



FATHER JACQUES Marquette

Father Jacques Marquette was 29 years old when he arrived in New France, later called Canada.

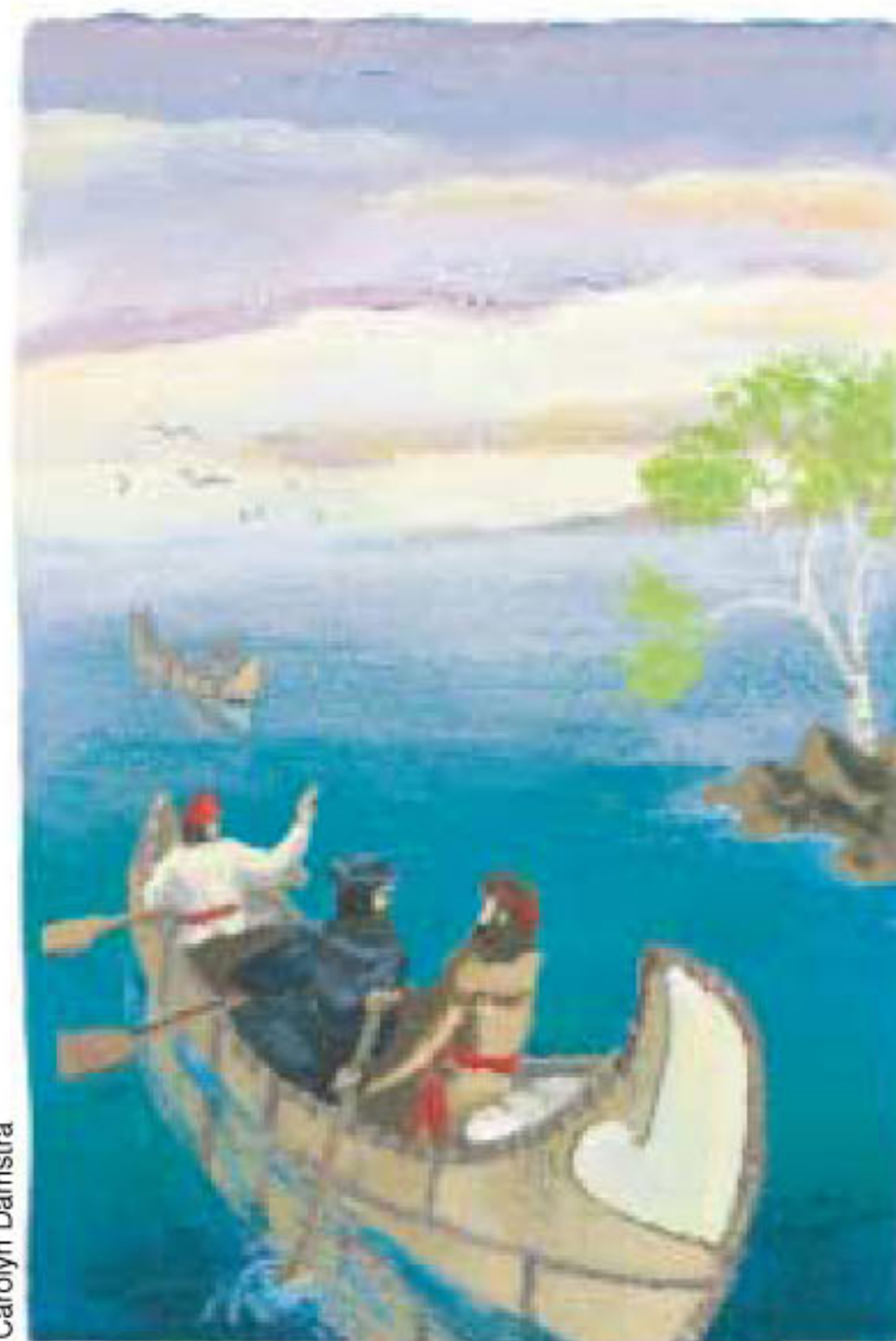
He had come to North America to introduce Native Americans to **Catholicism**.

Born in France, Jacques Marquette decided at a young age to train for the priesthood. When Marquette was 17 years old, he entered a Jesuit **seminary** in Nancy, France. The Jesuits were a religious group that established **missions** around the world to Christianize people.

After arriving in New France, Marquette studied Native American languages and learned how Native Americans lived. In 1668, Marquette was sent to present-day Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, to start a mission for Odawa and Ojibway Indians. A short time later, Marquette was sent farther west to run a

Jesuit mission at present-day Ashland, Wisconsin. There, he heard Native Americans talk about a great river to the west. Marquette wondered if this river might be a shortcut to the Pacific Ocean. Marquette also learned about the Illinois Indians who lived south of Lake Michigan.

