

The First Nuns in Montana and their Helpers, Sabine and Sophie.

To the Pacific Northwest in 1864

By Chalk Courchane

When the Sisters arrived in Montana: It was a time of historic proportions in Montana, which was proclaimed a territory unto itself by Abraham Lincoln less than five months [earlier]. Sheriff Henry Plummer was hanged in January at the apex of the vigilante movement in southwest Montana. Gold was discovered in Last Chance Gulch in July, and at the end of October miners will meet to dub the resulting gold camp “Helena.” <http://montanayesterday.com/?p=807>

On June 1, 1864, a group of eleven Sisters left Montreal for Fort Vancouver, in response to a call for help from Father Jean Pierre De Smet. This was the fourth group of the Sisters of Providence who traveled from Montreal to the American west coast. The Sisters' arduous journey took 41 days. They traveled by rail and ship to New York City, across the Isthmus of Panama, to San Francisco, and finally arrived in Fort Vancouver where they stayed about a month.

The eleven Sisters arrived in Fort Vancouver on July 11th, 1864. “The Sisters of Vancouver welcomed the new recruits joyfully. They were particularly interested in the first Indian missionaries of the Institute. They heard in excited French about their tumbles from the mules who had carried them across the Isthmus of Panama. Three of them were selected for the St. Ignatius Mission in Montana. They were the 37 year-old leader of the group, Sister Mary of the Infant Jesus, 32-year old Sister Mary Edward, and 18-year old Sister Remi. The party bound for St. Ignatius Mission consisted of Jesuit priests, Joseph Giorda, the Superior of the Indian Missions in the Rocky Mountains, Gregory Gazzoli and Francis Xavier Kuppens and two Irishmen. They were complete tenderfeet when they started on the trip but were hardened up by the time they arrived in Montana. They departed from Fort Vancouver on September 12, 1864 and proceeded up the Columbia River via steamboat. At the Cascades, where a set of rapids made the Columbia impassable to steamboat travel, they took a small wagon train to the top of the rapids and changed to another wagon train to The Dalles, a town 15 miles upriver at the head of the rapids.

From The Dalles they continued up river via steamboat to Walla Walla, which was at this time the outfitting and starting point for all travel to the upper country, arriving there September 14, 1864. The Sisters of Providence had already founded an establishment at Walla Walla. A fourth nun, 21-year old Sister Paul Miki, joined them in Walla Walla. “A Shining from the Mountains, Sister Providencia Tolan, S.P., 1980, page 81.

Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart of Vancouver wrote in a letter to Monsignor Bourget, Bishop of Montreal:

“Father Giorda, Jesuit Superior of the Jesuit Missions in the Mountains of Montana, came to see us on August 30th. His visit meant the departure of our Sisters. In fact, they left us on September 12th. They spent two days in Walla Walla where they met Father Giorda who had gone ahead to complete his preparations for the overland journey. Our dear Sister Paul Miki joined the caravan

there ... as those poor nuns had several hundreds of miles to travel on horseback, they wanted to practice the new method of travel altogether strange to them. It was amusing to see them rigged out in garments we had made to protect them from the cold and the rain. They had their blankets for beds and their carpet bags for pillows.” Mother Joseph They rode sidesaddle! “The day happened to be the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, the principal festival of the Order of Providence, and both our travelers and their Walla Walla Sisters would have much preferred to postpone the departure at least another day, but Father Giorda was of a different mind; “Everything is now ready,” said he, “and if we put off making a start today, we shall have to go through our long preparations once more; let us go.” The two Irishmen were in charge of a large prairie schooner, a kind of Noah's Ark on wheels, loaded with luggage and other effects for the caravan, as well as with provisions for the Coeur d'Alene Mission.” They had nine horses. “They had gone but a short distance when “the big thing” stood, stuck fast in a mud hole, whence it proved no easy task to release it. Some six miles from town the party went into camp, and after pitching their tents, partook of a rustic meal served on the ground. Sister Paul Miki, being rather delicate, was the only one whose appetite had not been sharpened by the outing and exercise of the day. She felt fatigued and, without eating a morsel, retired to rest her weary frame on a blanket spread on the ground, and her aching head on a saddle, which in miner's style was not doing her service as a pillow.” Indian and White in the Northwest”, Rev. L.B. Palladino, S.J.

