

Before Jogues it was Stavert by Ernie Bies December 8, 2014

How did the town of Stavert become Jogues and where in the heck was Byng?

The Algoma Central Railway (ACR) was completed from Sault Ste Marie to Hearst in 1914. A station, eight miles south of Hearst, was named Stavert after an employee of the Lake Superior Corporation, the parent company of the ACR. The developing community and the post office there took the same name. The first settlers in 1914 were Harry Waite, Mr. and Mrs. Gervais, and Philius Ranger. Others came from Britain, the USA and Quebec.

The name Stavert would soon be challenged by the growing French population in a series of events that could be traced back to July, 1912, when the Ontario Conservative Government of James Whitney issued a new education policy named Regulation 17. This policy restricted the use of French as a language of instruction to the first two years of schooling in Ontario. It was amended slightly in 1913 to allow for one hour a day of French as a subject but created much anger and opposition amongst the Francophone of Ontario and Quebec. Families from Quebec were encouraged to settle in Northeastern Ontario and develop their own schools with the support of the Catholic Church.



Father Joseph Hallé arrived in Hearst in 1919 with the dream of populating the north with immigrants from Quebec. He was to become Bishop of Hearst in 1921.

Father Hallé founded the Roman Catholic parish in Stavert in 1920. It was originally called Sainte Anne des Prés (St. Anne of the Meadows) but later changed to Sainte Anne de Jogues after a Jesuit Priest named Isaac Jogues who was martyred in 1646.

A new Parish Priest, thirty year old Father Edmond Pelletier, arrived in 1920 to supervise the construction of the first church in Stavert which was located west of the tracks. He was also very active in following Bishop Hallé's mission of recruiting French settlers to the area. He immediately began lobbying to have the name of the town changed to reflect the growing French majority. For a year and a half he encouraged his parishioners



to add "Ste-Anne des Prés" to their Stavert postal addresses, but it caused confusion with the similarly named Ste. Anne de Prescott. They then changed the name to Ste-Anne de Jogues and continued with their campaign. In May 1921, Father Pelletier had the postal station moved from the general store into the church to better serve the rapidly growing French population.

The July 1921 census listed 165 residents of Stavert of which 96 were French. Some of the familiar names of the French residents of Stavert were: Joe Montpetit (a foreman with the ACR), Roy, Dupris, Eva Samson (Father Pelletier's housekeeper), Jarvis, Ranger, Doucette, Brunet, Déroches, Lanthier, Lacasse, Laurin, Dodier, Boucher, Campeau, Fortin, and Ernest Martin. The non French population of Stavert featured names such as Garnett, Jones, Norris, Scott, Ferguson, Hinds, Beemer, Smith, Allen, Nailor, Stewart, Reid, Spalding, Humphries, Flood, Lundy, Abram, Coe, St. John, Bigger, Topaloff, McQuillen, and Hogan.

Two miles south of Stavert, near Byng Siding, the census listed a rural grouping of 62 residents, all but one being French, The family names in the Byng area were: Richard, Laurin, Roy, Tremblay, Smith, Dupuis, Potvin, Stripniuk, Roberts, Laneville, Carriere, and Desjardins, The Byng Siding was originally called Stavert before the new stopping place in town was given that name. It is located at about mile 286 on the ACR which would be in the vicinity of the Delray siding of the late 1940s. Stavert is at mile 287.8 and Hearst at 295.8

After months of rallying his parishioners and petitioning the Federal Government, the Post Office and Mr. T. E. Simpson, the federal MP representing the area, Father Pelletier made his move. On April 6th, 1922 he sent a very emotional and strongly worded letter to R.S. McCormick, General Superintendent of the ACR, petitioning that the name of the station be changed from Stavert to Jogues. Father Pelletier did not mince words, saying McCormick would be surprised at the powerful degree of a priest's influence on his parishioners and that the time for diplomacy was limited.

Father Pelletier built his case for change on five arguments. First: that the parish had received a substantial financial gift in January 1920 from a donor who requested that the church be named after St. Anne. This gave him the idea to change the name of the whole community to reflect the will of the majority and satisfy the donor.

Second: the majority of the population, almost 77%, was French speaking. He stated that there were 302 total residents of the area, of which 232 were French, 66 English and 4 Irish, and that the majority should rule. This indicated an increase of seventy-five people to the French population and none to the English in less than a year, reflecting his active recruitment of settlers. While Father Pelletier's numbers accurately described the total population, when comparing the eligible voters only, this majority is reduced to 63% with 70 French and 40 others. Not as overwhelming a majority but indicating that as the children came of age the French plurality would grow with them.

