



2016

8: Religious Life at Fort St. Joseph

Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project

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Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project, "8: Religious Life at Fort St. Joseph" (2016). *Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project*. 62.

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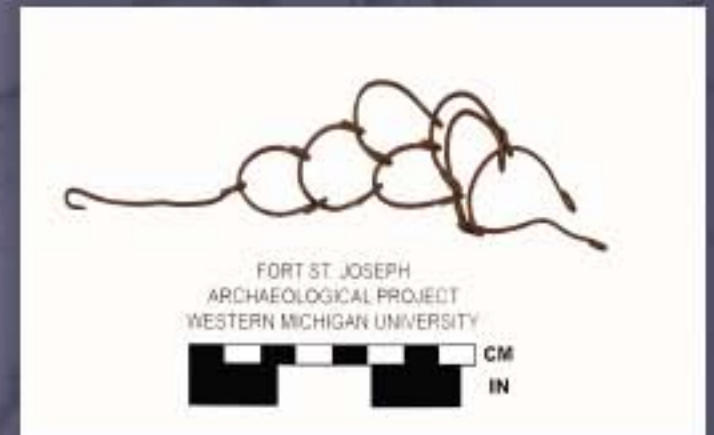
Religious Life at Fort St. Joseph

Written documents indicate that the Jesuit priests settled among neighboring Native American groups and were successful at creating some converts at the St. Joseph mission.



A cross erected near the fort site commemorates Father Allouez, a Jesuit priest at the mission.

- The discovery of an unusual artifact at the fort has the potential to shed light on Catholic devotional practices of the Native Americans and French-Canadians living at this frontier outpost. This artifact is a cilice, an item of self-mortification. It was used to inflict pain as Jesus suffered or to atone for one's sins. The cilice was found during the 2004 field season and is incomplete but enough remained for its identification. This cilice from Fort St. Joseph represents the only known example ever recovered from an archaeological site in North America. We may never know exactly who used the cilice, but there were three groups of people who could have used it: the Jesuit priests, the French-Canadian inhabitants, or Native American converts.
- Jesuit priests were known to engage in self-punishment and documents record the Fort St. Joseph priests' depth of devotion.
 - Catholic church attendance of the French-Canadian inhabitants was required by civil and ecclesiastic law. In conjunction with the written records, the recovery of many religious items such as medallions, crosses, rosary beads and "Jesuit rings" allows us to infer that at least some fort inhabitants were practicing Catholics and may have privately used the cilice.
 - Records also show that some Native Americans in the area were baptized and practicing Catholics. Native American ideology often mixed suffering (fasts, exposure to cold) as part of a spiritual process, and the use of the cilice may have been easily adopted into Native American beliefs. The cilice and other religious artifacts provide information on the importance of christianity at this frontier outpost.



Cilice uncovered at Fort St. Joseph.



Cilice of Bishop Scalabrini from the late 19th century.