“Mother Joseph, foundress of the sisters of Providence in the West, is Washington State's second representative in National Statuary Hall, in Washington, D.C. Her bronze statue was dedicated in 1980. A duplicate statue is in the capitol in Olympia. In 1999, at the request of a group of Vancouver, WA, sixth-grade students, the legislature passed a bill declaring her birthday, April 16, as Mother Joseph Day in Washington State”. <http://www.sistersofprovidence.net/150years/index.php?page=sixfacts>

They had carried with them a portable altar and every day the Fathers had Mass for the Sisters. “Pitching the tent and other elements of “making camp” were new to them. Happily, French gaiety and laughter rescued the ladies from too much culture shock.

The next morning the Sisters were happy; the delicate one felt better, and Father Giorda had told them that they would celebrate their great festival in the woods with Mass and Holy Communion. The devotions over, they had their second camp meal, and again mounting their horses, set out for a somewhat longer ride than the one of the previous day.

Riding horseback and camping out were now, day after day, the Sisters' occupations for a whole month. They were fatigued at first, being entirely unused to this manner of traveling, but they soon became accustomed to it, and the more they traveled, the better they liked it.” Tolan They traveled 20 miles the second day.

On the morning of the third day their mounts were to be seen nowhere around. Father Kuppens and the two Irishmen started out to look for the strays, and did not return till late in the evening. The animals had made their way back toward the town, and were only overtaken in its vicinity. To be left afoot by the horses running off during the night was a very common occurrence to travelers in this part of the country. We passed over the same trail just three years after and were left in the same predicament several times. No one but those who have experienced it can realize how annoying, and how full of anxiety it is to be left on foot, sometimes a hundred and more miles away from every habitation. This was often the case late in the fall, when good camping places along the beaten trail were not to be found, owing to scarcity of grass or lack of water. As

the animals could neither be picketed nor hobbled on such grounds, they would, naturally, stray and strike out for some better pasture.

On the following day our party had to dray rather heavily on their store of good humor to keep up their spirits. Sister Paul Miki when about to get on the saddle, was severely kicked by one of the horses. However, notwithstanding the brute's vicious compliment, she was soon able to resume her journey, and kept up with the rest, though not without considerable suffering through the whole day. It was late that evening when they went into camp and pitched their tents for the night." They traveled another 20 miles. "The place was a sandy desert with no grass for the horses, and the scanty meal of our travelers had been spoiled by over-seasoning, that is, a sudden gust of wind had salted and peppered everything with sand, dust, and all manner of unpalatable ingredients. To add to their discomfort, they found it hard work to stay their tents against the wind, and keep them from being blown down over their heads. As a consequence, they had little if any sleep at all that night, the wind blowing a furious gale the whole time." Palladino Next to get hurt was Sister Mary Edward who rode in the wagon afterwards.

"On reaching the banks of the Spokane River they were met by Seltis, the chief of the Coeur d'Alene Indians. He joined the party and accompanied them, as their escort, the entire day. On the 29th they followed the Mullan Road on horseback and came to the shores of Lake Coeur d'Alene and crossed it by canoe, and here the clouds commenced to pour down rain upon our travelers. But they were not greatly inconvenienced, as they soon found their tents a timely shelter from the storm." There now lay before the pilgrims thirty-five miles of rough mountain road, or sixty miles by water, to reach the Coeur d'Alene Mission. As the big prairie schooner could not be taken any further than their present camping place, it had been previously arranged that the Mission's raft or flat boat, and a number of pack animals for the transportation of persons, luggage, and provisions, would meet the caravan at this point. The boat not being large enough to take both persons and cargo, the Sisters were to go by water, while the goods could be freighted on packhorses over the mountain trail.

