title was passed down to a successor of a decidedly less French-exclusive foreign policy. The faction within the Wyandot desirous of a stronger alliance with the Iroquois reemerged after its brief submersion following Orontony’s death. The new Sastaretsy chose to reinforce Wyandot bonds to the Anglo-Iroquois Covenant Chain that Nicholas Orontony had formalized in his dealings with the British. The French called a council at Detroit in January 1754 as the competition for the Ohio River Valley sharply

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7 George Croghan, “Croghan’s Journal, 1760-1761,” in *Early Western Travels 1*: 121.
escalated tensions. Not only did the Wyandot refuse to affirm their support for a French war effort, they also tipped off the Iroquois that the Odawa and the other Anishinaabeg were amassing for war.\(^8\)

Nonetheless, French officials managed to secure some level of support from the Detroit tribes until the later years of the war as French supply shortages strengthened Sastaretsy’s rhetoric. A Wyandot-hosted Seneca observed a council at Detroit whereby the French commandant had managed to gather support for a raid against the British. Sastaretsy, however, vehemently refused to entertain this agenda and shouted the other tribes down, saying:

I am surprised at your Conduct & Readiness to take up the French Hatchet, without considering the Consequence, especially as I gave you a Caution, before we entered the Fort or Council Room of the French. He then added. How can I, who am the Flesh and Blood of the Six Nations and in whose Towns Numbers of our Friends & Children are living and settled, declare War against them. Where are there any of the Nations now present, that are not allied to the Six Nations also. To take up the Hatchet against them, wou'd in my Opinion be wrong.\(^9\)

Observers testified that Sastaretsy was so persuasive that he silenced the French rallying cry at that meeting and convinced the Detroit tribes to stand down for the time being. The French continued to call the Detroit tribes to arms again in early 1759 and, though some eventually joined the French during the siege of Fort Niagara, the Wyandot in particular were noted to wish to remain “tranquil on their mats.”\(^10\)

Nicholas Orontony’s actions in 1747 demonstrated the potential influence the Wyandot could wield on the Franco-Native alliance. This influence would only grow as the French and Indian War progressed. The Odawa had long reigned as France’s most powerful ally in the pays d’en haut, but the Wyandot became ascendant in the 1750s as demonstrated by the effectiveness

\(^8\) George Croghan, “Croghan’s Journal, 1754,” in Early Western Travels 1: 76.
\(^10\) Montcalm to Bourlamaque, Quebec, 12 March 1759, WHC 18: 290-292.
of Sastaretsy’s speech and his insistence on neutrality. The Wyandot alone among the French-aligned communities of the pays d’en haut possessed a strong political and kinship connection to the Iroquois and became a powerful voice for neutrality during the war. This voice became more and more convincing as the British blockade and supply shortages dried up the flow of French gifts that fueled their alliance. The acute supply shortages rendered the Wyandot and even the Odawa eager for the conflict to end and for trade to be reestablished through the British.\(^{11}\)

With growth in Wyandot power also came a renewal of internal division. Many Wyandot opposed strong ties to the Iroquois and the British, instead opting for exclusive ties to their long-standing allies, the French. Though the tribe generally trended towards neutrality during the war, the pro-French faction was powerful enough to send warriors to fight for the French in the later stages of the war despite the nadir of the French supply flow. Pro-French Wyandot fought during the siege of Fort Niagara in 1759, losing warriors to the violence and deepening the bitterness many of them felt toward the Anglo-Iroquois Covenant Chain. Though this internal tension did not manifest as a split as it had during the Orontony Crisis, rising internal disagreement accompanied the rising Wyandot influence and the turbulent political situation in the pays d’en haut. Many of the Wyandot reestablished themselves once again at Sandusky both to provide a permanent location near the new French fort and to network with tribes like the Delaware and Shawnee as well as to more easily receive visits from the Iroquois.\(^{12}\)


\(^{12}\) Sir William Johnson, “ Enumeration of Indians within the Northern Department,” 18 November 1763, NYC 7: 583.
While the internal conflict during Richardie’s tenure created opportunities for the old priest to influence the tribe, the stronger emphasis on Wyandot neutrality and a heightened position of power among the pays d’en haut communities diminished Potier’s power within the tribe. The Wyandot no longer needed a direct line to the French colonial power structure in the form of a Jesuit priest. They now communicated through their translator, St. Martin, or directly with the commandant at Fort Sandusky if they had demands for the French. The pro-British Wyandot so insisted on retaining St. Martin’s services that they extracted a promise from the British detachment sent to claim Detroit after the conquest over two weeks before they were due to arrive. They could now assert themselves to the other tribes without relying upon the French and had less need for French clout as they grew closer to the British and Iroquois and adopted neutrality. Potier’s influence continued to diminish as his financial support from New France decreased because of the financial strain of the war. Nevertheless, Potier remained a prominent member of the Wyandot community at Detroit and Sandusky in his capacity as their missionary. Ties to the British and distance from the French did not diminish their fervor for the Catholic faith. Conversion to Catholicism appears to have been close to total by 1760 and the Wyandot continued to embrace Potier as a pastor even as their diplomatic activism meant they no longer had use for him as a diplomat.13

THE NEW ORDER: 1760-1763

With the fall of Montreal in 1760, the Seven Years’ War came to its conclusion. With that conclusion came the immediate withdrawal of the French imperial presence from Quebec

