

The miles may still be long, but thanks to Facebook, the ride has definitely gotten shorter.

FIRST MASS

Maine Jesuits celebrate a forgotten liturgical anniversary.

Students and faculty of Cheverus High School, a private, Jesuit college preparatory school in Portland, will have something additional to commemorate when they gather for prayers on All Saints' Day this year: the four hundredth anniversary of the first recorded Catholic mass in Maine.

"As far as we can tell from the documentation, it was celebrated on November 1, 1611, on Swan Island in the Kennebec River," says the Reverend William R. Campbell, Cheverus' president. Among the sources for this piece of Maine history: a letter written by the priest who said the mass, Father Pierre Biard.

Not be confused with Swans Island near Bar Harbor, the Swan Island in this story

is just a stone's throw from the town of Richmond. Managed today by the state as a wildlife area, it is a gorgeous place, just four miles long and little more than half a mile wide and known for its abandoned eighteenth-century town.

Pierre Biard was one of two French Jesuits who accompanied explorer Charles de Biencourt de Saint-Just on a journey to the Maine coast from the French settlement at Port Royal, Acadia (present day Nova Scotia). In his letter to a superior in Paris, Biard writes in rich detail of arriving at the "Kinibéqui, eighty leagues from Port Royal, on the 28th of October" and of encounters with the Armouchiquois Indians. Those tentative meetings included a seventeenth-century battle of the bands, with the Indians "haranguing, singing, and dancing" on one riverbank and the French trying to drown out those "invocations to the devil."

The date of November 1 and the Swan Island location are suggested by a handful

of secondary sources, according to Father Campbell, who emphasizes that the ceremony, which is referenced in a stained glass window in Cheverus' Loyola Chapel, is the earliest *recorded* mass in Maine, not necessarily the first mass. The anniversary is unlikely to receive attention in Maine's Catholic churches, which celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of the first mass in the New World — on Saint Croix Island — in 2004. "This is more of a Jesuit event," Campbell says of Biard's mass, and a natural milestone for a school that still honors that brave missionary's vision. ▲

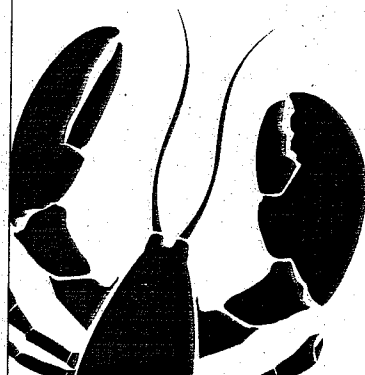
ONE MAINER TO ANOTHER:

"At this season, the insistent clarity of the light is the most dramatic thing in the whole pageant of seasonal change. In winter and spring, mists and fog often obliterate the view, and in summer, a light haze settles over the landscape, softening detail and blurring objects at a distance. But as autumn slips into winter, the air becomes clear as crystal." — Caskie Stinnett, *One Man's Island*

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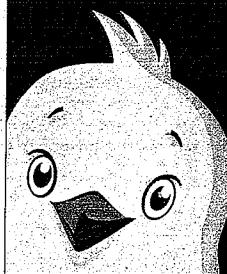
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