

The Discovery of Oswego



The First Recorded History of Oswego -

Although Samuel de Champlain is said to have been in the region, and was the first European to have traversed the Great Lakes in 1615, the first recorded history of Europeans in Oswego occurred in August, 1654. Father Simon Lemoyne (seen left), by way of the Oswego River, passed through Oswego en route back to Quebec City.

Lemoyne, a Jesuit priest, missionary to the Huron and ambassador to the Iroquois, left Quebec City, New France on July 2, 1654 on a mission to broker peace with the Iroquois who occupied much of present day western New York. His mission was to retrieve captive Huron in Iroquois possession and perform missionary work. On August 16, 1654, Lemoyne made a discovery in Onondaga territory that left a lasting impression on all those that followed. He discovered the salt springs of Syracuse (hence the nickname Salt City), which the Onondaga dare not drink given their belief that "...there is an evil spirit in it."

Between August 17 and 20, 1654, Lemoyne traveled down the Oswego River arriving at Lake Ontario. On the 21st of August he wrote "this lake is in violent commotion, owing to the furious winds that followed a rainstorm."

In the Frank Kraft painting seen here, Father Simon Lemoyne exits the mouth of the Oswego River, into Lake Ontario, almost exactly where you stand today. Lemoyne is accompanied by a group of Huron guides, as well as his travel companion Jean Baptiste.



To read the transcription of Simon Lemoyne's journey down the Oswego River, scan here with your smart phone or tablet.