13 George Croghan, “Croghan’s Journal, 1754,” in Early Western Travels 1: 121.
and the *pays d’en haut* and its eventual withdrawal from French Louisiana. The peace and transfer of power was discussed and handled exclusively between the French and the British. No representatives from indigenous communities took part in the transfer even though they were an important topic of discussion. The French Crown recognized the conquest of New France by the British and withdrew from the *pays d’en haut*, but their Native allies had not been conquered.\textsuperscript{14}

French military officials at Detroit tried to ensure a smooth transfer of power when it came time for them to depart. Commandant Belestre, a French-Canadian born at Detroit and its final French commander, held a council with the Wyandot, Odawa, Ojibwa, and Potawatomi tribes a few days before Colonel Robert Rogers would claim Fort Detroit for the British. Belestre informed the tribes of his orders from Governor Vaudreuil to turn Detroit over to the British peacefully. The French settlers had been guaranteed their property and their right to practice their Catholic faith. He told the tribes that the British had promised to take over from their French father and attend to them as well and faithfully as the French had before them. But even Belestre did not believe that the British would deal evenly with the Natives. He departed Detroit with his French soldiers in December 1760, ashamed to abandon his home and his longtime allies.\textsuperscript{15}

Potier’s future was even less certain than that of the interior French or the Wyandot. The departure of the French meant that the financial support that had fallen to a trickle during the war would now be suspended indefinitely. Protestant Britain would certainly never have funded a Catholic mission in conquered New France. More than that, the British government hated the Jesuits more than perhaps any other entity in North America, seeing them as the manifestation of all their problems in the continental interior. They believed the French, and especially the Jesuits,\textsuperscript{14--15}

\textsuperscript{14} Widder, *Beyond Pontiac’s Shadow*, 4-5.

to be at the heart of every hostile inclination directed at the British. The interior French, they believed, continually roused Native warriors to raid the interior and thwart Britain’s colonial ambitions. Reflecting on the challenges of his early years as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Sir William Johnson saw in the Jesuits a symbol for all difficulties for British expansion, writing:

The French in order to reconcile them to these encroachments, loaded them with favours, and employed the most intelligent Agents, of good influence, as well as artful Jesuits amongst the several Western and other Nations, who by degrees, prevailed on them to admit of Forts, under the Notion of Trading houses in their Country, and knowing, that these posts, could never be maintained contrary to the inclinations of the Indians, they supplied them thereat with Ammunition and other necessaries in abundance, as also called them to frequent Congresses, and dismissed them with handsome presents.¹⁶

British officials were incapable of believing that the Natives could raise the hatchet against the British without some puppet master pulling the strings. Though they universally distrusted the French *habitants*, their antipathy towards the Jesuits was special. No European, French or British, had managed to insert themselves more fully into indigenous communities than the Jesuits. They had lived and worked among the Natives for over a century and had succeeded, in many cases, in ensuring that the tribes who embraced Catholicism would stay strongly attached to the French.¹⁷

British missionaries rarely approached Jesuit missionary success in winning converts and imperial allies. The British, as did many of the Native tribes, understood that Jesuits had represented a commitment to ally militarily and politically with the French and against the British.¹⁸ British colonial officials constantly complained of the vexatious Black Robes rousing the interior against them. This reputation as Indian rabble-rousers even became a motivation to

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¹⁶ Sir William Johnson to the Lords of Trade, Johnson Hall, November 1763, *NYCD* 7: 575.
ramp up colonization for some in order to combat their influence. One pamphlet entitled “The Expediency of Securing Our American Colonies” summarized the overall attitude of the British Empire towards the Jesuit missionaries with the following statement:

These unjustifiable proceedings afford very plausible arguments to the French Jesuits and Priests, who, like Satan, whose creatures they are, love to fish in muddy waters, and are ever rambling in these parts, — to create jealousies and suspicions; widen breaches however occasioned; inflame the revengeful spirits of these cruel savages, whom they still abuse; and in short, to persuade them, that our design is, to expel all the natives, and take possession of the whole country: A notion, with which they seem to have been strongly impressed of late; but by whom, is no mystery. 19

For many British officials, the first order of business after conquering New France was to expel all French settlers, fur traders, and especially the Jesuits from the interior. They believed that control of the west could not be secured unless these dangerous subversives were removed immediately. Therefore, the new regime held little promise of friendliness for the Black Robes. Anxiety over their vulnerability in the face of institutional hostility motivated Potier and Du Jaunay in the years of conflicts and crises to come to prove their worth to British colonial officials and thus prevent their expulsion. 20

At first, the fear of expulsion compelled some Jesuits to flee to Upper Louisiana into French-held territory. This included Potier and the other Jesuit stationed at Detroit, Jean-Baptiste Salleneuve, and Jean-Baptiste de la Morinie, the missionary to the Potawatomi at St. Joseph. Salleneuve and Morinie never returned to their posts, but Potier, either from a sense of obligation to his charges or prescient awareness of the international situation of the Jesuit order, returned to Detroit before September of 1761 and was received “amid the greatest manifestations of joy by

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20 Calloway, Scratch of a Pen, 158.
his friends and with utmost humanity by the British General.” Potier’s return from exile proved incredibly fortuitous when the Superior Council of Louisiana decreed the Jesuit order to be dissolved on July 9, 1763. All the Jesuits in Upper Louisiana, including Salleneuve and Morinie, were seized and expelled from the colony with only the clothes on their backs and a few books. Britain did not dissolve the Jesuit order in Canada until the order’s global dissolution by papal decree in 1773. Thus, Potier and Du Jaunay, the last remaining Jesuits in the pays d’en haut, were left with allegiance to the regime as their only option.

