

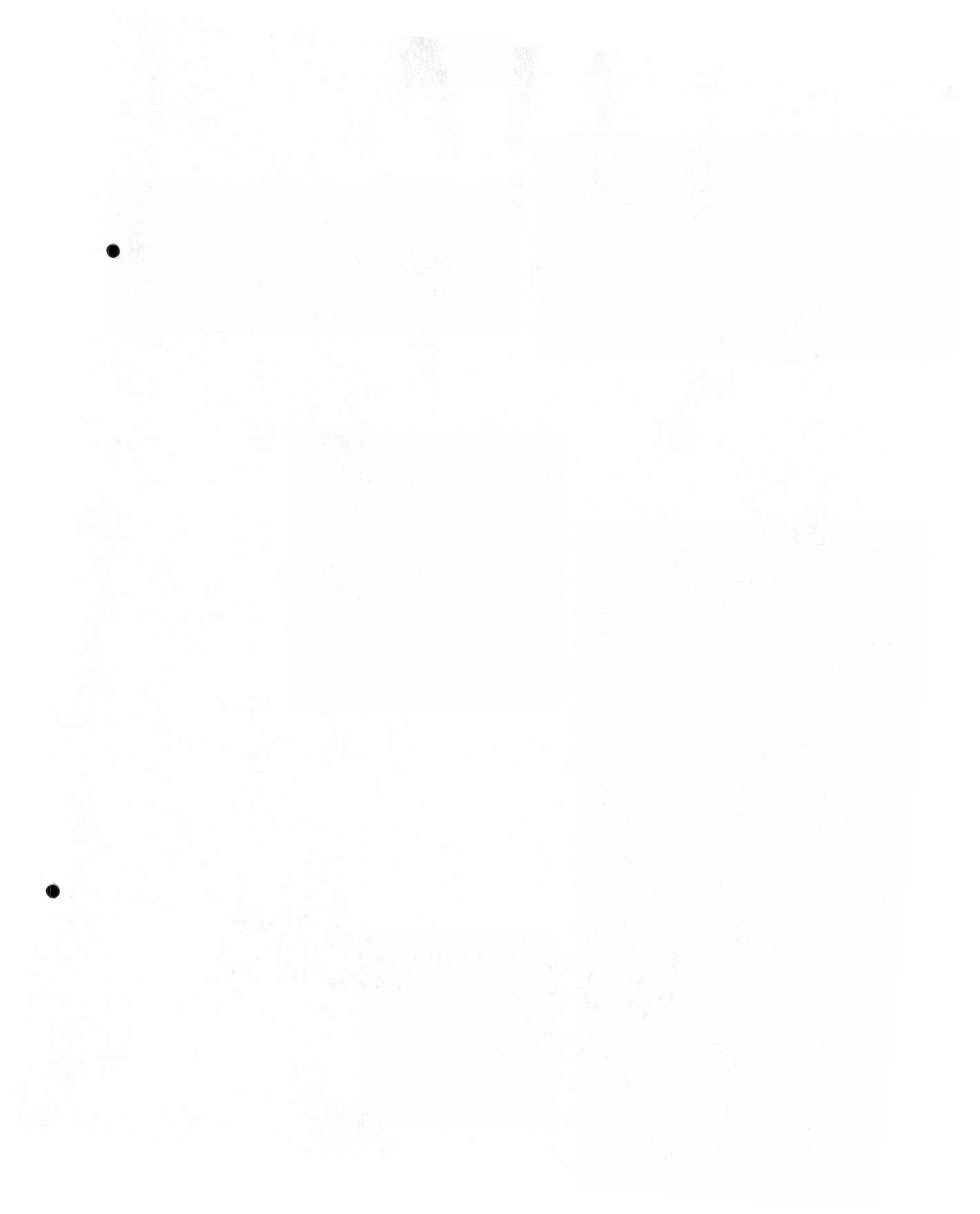
THE CHRISTIANIZATION AND EDUCATION OF THE INDIANS
OF MONTANA: A STUDY OF THE JESUITS,
THE URSULINES AND ST. PETER'S
MISSION, 1859-1918

A thesis submitted to the Department of History at
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support and understanding over the last four years; I could not have done it without them.

FOREWORD

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of
all the nations" (Matt., 28: 19).

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INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church registered sensational gains in the United States. This feat was not equalled anywhere else and was due not only to the great influx of Catholic immigrants, but also to the extensive missionary activity of the different orders such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Capuchins and others. These missionaries were motivated by tremendous zeal and a genuine concern in saving the souls of the Indians. Their strong beliefs and desires enabled them to endure every form of sacrifice and hardship, even torture and death, in the building of their small parishes and the conversion of the Indians.

One area that received much attention from the Catholic missionaries was the territory of Montana. Once established, they faced many obstacles, but were undaunted in the attempts to "educate," "civilize" and "Christianize" the Indians of the territory. While some view this as strictly "cultural imperialism" in a very gross sense, the missionaries' objectives and actions must be viewed in the context of their time and in relation to what was happening to the Indians elsewhere.

This thesis lies within the general area of cultural,

religious and educational interaction between whites and Indians during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although there were many different religious orders, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, that worked to "civilize" and "educate" the Indians, I have chosen to focus on the Jesuit Fathers and the Ursuline Sisters. While there were many locations established for this work, I have elected to look mainly, but not exclusively, at St. Peter's Mission for the Blackfeet Indians.

CHAPTER I

ORIGINS OF THE CATHOLIC MISSIONARY MOVEMENT IN MONTANA

Near the eastern slopes of the Rockies, about fifteen miles northwest of the present town of Cascade, Montana, lies the ruins of the St. Peter's Mission. Begun in the middle of the nineteenth century for the Blackfeet Indians, it played a major role in the development of religion and education in Montana. The story of the mission is one of many struggles and hardships. During its fifty-year existence, it was located on four different sites and under the direction of first the Jesuit Fathers and later the Ursuline Sisters.

Although St. Peter's was a major factor in the early development of Christian religion for the Indians, it was not the first of such encounters. It was the Flathead tribe in the territory of western Montana that originally had the "Black Robes"¹ among them. The Flatheads were first introduced to the white man's notion of religion in the early part of the nineteenth century by a migrating band of Iroquois Indians from Canada. The Iroquois, led by Old Ignace, had settled with the Flatheads in the Bitter Root Valley and were soon integrated into the tribe. Old

Ignace, along with the others of his band, instructed the Flatheads in the ways of Christianity and Catholicism. As their faith and interest grew, the Flatheads developed a strong desire to have a Black Robe of their own.