To perfect these arrangements Father Gazzoli had left the party a few days before. It was, therefore, expected that by the time our travelers would arrive at the lake, the transportation would also be there. But they were disappointed, nothing of the kind being in sight. While the rest of the party were to remain in their present camping place, Father Giorda himself set out for the Mission and arrived there before Father Gazzoli. For the latter had been afoot because of his horse running away from him. He had to walk two whole days to reach the Mission, and when he arrived he seemed more than half starved and utterly exhausted. His mishap explained the disappointment.

Boat and pack animals for the party at the lake were soon in readiness. Father Caruana, with several Indians, took the horses over the trail, arriving at the camp the first of October in the evening; while Chief Edward and two French Canadians, who manned the boat down the river, came in sight on the morning of the next day. Before long, all were on the move toward the Mission. Father Caruana, with the goods returning by trail and Father Kuppens, and the Sisters by water. The latter had scarcely left the shore to cross the lake when a strong breeze sprang up and for awhile the boat, passengers and crew seemed in danger. They crossed safely, however, and pursued the rest of their course up the river without accident." Palladino Finally on October 5

the “the majestic buildings of the famous Cataldo Mission were sighted when they paddled up a river. The Coeur d’Alene Indians lined river bank, and were eager to see the Lady Black Robes.

After two days' rest the Sisters and their escort set out again and began the second part of their journey. A couple of Indians, Joseph [Standing Bear] and Adelaide, his wife, sent by Father Grassi from St. Ignatius, had come to meet our travelers, and proved very serviceable, as the road not lay through thick forests over the Coeur d'Alene Mountains. Steep ascents, deep ravines, fallen timber, streams and gulches, lay in their path, and the difficulties and inconveniences of the travel before them were greater than any they had so far encountered. But the brave Sisters were inured by this time to all manner of discomfort, and bore these troubles as they had done the others, not only without complaint, but with a buoyant and sparkling cheerfulness. They prayed, they sang, they chatted as they went along, and had many a hearty laugh over the incidents of the road. Father Giorda enjoyed listening to them from without, when all by themselves under their tent they seemed to overflow with good humor and merriment at the happenings of the day; and equally as good-humored himself, he would say to his companions with reference to the Sisters; "Birds chirping in the evening bring fair weather in the morning." Palladino

“Adelaide [Standing Bear] proved to be a blessing for the Sisters, teaching them many things about wilderness travel and preventing mishaps. Not so the youngest boy. He had a way of getting behind the Sisters’ horses to give them a whack if he thought they were too slow. The Chronicles give praise to Adelaide and her family, their first Indian friends: “They were brave, gentle people and gave us the best care. Even after we reached the Mission, Adelaide never missed coming each morning to ask if we needed water or other supplies.” Tolan, p 82.

“Whenever they happened to pass the night near an Indian camp, Father Giorda's zeal was remarkable and most edifying. He assembled the Indians and held evening devotions with them; he taught them their catechism; heard their confessions, and in the morning at Mass all received Holy Communion. On one of these occasions he showed himself not unversed in the ways of the saints. Though the party had replenished their "commissary" or larder, at the Coeur d'Alene Mission, traveling as they did very slowly, their provisions were growing light, and Father Giorda feared they might run short of them before the end of the journey. Having found in an Indian camp an old man extremely poor, and totally blind, he brought him his own share of the evening's repast, and lest his charity should entail the least privation upon the others, he went that night without eating a morsel himself.” Palladino

They rode across Lookout Pass on a steep trail and on down to Frenchtown, Montana, crossing one stream 26 times in a day. "In the afternoon of the 15th (October) they arrived at Frenchtown, the first white settlement they had seen since leaving Walla Walla, a distance of 400 miles, and were most hospitably entertained by Mr. Louis Brown, a French Canadian, who, besides seeing the first missionaries, had frequently also shared with them their privations and hardships. Words could not convey the surprise and the pleasure of both himself and his wife at the sight of the Sisters, the first white women who had ever crossed the Coeur d'Alene Mountains. Louis Brown’s wife was Emily Goetsche (Gauche), a Pend d'Oreille woman. They welcomed the travelers to their home. A month later Emily, [age 12] and Eliza, [age 14], the old pioneer's daughters, were among the first pupils of the Sisters at St. Ignatius."

