

Joseph the Huron



Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Antoinette Bosco

Joseph the Huron

by Antoinette Bosco



Illustrated by Norman Pomerantz

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Portraits in Faith and Freedom

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Joseph the Huron

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Statement on Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Bethlehem Books is bringing back this series of biographies originally made available in the 1950's and 60's by publishers who wished to introduce young people to a wide range of arresting and faithful Catholic lives. Slightly edited now for the modern reader, these biographies present key people and events from the past that help us reflect anew on the meaning of freedom. They depict how powerfully men and women of faith have formed and influenced the world in which they live.

Web Resources

To access printable maps, a timeline, and other information, visit <http://bethlehembooks.com/joseph-huron-856>

About Usage of Outdated Terms

In republishing the books that form our *Portraits in Faith and Freedom* series, the editors considered whether it would be worthwhile to update the authors' usage of words like "Indian" and "Negro." The more current preference among many is "Native American" and "African American." The editors found, however, that changing the original terms often did not work well for the context of those times. The attitudes of respect and honesty that inspired these works—written in the 1950s and early 1960s—clearly conveyed the authors' positive meaning. In most cases, therefore, we have let the words stand.

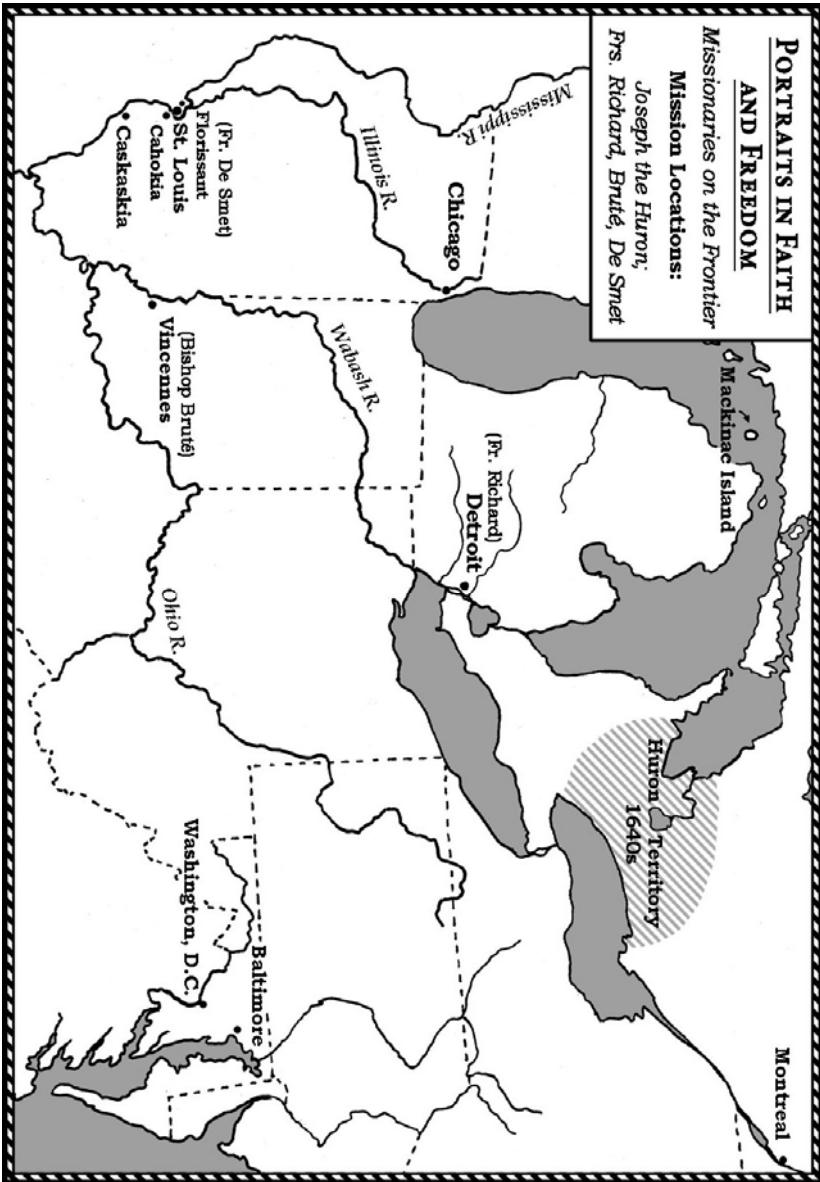
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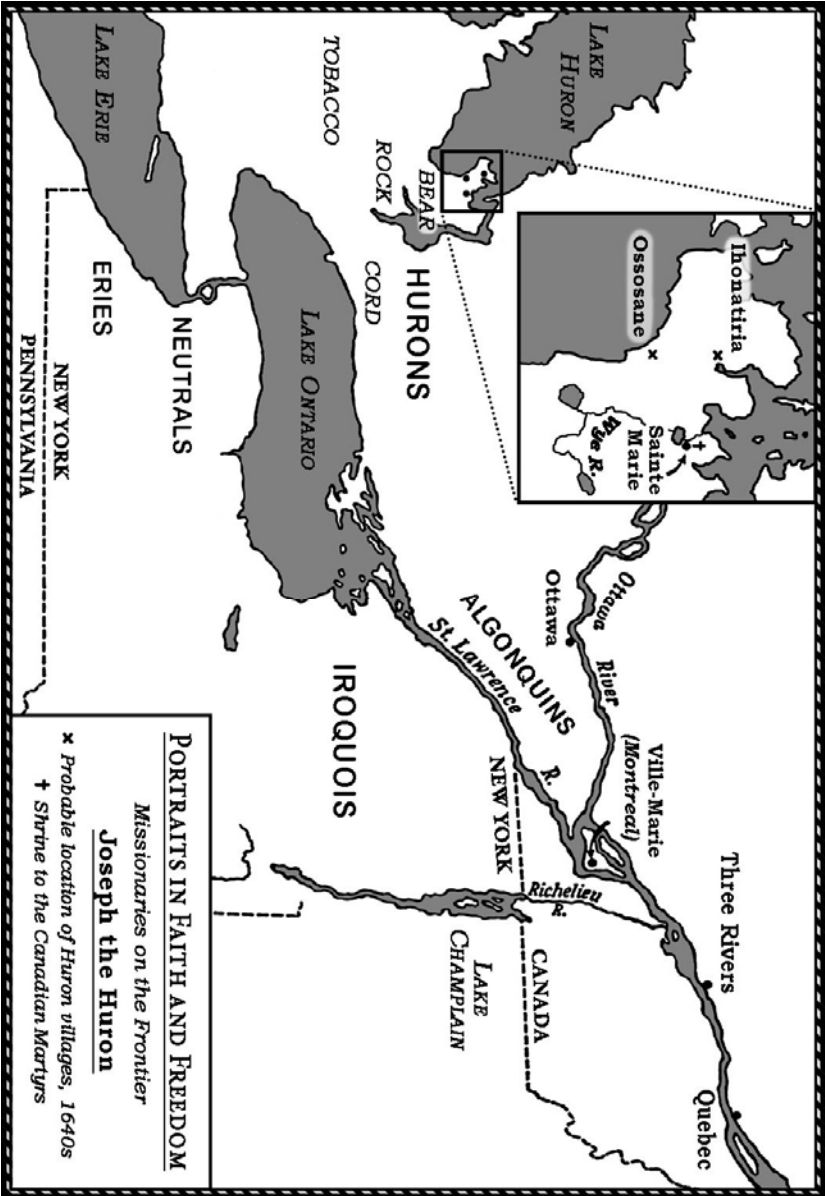
Dedicated to
the Reverend Francis X. Talbot, S.J.,
of beloved memory, who first hoped that
the story of Joseph Chiwatenwa would
be made known

