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Spring 2017

## Partnerships 2: An Archaeological Partnership with the Religious of Niles

Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project

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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Fort St. Joseph Archaeology

# An Archaeological Partnership with the Religious of Niles

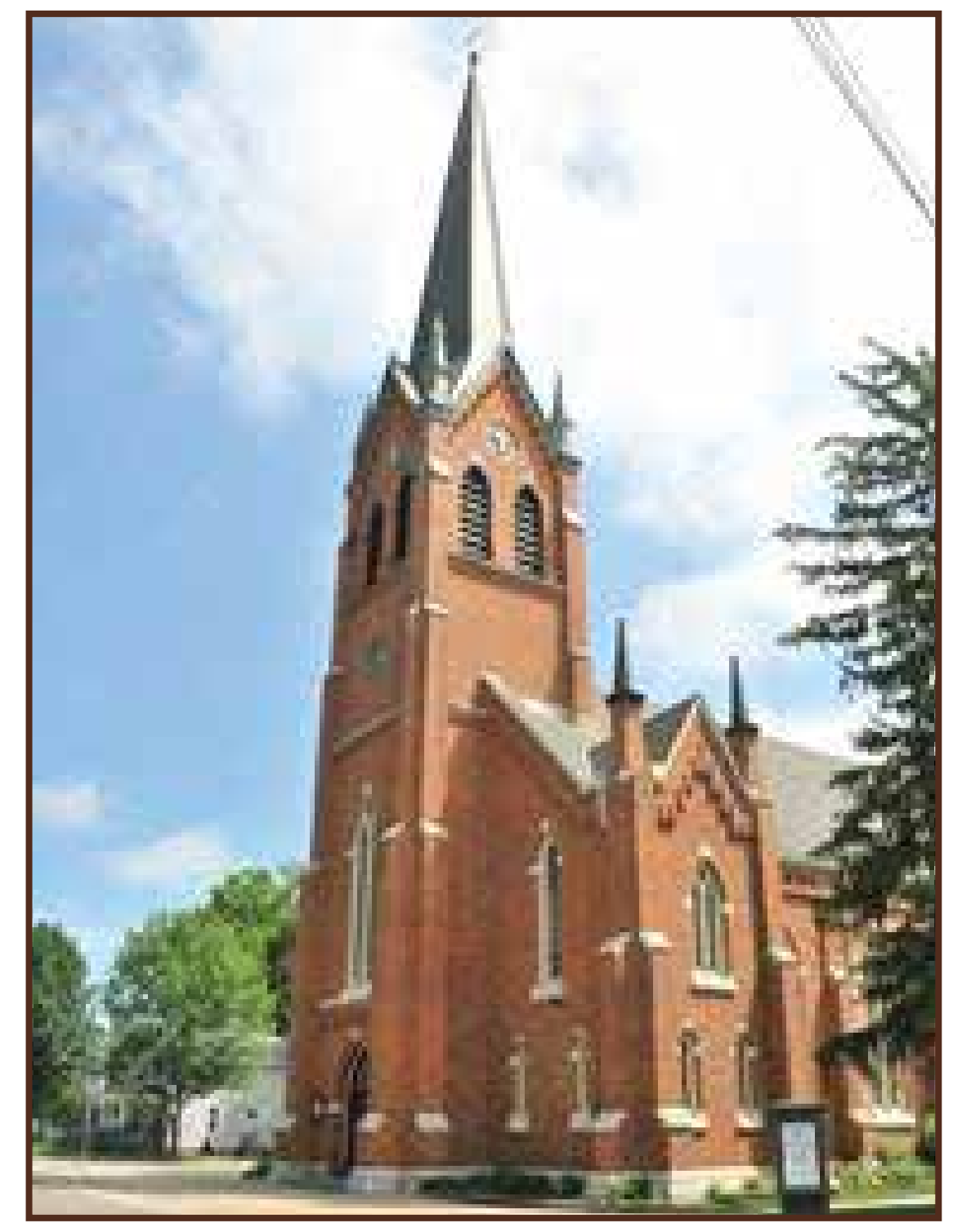
The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project (hereafter “the Project”) aims to build an active partnership with the religious community of Niles. Given the importance of Catholicism at Fort St. Joseph, the Project has reached out to one of these communities, St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish, to explore their potential interest in collaboration.



Religious pendants found at the Fort St. Joseph site. Two crosses (pictured right and left) and one crucifix (pictured middle) are indicative of a Catholic presence at Fort St. Joseph. Photo by Genevieve Perry.