During the decade of the 1830's, four different expeditions set out from the Bitter Root Valley to St. Louis in search of the Black Robe. It was not, however, until the fourth expedition in 1839 that the Flatheads were successful in attracting a missionary. The fourth delegation set out in the summer of 1839 and arrived in St. Louis some three months later. There they pleaded once again with Bishop Joseph Rosati for missionaries. Upon his assurance that one would be sent in the spring of the following year, they departed. One of the two Indians who comprised the delegation returned to the Bitter Root Valley to carry the news to the tribe. The second camped at the mouth of the Bear River for the winter in order to escort the Black Robe to his people.²

The missionary who was chosen for the task was Father Pierre Jean DeSmet, S.J., originally from Belgium. He, along with his guide, left St. Louis on March 27, 1840. They traveled to Westport (now Kansas City) and after joining up with a party from the American Fur Company, they moved on to the rendezvous point on the Green River near Fort Bonneville (at present, Daniel, Wyoming).³ Arriving there on June 30th, they found a group of ten Flathead warriors waiting for them. On July 6th, DeSmet and his

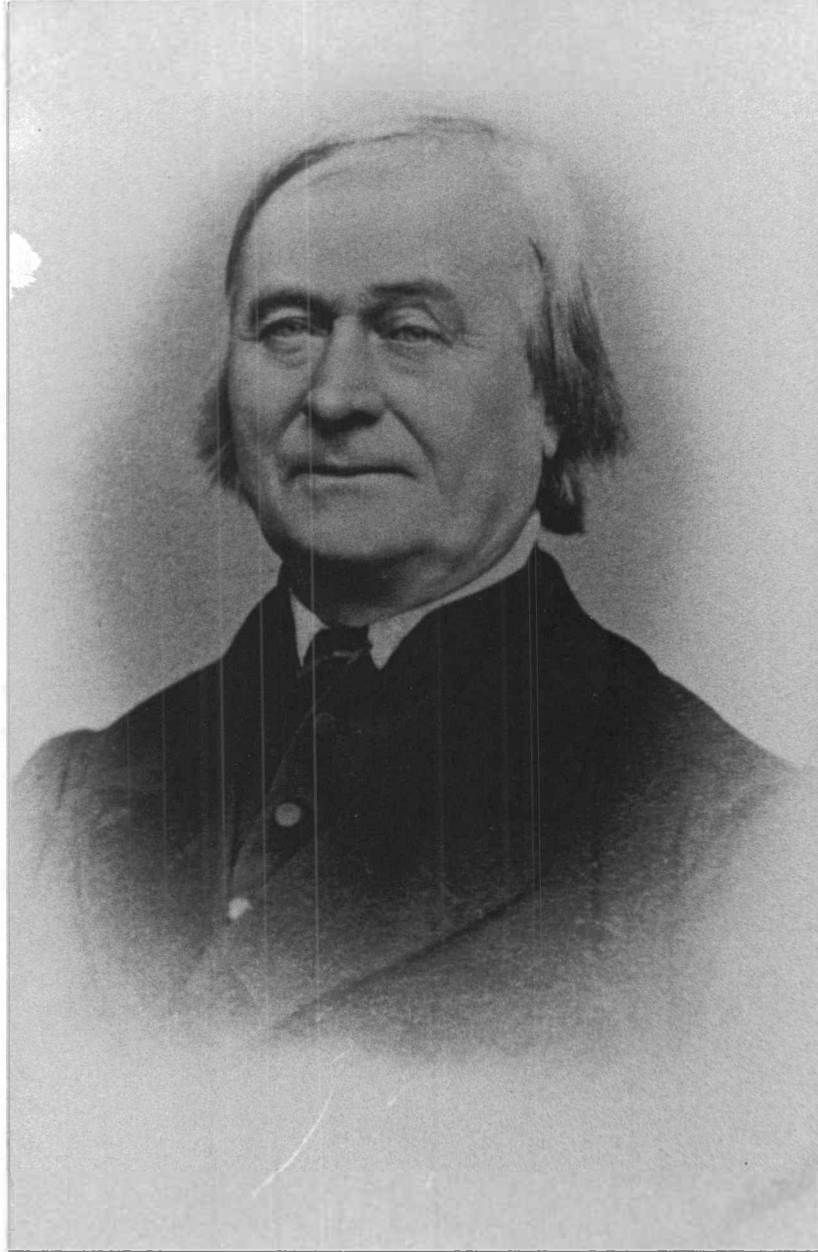


Fig. 1. Father Pierre Jean DeSmet, S.J., first missionary to the Montana territory. (Photo courtesy of the Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, Helena, Montana.)

escort of eleven Indians were underway again. After an eight-day journey they finally merged with the main body of the tribe. Father DeSmet, upon realizing the opportunity at hand for their conversion, wished to return to St. Louis to urge the establishment of a permanent mission among the Flatheads. He departed from the tribe on August 27th and journeyed to St. Louis, arriving there on December 31st.⁴

Preparations were made in St. Louis and following a long and difficult journey, Father DeSmet and his companions (Fathers Nicholas Point and Gregory Mengarini, and Brothers William Claessens, Joseph Specht and Charles Huet) reached the Bitter Root Valley on September 24, 1841. They set to work immediately building a small log church which was dedicated on the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary (the first Sunday of October). The mission was called St. Mary of the Rocky Mountains and placed under the patronage of the Mother of God. Thus the first mission and one of the first white settlements was established in the Montana territory.⁵

Father DeSmet and the others believed that it was not difficult for the Flatheads to understand and accept the white man's religion. Even while still "pagans," they believed in both a "Good Spirit" and a "Bad Spirit." At death,

. . . the good Indian went to a country of perpetual summer, where the rivers were alive with fish and the plains swarming with buffalo and

horses. The bad Indian, on the contrary, was doomed to a place covered with perpetual ice and snow, where he would always be shivering with cold. He could see fire, but afar off; he would see water also, but beyond his reach, and never could he get as much as a drop to cool his parched lips.⁶

Soon after the establishment of St. Mary's Mission, the Jesuits established St. Ignatius Mission, which would become their second mission in Montana. It was first located on the Clark Fork River in northeastern Washington in 1844. The first few years of its existence were filled with many struggles, most of them due to the elements. Harsh winters and spring floods rendered impossible the planning of provisions for the year. By 1853, it was decided that a new site should be found.⁷ The new site was in the Flathead Valley of present-day Montana and was called "the Rendezvous" by the Indians. The new mission was established on the 24th of September, 1854, and became the location for the first resident Indian schools and the first printing presses.⁸

The creation of these permanent and significant institutions marked the definite establishment of Catholic, including Jesuit, influence in the missionary movement in Montana. The missionaries were here to stay and to struggle in their selfless endeavors. These activities, ultimately, would lead to the creation of St. Peter's Mission.

ENDNOTES

¹The Indians referred to the Jesuits as "Black Robes" or "Black Gowns" because the missionaries wore long, black vestments. Of all the missionaries to the Indians of the Montana territory, the Jesuits were the most revered. Their "black robes" were one reason for this.

²William N. Bischoff, S.J., The Jesuits in Old Oregon, 1840-1940 (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1945), pp. 9-11.

³Albert Antrei, "Father Pierre Jean DeSmet," Montana the Magazine of Western History 13 (Spring 1963): 29.

⁴Lawrence B. Palladino, S.J., Indian and White in the Northwest: A History of Catholicity in Montana, 1831-1891, 2d ed., rev. and enl., with an Introduction by Right Reverend John B. Brondel, D.D. (Lancaster, Penn.: Wickersham Publishing Company, 1922), pp. 31-36 (hereafter cited as Palladino, S.J., Indian and White).

⁵Wilfred P. Schoenberg, S.J., Jesuits in Montana, 1840-1960 (Portland, Oregon: Daily Journal of Commerce for the Oregon Jesuit, 1960), pp. 12-14.

⁶"St. Peter's Mission," 19 August 1927, unidentified newspaper article, vertical file, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, Montana.

⁷Bischoff, S.J., The Jesuits in Old Oregon, 1840-1940, pp. 70-71.

⁸Schoenberg, S.J., Jesuits in Montana, 1840-1960, pp. 23-25.