Because the British recognized Detroit’s strategic importance, they made the fort the command center for the entire pays d’en haut alliance system. Sir William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the northern colonies, paid a visit Detroit in September of 1761 to smooth over some of the tensions that had arisen in the west. The regime change had left many of the tribes in doubt as to their status and to how the new alliance system would function. The indigenous communities were eager for a resumption of trade and for the flow of gifts that had been disrupted by the Seven Years’ War. Some felt threatened by the new order, with tribes like the Ojibwe of Michilimackinac and the Odawa at Detroit losing the favorable status they had enjoyed with the French regime. These tribes especially resented the British efforts to humble the tribes and relegate them to a submissive position. Others saw this new order as an opportunity to advance themselves in the new imperial context.

The Wyandot tribe split between Detroit and Sandusky found itself in a better position than any other outside the Iroquois Confederacy to take advantage of the new regime. Though a

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portion of the tribe remained firmly anti-British and anti-Iroquois, the prominence and power of the pro-Covenant Chain faction and the tribe’s kinship ties to the Iroquois allowed them to position themselves as the intermediary between the Anglo-Iroquois Covenant Chain and the former French-allied tribes of the pays d’en haut. The British even recognized the Wyandot as the head of the Detroit River confederacy of tribes and communicated both their potential as British allies and the danger they posed as an influential enemy. Other sources saw the Wyandot as strong allies who were well-disposed to the British and effective intermediaries.24

Sir William Johnson’s visit to Detroit in September 1761 testifies to the intricacies of the Wyandot position in the pays d’en haut and Potier’s new position within the alliance system. Immediately after his arrival at Detroit, fifty Wyandot women and two headmen greeted Johnson and gifted him with corn and other food goods. Johnson held a conference with all the tribes of the western Great Lakes, including the Wyandot from Detroit and Sandusky, to address their grievances with the new system, assure them of his respect, and grease the wheels of alliance with a multitude of gifts. Many Wyandot, already well-disposed to the British and the Iroquois, received him happily, but tensions persisted with others. A fight nearly broke out between the Wyandot and the Seneca present at the conference and only Johnson’s mediation and liberal distribution of gifts prevented an altercation. Ultimately, Johnson parted ways with the Wyandot on good terms, but the tensions present at the meeting did not dissipate.25

While Richardie had been central to councils and conferences like this under the French regime both as a participant and a translator, Potier did not play an active part in the negotiation.

Due to both the British distrust of Jesuits and because Wyandot ascendancy had cut out the need for a middleman in the form of a missionary, Potier was relegated to the sidelines in this affair. Johnson hired St. Martin for interpretation rather than rely on Potier, who is not recorded as having participated at all. Potier did manage to secure some face time with Johnson, however, by inviting the man to dine with him at the mission. Johnson was charmed enough by the Jesuit to personally invite him to a ball for the well-to-do habitants and French traders.\textsuperscript{26} He also made sure to visit and dine with Potier whenever he visited the Wyandot village to meet with the Wyandot chiefs. Whether or not Potier offered any counsel on dealing with the Wyandot is not recorded, but Johnson ended his visit convinced of the “favorable disposition” of the habitants and the Jesuit despite his earlier conviction of the untrustworthiness of both parties.\textsuperscript{27}

The tense situation in the pays d’en haut seemed to have stabilized after Johnson’s visit, but tribal anger reignited in 1762 when Henry Gladwin took over as the commandant of Detroit. Gladwin, much like the Governor-General, Jeffrey Amherst, held a very low opinion of the indigenous peoples. He resented Britain’s inability to conquer the tribes and made it clear in his dealings with them that he believed them inferior and foolishly arrogant for thinking otherwise. He, as did other commandants at Amherst’s behest, stopped the flow of gifts the tribes believed were the bare minimum of an alliance. He refused to lower the prices on trade goods to the competitive levels the British had earlier promised to the tribes. Worse still, his interactions with the Detroit tribes were contemptuous at best, as he disdained of all Natives and strove to subjugate the tribes through British rule rather than alliance. In one famous example, he

\textsuperscript{26}William Johnson, “1761: Conference at Detroit,” July 4-October 30, 1761, \textit{WHC} 28: 236-244.
\textsuperscript{27}Ibid, 247.
publically executed an enslaved Native man in order to send a message to all Natives to fall in line with British rule or else suffer the consequences.\textsuperscript{28}

A similar pattern emerged throughout the Great Lakes region as tension rose between the tribes and the British. The Shawnee, Mingo, and Delaware resented both British rule and their own vassalage to the Iroquois. They felt threatened by the influx of British settlers in Pennsylvania and near the Ohio River who squatted on Native land and disrupted their communities through the sale of destructive alcohol. The Odawa and Potawatomi of Detroit and the Ojibwe of Michilimackinac resented the British for their heavy-handedness and feared that they would be reduced to thralldom under a British yoke. A Delaware spiritual leader, Neolin, preached of a Native America unified against the encroaching British and called for all Native tribes to cast out the invading Europeans or else meet their doom.\textsuperscript{29}

Even the Wyandot, who had tipped off the British about a potential attack from the Seneca in 1761, could no longer suppress their animosity towards the British and began to rail against their abuses. Sandusky especially became a hotbed for Wyandot discontent, who complained to the commandant of the nearby fort that he “used them to[o] severe and bought their Land up.”\textsuperscript{30} Ironically, considering his earlier pro-British stance, Sastaretsy and his lieutenant, Takay, were the loudest among the Wyandot who came to oppose the British. The two other phatry chiefs, Babi and Téata, pushed for neutrality in the face of these tensions, but


\textsuperscript{29} Dowd, \textit{War Under Heaven}, 82, 94-96; Widder, \textit{Beyond Pontiac’s Shadow}, 77-78.