## RELIGION AT FORT ST. JOSEPH

Fort St. Joseph was established as a mission by the Jesuits in the 1680s with the support of the French crown. The French prioritized the establishment of a mission in this area of the St. Joseph River as part of a strategy to convert Native Americans to Catholicism and, more generally, to create social, economic, and political alliances with the Potawatomi and other Native peoples. Archaeologists have identified evidence of religious activity at the site. Archaeological investigations have the potential to directly connect modern religious individuals to the history of their faith in the region.



St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish Church located in Niles, Michigan. Photo courtesy of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COLLABORATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

Collaborative research involves the direct involvement and active participation of community partners. Collaborative anthropology allows researchers the opportunity to gain personal insight from community members and produce braided knowledge, a form of knowledge which blends the perspectives of all project partners, and creates a more responsible anthropology. Such research is valuable, and different from traditional academic study, as it recognizes the fact that knowledge comes in various forms and from diverse sources.

## ACADEMIC AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTERESTS

Anthropologists study people and their culture, past and present. The accurate and respectful characterization of the groups they study, and those they engage with in the field, is among their top priorities. For this reason, anthropologists and archaeologists, who are experts at studying both immaterial and material culture, often seek the input and involvement of descendant, local, and interested communities. Anthropological work which is produced with the approval of, and in collaboration with, such communities is more likely to be sustainable, ethical, useful, and relevant.



Jesuit re-enactor interacting with guests at the 2016 Archaeology Open House. Photo by Genevieve Perry.



Granite cross commemorating Father Allouez along Bond Street in Niles near Fort St. Joseph. Photo by John Cardinal.



St. Mary's School, the private primary school associated with St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Niles, Michigan. Photo courtesy of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish.

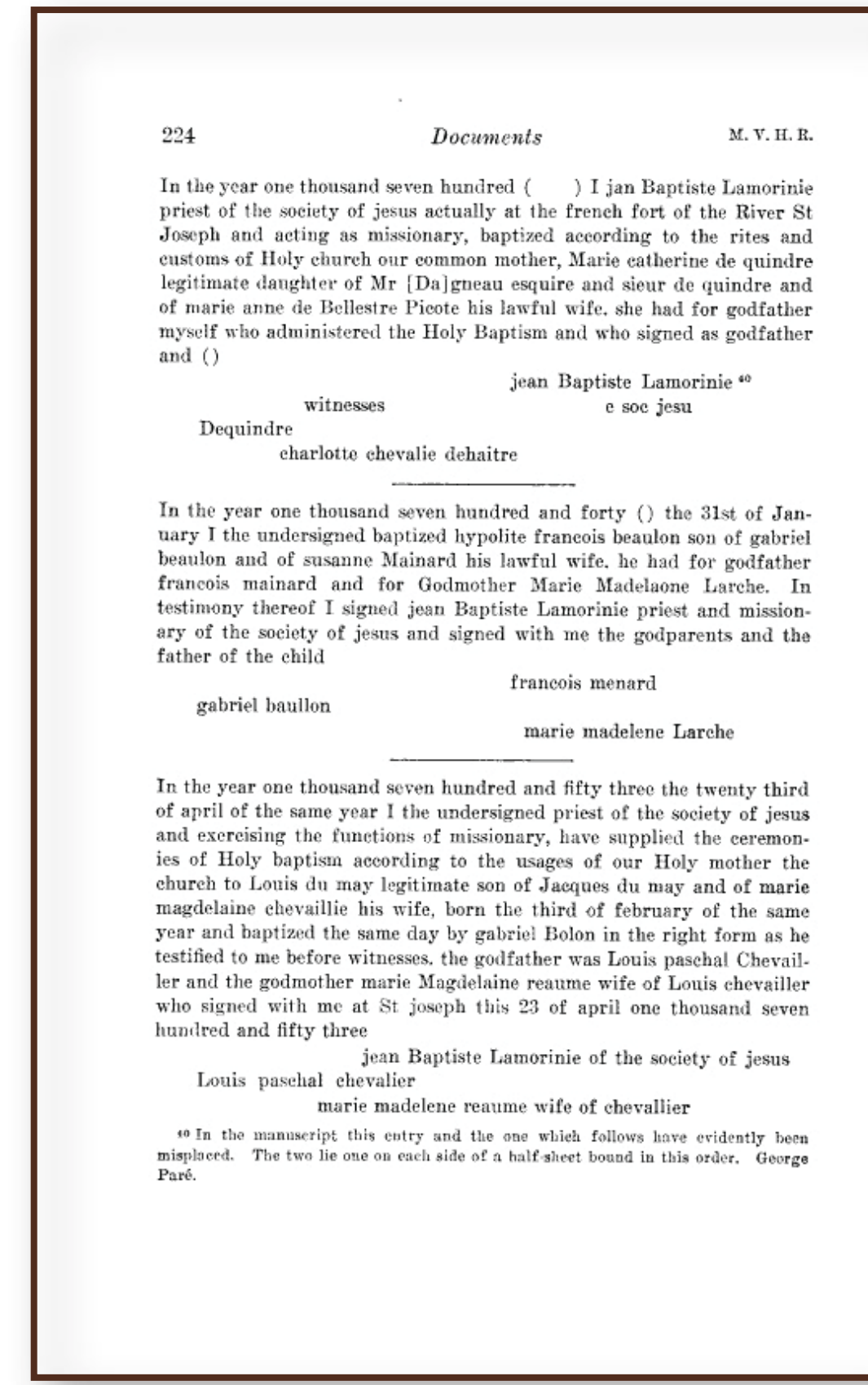
Religious medallion depicting Jesus Christ found at the Fort St. Joseph archaeological site. Photo by Austin George.