Marquette wanted to visit the Illinois Indians and explore the mysterious great river. These plans were delayed when he was ordered to start a mission at the Straits of Mackinac. In 1671, Marquette opened a mission on Mackinac Island. He soon moved the mission

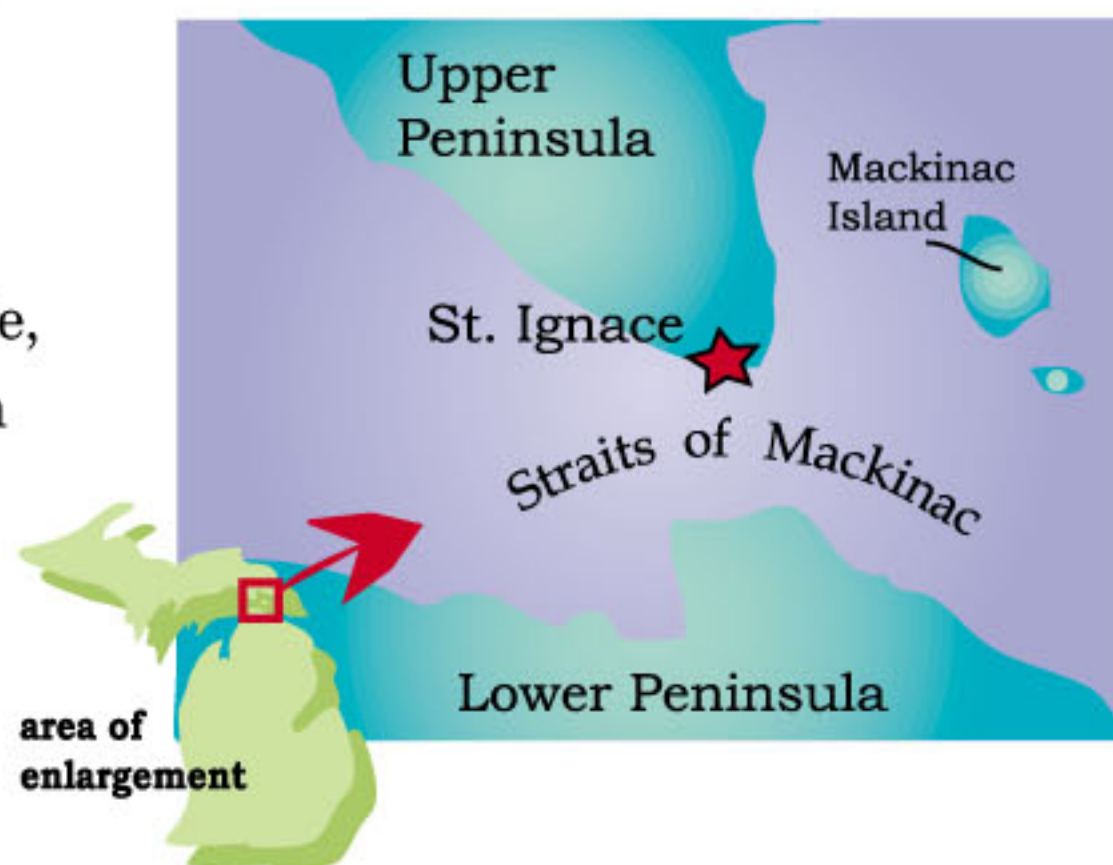


Carolyn Damstra

west to the mainland and named it St. Ignace, after Saint Ignatius Loyola, who had started the Jesuits.

On December 8, 1672, Marquette saw a lone paddler approach his mission in a canoe. It was Louis Joliet, who brought news that the two of them had been granted permission to explore the great western river. Born in Canada in 1645, Joliet had trained for the priesthood, but decided to become a fur trader and explorer. Marquette and Joliet had met each other earlier in Quebec.

(Continued on page 2)