CHAPTER II

THE JESUITS: THE FOUNDATION AND BUILDING OF ST. PETER'S MISSION FOR THE BLACKFEET INDIANS

The third mission founded by the Jesuits in Montana was St. Peter's for the Blackfeet Indians. The story of the many obstacles that the Jesuits and the Ursulines were required to face is a testimony to their devotion and zeal in the Christianization and education of the Indians. The Blackfeet were a particularly fierce and independent tribe. Father DeSmet hoped that by converting them to Christianity, some, if not all, of the intertribal wars and tensions could be ended.

In 1846 Father Nicholas Point, S.J., with Father DeSmet, traveled through the Blackfeet country. While DeSmet continued on to St. Louis, Point stayed and spent the winter with the tribe, baptizing and converting many members. Although he was very selective to whom he would administer the sacrament of baptism, the Blackfeet came to believe that when they were baptized they could conquer their enemies. They did, however, "revere the sign of the cross, . . . and would harm no one, not even a deadly foe, if he had a cross about him or if he knew how to

bless himself."¹ Because of Father Point's work, it may be said that the spiritual foundations of the mission were laid as early as 1846, although St. Peter's was not physically established until 1859.²

In the spring of 1859 Father Adrian Hoecken, S.J., and Brother Vincent Magri were assigned to find a suitable location for the mission. They arrived on the plains in April and spent the entire summer months "traveling extensively with the tribe, always alert to the advantages of a mission on any site visited."³ The first site that was chosen was on the banks of the Teton River near the present town of Choteau, Montana. There they hastily built three log cabins for winter quarters and set about their studies of the Blackfeet language.⁴

After only five months, the location on the Teton River proved to be unsatisfactory because of the lack of wood.⁵ Thus a new site had to be found. The second location of the mission was on the Sun River close to where Fort Shaw was later positioned. On March 13, 1860, two cabins were built, but by August 9th, building operations were suspended for unknown reasons⁶ and the second site was abandoned.

In 1861, Fathers Joseph Giorda, S.J., and John Baptist Imoda, S.J., along with Brother Francis DeKock, were assigned to the Blackfeet Mission. On October 25th, they arrived at Fort Benton with the following instructions:

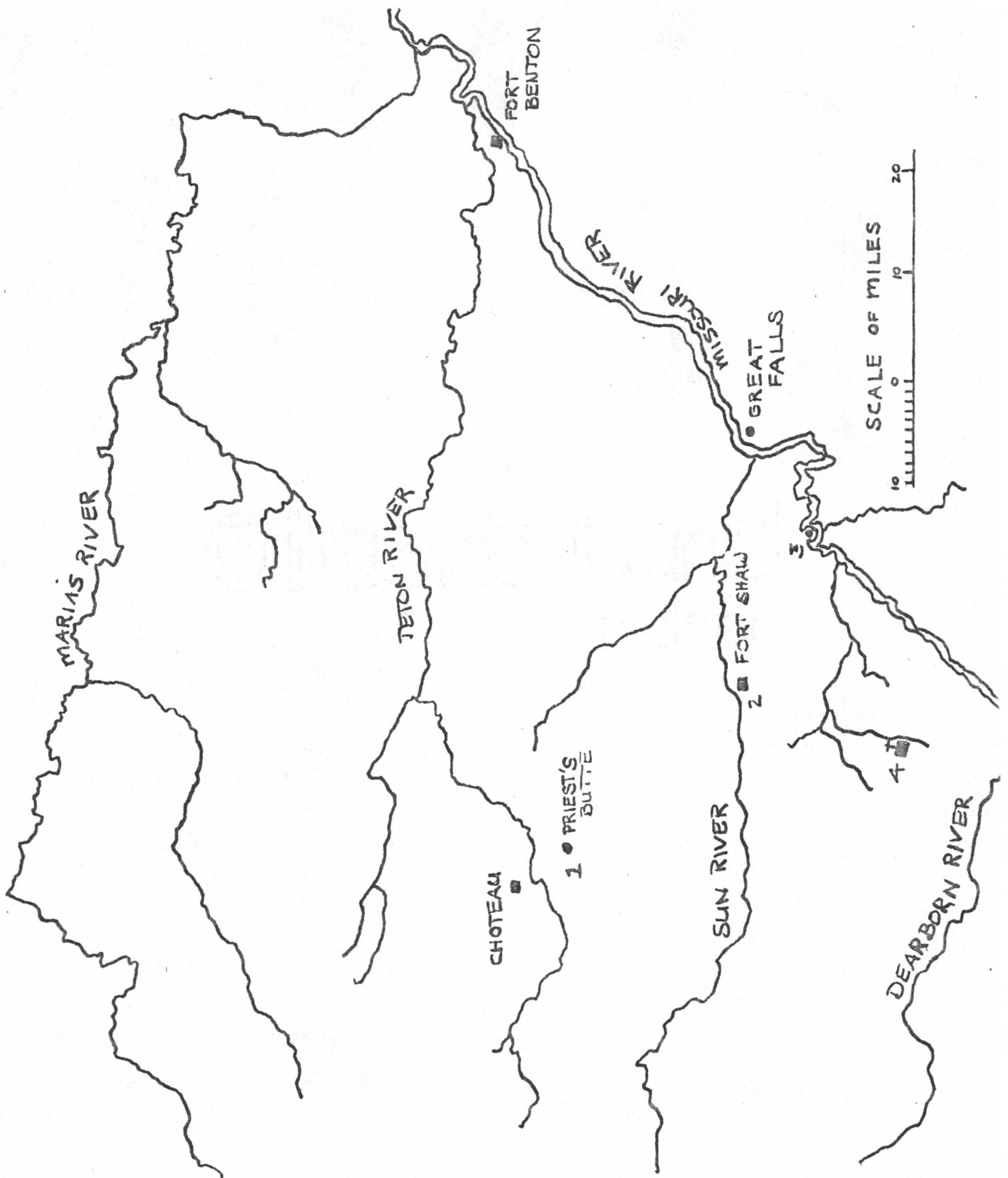


Fig. 3. Detailed map showing four locations of St. Peter's Mission.

1) Proceed to Fort Benton, pass the winter studying the language of the Indians and attend to the spiritual wants of all the people in the vicinity. 2) Select a suitable site for the permanent location of the mission. 3) Once located, the new mission was to be called after St. Peter the Apostle.⁷

The Fathers followed their instructions and spent much time during the winter in search of a new location. In the spring of 1862, it was decided to place it on the banks of the Marias River. However, because of Indian objections, it was instead established on the Missouri River approximately six miles above the mouth of the Sun River near present-day Ulm, Montana.⁸

The Jesuits took possession of this site on February 12, 1862. Two cabins were erected immediately, then a third for a chapel, and finally the three were joined together into a "L" shape by the simple expedient of building two more cabins in between.⁹

Father Kuppens described the land as follows:

. . . a small peninsula formed by a prolonged bend on the River. It contained about 175 or 200 acres of land. The neck was not more than 1/2 mile wide; a short fence at this place would enclose the whole property. On the East a wide fringe of heavy cottonwood trees occupied about 40 acres. The remaining, about 150 acres were level, good loam, sufficiently high to be safe from the spring floods, and were good for farming or pasture.¹⁰

However, the poverty of the mission throughout the succeeding three years was appalling. Unfortunately the land was too high for irrigation purposes. Not only did the area have three excessively dry summers in a row, but the government ignored its earlier promises that it would send the necessary farm implements to the mission.