The following day, October 16, being Sunday, they had Mass in the little log church, which the Fathers had recently erected in the settlement. In the afternoon, taking leave of their kind hosts, our pilgrims went to pitch their tents at the mouth of what is known today as O'Keefe's Canyon, some seven miles northeast of Frenchtown. This was the last time they were to camp on the road. "We are nearing the end of our journey," remarked Father Giorda to the Sisters; "the trials and crosses you have thus far encountered and endured are not to be compared with those that await you."

During the latter part of the journey the Sisters met occasional small bands of prospectors whose amazement at their presence in the wilderness reached its climax when they heard from the Sisters whither they were going, and for what purpose; "No," these miners would tell them, "you will never stay there. No white women could ever endure living in such surroundings."

About noon on the October 17, 1864, they arrived at the Agency [now Arlee, Montana], where a most unexpected reception was in store for them. The surly agent treated both Fathers and Sisters with worse than the coldest indifference. They soon withdrew from the presence of the inhospitable and ungentlemanly Government official, and continuing on their way, by evening they were at the end of their pilgrimage, reaching St. Ignatius just one month from the day they left Walla Walla.

A few miles from the Mission, Joseph and Adelaide Standing Bear, with their two sons, Baptiste "Pah-tee" Standing Bear 4 years old, and Lome (Romaine Joscum) 6 years old, whom they had taken along on the trip, leaving the rest of the party, went ahead to give the news to the camp. When the Sisters arrived, they found all the Indians assembled to bid them welcome. *Mission Valley News*, August 6, 1986, page 6, "Early Days by Miss Beaver." Baptiste Standing Bear married Melanie Pierre whose daughter Agnes married Jim Pichette.

"The people then escorted the Sisters to the big wooden church not far from the little cabin. The priests were assembled to offer prayers of Thanksgiving for a safe arrival." Tolan, p 83. The trip on horseback from Walla Walla to St. Ignatius took five weeks, 700 miles and 400 of it on horseback. Getting from Montreal to St. Ignatius spanned four months and included travel by rail, ship, mule and covered wagon. "Uncommon Women, Unmarked Trails, Suzanne H. Schrems."; "Indian and White in the Northwest", Rev. L.B. Palladino, S.J.

The large building planned by Father Grassi for the new school was still under construction, and it would take some months yet before it could be made ready for occupancy. But this caused no delay; nor was there any time lost on the part of the Sisters in beginning active work, instructing the Indians. They opened a school upon their arrival on the place. *The Montana Catholic Online*, Volume 27, No. 8, August 19, 2011; *St. Ignatius Chronicles*, p. 3-8 and *The Sunday Missoulian*, August 23, 1964; "Indian and White in the Northwest, or A History of Catholicity in Montana," Lawrence B. Palladino, S. J., John Murphy & Company, Baltimore, 1894, pp46, 62;

The Sisters of Charity's Holy Family School, would eventually teach girls from 17 different tribes. The school lasted from 1864 to 1919 when it burned down. "The first school building for the girls when the Sisters arrived on October 17, after the long ride from Walla Walla, was a house." Tolan, p. 88. They found that Father Grassi, S.J. had prepared a small house to serve them until the new convent building and a new school building was built. The cabin that they were to live in was fourteen feet square and it was to be used as the school too. It was built with wood

sawn by the newly constructed sawmill and as most houses in the “Reduction” village has one big room and a loft. This loft or attic was ten feet square and had two small windows and was used by the Sisters as living quarters. “They slept on the floor with straw mattresses and carried water up a ladder.” The downstairs fireplace was the only one in the cabin and it was the only heating and cooking facility they had. Insulation was achieved by using upright 14 x 3 boards. They lived here for two years or until the convent was finished. It was later used to “bunk” the Mission workers.