Third: the permanent residency and hard work of the parish priest were chiefly responsible for the prosperity and improvements to the community. He also stated that the French School Board had refused financial support from the public school supporters presumably in an effort to maintain strict independence and separation of the two communities.

Fourth: When Father Pelletier visited McCormick on July 20, 1920, he was told that if the Dominion Government agreed with the name change the ACR would consider it too.

The fifth argument was concerning the historical significance of the name Jogues.

Father Isaac Jogues, a Jesuit Priest, had actively tried to bring Christianity to the native people in what are now the Sault Ste Marie and Brantford regions of Ontario and Northern New York State. He was taken captive and tortured by the Iroquois but managed to escape only to return in 1646, this time paying with his life.



Father Pelletier closed his letter to McCormick with the not so veiled threat that if the ACR did not support his petition he would use his influence against the company. Since the only access to Stavert was the ACR one must wonder what he had in mind.

While Father Isaac Jogues may have been significant in the history of missionary work, Mr. McCormick was not quick to change the name of an ACR station at that time. His initial response was negative but he left the door open by suggesting that if Father Pelletier could get agreement from the Post Office to change the name, the ACR would consider doing the same. Father Pelletier did succeed in getting the Post Office to change the name of the Postal Station from Stavert to Jogues effective October 1, 1922.

The English speaking residents countered with petitions of their own to ACR's McCormick and to the Post Office on Oct. 3, 1922, They stated that they felt oppressed and asked that the name of Stavert be retained and that the Post Office be moved from the church into Cleve Jones's store. They felt that the only reason for the change was to show the supreme power of the Parish Priest. They also suggested that by changing the first letter of Jogues to an "R" it would be very appropriate for the man from whose brain this idea originated.

It was to no avail, as the decision for the change had already been made by the Post Office. Father Pelletier won the day and to avoid further conflict, the ACR eliminated the name of Byng and moved the name Stavert back to its original siding location. The road conditions at the Stavert (Byng) siding were not favorable for picking up passengers so the train continued to stop at the church. This second stopping place at the church remained unnamed as it was so close to the Stavert (Byng) siding. This was a form of passive resistance and allowed the company to continue honouring their former employee. The name Stavert had also received support from other communities like the town of Hazel which had seen its name changed to Wyborn by the Post Office in 1915.

Alfred Weight, an employee of Pellow and McMeekin Lumber and General Merchants, wrote to McCormick on October 11, 1922, using company letterhead that proclaimed its address as Hearst, Hazel Siding. He protested the changing of the name of the Stavert Post Office and stated that they would continue billing merchandise and mail to Stavert Ontario. To this day the ACR stop is still called Stavert though schedules do show Jogues in brackets.

Father Pelletier might have pulled the trigger on the name Stavert, but Regulation 17 loaded the gun.

Soon after his victory Father Pelletier left Jogues in 1923, presumably to face other challenges. In 1924 the parish in Jogues was renamed as the Parish of the Saints Martyrs Canadiens (Canadian Martyrs) because there was another church named St. Anne at Hallébourg, east of Hearst. Regulation 17 was repealed in 1927. Father Isaac Jogues was canonized in 1930. The church in Jogues burned to the ground along with the Parish archives in 1933 and it was rebuilt the next year on the east side of the tracks where it stands today.



Community of Jogues in Front of new church, 1937, photo courtesy of Denise Morin



Sadly, the church stands empty as the parishioners decided to close its doors due to lack of attendance and low funding. The last mass was held on October 26, 2014 with Father Jacques Fortin, Father Sébastien Groleau and Bishop Vincent Cadieux officiating and Father René Grandmont assisting. The population of Jogues is currently about 300 people, the same as it was in 1922.

This story gives an accurate snapshot of the conflicts that existed at that time between strong willed men of different cultures and of the power of the parish priest. Some say this cold war did not begin to thaw until Bummer Doran came to Hearst and united the French and English hockey players to form the mighty Hearst Lumberkings that won the Northern Ontario Hockey Association Intermediate B Championship in 1951.

Ernie Bies Copyright 2014.

PHOTOS

1. Bishop Hallé from Diocese of Hearst website
2. St. Isaac Jogues. From Wikipedia, note his mutilated fingers
3. Old pictures of Jogues from Town of Hearst photo archives.
4. Jogues church from Wikipedia

References:

Letters from the ACR recycle Bin courtesy of Harold McQuarrie

Diocese of Hearst website

Clayton's Kids, Pioneer families of Hearst Public School

1921 Census of Canada

Train Timetables, NTR – 1915 and ACR – 1946.

Le Nord, October 23, 2014

Wikipedia