\textsuperscript{30} Ensign Pauli to Bouquet, Fort Sandusky, August 8, 1762, \textit{Bouquet Papers} 6: 107.
neutrality became a less viable option with each passing day as Pontiac, an Odawa chief at Detroit, began to rally the tribes towards war.\textsuperscript{31}

Du Jaunay and Potier opposed any clash with the British and tried to smooth over tensions and aid the British before the war broke out. Du Jaunay wrote often to Gladwin at Detroit to inform him of the discontent of the Ojibwe at Michilimackinac.\textsuperscript{32} However, their advice went unheeded by colonial officials at least in part because of their innate distrust of the Jesuits. The Fort Sandusky commandant dismissed Wyandot complaints in 1762 as the “Lies of the old Pri[e]sts.”\textsuperscript{33} Their distrust was certainly not without merit. Father Richardie had rallied the Wyandot at Sandusky into ransacking the wares of nearby British traders a mere ten years before. The Jesuits by 1762 had far more to lose by opposing the British than by assisting them, but two years as allies could not erase the suspicion born from over 150 years of direct opposition.

**JESUIT DIPLOMACY AND THE SIEGE OF DETROIT, 1763**

In 1763, the Odawa chief Pontiac managed to unite thousands of Native men and women in the colonial west to take up the hatchet against the British in the hopes of restoring the French presence on the river. The Odawa, Potawatomi, and Chippewa of Detroit and the Ojibwe from Michilimackinac took up arms under his direct command while the Mingo, Delaware, Shawnee, and the Seneca of Pennsylvania and the Ohio River Valley lashed out under the spiritual influence of Neolin. Though none of the pays d’en haut tribes took up arms against Pontiac, two specific groups offered notable resistance to Pontiac’s War. The Odawa of Michilimackinac and

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\textsuperscript{31} Navarre, “Pontiac Manuscript,” 6. \\
\textsuperscript{32} Campbell to Bouquet, Detroit, June 8, 1761, *Bouquet Papers* 5: 533. \\
\textsuperscript{33} Pauli to Bouquet, Fort Sandusky, 8 August 1762, *Bouquet Papers* 6: 107.
\end{flushright}
L’Arbre Croche never aided Pontiac, and the Wyandot of Detroit and Sandusky, whose support was either brief or mixed, had their own compelling reasons for opposing the war. It is no accident, however, that these two were the only remaining groups who hosted a Jesuit missionary. Du Jaunay and Potier both used the war as an opportunity to resume their earlier role as imperial diplomats and emissaries with notable success.

The *pays d’en haut* erupted on May 7, 1763 when Pontiac and his allies attempted to capture Fort Detroit. Colonel Gladwin was tipped off to the plot and what would have been a sack instead became a protracted siege. Pontiac’s efforts enlisted all the Detroit tribes and about half of the Wyandot. Much as the Orontony affair had done over a decade earlier, the plan to take Detroit split the Wyandot into two factions. One part, led by Sastaretsy and Takay, took part in the initial attack with the. Sastaretsy himself played an important role in rallying the other tribes into action with the Onondaga and Oneida counting him among “the first disturbers of the peace.”\(^\text{34}\) The Wyandot at Sandusky chose to align primarily with Sastaretsy and attacked the British Fort Sandusky, killing all of its inhabitants except for the commandant, who they took captive. Another part, led by the elders Babi and Theata, refused to answer the initial call.\(^\text{35}\)

Catholicism majorly affected Wyandot behavior during the siege, even among the Pontiac-aligned Wyandot. The anti-war faction even refused to take part in any war until the Catholic feast day of the Ascension on May 12 had passed. Pontiac, however, refused to take no for an answer and continually pressured the neutral Wyandot to take part in the siege. The faction finally answered his call after Potier’s Ascension Day Mass, but their aid was half-


hearted at best. Only fifty warriors from the Wyandot took part in a siege comprised of 875 warriors.\(^{36}\)

Potier became the loudest voice for peace outside of the besieged Fort Detroit. Pontiac and his allies had left him and most of the French *habitants* unmolested, but many French settlers outside the fort refused to aid him either directly or indirectly. Most of the French doubtless wished to simply be left alone and away from war, but Potier had additional motivation to pursue an end to the fighting. Potier understood that blame would fall immediately upon the French especially the Jesuits as the instigators of the attacks, even though they had nothing to gain from expelling the British and restoring French imperial presence. France had dissolved its branch of the Jesuit order, stripped them of their property, and expelled them from French lands. Two of Potier’s close friends, Salleneuve and Morinie, had been expelled as a result and Potier could not expect his situation to improve if the French returned. The British Empire was no friend to the Jesuit order, but the imperial regime in Quebec had refrained from dissolving the order unlike the French in Louisiana. Potier’s only hope to remain with his mission was for the British to retain their presence on the Detroit River. But Potier also needed to send a clear message to the British that he was an asset rather than a liability. To that end, Potier and his compatriot at Michilimackinac actively collaborated with British imperial authorities to absolve themselves of suspicion and to restore peace as quickly as possible.\(^{37}\)

Potier gave a speech on May 14 to both the French *habitants* and Wyandot attending his mission that he would deny the holy sacrament to anyone who further aided Pontiac’s War, effectively excommunicating the pro-war faction as his predecessor Richardie had during the