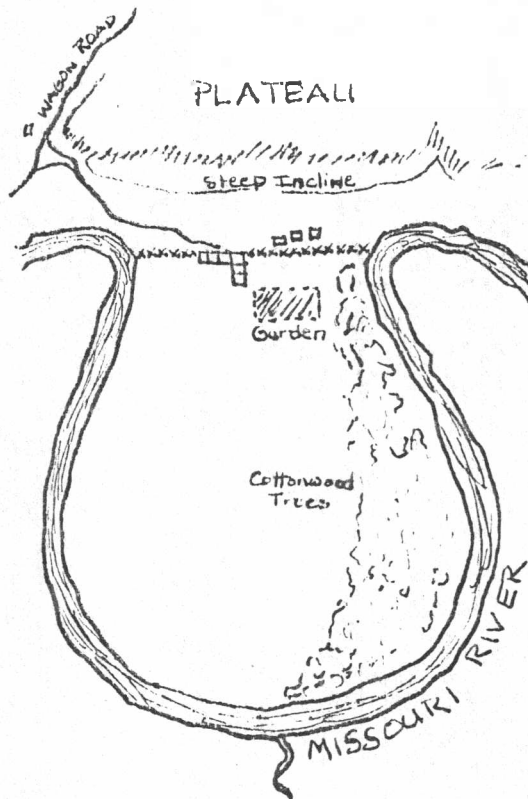


Fig. 4. Grounds and surroundings of the third location of St. Peter's Mission.

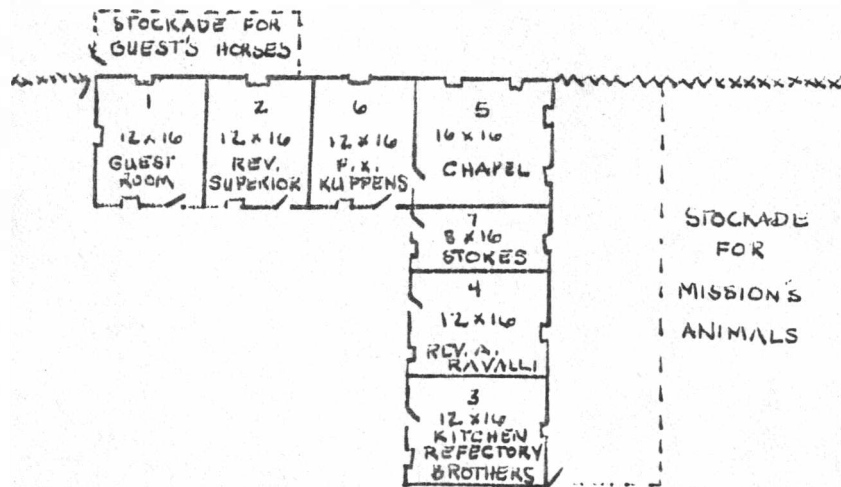


Fig. 5. Detail of buildings of third location of St. Peter's Mission.

The Indians, already disheartened over the indifference of the government, became inflamed during the winter of 1865 with the coming of the Sun River gold strike and the great influx of white men into their lands. The tension, coupled with the farming difficulties, led Father Giorda to prepare a new mission site near Bird Tail Rock.¹¹

What little peace that remained was shattered in the spring of 1866 with the treachery of the "squaw-man," John B. Morgan. After receiving a party of four Indians into his home, he then turned them over to a group of white prospectors, who in turn murdered them. This was the spark that kindled the fire of revenge. A band of Indians proceeded then to attack the governmental agency buildings of the Blackfeet tribe and killed all of the employees.¹² "Other murders rapidly followed and the war thus precipitated only terminated with Baker's battle in January, 1870."¹³

In the meantime, Morgan pleaded with the priests of St. Peter's for refuge and they, knowing fully what the consequences might be, accepted him into the old mission on the Missouri River. The reprisals came quickly, at which point the Fathers retired to their new mission halfway between the Sun and Dearborn Rivers, near Bird Tail Rock on the Old Mullan Road.¹⁴ They arrived on the 27th of April after a short journey, during which they were witness to several parties of both Indians and whites on the war-path. Because of this conflict, they closed the mission

the following day and left for the St. Ignatius Mission.¹⁵ Tensions between the whites and the Indians were too great and Father Giorda did not feel it prudent to waste the Jesuits' already limited manpower in a fruitless mission. Little progress could be hoped for until the return of peace to the frontier.¹⁶

Between 1866 and 1874, the mission remained closed and under the care of a local rancher, Thomas Moran. Periodically, the mission was visited by one of the Jesuits to keep things in order and to also comply with the federal legal requirements of sustaining a mission, "so as not to forfeit title to the claim."¹⁷

It was during this period, on December 5, 1870, that President Ulysses S. Grant issued his infamous "Peace Policy" for the administration of the reservations. This new and somewhat idealistic approach included an attempt to "upgrade the quality of personnel in the Indian service. Until 1870, low salaries and harsh working conditions had generally not attracted qualified men."¹⁸ There had even been many close associations between whiskey traders and Indian agents. Although Grant seemed to have genuine concern for the Indians,¹⁹ this new policy was unfortunately misguided for the Jesuits' purposes. "President Grant proposed to upgrade the job by having Indian agents chosen from candidates recommended by the churches," infusing the service with "superior moral authority."²⁰

The proposition that the management of the Indian

reservations be turned over to the missionary societies is usually credited to Vincent Coyler of New York, the secretary of the new Board of Indian Commissioners. The previous summer (1870), he had apportioned nearly all the tribes of the United States based on his conferences with representatives of different religious bodies, specifically excluding Catholics.²¹ In his second annual message to Congress, Grant spoke of what had already taken place, namely the conferences of Coyler.

Indian agencies being civil offices, I determine to give all the agencies to such religious denominations as had hitherto established missionaries among the Indians and perhaps to some other denominations who would undertake the work on the same terms--that is, as missionary work.²²

Coyler made these assignments primarily according to geographic proximity. This meant that not one, but several Indian nations in one area, could be entrusted to the same religious denomination.²³

Be that as it may, according to this new policy, Grant turned over the Blackfeet Reservation to the Methodists. The Catholic missionaries were informed that they would no longer be able to establish missions there. In a letter to Father J.B.A. Brouillet, Director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Father Imoda expressed his confusion over the government's action and his analysis of the situation:

Why, an agency, the Indians belonging to which, are in a considerable number Catholic, and among whom there is not a single Methodist or Protestant Indian of any denomination whatever, should

be taken from our church and given to a denomination of which the Indians know nothing, has always been a mystery to me. The Catholic agent may have been removed for personal reasons; but that should not be allowed to prejudice the claim of the Catholic Church. Our mission has not been dirilect [sic] or inattentive to its duties, and if it has not proven so eminently successful, as under more favorable circumstances might have been expected, the fault lies, rather in our limited means, than our endeavors.²⁴

This reapportionment of the reservations did, however, increase Jesuit interest in St. Peter's since it was near, but not on, the reservation.²⁵

In the early spring of 1874, Father Imoda, along with two brothers, were sent to reopen the mission. They had scarcely arrived when news was received that Congress had passed a law on April 15th placing the border of the Blackfeet Reservation some sixty miles distant. Determined to remain, they converted their mission into a school for boys, both Indian and white. It was Grant's Peace Policy and the Jesuits' new plans that sparked the subsequent problems with the reservation agent, Major John W. Young, a Methodist.²⁶

Young came to view the Jesuits as trespassers on the reservation and challengers to his authority. The Jesuits, on the other hand, saw both Young and the Methodist Church as poachers on Catholic territory. When Father Peter Prando, S.J., who had just been assigned to the Blackfeet, requested an interview with Young, it appeared that relations might go well and Young seemed cordial. But such would not be the case, as Father Prando stated

in his letter to his superior.