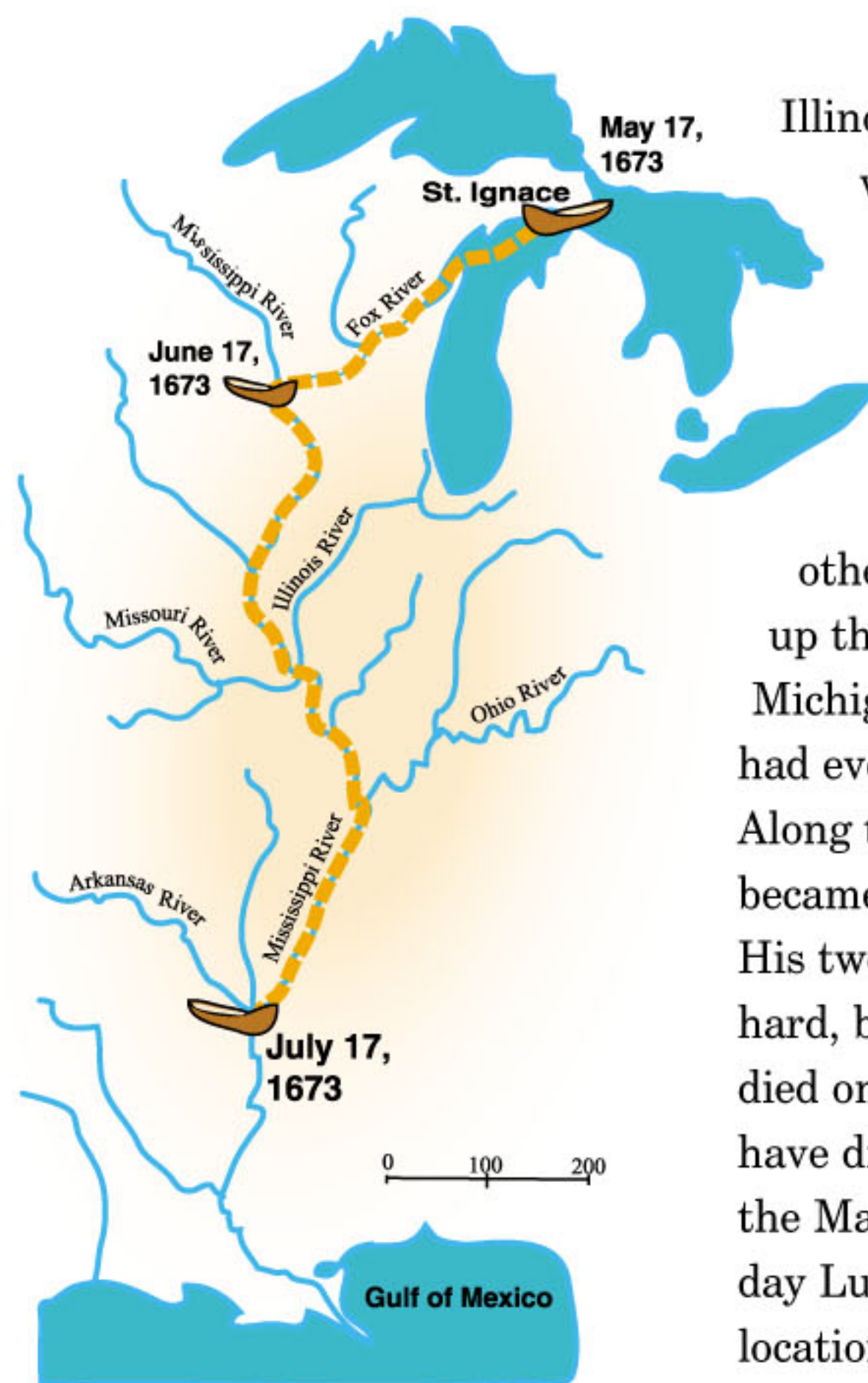
(Continued from page 1)

On May 17, 1673, Marquette, Jolliet, and five other men, described as “simple, hardy and unwashed,” set out in two canoes from St. Ignace. They traveled along the northern shore of Lake Michigan and paddled about 30 miles a day. Marquette wrote, “Our joy at being chosen for this expedition roused our courage and sweetened the labor of rowing.”

In two weeks, they reached present-day Menominee, Michigan. The Menominee Indians warned the Frenchmen if they went farther west they would meet Indians “who never show mercy to strangers but break heads without any cause.” The Indians also told Marquette and Jolliet that the great river “was full of horrible monsters, which devoured men and canoes in one bite.”

The Frenchmen pushed on and crossed present-day Wisconsin. On June 17, 1673, they paddled into the great river. Marquette wrote in his journal that they felt “a joy” that he could not express. They were the first Frenchmen to see the Mississippi River.

Marquette and Jolliet followed the river. They saw many new things, including several different tribes of Native Americans. After a month on the Mississippi River,



the explorers realized that the river flowed south, not west. Near present-day Arkansas, they turned around. Despite the difficulty of paddling upstream, the Frenchmen reached present-day Green Bay, Wisconsin, in September 1673. They had traveled more than 2,500 miles since leaving St. Ignace.

Marquette wintered at Green Bay. Jolliet headed east to Quebec to share the news about their explorations with French authorities. Marquette spent the next year among the Indians of northern Illinois. In the spring of 1675, he was called back to St. Ignace. According to one observer, the

Illinois Indians “were filled with affection” for Father Marquette and had “a burning desire for him to return soon.”

It was not to be. Marquette and two other Frenchmen paddled up the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. No other European had ever traveled this route. Along the way, Marquette became weak with **dysentery**. His two companions paddled hard, but Father Marquette died on May 18, 1675. He may have died near the mouth of the Marquette River (present-day Ludington), but the exact location remains a mystery.

Marquette was buried and his grave marked. Two years later, Indians from Marquette’s mission visited the site and returned Marquette’s bones to St. Ignace. They were placed beneath the chapel. In 1705 the chapel burned and, according to Marquette’s **biographer**, “knowledge of the exact location of the mission church slowly faded from memory.”

Today, a Michigan city, county and river are named for Marquette. There is even a statue of him in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC. But the journal he kept of his explorations down the Mississippi River remains the best monument to this remarkable man. ■