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Author's Note

It was Julie Kernan, editor of American Background Books, who first introduced me to Joseph Chiwatenwa. Her friend, Father Francis X. Talbot, S.J., had talked about “an Indian named Joseph,” converted by the Jesuits, who lived a fascinating story. Father Talbot hoped to write a book about Joseph, but he died before this could be done.

With the help of Father James Somerville, S.J., chairman of the Philosophy Department of Fordham University, I obtained volumes of the *Jesuit Relations*, and began to study the history of the seventeenth-century North American Jesuit missions, gleaning the story of Joseph Chiwatenwa's life from these *Relations*, or letters which the missionaries wrote and sent back to their superiors in France.

For his help in obtaining research materials, I now publicly thank my friend Father Somerville.

In addition to the *Jesuit Relations*, mainly volumes 15 to 21, *the Encyclopedia Americana*, and reference books on Indian history from the shelves of the New York State Library in Albany, N. Y., the following books were also helpful in my research: *Saint Among the Hurons*, F. X. Talbot, S.J., Harper & Bros., New York, 1949; *Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons*, Wilfrid and Elsie Jury, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1954; *Saint Among Savages*, F. X. Talbot, S.J., Harper & Bros., New York, 1935; *Les Relations de ce qui s'est passé au pays des Hurons (1635–1648)*, St. Jean de Brebeuf; *Jesuit and Savage in New France*, John H. Kennedy, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1950; *Donjon of Demons*, B. Fitzpatrick, Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1930; *The Jesuits in History*, Martin P. Harney, S.J., America Press, New York, 1941.