Our agent is a Protestant, and an open enemy of Catholicism. . . . When I converted the great chief, this agent took it so ill, that he was on the look out for some pretext for my banishment from the reservation. Towards the close of May, . . . I learned that the physician was spreading a most calumnious report about me, to the effect that I had advised some of the Indians to shoot the agent. I immediately went to the agency, and asked the lieutenant to summon the physician, who came after some delay. I questioned him, but he denied that he had ever spread any reports about me. . . . As soon as the lieutenant and the physician left me, the agent broke out into most abusive language, telling me I must leave the reservation. "It made little difference to him" he said, "whether Mormonism or Catholicism were propagated among the Indians." "But do you not recollect," said I, "how, at our first interview last year, we agreed to commence a sort of college among the Indians, and how you granted me permission to go about the reservation, as I pleased?. . ." "I never told you anything of the kind." said he, "and furthermore, you must leave the reservation and never enter it again."²⁷

Father Prando did, however, obey the order and retired to his small cabin on Birch Creek just outside the reservation boundry. When the Indians learned of Prando's expulsion, they became convinced that Young was surely doing all he could to ill-treat the good Father. It was then that the Indians began crossing the creek every Sunday to hear Mass in the small chapel.²⁸ It was in his next letter to his superior that Father Prando stated that previously he had not visited the reservation in the hopes that by doing so, tensions with Young might be eased. However, he then declared that in the future he would begin to do so. He would minister to the Indians and

pay no heed to the agent. When Prando did finally cross paths with Young on the reservation, the latter did not mention a word about his previous order, so as not to stir up trouble with the Blackfeet. It was on this supposition that Father Joseph Damiani, S.J., sent workmen to expand and finish Prando's small chapel. He stated that "the work was finished up in a week, and we now have a chapel twenty feet wide and forty-eight long."²⁹ It was this small chapel that later became Holy Family Mission.

Meanwhile, the boys' schools were flourishing at St. Peter's and a new stone building was erected providing accommodations for about four hundred pupils.³⁰ It was described as follows:

The school is for boys and is located in one of the most romantic spots of the country, and being situated close up among the buttes of the mountains on Missouri Creek, presents to the eye a scene of beauty seldom found in Montana.³¹

Prior to 1885, the school had a few more than thirty pupils. During that year the school became a contract school and government aid allowed the attendance to increase to more than two hundred.³²

With the boys' schools doing so well, Father Damiani began to press his superiors to obtain Ursuline Sisters for a girls' school at St. Peter's. He protested that without nuns, a mission school was no school at all. His wishes were finally realized on October 30, 1884. At that time, a group of six Ursuline nuns, led by Mother



Fig. 6. Father Joseph Damiani, S.J. (Photo courtesy of the Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, Helena, Montana.)

Mary Amadeus, O.S.U., arrived at St. Peter's Mission from St. Joseph Labre's.³³ Thus it was that St. Peter's began a new phase of its existence.

ENDNOTES

¹"St. Peter's Mission," 19 August 1927, unidentified newspaper article, vertical file, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, Montana.

²Palladino, S.J., Indian and White, pp. 189-191; "The Catholic Church in Montana," Helena Weekly Herald, 1 January 1880, p. 8.

³Wilfred P. Schoenberg, S.J., "Historic St. Peter's Mission: Landmark of the Jesuits and the Ursulines Among the Blackfeet," Montana the Magazine of Western History 11 (Winter 1962): 72 (hereafter cited as Schoenberg, S.J., "St. Peter's Mission").

⁴Bischoff, S.J., The Jesuits in Old Oregon, 1840-1940, p. 87.

⁵Genevieve McBride, O.S.U., The Bird Tail (New York: Vantage Press, 1974), p. 9; James H. Bradley, "Excerpt James H. Bradley MS," Historical Society of Montana--Contributions 9 (1923): 315.

⁶Bischoff, S.J., The Jesuits in Old Oregon, 1840-1940, p. 87.

⁷Schoenberg, S.J., Jesuits in Montana, 1840-1960, p. 73; F.X. Kuppens, S.J., "Notes on St. Peter's Mission," unpublished manuscript, Oregon Province Archives of the Society of Jesus, Spokane, Washington, p. 11 (hereafter cited as Kuppens, S.J., "Notes").

⁸Schoenberg, S.J., "St. Peter's Mission," p. 74.

⁹Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁰Kuppens, S.J., "Notes," p. 23.

¹¹Schoenberg, S.J., Jesuits in Montana, 1840-1960, p. 37. The Bird Tail Rock is a huge promontory about two miles away from St. Peter's Mission that looks like a bird with spread tail feathers. Long before the missionaries arrived it was revered by the Indians in their religious rites.

¹²"Excerpt James H. Bradley MS," pp. 253-254.

¹³Ibid., p. 254. With the rising demands for military action against the Blackfeet, General Phil Sheridan, head of the Army's Division of the Missouri, ordered Major Eugene M. Baker at Fort Ellis to retaliate. Sheridan believed in "total war" and demanded that Baker "strike them hard." Baker, who was supposedly drunk attacked the wrong village and massacred 173 Indians, including 53 women and children. Although condemned by some, Baker was commended by many and the massacre largely ended the resistance of the Blackfeet to the invasion of the whites. See Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, Montana: A History of Two Centuries, paperback edition (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980), pp. 90-91.

¹⁴Schoenberg, S.J., "St. Peter's Mission," p. 79.

¹⁵Palladino, S.J., Indian and White, pp. 209-210.

¹⁶Schoenberg, S.J., "St. Peter's Mission," p. 80.

¹⁷Palladino, S.J., Indian and White, p. 211.

¹⁸Howard L. Harrod, "The Blackfeet and the Divine Establishment," Montana the Magazine of Western History 22 (Winter 1972): 42 (hereafter cited as Harrod, "Divine Establishment").

¹⁹Peter J. Rahill, The Catholic Indian Missions and Grant's Peace Policy, 1870-1884, with a Foreword by the Most Reverend Edwin V. O'Hara (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), p. 32 (hereafter cited as Rahill, Grant's Peace Policy).

²⁰Harrod, "Divine Establishment," p. 42

²¹Rahill, Grant's Peace Policy, pp. 35-36.

²²Ibid., p. 36, citing Elsie Mitchell Rushmore, The Indian Policy During Grant's Administrations (Jamaica, New York, 1914), p. 28.

²³Rahill, Grant's Peace Policy, p. 36.

²⁴Father Imoda to Father J.B.A. Brouillet, Director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 30 January 1874, as published in Francis J. Weber, ed., "Grant's Peace Policy: A Catholic Dissenter," Montana the Magazine of Western History 19 (Winter 1969): 59.

²⁵Schoenberg, S.J., "St. Peter's Mission," p. 80.

²⁶Ibid., p. 80-82.

²⁷Father Prando to Father Caltaldo, St. Peter's Mission, n.d. (probably 1882), in Woodstock Letters, vol. 12, no. 3, p. 315, Oregon Province Archives of the Society of Jesus, Spokane, Washington.