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\(^{37}\) For details on the expulsion of the Louisiana Jesuits, including Morinie and Salleneuve, see P. Watrin, “Banishment of the Jesuits from Louisiana,” *IHC* 10: 62-125.
Orontony crisis.\(^{38}\) The anti-war faction of the Wyandot had been loathe to participate from the beginning and would later claim to have only participated under duress. Babi and Theata’s faction believed it still had much to gain in allying with the British rather than opposing them like Sastaretsy and Takay’s group. The Wyandot had become the de facto representatives of the Detroit tribes under British rule. Potier’s declaration capitalized on their already-present feelings of discontent with the role forced upon them by their pro-war kin and Pontiac’s confederacy. On May 16, two days after Potier’s ultimatum, the majority of the Wyandot withdrew their support and joined Potier in calling for peace. Considering the Wyandot were so devotedly Catholic that they had refused to partake in the war before a special feast day, Potier’s declaration would have certainly influenced their timely decision to withdraw. The anti-war Wyandot sent a delegation to Detroit on May 22 to assert that they had only participated in the war due to Pontiac’s coercion and returned some captives as a show of good faith. Not all Wyandot stood down after Potier’s ultimatum, however, and a large portion of the tribe aligned with Pontiac through the rest of the year.\(^{39}\)

Potier became a leader among the Detroit French in addition to his prominent place within the Wyandot tribe and brought this clout to bear in an attempt to prove his loyalty and bring about peace. On May 14, the same day he excommunicated the pro-war faction, Potier organized a delegation of French *habitants* on the south side of the river to beseech Pontiac to end the war. Like Potier, the French settlers understood that they were under suspicion from the British for instigating the conflict. The war itself was also dangerous and disruptive for their lives even if Pontiac never targeted the French due in part to him forcing the French to supply

\(^{38}\) Navarre, “Pontiac Manuscript,” 76-77.

him throughout the siege. Fearing for their future motivated Potier and his delegation to sue for peace to prove that they had a place in the British west. This first delegation met little success, but Potier persisted throughout June and July to petition for an end to the war.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the Ojibwe of Michilimackinac had chosen to support Pontiac. The Ojibwe took the fort by surprise on June 2, killing or capturing almost all of the soldiers and British traders and ransacking their wares and magazines for supplies. The Kiskakon Odawa, much like the Wyandot, had embraced Catholicism thanks to the efforts of the Jesuits stationed at the longstanding mission of St. Ignace. The Kiskakon Odawa were more numerous and independent than the Wyandot and resisted all coercion to take part in Pontiac’s plan. Because this branch of the Odawa refused to participate from the beginning, Du Jaunay took a different route to prove his worth to the British Empire. While Detroit’s social and political power centered on the military post at the fort, Michilimackinac’s social and political center rested in its Catholic church. Michilimackinac’s St. Anne’s Church, according to Keith Widder, “functioned like the hub of a wheel whose spokes fanned out across the pays d’en haut,” and the old Jesuit wielded political power as its pastor. Du Jaunay’s influence derived from his close relationship with the Odawa, his ability to represent their interests before the British, and his personal bravery and initiative to take action.⁴¹

When the Ojibwe broke into Fort Michilimackinac, Du Jaunay offered refuge to a dozen soldiers, including the commander, Captain George Etherington, preventing their capture and ultimately saving their lives. He sheltered them in his house within the fort until the fighting ended, then spirited them away to the Odawa at nearby L’Arbre Croche with aid from a

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⁴¹Widder, *Beyond Pontiac’s Shadow*, 41-43.
prominent French fur trader and soldier allied with the British named Charles Langlade. The Kiskakon Odawa, who had not been notified of a forthcoming attack, were outraged at their Ojibwe neighbors and offered shelter to the surviving British soldiers. The local Odawa chief, Bindanowan, and Etherington dispatched Du Jaunay alongside Langlade and the chief’s son, Kinonchamek, to inform Detroit of the fall of Michilimackinac, assure Gladwin of the Kiskakon Odawa’s allegiance, and to demand answers from Pontiac. Etherington was convinced that Du Jaunay would be essential for peace talks and vouched for the priest while begging Gladwin to send him back as soon as possible.42

Du Jaunay’s actions at Detroit demonstrate his two-fold role as both an emissary for the British and an ambassador to Pontiac. Gladwin received the delegation from Michilimackinac and trusted him enough to give him a war belt to give to the Ojibwe. This war belt held special symbolic importance in Euro-Native diplomacy as a physical representation of alliance. Du Jaunay did not depart immediately, however, as he had received a different set of tasks from Bindanowan to hold council with Pontiac. Pontiac agreed to the council where Du Jaunay pleaded for the future safety of British captives from Michilimackinac. Du Jaunay also relayed Bindanowan’s outrage at Pontiac’s actions and his demand for an explanation. Pontiac responded only by sending a ritual war hatchet with Du Jaunay to the Kiskakon Odawa, demanding they join in the rebellion. Du Jaunay returned to Michilimackinac as an emissary both to the Ojibwe and the British, as Gladwin tasked him with carrying a wampum belt to the Ojibwe to reaffirm their good faith with the British. Bindanowan accepted the gesture from Gladwin, but rejected that of Pontiac and threw his hatchet away.43