A. B.

Principal Persons and Places

Indians:

CHIWATENWA, Huron brave who took the Christian name of Joseph
TEONDECHOREN, Chiwatenwa's older brother

SAOEKBATA, another brother of Chiwatenwa who became the
Christian Peter

AONETTA, wife of Chiwatenwa, baptized Marie

TSONDIHWANE, elderly Indian of Ossosane, whose Christian name
was René

ONDIHORREA, a chief of the Cord nation of the Hurons

AOCHIATI, first Christian of the Cord nation, baptized Matthias

ONONKWAIA, Oneida chief captured by the Hurons

Jesuit missionaries:

FATHER JEAN DE BRÉBEUF, known as Echon by the Indians

FATHER ISAAC JOGUES, whose Indian name was Ondessonk

FATHER JEROME LALEMENT, successor to Father de Brébeuf as superior of Huron mission

FATHER FRANÇOIS LE MERCIER, another missionary to the Hurons

FATHER PIERRE CHASTELLAIN, missionary called Arioo by the Indians

ROBERT LE COQ, Jesuit oblate or *donné*

Huron villages:

IHONATIRIA, site of first Jesuit residence with Hurons

OSSOSANE, capital village of Bear nation



1. The-People-of-One-Land-Apart

THE CAPTAIN of the capital village of the Bear nation gave the order. It was time to move the village again. The soil which had been so rich ten years ago now no longer yielded high stalks with ears full of yellow corn, or squashes or pumpkin fat with nourishment. A few miles away there was new land. They would move there, build their wall and their cabins, and a new capital would rise up on rich soil.

The nations of the Hurons—or in their own language the Ouen-dats, the People-of-One-Land-Apart—could always find a new location for their villages. There was land to the north for the Bear nation; land to the south and east for the Cord nation; land to the center and south for the Rock nation.

The forests were thick with cedar, birch, maple and spruce, providing wood and bark for their canoes and for their cabins which were called longhouses because of their shape. Land could be cleared for planting. There were mighty lakes for fishing. And the great river close by provided a waterway on which their flotilla of canoes, laden with beaver skins, furs and tobacco, could reach the French settlements in the area called Quebec. After bargaining, they would return to the land of the Hurons with metal pots, iron knives and arrow points, hatchets, blankets, and the prized porcelain beads.

Chiwatenwa, a chieftain's son, and his brothers, Teondechoren and Saoekbata, followed their father. Like the other braves they carried the tools of men to the new location—bows and arrows, javelins, knives, clubs and hatchets.

The squaws and the young girls of the family carried the makings of a longhouse. First they had packed blankets, winter clothing, dried eels and corn into bundles. Then they had salvaged and tied into rolls big pieces of bark from the top and sides of the cabins to be abandoned. The women carried these huge bundles on their shoulders, supporting them by fastening them to the ends of a broad leather strap which circled their foreheads. From another leather belt around their waists dangled kettles, knives, bark bowls and the possessions they cherished, clanging and clattering as they walked.

Chiwatenwa's father glanced back at his second son. The boy had reached manhood, for he could see over the tops of the heads of his uncles, and the round hard muscles of his chest and arms showed strength under his copper skin.

"The women of our cabin are heavily burdened. If you had taken a wife, Chiwatenwa, she could be sharing the work."

Chiwatenwa nodded to his father, but did not answer.

"Chiwatenwa does not care about such matters," his brother Teondechoren taunted, laughing meaningly. "He does not play the games which men enjoy. He does not even use tobacco!" Teondechoren patted the tobacco pouch on his back hip.

"Games?" answered Chiwatenwa in derision. "I do not care to gamble away the possessions I have worked hard to earn." He glanced at his brother, only two summers older than himself, and smiled at the manner in which he had adorned himself for the special occasion of the moving of the village.

Teondechoren wore a broad black band of paint across his face from ear to ear; his nose was painted red so that with its pronounced curve, it resembled a beak. He had outlined his eyes with white circles, and his body was shiny from crisscrosses of greasy paint. He wore his hair sticking up from the crown of his head in a tuft, while the rest of his head was shaved.