²⁸Ibid., p. 316.

²⁹Father Prando to Father Caltaldo, n.d. (probably 1882), in Woodstock Letters, vol. 12, no. 3, p. 319.

³⁰Jean Conrad Rowe, comp. and coll., Mountains and Meadows: A Pioneer History of Cascade, Chestnut Valley, Hardy, St. Peter's Mission and Castner Falls, 1805-1925 (Great Falls, Mont.: Blue Print and Letter Co., 1970), p. 61.

³¹"St. Peter's Mission School," Helena Weekly Herald, 28 August 1884, p. 8.

³²"Ruins on Sullivan Hill Road Mark Indian Mission School," Great Falls Tribune, 18 April 1926, sec. 2, p. 1.

³³Schoenberg, S.J., Jesuits in Montana, 1840-1960, p. 39.

CHAPTER III

THE ORDER OF ST. URSULA: ACTIVITIES PREVIOUS TO ST. PETER'S MISSION

The Ursuline Order was founded by St. Angela Merici in Brescia, Italy in 1537, under the invocation of St. Ursula. Soon afterwards, the Order spread rapidly throughout Italy. Later, in 1594, it spread to France under the leadership of Frances de Bermond at l'Isle-sur-Sorques. With the help of Mlle. Bermond, Madame de Saint Beuve, along with a Madame Arcarie, subsequently founded the Congregation of Paris. "Four years later [1612], at its own request, the Congregation of Paris became a monastic order with solemn vows and papal enclosure, under the Rule of Saint Augustine. . . ." This move was the result of pressure that was brought to bear by the sentiment of the times. To have religious women living without cloister was such a novel and unconventional way of life that many parents had hesitated to entrust their daughters to the Ursulines.¹

The growth of the Ursulines was so great in France, and so numerous were their schools, that a large majority of French women in the seventeenth century were instructed by them. By the time of the French Revolution there "were

three hundred and fifty monasteries in this country along with nearly nine thousand nuns teaching children from the lowest to the highest class of society." The law of monastic suppression, in 1792, is said to have deprived some 600,000 children of means of an education; and when enforced, the schools were emptied and those Ursulines who were not deported were beheaded.²

From France, the Order then spread to Belgium in 1622, Ireland in 1771, and Asia in 1857. As early as 1651, offshoots of the mother houses of France could be seen throughout the continent of Europe in Germany, Austria, Poland and Greece.³

The first convent established in North America was located in Quebec in 1639. There were three offshoots from this house in Canada and one of them, Three Rivers, was later to help the Indian missions in the Montana territory.⁴

In 1727, the Daughters of St. Angela established their first house in what would become the United States at New Orleans. In the ensuing century, houses were placed at different locations throughout the United States. In 1844, the house of St. Martin's, Brown County, Ohio, was established, followed by the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Toledo in 1850. It is from these last two that the Ursulines set out for the missions of Montana.⁵

While the Ursulines have always had as their objectives the nursing of the sick and the sanctification of the

lives of their members, their primary activity has been in the education of young girls. As the Fort Benton River Press in 1885 stated:

The aim of the Ursuline order being the instruction of young girls in piety, knowledge and becoming manners, every incentive to virtue, science and refinement is strenuously employed. The greatest attention is given to the religious training of the pupils. . . .⁶

So when the call to help in the education of the Cheyennes reached the Ursulines in Ohio, they were more than willing to volunteer themselves for the task.

The Cheyennes, originally from Minnesota, had been pushed westward by white settlers and other tribes into the region of the headwaters of the Yellowstone River. These Indians, sometimes called the Race of Sorrows, had taken up a new kind of economic life dependent upon the buffalo. With the wanton slaughter of the great herds by the white men, the tribe was left helpless, and in frustration it lashed out at the whites in a series of wars from 1861 to 1882.⁷

The plight of the Cheyennes was finally brought to the attention of Bishop John Baptist Brondel of Helena by an ex-soldier, George Yoakum, and by Father E.W.J. Lindesmith, the chaplain at Fort Keogh. "Both Father Lindesmith and George Yoakum were instrumental in obtaining the Ursulines from Toledo for the Cheyenne Indian Mission."⁸ Bishop Brondel set about obtaining help for the Cheyennes by writing a letter to Bishop Richard Gilmour of Cleveland.



Fig. 7. Bishop John Baptist Brondel, D.D., first bishop of Montana. (Photo courtesy of the Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, Helena, Montana.)

Bishop Gilmour asked for volunteers to the Indian mission, and received thirty names. Of these thirty, six were chosen for the task, their leader being Mother Mary Amadeus Dunne, O.S.U.⁹ Upon receiving word from Bishop Gilmour of the Ursulines' offer, Bishop Brondel wrote his letter of joy and gratitude to the Bishop of Cleveland.

Your favor of Christmas day reached here this evening, and it sounded like the Song of the Angels, and was heard from the east to the west of America: Gloria Deo et in terra Pax.

I have written to Father Lindesmith the happy news and told him that I would send him soon some money for that mission. Your arrangements are perfect and I will do my best to cooperate and make it a success here with the grace of God. If anything should be wanted to help send the Nuns out, please let me know.

And what shall I say to you in thanksgiving for that fine Christmas present? Well I will say nine Masses for the success of the Missionaries, and for the health and blessing of the Bishop who sent them.¹⁰

On January 18, 1884, the Ursulines made their first appearance in the "wicked little town" of Miles City. The temperature registered forty degrees below zero, but there was a warm reception waiting for them, including Bishop Brondel who had traveled over five hundred miles to meet them.¹¹ Having no provisions made for them, their first night was rather harsh and was spent sitting on the floor of the "boarding house." This, however, did not daunt their spirits. The following day Mother Amadeus secured new lodgings, and a new school was opened on February 2nd.¹² They had come to Miles City with the intent of opening a school there. Half of their party would

then continue on to the Cheyenne Indian Reservation where they would help in the establishment of a mission and in the opening of another school.

It was from Miles City that Mother Amadeus set out with three of the Sisters on March 30th. In a letter to Bishop Gilmour, Father Lindesmith described how an army transportation outfit and guard were obtained for the Sisters, as well as the reactions of the soldiers to the party:

A good man, frontier man, Mr. L.D. Toner, interested himself for the Priest and Sisters. He managed so as to get an army transportation of one ambulance for the Sisters, and two wagons for their goods, and a guard of eight soldiers, to take them from Miles to the settlement. . . .

. . . The soldiers and teamsters all agree this was the happiest and most successful expedition they ever had, and that it will be something pleasant to speak of all their lives.¹³

Sister Sacred Heart, O.S.U., a member of the party, in a letter to Mother Stanislaus of Toledo, described the journey also. Of the first of four nights of camping on the trail she writes:

Our tent (Maj. Logan's) was not up yet so we were requested to remain in the ambulance as the ground was damp. We did so and watched the soldiers pitch the tent, put in a Sibley stove, carry wood, start the fire, put up our cot beds, carry our bed clothing (it was wonderful they did not spread them for they would not let us do anything) and then quietly return to their own quarters, leaving us to enjoy the fruits of their labors.¹⁴

It was on April 1st that they reached their destination, a little log cabin. There with Father Eyler, they began the Mission of St. Joseph Labre for the Cheyenne

Indians and the Academy of the Sacred Heart.¹⁵ And it was there that they had their first experience, in what would prove to be a long chain of experiences, in Indian Mission life.