Meanwhile, dissension among the Wyandot began to undermine Pontiac’s attempts to cast out the British. Pontiac dispatched the Wyandot and the Potawatomi to capture the British fort at Presque Isle at the mouth of the Detroit River. Rather than kill the garrison, however, the Wyandot captured most of the soldiers and returned them to their village at Detroit. Dissent between pro-war and neutral Wyandot became acute when Pontiac-allied Wyandot killed two of the prisoners while the rest were released to take refuge in Fort Detroit.44

Potier’s endeavors for a peaceful end to the conflict continued into July. He organized at least two more delegations of prominent habitants to petition Pontiac and kept an open line of communication with Fort Detroit despite the siege. Potier learned of another planned attack on Detroit Pontiac for July 5 and made ready to cross the river to inform the fort. Pontiac had had enough of the priest and the French’s unwillingness to lend him aid and threatened to destroy the mission and kill Potier if he continued to aid the fort. Potier did not remain cowed for long, however, and managed to send word to the fort on July 17 of another attack.45

“RESOLUTIONS”

Pontiac’s siege continued to deteriorate through the summer and early autumn of 1763. The neutral Wyandot had abandoned the siege near the start, but the pro-war Wyandot finally departed shortly after the attack on Presque Isle. The remaining besieging tribes began to fall away as well until October 31, when Pontiac himself withdrew to the Maumee River to continue his war deep within the hinterlands. Pontiac’s withdrawal brought an end to the most intense stage of the war in the west.

44 Christie to Bouquet, Detroit, 10 July 1763, Bouquet Papers 6: 301-303.
Peace talks began in late 1763 and the Wyandot were among the first to come to terms. Though the Detroit Wyandot had established a formal peace in 1763, many of the pro-war Wyandot, including Sastaretsy and Takay, had fled to Sandusky and continued to fight in near Fort Pitt alongside the Mingo, Delaware, and Shawnee. Colonel Henry Bouquet dealt a serious military defeat to these tribes in 1763 at the Battle of Bushy Run, but the defeat had merely halted the Native offensive. The British military’s best efforts could not bring a decisive end to the conflict.46

The Sandusky Wyandot and the rest of the belligerent tribes came to terms during Colonel John Bradstreet’s 1764 expedition into the west. A delegation commissioned by “Sastaregi of the Hurons” that represented the Wyandot, Shawnee, Delaware, and Mingo met with Bradstreet after the colonel marched into the Ohio River Valley at the head of a large detachment of British soldiers. Bradstreet offered generous terms as he had with other belligerent tribes and, in exchange for the release of all British prisoners, promised to cease hostilities. Nevertheless, the Wyandot so feared retaliation and subjugation that they sent their terms of acquiescence during William Johnson’s final peace council through a messenger rather than risk attending the conference. The compliance of the Detroit Wyandot, however, still benefitted their kin. The Wyandot returned to the prominent position they had held on the Detroit River before 1763. They assisted in bringing the Detroit Odawa to terms with the British and resumed their position as the spokespeople for the tribes of Detroit.47


The end of 1763 also marked a firm end to the influence of the Jesuits in imperial affairs. Though the British refrained from holding the French legally responsible for Pontiac’s War, British officers and agents persisted in the belief that the interior French were the true instigators of the conflict. George Croghan, a prominent tradesman and an agent of Britain’s Bureau of Indian Affairs, remarked, “In the last Indian war the most part of the French were concerned in it … they have, therefore, great reason to be thankful to the British clemency in not bringing them to deserved punishment.” The British continued to view the Jesuits as the symbol of their inability to control the interior and as masterminds sparking insurrection in the “lazy, idle people” and the indigenous communities. The Jesuits’ actions during the war could not overwrite the pre-war prejudices of those officers they had aided.48

Sir William Johnson believed expelling the Jesuits would aid the British empire in more ways than disposing of a subversive presence. Writing in January 1764, Johnson expressed:

After all that can be said, we shall be liable to many Broils, till the French Inhabitants and Jesuits are removed, the latter (being no longer a society in France) we might very well appropriate their Lands to his Majesty’s Use. I dare say they would be sufficient to endow a Bishoprick in Canada, and for good Missionaries, and I imagine an Episcopal Foundation in that Country would greatly Contribute to bring over the French, and make good Subjects of them in Time.49

Also subscribing to the belief that Britain could never control the interior while it maintained a French population, Johnson saw an opportunity in Jesuit expulsion to further consolidate British control. Taking inspiration from the Catholic missionaries he despised, Johnson planned to deploy similarly trained British missionaries to replicate the attachment some indigenous communities felt for the Jesuits in order to further wed them to British rule.

48 George Croghan, “Croghan’s Journal, 1765,” in Early Western Travels 1: 152; Calloway, Scratch of a Pen, 123.
Part of the peace terms for the Michilimackinac Ojibwe were to consent to the removal of all French fur traders and Jesuit missionaries from the fort, to which the Ojibwe consented. The Kiskakon Odawa, however, did not consent to the removal of their trusted missionary. They had fallen under suspicion despite never having aided Pontiac and had to argue their case before Sir William Johnson. Chief Bindanowan affirmed both his and Du Jaunay’s friendship to the British during the war, saying:

I only heard a little bird Whistle an Acct of it & on going to Michilimackinac I found your people killed. Upon w[hi]ch I sent our Priest to inquire into the Cause of it. On the Priests return he bro[ugh]t me no favorable acc[oun]t, but a War hatchet from Pondiac w[hi]ch I scarcely looked on, & imediately threw away.\(^{50}\)