The obverse and reverse of a religious medallion found at the Fort St. Joseph site during excavations in 2016. The Latin inscription, “MATER DEI,” on the side depicting the Virgin Mary (pictured left) translates to “Mother of God.” Photo by Austin George.



The obverse and reverse of a religious medallion found at the Fort St. Joseph site. The depiction of Christ (pictured left) includes a Latin inscription, “CLARIOR SOLE MISERE,” meaning “you, who are brighter than the sun, have mercy.” The depiction of the Virgin Mary (pictured right) includes an inscription, “MATER SALVATORIS,” meaning “Mother of the Savior.” Photo by J. Lacko.



A page taken from the St. Joseph Baptismal Register detailing 18th century baptisms at Fort St. Joseph. From George Pare and M. Quaife (1926).

## EXISTING RECORD OF SUPPORT

The church and the Project have an established relationship. St. Mary's parishioners and students have visited the museum and the archaeological site and have donated time and resources to the Project. Additionally, individual members of the Niles Catholic community have expressed interest in the Project by attending the Archaeology Open House, the annual summer lecture series, summer camps, and other community events sponsored by the Project.



Crucifix found at Fort St. Joseph in 2009. Courtesy of The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project.



Field school student showing off crucifix found at the Fort St. Joseph archaeological site. Photo by Tori Hawley.



Jesuit re-enactor interacting with guests at the 2009 Archaeology Open House. Photo by Tori Hawley.

## STRENGTHENING OUR PARTNERSHIP

Discussions with religious community members have revealed a series of possible collaborative initiatives with the potential to strengthen our working relationship, including:

- The study and preservation of the Fort St. Joseph site. Project findings, specifically those related to religious practice, have contributed greatly to the understanding of the history of Catholicism in the region. As such, religious community members are interested in supporting further study, preservation, and interpretation of the site.
- A historical places tour in Niles to showcase locations related to the shared history of the church and the fort.
- A field mass at the Archaeology Open House to include historical prayers and reference to the Catholic presence at Fort St. Joseph.
- Representatives from St. Mary church have expressed interest in hosting guest speakers to inform their youth groups, and potentially wider audiences, about the religious history and significance of the fort.
- The inclusion of a traveling teacher's trunk, specifically one containing artifacts and informational materials related to the study of Fort St. Joseph, could be added to the St. Mary's School curriculum.

Archaeologists and the religious community of Niles are working together to define and achieve mutual goals using the tenets of collaborative, community-based research. Our next steps await operation, but a shared interest in the history of Fort St. Joseph and in community-based learning objectives is likely to drive the partnership forward in the future, in ways we have yet to imagine.



This exhibit was created and designed by members of the Anthropology in the Community class (ANTH 5030) in Spring 2017 (Jennifer Blouin, Chris Carpenter, Amber Coniglio, Stephanie Flounory, Alyssa Gunn, Stefan Hubble, Hailey Maurer, Jeffrey Nau, Kourtney Potts, Josh Schneider, Kyle Sicotte, Ashley Sussmann, and Meghan Williams under the supervision of Michael S. Nassaney). It was produced with support from the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project, a partnership between Western Michigan University and the City of Niles. Thanks to our community partners who assisted, especially Christina Arseneau, Steve Arseneau, Mary Ellen Drolet, Roger Gregorski, Sharon Gregorski, Christian Johnston, Bob Myers, Sanya Phillips, Ken Sarkozy, Monica Topash, Marcus Winchester, and Michael Worline.