ENDNOTES

¹Clotilde Angela McBride, O.S.U., Ursulines of the West, 1880-1935 (Everett, Wash.: Provincial Novitiate, Ursuline Convent, 1936), pp. 17-18.

²Ibid., p. 18. During the French Revolution of 1789, the National Assembly confiscated the extensive property of the Catholic Church and then sold it publicly at auction to help lessen the bankruptcy of the government. The Catholic Church had previously held a privileged position in French society, and then came to be viewed as being much the same as the hated "aristocrats." The assembly then proceeded to issue the "Civil Constitution" and forced the clergy to sign an oath supporting it. Had members of the clergy done so, they would have demonstrated complete submission to the Revolution. However, some eighty percent of the clergy refused to sign the oath and were looked upon as potential and real traitors. Thus began the attempted dechristianization of France during the French Revolution. See Thomas Bokenkotter, A Concise History of the Catholic Church (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1979), pp. 286-291.

³Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

⁵Ibid., p. 21.

⁶"The Sister's School at St. Peter's Mission," Fort Benton River Press, 16 September 1885, p. 6.

⁷Schoenberg, S.J., Jesuits in Montana, 1840-1960, pp. 54-55.

⁸G. McBride, O.S.U., The Bird Tail, p. 27.

⁹Angela Lincoln, O.S.U., Life of the Reverend Mother Amadeus of the Heart of Jesus (New York: The Paulist Press, 1923), p. 61.

¹⁰Bishop Brondel to Bishop Gilmour, Helena, Montana, 31 December 1883, Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, Helena, Montana.

¹¹C.A. McBride, O.S.U., Ursulines of the West, 1880-1935, p. 29.

¹²Ibid., pp. 31-32.

¹³Father Lindesmith to Bishop Gilmour, Fort Keogh, Montana, 6 April 1884, Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, Helena, Montana.

¹⁴Sister Sacred Heart to Mother Stanislaus, Cheyenne Indian Mission, Brandenburg P.O., Montana, 27 April 1884 as cited in G. McBride, O.S.U., The Bird Tail, p. 39.

¹⁵C.A. McBride, O.S.U., Ursulines of the West, 1880-1935, p. 34.

CHAPTER IV

THE URSULINES ARRIVE AT ST. PETER'S AND THE NEW SCHOOLS

The arrival of the original Ursuline Sisters at Miles City helped to usher in a century of committed service to the people of Montana. After founding St. Joseph Labre's, the Ursulines were called to St. Peter's. Mother Amadeus, with two novices, arrived in October, 1884, and set up residence in log cabins. A fourth Ursuline was summoned from Miles City and, by November, school was under way with thirty pupils.

With the coming of the Sisters, there were many changes that had to be made. They had been called upon to help in the "civilization" and education of the young, to rear them to achieve better lives. The log cabins, formerly used by the Fathers, ultimately proved to be insufficient for this work.¹ In December of 1891, after living seven years in the cabins, their new convent and school building was ready to be occupied. One newspaper described it as "a grand structure" that was "built of fine greystone."² With the help of Bishop Brondel, the move was made and the first Mass was celebrated in the new chapel on January 1, 1892.³



Fig. 8. Original log cabins and chapel at St. Peter's Mission. (Photo courtesy of the Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, Helena, Montana.)



Fig. 9. Mt. Angela Academy. (Photo courtesy of the Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, Helena, Montana.)

Upon the construction of Mt. Angela Academy, a fourth school at St. Peter's was begun. Prior to this, there were three schools at the mission. Two were run by the Jesuits: one for white boys and one for Indian boys. The Ursulines ran the school for Indian girls, and beginning in 1892 at Mt. Angela, also an academy for white girls. In keeping with tradition, the schools were kept separate. The Great Falls Tribune stated in 1901 that

The mission is arranged for the accommodation of Indian boys and girls, each in quarters of their own and separate school rooms. There are also separate buildings for the white children. . . . The academy or school for the whites is entirely separate from that of the Indian children.⁴

A possible explanation for this is that the Sisters feared the loss of students because the white parents would not allow their children to attend an "Indian" school. Another could be that the Sisters actually accepted the prevailing ideas of segregation.

Originally, the Ursulines planned on establishing their motherhouse in Miles City. However, upon their arrival at St. Peter's, the advantages of placing it there were recognized. St. Peter's was located centrally in the state and from it the nuns would radiate their work throughout the state like a wheel. Their awareness of this caused them to locate not only their motherhouse at St. Peter's, but also a novitiate to further instruct the young ladies in Catholicism and to help perpetuate their Order. In the November 10, 1982 issue of the Catholic

Sentinel of Portland, Bishop Brondel, in speaking to a group of postulants about to take their vows, was quoted as follows:

Beloved Daughters of Christ: This day of your taking the veil is one of great significance. It means that you say farewell to the world, for you change your name for that of religion, and your worldly habiliments for the Holy Habit and the sacred veil. You intend to belong wholly to Jesus Christ, to carry His cross, to venerate His Mother by wearing the rosary and to live in community with the other Sisters of the Ursuline Order.⁵

The schools at the mission were partially connected to the government, operating as mission-contract schools. A mission-contract school was supported in part by the government and partly by donations and private enterprise. The construction and maintenance of the buildings were left under the direction of the superiors, and the teachers received no salaries. This was in contrast to the outright government schools, which were "built, furnished, and equipped at government expense. The superintendent, teachers, and other employees were political appointees paid by the government."⁶ As Sister Mary Clotilde McBride stated:

A contract with the government was secured by which the Ursulines [and Jesuits] were paid a certain amount per month for a designated number of Indian pupils. This number was gradually increased until the Indian Department provided for one hundred and ninety children at \$9.00 per child per month. However, there were always a number of Indians in excess of the number paid for; and \$9.00 a month, . . . barely covered food, clothing, medicine, and other items necessary for each child.⁷

In the early 1890's plans for a new policy of substituting the government schools for the contract schools were already being made. This was happening even though many of the government officials believed that the mission schools were far superior to the non-sectarian kind. Many of the officials who visited the mission schools actually felt these institutions should be imitated by government schools, and even sent their non-sectarian teachers and attachés to learn the methods of the mission teachers. In his strong, if somewhat emotional, defense of the mission-contract schools, Father Lawrence B. Palladino stated:

If our Catholic Indian schools are efficient and successful, it is principally through that very one factor which non-sectarianism excludes from the schools of the Government, religion--live, sterling Christianity. Catholic Indian teachers are not hirelings; they draw no salaries; they have no families of their own to provide for and look after. These children of the woods, these degraded human beings are the children of their adoption; and the greater their wretchedness and degradation, the greater also to Christian charity is the incentive to go to their assistance. Catholic Indian teachers look not for gain, nor seek they for comforts. Their personal wants are reduced to a minimum compatible with bare living and a life of persistent, hard toil, all superfluities being retrenched even by solemn and most sacred vows.⁸

But even this eloquent plea could not stop the wheels of government. By early 1895 the Jesuits and the Ursulines were notified that their contract with the government had been cut considerably. In August of that same year, their last payments were received. One reason for this,

aside from the anti-Catholic sentiments that were prevalent at the time, was the desire for complete separation of church and state. The missionaries continued to struggle for the ensuing school year but in June, 1896, the Jesuits were forced to close their schools. Finally, after two years had passed, the Jesuits abandoned St. Peter's Mission altogether.⁹