Despite these affirmations and the significant aid that Du Jaunay and the French had given to the British during the war, British high command under General Thomas Gage ordered that all French traders, settlers, and missionaries be removed from Michilimackinac. The commandant, holding a better understanding of the situation at Michilimackinac, saw no reason to comply with this and belayed the order. The French were allowed to remain at Michilimackinac, but their numbers remained too small for a tithe to support Du Jaunay’s mission. The old Jesuit retired to Quebec in 1765.\(^{51}\)

Though Potier had tried to reinsert himself in the imperial system as an ambassador during Pontiac’s War, the missionary never managed to reclaim the position he had under the French. Unlike Du Jaunay, Potier was allowed to remain at his post. His saving grace likely came from his attachment to the Wyandot, who were, to the British, “remarkable for their good sense and hospitality” with, “a particular attachment to the Roman Catholic religion, the French,

\(^{50}\) “A Conference With Foreign Nations,” July 9-14, 1764, \textit{WJP} 4: 476.
by their priests, having taken uncommon pains to instruct them.” Potier and a delegation of elders personally requested that Potier be allowed to remain among them during council on April 29, 1764. Potier was allowed to remain the Wyandot missionary as he had under the French, but no effort was made to fund his mission.

Potier relied on tithing his Wyandot and French parishioners to fund the mission, but still found himself unable to cope with the costs. The war had left the Wyandot with few trade goods to help fund the mission, so they deeded a portion of their land to the mission. Potier, lacking the laborers needed to till the soil, sold the land to a French habitant. The Catholic bishop of Quebec provided a more lasting solution to support Potier’s missionary efforts. He established a parish on the southeast shore of the Detroit River to join the parish on the northwest shore adjoining the fort. Naming it the Parish of the Assumption and appointing Potier the pastor, the archdiocese of Quebec began to support the mission financially to prevent its closure. Potier never truly escaped financial hardship, but the additional support from the bishop and his appointment as a parish priest allowed him to continue his practice even after the international dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773.

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53 “Brother, when you first came here you told us you had conquered our Father & sent him over the Great Lake, & that all that then belonged to him was yours, but that we shou'd remain in our former Possessions and be allowed the Jesuit, and now as we are going to alter our Village we hope you will not prevent him going with us,” Jehu Hay, “Diary of the Siege of Detroit,” 90-91.
54 Potier to Briand, Detroit, 6 September 1768, Windsor Border Region, 118.
CONCLUSION

The Society of Jesus and its black-robed missionaries rank among the most important and influential figures in early North American history. They spearheaded New France’s expansion by forging strong and lasting relationships with powerful indigenous communities. Their zeal for spreading their version of Roman Catholicism to indigenous communities pushed them deep into the interior and pushed them to contact peoples with which no other European had interacted. Perhaps alone of all the Europeans who chose to relocate to North America in the seventeenth century, the Jesuits could not count the possibility of material gain as one of their motivations. Many of the Black Robes crossed the Atlantic in the hopes of meeting a violent end and so receive an eternal reward as a martyr of the Christian religion. In this regard, at least, many found success.¹

The Jesuit legacy in early North America is complicated, to say the least. In pushing deeper and further than most Europeans and through their sustained contact with the indigenous peoples of North America, they undoubtedly and unintentionally exacerbated the spread of infectious diseases that killed so many thousands of Native people. Their push for certain Native tribes to ally with New France involved them in the continental wars of European empires. Their constant drive to evangelize North America had them press for the dissolution and rejection of centuries-old Native traditions and spirituatlities, though in this they found relatively little success.²

Historical narratives of New France tend to shift away from the Jesuit priests after the 1660s as the French colonial project intensified and expanded, but the Jesuits occupied an

¹ Axtell, Invasion Within, 5, 273, 276, 279-280.
important place in the new phase of colonialism as they had of old. The missionaries had enjoyed a near monopoly of access to the indigenous communities of North America before Louis XIV converted New France into a royal colony. The Jesuits then contended with an imperial vision that often clashed with their own but could not dispense of their services or their expertise. Rather than limit themselves to decrying the liquor trade, spreading Catholicism, or regulating sexual interactions between Europeans and Natives, the Jesuits threw themselves into the transforming imperial enterprise of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. They adapted their previous methods of interacting with the indigenous communities to become powerful and influential diplomats who could often direct the course of intercultural discourse, interactions, and politics. In theory, they advised and aided their assigned indigenous communities while pushing the French colonial agenda. In practice, they maintained their own agenda based on what they saw as their overriding missionary obligations. They subverted or complicated relations between French and Natives if they felt their vision threatened, jealously defending their access to the tribes and limiting the access of parties they considered undesirable.³

The pressures of rising imperial tensions during King George’s War and the Seven Years’ War led many of the tribes to which the Jesuits were assigned to adopt a more direct approach when dealing with European colonial empires. They began to eschew the use of the Jesuits as intermediaries and openly courted an alliance with the British that would render their political relationship with the Society of Jesus moot. Nevertheless, the few remaining Jesuits

would take up their old mantle as agents and arbitrators of empire during the crises of the British regime in the *pays d’en haut*.4

The British conquest of New France created a powerful anxiety in the Jesuit missionaries over their place in the new regime. Fearful over their fate at British hands, some chose to flee to Louisiana and faced expulsion as their order was abolished in France. Others, such as Du Jaunay and Potier, resolved to make themselves valuable to the new order by encouraging the Natives and French settlers and fur traders to consent to British rule. Pontiac’s War provided them an opportunity to demonstrate their suspect loyalty to the new regime and to potentially reclaim a portion of their diplomatic power held previously under the French.