In contrast, Chiwatenwa's body shone from the natural oils of his skin, not paint, and he wore his straight black hair greased and flattened against his ears and neck.

Teondechoren frowned angrily. "So you do not choose to guess the straws—but if you are a man, you should have a squaw!"

Chiwatenwa threw his head back. The sun on his high cheekbones and straight nose gave him the appearance of a great chief. "Most of the squaws are sour-faced, with tempers that shoot anger like the clap of thunder and the flash of lightning. Without a squaw, I have peace, my brother."

Chiwatenwa's father interrupted them. "Brothers should not argue. Forget your differences. We are almost to the site of the new village, and we will have work—the cabin must be built."

Chiwatenwa nodded. Secretly he admitted to himself that he was not being honest with Teondechoren. There *was* one, he thought. *She* might consent to be a faithful wife.

Nonchalantly he turned his head to look at the women and girls far behind, weighed down with their burdens. But his eyes could not single out the slight girl with the black eyes that glistened like the sun on the lake waters at twilight.

A few days later their cabin and the cabins of the other families were completed, turning the clearing into the new village. Chiwatenwa and the men who shared the same roof had felled the trees, peeled the bark, and shaped the thick branches into arbors which curved riblike over a span twelve feet wide and seventy feet long. The bench along both sides, which was their summer bed to protect them from the fleas on the ground, was in place. And storage shelves were suspended from the roof so that they could place garments and provisions there, safely away from the ever present mice.

The whole outside frame of the cabin had been covered with sheets of cedar bark, overlapping like shingles, and tied securely by cords of linden bark. The twelve fires were spaced at equal intervals along the center of the longhouse from front to back. Since two families shared a fire, the twenty-four families who lived under the same roof with the father of Chiwatenwa were comfortably settled.

In celebration, the Captain of the village called a feast. The women prepared small game and cooked the corn mush, or sagamite, with dried fish. After the meal, the chiefs and the braves sat in large circles and smoked their tobacco.

When the talk became too long-winded among the older men, some of the younger braves proposed the game of straws. Chiwatenwa watched them as they feverishly collected piles of peeled willow sticks from their cabins. They no longer asked him to play. They knew he could see no sense in such sport.

Teondechoren and his opponent sat facing each other, the bundle of sticks on a mat before them. They began to utter cries to their *oqui*—their good luck charms—praying to win. Teondechoren put a handful of porcelain beads on the ground. His opponent matched them. Then, still chanting loudly, they divided the bundle and placed their bets, hoping to select the one with the odd number of sticks and thus win.

Chiwatenwa was bored and disgusted. He knew the game would go on endlessly until the bets were furious and one of the players

would be stripped of all his belongings. Abruptly he uncrossed his long legs and walked away. It would be a good time to work undisturbed on his new set of bows and arrows. He went to his cabin, and taking a bundle wrapped in skin, walked beyond the forest to the clearing near the lake.

As Chiwatenwa scraped and rubbed the piece of cedar he had chosen for his bow, he wondered about himself. Why was it that he was different? Why was it that he could not accept many of the customs: He did not approve of the gambling games. He mistrusted the sorcerers who were supposed to make sick people well. He did not like the continual noise at the gatherings. He felt it was wrong for men and women to be free in their marriages as was the common custom. As for the dream, well, it was dangerous not to believe in the dream.

Chiwatenwa frowned as he heated the cedar piece before a fire to toughen the wood. Was there an answer somewhere for him? Would he someday find the meaning of man's life?

He tied the strip of twisted rawhide which he had prepared to the ends of his cedar piece, and then placed the finished bow on the ground. The same thoughts taunted him as he carefully scraped a piece of slate to form an arrowhead, sharp and fine.

Gradually he became absorbed in his work as he tied the arrowhead to the end of a straight piece of wood with the fresh sinews of a rabbit. The sinews would dry and shrink, and the arrowhead would remain firmly in place. He fastened feathers at the other end of the wood and held the arrow up to inspect it, satisfied that it was good.

As Chiwatenwa made his arrows, he became aware that he was not alone. He raised his eyes and saw that a girl had walked silently past him a few dozen feet away and was now gracefully sitting bent over the lake with one hand swinging in the water. Her long thick braid fell over her shoulder.

Chiwatenwa put down his arrow. He felt a movement in his breast which made him catch his breath in sudden excitement. It was *she*—Aonetta.

He jumped to his feet and ran to her, sitting beside her. She raised her eyes and smiled at him.

"I saw you come this way, Chiwatenwa," she said, her voice low and gentle.