

"The Oneida Indian Mission"

Far too few members of the American Episcopal Church are familiar with the history, or perhaps even know of the existence of the Oneida Indian Mission. Way back in the days of good Queen Anne Iroquois chiefs, in what is now New York state, asked for Christian missionaries of our faith. The old Society for the Propagation of the Faith responded to this request and thus the Mission to the Indians, oldest in the Anglican Communion, was founded in 1702. After the Revolutionary War (in which, incidentally, Oneidas gave good account of themselves in George Washington's service) and the establishment of the American Episcopate we read the spiritual care of his Oneida "children" was one of the chief concerns of Bishop Hobart.

The migration of the Oneidas from their native New York to Wisconsin in the 1820's was part of the westward movement in American history. They were led by that romantic historical figure, Eliezer Williams.

For the sake of readers unfamiliar with the story of Williams, we will make a short digression in order to highlight the details of his fascinating story. Eliezer Williams had been converted to the Church and served as lay reader and catechist to the Oneidas in New York. He led the scouting party and subsequent first group of these people to wend their way westward. Williams was thought to be a descendant of the famous Preacher Williams, who had been captured and carried with his family from Deerfield, Massachusetts at the time of the Deerfield Massacre. Some years after his coming to Wisconsin came the rumor that Williams was in reality the Lost Dauphin of France, son and heir of Louis XVI; that he had been rescued from the Tuileries on the eve of the royal family's execution during the French Revolution; somehow spirited safely out of the country, brought to America and placed with a family of Mohawks in New York.

No one will ever know the truth, but there was enough credence in the story to bring Prince de Joinville, representative of Louis Philippe, then reigning in France, here to Green Bay to interview Williams and bring gifts. The Wisconsin Historical Society has set aside his home site on the Fox River as "Lost Dauphin Park". Williams later returned to New York state where he died in 1857. He was buried in the cemetery of a little parish church near the St. Regis Reservation. After the dissolution of that parish nearly one hundred years later, in 1947 with proper civil and ecclesiastical authority, Williams' remains were disinterred and brought back to Wisconsin by the Rev. W. F. Christian then missionary priest to the Oneidas. The original tombstone over the grave was also brought to Wisconsin. It now marks the spot of the re-burial at Oneida with proper ceremony close by the Church where the descendants of the Oneida people he served so well now worship.

Now back to the story of those people. The Oneidas' first concern on arrival here was to build a little log church and a log school. In both, Eliezer Williams served as spiritual leader and teacher respectively. A few years later the log church was replaced by a frame church, "Cradle of the Church" in the midwest. It was consecrated by the great Bishop Kemper as "Hobart Church" in commemoration of the Oneidas' greatly loved spiritual Father in God, Bishop Hobart.

Today the Oneida Indian Mission has between five and six hundred communicants. The white frame church was replaced by a big stone church, whose corner-stone was laid in 1887 and dedicated likewise Hobart Church to commemorate the Oneidas' great friend and spiritual leader, Bishop Hobart. In 1920 the stone church was gutted by fire when the great tower was struck by lightning. It was rebuilt, enlarged and reconsecrated as the present Church of the Holy Apostles. Every Sunday at 7:30 and 10 A.M. sees a goodly congregation of Oneidas out to worship in this beautiful and historic edifice. At the Midnight Mass of Christmas and at the Easter Sunrise Mass 500 communions is not unusual.

The original Mission House burned down many years ago and about twelve years ago the old frame Oneida Hospital was destroyed by fire. But next to the Church stand the rectory and the Convent building. The latter, first built by the Sisters of Holy Nativity, who served at the Mission over 50 years, was enlarged at the time the Order of St. Anne came to the Mission in 1946. Across the road from all these stands the Bishop Grafton Parish Hall which houses the Oneida Mission School as well as serving as meeting place for many and varied organizations and activities.

The Oneida Mission School can trace its history back to its first teacher, Eliezer Williams. It, too, started out in a log house, replaced by a frame building and that in turn by the Parish Hall whose corner-stone says it was built "for the People of the Red Stone" in 1905.

At present there are three teachers and an enrollment of about 60. This does not take in all the children of elementary school age. The people of our congregation live up to ten or twelve miles in every direction from the Church. So we have in our day school mostly only those within walking distance. But we have a Sunday School enrollment of about 120. Those not in our Mission day school are scattered week days among a dozen different rural schools. Our high school young people are divided among four neighboring high schools. At present we have several young people away at college.

In a group as large as ours at the Mission there are always many shut-ins and hospitalized patients to be visited, various other personal problems which need guidance and counsel.

There are many active organizations for various age groups. We have Senior and Intermediate Girl Scout Troops and Brownies. We have Boy Scouts and Cubs. The Y. P. F. meets on Wednesday evenings. There are two active Woman's Auxiliary groups (we still cling to the old name!) - one that meets in the evenings for women whose work prevents coming to a daytime meeting. They are the so-called "Junior Auxiliary". The Senior Auxiliary meets every Thursday. Some come to the 9 A.M. Communion Service, which the school children also attend, and stay on into the afternoon for a work meeting broken at noon by a potluck luncheon, or once a month more elaborate "pay dinner".

The Men's Club sponsors a Baseball Team which makes a good showing each year in the N. E. Wisconsin League. Home games on our own diamond behind the Church draw big crowds of enthusiastic rooters. In the winter the men turn to Dartball indoors. They have won trophies in the League to which they belong. Sometimes on Saturdays the men get together for a wood-cutting and hauling "bee" or a clean-up "bee".