Although the Jesuits could no longer continue their work at St. Peter's, the Ursulines decided to remain and to persevere in their work. Donations from the east helped with these labors. Hoping that more public awareness of the situation might cause a change, Bishop Brondel published a letter detailing the cost of the mission schools and his beliefs as to why they were discontinued:

First class buildings, mostly of stone and brick were erected in the wildest parts of Montana at a cost of \$400,00 and furnished with all the necessary and convenient equipments for boarding, lodging and schooling of the respective tribes. Let it be taken into consideration that said expensive structures, etc., were put up in compliance with suggestions, if not demands, of the Government officials and inspectors, whose requirements for Indian School accommodations and equipments seemed to surpass what might have been considered more than sufficient in first class schools for white children. Under such circumstances the action on the part of Congress in discontinuing to make appropriation for the funds which alone can make the running of said schools possible, will hardly be considered as just and fair, more especially as it was at the urgent request of the administration that the Catholic Church entered upon the work to the extent that it did. As the cause of this unexpected and unfair treatment is traceable to the fact that religion is taught to the children, it may not be amiss to state what is well known to everyone acquainted with the work in

question, that in order to successfully civilize the Indian [to adapt him to the white man's civilization], it is necessary to christianize him.¹⁰

It was at this time that the Ursulines, although already struggling to maintain the girls' schools, decided to open a boys' school because a small Indian boy was refused admittance at a government school unless his two sisters attended also. The school was called St. Joseph's Academy and was housed in the buildings formerly used by the Jesuits.¹¹

The different schools at St. Peter's struggled on until 1908 when a fire broke out in the boys' dormitory. As stated in the January 17th issue of the Great Falls Tribune:

Fire broke out about noon today in the old dormitory building at St. Peter's mission and this evening the building is a total ruin. The loss is estimated at \$25,000 and there is said to be no insurance.¹²

With the burning of the buildings for the boys' school, the Ursulines were forced to discontinue that part of their operations. This was soon followed by the closing of the school for white girls.

In 1911, John D. Ryan gave a gift to the nuns in the form of land to build a new academy and novitiate in Great Falls. Construction was begun and in September of the following year, the buildings were occupied.¹³ This left only the Indian girls' school in operation. The Ursulines persevered in this activity until 1918,



Fig. 10. St. Peter's Mission between 1892 and 1908.
(Photo courtesy of the Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena,
Helena, Montana.)

when once again fire destroyed their efforts.

Fire, which was started in some unexplained manner, completely destroyed the Ursuline convent at St. Peter's Mission, at an early hour last Saturday morning [November 16, 1918], entailing a loss of between \$50,000 and \$75,000, and completely wiping out all the equipment of the Ursuline sisters for the carrying on of the work at that institution.¹⁴

Due to their staggering loss and limited funds, the Sisters were unable to rebuild at St. Peter's. The children were placed in other institutions and the nuns were recalled to Great Falls.



Fig. 11. Mt. Angela Academy after the 1918 fire.
(Photo courtesy of the Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena,
Helena, Montana.)

ENDNOTES

¹"Beautiful Mount Angela Academy Of The Ursuline Nuns At St. Peter's," Great Falls Tribune, 4 August 1901, p. 9.

²"Civilizing the Indians," The Daily Tribune (Great Falls, Mont.), 16 May 1890, p. 1.

³Rowe, Mountains and Meadows, p. 62.

⁴"Beautiful Mount Angela Academy Of The Ursuline Nuns At St. Peter's," Great Falls Tribune, 4 August 1901, p. 9.

⁵"Giving of Veil," Catholic Sentinel (Portland), 10 November 1892, Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, Helena, Montana.

⁶Mary Afra White, S.C.L., "Catholic Indian Missionary Influence in the Development of Catholic Education in Montana, 1840-1903" (Ph.D. dissertation, Saint Louis University, 1940), pp. 90-91.

⁷C.A. McBride, O.S.U., Ursulines of the West, 1880-1935, pp. 39-40.

⁸Lawrence B. Palladino, S.J., Indian Education: An Impending Calamity to the Catholic Indians of Montana (Philadelphia, Penn.: D.J. Gallagher & Co., 1892), pp. 5-6 (Supplementary Issue of the American Ecclesiastical Review).

⁹C.A. McBride, O.S.U., Ursulines of the West, 1880-1935, p. 42; Schoenberg, S.J., "St. Peter's Mission," p. 84.

¹⁰Bishop Brondel to Whom It May Concern, Helena, Montana, 12 July 1899, Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, Helena, Montana.

¹¹C.A. McBride, O.S.U., Ursulines of the West, 1880-1935, p. 43.

¹²"A Big Fire," Great Falls Tribune, 18 January 1908,
p. 1.

¹³Schoenberg, S.J., "St. Peter's Mission," p. 85.

¹⁴"Ursuline Convent at St. Peter's is Destroyed By
Fire," Great Falls Tribune, 19 November 1918, p. 4.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND CLOSING NOTES

Thus it was that, as a mission, St. Peter's came to an end. The contributions made by the Jesuits and Ursulines at St. Peter's were considerable. They came to Montana early in its history, and in their struggles they laid the foundations for the Catholic Church and for the education of both the Indians and the whites. While the Ursulines, in their educational system, placed most emphasis upon a classical education, they were always open to new additions to their academic programs, therefore providing for the best possible education. Of the buildings still left at the mission site, one is the original church and the other is the "Opera House," a testimony of the attempt of a few to bring "culture" and Christianity to the Indians of Montana.¹

In the aftermath of the departure of the Ursulines, St. Peter's has not been forgotten. Although most of the acreage was sold in 1943, the Ursulines did retain ownership of a few sections, those containing the church, cemetery, and the road from the highway.² The church was restored in 1945, as near as possible, to its original likeness; and beginning in 1947, Mass was once again cele-

brated there during the summer months.³

By today's standards, the missionaries may be viewed as having been cultural imperialists. Some critics believe that the missionaries "forced" their ideas of "culture," "religion" and "civilization" upon the Indians. While this may be a valid accusation, we must examine these actions in the context of the missionaries' time and in relation to the other white settlers and government officials. Of the majority of the white settlers, the missionaries were the most concerned with the welfare of the Indians. The actions and attitudes of the missionaries can be seen as being admirable and perhaps in the Indians' best interests. The missionaries allowed the Indians the opportunity to adapt, by teaching them a variety of skills and subjects, to the ever-changing society of the white men.⁴

The methods of the Ursulines and the Jesuits did work, and is exemplified by the fact that the government attempted to pattern its secular schools after those of the missions. These missionaries were often successful because they were sincerely devoted to the welfare of Indians. Consequently, St. Peter's Mission played a major role in the Christianization and education of the Indians of Montana.

ENDNOTES

¹G. McBride, O.S.U., The Bird Tail, p. 207.

²"Convent Sells Old St. Peter's Mission Acres," Great Falls Tribune, 22 June 1943, p. 7.

³"St. Peter's is Open Again," Great Falls Tribune, 30 September 1947, p. 5.

⁴For further information concerning the Catholic Indian missions in Montana, see Ella E. Clark, "Mission in the Wilderness," Montana Magazine of History 5 (Winter 1955): 51-57; Howard L. Harrod, Mission Among the Blackfeet (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); and Edwin V. O'Hara, "DeSmet in the Oregon Country," The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society 10 (September 1901): 239-262.

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