The British, ever suspicious of the black-robed priests who had opposed them for over a century, refused to grant the Jesuits their old prominence. While local officials at Detroit and Michilimackinac as well as tribal chiefs among the Wyandot and Kiskakon Odawa rediscovered the Jesuit potential to aid their cause, officials stationed in Quebec, New York, and Pennsylvania insulated from the direct conflict did not recognize their contributions, pushing instead to expel the Jesuits and all French-Canadians from the interior. Despite these suspicions, the interior French remained in their long-established position in the west. British fur traders needed them to act as middlemen between themselves and the western tribes due to the longstanding friendship and frequent kinship bonds between the French and the Natives. The interior French remained in the west well beyond the American Revolution.5

The Jesuits, however, lost what little place they had left. Expelled from Louisiana and removed from their remaining enclaves at Kahnawake and Michilimackinac, the Jesuits who had roamed the interior and influenced empire and colonialism in French North America for over a

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5 Gitlin, *Bourgeois Frontier*, 10-12.
century disappeared from the continent outside of Detroit, Quebec, and Maryland. Though the order maintained a small presence in British Canada until the papal act of suppression in 1773, only Potier remained of the Jesuits in the *pays d’en haut*.

Armand de la Richardie, after retiring to Quebec in 1751, became a professor at the Jesuit seminary college. He was eventually promoted as the seminary’s vice superior in 1755 and became the spiritual director at the Hotel-Dieu monastery in 1756. Richardie died in Quebec at age seventy-two in 1758, just one year before the capture of the city. Pierre du Jaunay was forced by financial circumstance to end his twenty-nine year tenure as missionary to the Odawa at Michilimackinac in 1765. He left a deep impression upon those Odawa who knew him, some of whom spoke of his missionary activities and prayers as late as 1824. He was appointed to be the spiritual director of the Ursulines at Quebec in 1767, a post he enjoyed until his death at age seventy-four in 1780.6

Potier spent the rest of his life on the south shore of Detroit in what is now Windsor, Ontario. He was allowed to remain at his post after the international suppression of the Jesuits because Archbishop Briand appointed him the pastor of the Parish of the Assumption at Detroit. His parish grew so rapidly that he had to sell mission land to fund construction of a larger parish. Wyandot and French settlers worshiped alongside each other at the mission and Potier remained active as both a missionary to the tribe and a pastor to the French. Potier would have preferred focusing entirely upon his mission to the Wyandot, however. He tried to enlist Rev. Pierre

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Gibault as an associate pastor to minister to the French so he could focus all his effort on the Wyandot.⁷

The British commandants eventually came to respect Potier as a decent man and called upon him to reaffirm the loyalties of the Detroit habitants during the American Revolution. Potier’s own loyalties during the Revolution are complex. While he called upon the habitants to honor their oaths of allegiance to the British Crown, he maintained a correspondence with an American patriot named John Dodge. He met Dodge when the man was held captive at Detroit during the war and maintained a correspondence even as Dodge aided George Rogers Clark’s famous expedition into the pays d’en haut. That expedition eventually captured the Detroit commandant and all his men at the Battle of Vincennes in 1779. Whether or not Potier aided the Americans directly or indirectly if at all, Potier speaking with the British and Americans from both corners of his mouth indicates his resolve to remain with his mission no matter who laid claim to the Detroit River.⁸

Potier died in 1781 at the age of seventy-three after falling onto a fire poker that pierced his skull. Potier was deeply mourned by the French habitants and traders but his sudden passing especially aggrieved the Wyandot. The tribe mourned publically for the priest who ministered at Detroit for nearly thirty years. The principal chiefs called a council after a period of mourning and demanded a new missionary to fill the void, saying:

My father, in the name of God & of all the Huron nations, help us in our present need of a missionary, the loss of Pere Poitier has left a general desolation in our villages, which will only cease when he is replaced by another. Instructed from infancy in the principles of the Christian religion, we follow them faithfully under the direction of our spiritual

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⁸ “Report by Lieutenant-Governor Henry Hamilton on his proceedings from November, 1776 to June, 1781,” *IHC 8*: 177; John Dodge to Potier, Fort Duquesne, 15 September 1779, *IHC 5*: 120-121.
leaders; but today what have we become? The souls of our warriors will tremble henceforth at the thought of death which follows them every moment, the blood of our old men & of our women will freeze at the approach of the last moment of their lingering lives, the mothers are distressed at the state of their children …⁹

The British allowed Jean-François Hubert, a diocesan priest, to assume Potier’s old office later that same year.¹⁰

The fate of the Wyandot follows an all-too familiar pattern through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. More French and Anglo-American settlers relocated to Detroit as the eighteenth century progressed, putting more pressure on the Wyandot. They and the other Detroit tribes began to sell land to the newcomers, especially the French, until the newborn United States of America was granted possession of Detroit in 1797. The Wyandot remained neutral to imperial tensions during the American Revolution, but opted to oppose the Americans at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 and to side with the British and their allies, the Native confederacy organized and led by the Shawnee headman, Tecumseh. They aided in the capture of Detroit during the War of 1812. The Americans did not forget this or Tecumseh’s confederacy after the war’s conclusion gave Detroit back to the Americans. Subsequent federal laws progressively shrunk Wyandot land holdings until the tribe was forced to relocate in the 1820s. Moving several times throughout the nineteenth century, the Wyandot tribe eventually settled in Oklahoma and Kansas, where their descendants live to this day.¹¹

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