Our Oneida people take their share in diocesan gatherings and activities. We are usually well represented at Diocesan Council, Diocesan Altar Guild, Men's Quiet Days and other meetings.

In spite of the size of our congregation and self-sacrificing labor on the part of many people in it, the Oneida Mission is not and cannot be wholly self-supporting. We must still depend on the generosity and missionary spirit of our friends. The Diocese of Fond du Lac supplies the lion's share of this help, for Oneida is its special charge. And the Oneida people labor valiantly to support their Church. However by far the greater number of our people live in circumstances that prevent very substantial financial giving. And our expenses far exceed that of any ordinary parish. There are the several buildings to be kept in repair, heated and lighted for adequate service. The members of the staff from priest down through teachers and janitor have living expenses to meet. There are day school and Sunday school supplies to be purchased, janitor's supplies, equipment of various sorts to be kept in working condition and occasionally replenished, the upkeep on the Mission station wagon to mention a few items.

Our day school has for many years operated a Hot Lunch Program, from which all our children benefit much. We serve a Type A lunch under Government supervision and do get help on buying milk for the children and also in the form of surplus commodities. Some of the children do pay 10¢ per day. The rest of the expense the Mission School P. T. A. labors to try to meet. Most of the parishes throughout the diocese have been kind about sending canned foods and money sometimes. But even with much help the program is usually "in the red", yet it is one which we must not drop - the benefits to the children are so great.

Last year the Diocesan C. P. C. helped us much with replenishing text-books and other agencies helped buy a few much-needed desks.

Recently, through the generosity of some anonymous donor, the Church has been redecorated. This was a very badly needed project. The resultant transformation of walls and ceilings inspired some of our men to scrub floors, then apply sealer and varnish to make them shine resplendent beside the walls.

May we not have your prayers, interest and alms?

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The Oneida Indian Mission is the oldest Indian Mission of the Episcopal Church. It was founded in New York State in the year 1702 by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Missionaries were sent by that Venerable Society to the Iroquois Nations, and the Oneidas being a part of that Confederacy thus shared in the ministrations.

The Oneidas ranked second in the Six Tribe Nations and were known as "The People of the Red Stone." Their home was at Oneida Castle near the city of Utica, N.Y. During the Revolutionary War the Oneidas aided the Colonies and were staunch friends of George Washington. In fact the only money received by our Indians today is 52¢ per head annually, and that was for services their ancestors rendered George Washington in the Revolutionary War.

After that war with the conversion to the Episcopal Church of the Rev. Eleazer Williams the Church made rapid headway with the Indians. A brief sketch of his life is given at the end of this article.

In 1821 through the greediness of the white people the Oneidas were moved West establishing their new home near Green Bay, Wis., which they called Oneida after their New York home. The first thing they did was to build a log Church. Soon out-growing its usefulness it was superceded by a larger one of frame construction. The laying of its corner-stone was by Bishop Kemper, the first Missionary Bishop of the Episcopal Church, and his first official act in the territory. Its Consecration by Bishop Kemper in 1837 made it the first consecrated Church in the Northwest Territory. To this edifice walking the 150 miles with an occasional lift in a lumber wagon came the Rev. James Lloyd Breck and the Rev. Wm. Adams, the founders of Nashotah House Seminary to be advanced to the priesthood.

The third and present Church building was due to the tireless efforts of the Rev. E. A. Goodnough. The Indians gave one day a week for the quarrying of the stone from their own quarry. The Church was consecrated in 1886 under the patronage of the Holy Apostles.

With the coming of the Sisters of the Holy Nativity in 1894 to take over the Oneida Hospital the Episcopal Church saw the first instance of a Religious Order being sent to the American Indian. They established the lace industry, gave religious instructions, did parochial work, and were consecrated leaders for fifty-two years.

The Sisters of St. Anne arrived at the end of January 1946 to take over the work of the Sisters of the Holy Nativity. Their Order was founded at Arlington Heights, Mass., in 1910 and has over one hundred nuns in the Order. They have Convents besides the one at Arlington Heights in Cambridge, Mass., Kingston, N.Y., Chicago, Ill., Denver, Colo., Emsworth Hants, England, the Philippine Islands, and Oneida, Wis. There is a Branch House at Albany, N.Y. from the Kingston Convent, where the Sisters run the Children's Hospital. The Order's work is primarily with children. The Sisters teach in our Parish Day School the secular as well as the religious instructions, head the Workshop and all Women's guilds, and do Social Service Work in the Mission. An automobile needed in their work is unavailable at the present time. Is there some kind person who could help out now? One of the Sisters is able to drive. The Oneida Convent is an autonomous Convent of the Order of St. Anne with its own Reverend Mother and Novitiate. Women who wish to try their vocation to the Religious Life may try it here and will be most welcome. A High School education and good health are required. More information about the Order can be obtained from the Rev. Mother Edith, O.S.A., Convent of St. Anne, Oneida, Wis.

Our Parish Day School: was founded in New York State by the Rev. Eleazer Williams. The early missionaries or members of their families were the teachers. It was the first Day School at Oneida, and at first consisted of only one room. Today we have three rooms with three teachers with an enrollment of 64 pupils. There is no District School in the village. We have grades one through eight. The same text books used in the County Schools are also used by our pupils and there is one half hour religious instruction each day.

Through the Parent Teachers' Association a Hot Lunch Program is maintained for the pupils' benefit. The government gives us .09 per child a day. The parents pay 10¢ per child a day. Where there are more children in the family a sliding scale is used. The deficit resulting