



St. Paul's Mission

St. Paul's Mission near Kettle Falls as it looked in 1888.



Catholic Missionaries Come to Kettle Falls

As early as 1838, two Catholic Missionaries, Father Blanchet and Father Demers secured passage with the Hudson's Bay Company from Montreal to Fort Vancouver located on the lower Columbia River. Their goal was to establish a Catholic mission in the Willamette area. News of their arrival preceded them to Fort Colville, the Hudson's Bay Trading post located near Kettle Falls. Representatives from five Indian tribes were waiting there to greet them. The Fathers ministered to the Indians they found there for three days, baptizing 19 people. That was the first recorded Catholic mass held in the lands between the Rocky and Cascade Mountains. The Fathers promised that one of them would soon return and build a mission for the people of the Upper Columbia River.

Missions on the Upper Columbia

The first missionaries to reach the Kettle Falls area arrived in 1836. They were representatives of the American Board of Foreign Missions, sponsored by the Presbyterians and Congregationalists. In 1838 two couples, Cushing and Myra Eells with Elkanah and Mary Walker, built the Tshimakain Mission near present day Springdale in the Colville Valley. It was hard work to get settled in, but they were well liked by the local tribes and Hudson's Bay Company people. Archibald McDonald, Chief Trader at the Hudson's Bay Fort Colville 70 miles north, welcomed them to the area and visited them often.

The Presbyterian missionary efforts in the Colville Valley were not as successful at gaining converts as their Catholic counterparts. They required the Indians to

demonstrate an understanding of the scriptures before being baptized. In the nine years the Tshimakain Mission existed, not one Indian was baptized there.

When the Catholic Missionaries arrived they were also welcomed by the Hudson's Bay people and local tribes. Fathers Demers and Blanchet returned several times to Kettle Falls to hold mass and convert new Christians, but they were unable to staff a permanent mission there. In 1840 Father DeSmet, a Belgian Jesuit, came to the area. Realizing that the "Rocky Mountain Region of the Catholic Missions" (everything west of the Rocky Mountains) needed more staff, he wrote Fathers Blanchet and Demers that he would return to Europe to recruit more Jesuits to help with their missions.

Establishing St. Paul's Mission



Father Ravalli

In 1845 Father DeSmet returned to establish a permanent mission near Kettle Falls to serve the more than eight hundred Indians who assembled there annually for the fishing season. He built a temporary structure of boughs above the falls.

Two of the new recruits he brought with him from Europe, Father Ravalli and Father Hoecken, were placed in charge of this small mission.

Father Ravalli was educated in theology, medicine, drawing, and mechanics. He built a small church where DeSmet had placed his chapel of boughs. St. Paul's Mission, a more substantial structure was built in 1847.

The Center for Jesuit Activity on Upper Columbia

St. Paul's Mission became the center for Jesuit activity among the Indians of the Upper Columbia. In 1847 Father DeVos established his year-round residency at the church. Previously, Father Ravalli traveled several times a year from St. Ignatius Mission in Cusick, two days journey to the east, to Kettle Falls, to minister to the Indians who gathered there to fish and trade each year. When Father DeVos' health failed in 1851 he moved to the Willamette Valley. During his time at St. Paul's Mission

he baptized 491 people, conducted 123 marriages, and presided over 99 burials. Fathers Joset and Vercruysse replaced him.

The priests' main concern at St. Paul's Mission was religious instruction. In order to facilitate that, they needed to keep these usually nomadic people in one place all year. The church advocated teaching the Indians farming to make them less dependant on the hunting and gathering that drew them away from Kettle Falls each year.

The Decline of St. Paul's Mission

Things went well at St. Paul's Mission until the mid-1850's when several events occurred in close succession. First, a man calling himself a "dreamer" of a Native religion, preached against the "white man's religion," at Kettle Falls. Though the priests declared the "dreamer" a fake, he gained many followers among the Indians at the falls. Eventually the "dreamer" was forced to leave.

A more serious challenge to the priests came in 1853 in the form of a smallpox

epidemic. Father Joset tried to help the victims, but to little avail. Many Columbia River Indians died of the disease.

The increase of white settlers in the area after gold was found and the construction of a saloon close by made it increasingly difficult to keep the Indians interested in "white man's religion".

In 1858 the Catholics were forced to close St. Paul's Mission temporarily.

New Responsibilities for Catholic Missionaries

During the time period the Jesuits were not living at St. Paul's Mission they continued to minister to the Indians and the growing number of white settlers. In 1862 Father Joset returned to his residence at the Mission and to increased responsibilities. He now had a following of Irish Catholic soldiers 10 miles away at the military Fort Colville. Desirous of having a priest close by, they built a log church named Immaculate Conception, in the town of Colville. In 1869 St. Francis Regis Mission was built 5 miles east of St. Paul's Mission to accommodate the growing number of whites in the area. By the 1870s the government had

made a contract with the Sisters of Charity, of the Catholic Church, to convert St. Francis Regis into an Indian boarding school which overshadowed the influence of St. Paul's. Father Joset, with the help of Father Menetrey, who resided at Immaculate Conception, administered to the needs of the two missions at Kettle Falls. Father Joset, who preferred to minister to the Indians, is believed to have resided at St. Paul's Mission when not traveling.

The last known service held at St. Paul's Mission was August 14, 1875.

St. Paul's Mission Today

St. Paul's Mission gradually deteriorated. It stood as a lonely sentinel on the hill overlooking the Kettle Falls and the old Hudson's Bay trading post, Fort Colville. In 1901 more than half the roof was gone, the cross, which had stood at the peak of the roof, had fallen. Windows, floors, and doors were absent. Concern about the structure mounted as the building continued to decay. The mission stood for 90 years, mostly in a state of decay. In 1939 a group headed by Father Georgen painstakingly restored the building to its original appearance.

St. Paul's Mission is a monument to much more than the proselytizing efforts of Jesuit missionaries in the 1800's. The mission stands as a reminder of the Indians it was built to serve and the effects of Westward expansion on the indigenous people of the Northwest.



St. Paul's Mission in 1908