St. Ignatius Mission was first established in 1845 on the Pend d'Oreille River, near present Cusick, in Northeast Washington State. Because this site was both isolated and vulnerable to flooding, the mission was moved in 1854 to its current location on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Father Adrian Hoecken, S.J., is the predominate figure in this early period of the mission's history. <http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/copyrights.html>



Taken by Chalk Courchane

Father Adrian Hoecken opened the first school in 1856, but lack of supplies forced its closure the following year. He turned his energies instead to construction of flour and lumber mills, intending the former as a source of income and the latter of raw materials for the growth of the mission itself. By 1864 the mission's whipsaw was fully engaged toward the construction of a belfry 100x40 foot on the church and residences for the priests and newly arrived Sisters of Providence. The Sisters promptly established both a girl's school and hospital, and the Jesuits reopened their boy's school shortly thereafter. The schools flourished into large boarding institutions, in direct consequence of federal funding.

Sister Remi showed a facility to learn the Salish language as all the Sisters were began the Salish language classes with Father Grassi. "All church prayers and ceremonies of the mountain missions were conducted in this common language, called "Kalispel" by Father Grassi.

"Within a month, Sister Remi could begin teaching religion classes to the local Indian girls, chiefly the Pend d'Oreilles. The girls came every morning to the convent-school at the ringing of a bell. School was entirely a new experience for the girls. At first, they were very shy and seemingly unresponsive. No doubt, since the girls knew no French and the Sisters had to stumble along with the Salish tongue, the teaching was a slow business for everybody. It did help, however, that the church vocabulary for prayers, etc. was familiar to a degree from the Sunday ceremonies." "A Shining from the Mountains, Sister Providencia Tolan, S.P., 1980, page 89-90. The Fathers taught the boys. In a number of years Father Grassi started teaching religion to both the girls and boys. The Sisters concentrated on the lessons dealing with reading, writing, arithmetic and in home-making to the girls. This was mostly cooking and sewing. "According to records in the Providence Archives, Sister Remi ... 'was loved for the goodness of her heart, esteemed for the

strength of her character and her virtue ... her desire to do good for people was immense. She had many tasks other than teaching. She was the seamstress and the "boarder mistress" when boarders began to apply at the school. She was also sacristan at the big church nearby, preparing the altar for daily ceremonies. The sewing and mending of clothes were important, because there was no store within hundreds of miles where material to make the black robes could be bought." Tolan, p. 90.

Sister Paul Miki also from Montreal and had joined her fellow Sisters at Walla Walla knew some English. "In Montana, Sister Paul Miki seemed to suffer more than the other Sisters from the isolation and the bitterness of exile from her own country. But she never faltered. .. At first she did not understand Indian psychology. "But as the Indian girls learned and received their Sacraments and had their First Holy Communion she came to understand them better. After 16 years at the Holy Family School in St. Ignatius she sickened and died in 1880 and is buried in the St. Ignatius Catholic Cemetery.

Sister Mary Edward of Montreal was Irish, and was experienced in social work and nursing. "The Providence records report that she was "...gifted with an amiable disposition and the most exquisite politeness. She was loved and esteemed by all." Tolan p.90 She was often asked to go on begging to the gold mines near Missoula, Helena and elsewhere in Montana and of course riding side-saddle on horseback. These trips were very tiresome and dangerous. She traveled with a younger Sister on these treks and the English speaking Nun would be gone a month or so. "She had courage and determination, straightforwardness and frankness." According to the Chronicles, "They had great success and made a good collection wherever they went."

"The pioneer sisters took lengthy, dangerous trips by horseback, stage coach, wagon and river boat to the communities, mines and lumber camps in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and the Caribou Country in British Columbia. They begged for donations, provisions and the precious gold dust and nuggets essential to the support of their works of charity. Their The pioneer sisters took lengthy, dangerous trips by horseback, stage coach, wagon and river boat to the communities, mines and lumber camps in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and the Caribou Country in British Columbia." <http://www.sistersofprovidence.net/150years/index.php?page=sixfacts>. After nine years at St. Ignatius she moved to Missoula, where she and two others Nuns opened a school in 1873 "The Academy of the Sacred Heart." She later went home to Canada where she lived out her life.

Sister Mary of the Infant Jesus, was both honored and loved by the Flatheads who called her Mother Infant Jesus. She tended to the sick in their homes, "Neither the inclemency of the season, nor rough roads, nor long distances could keep her away from anyone in need of comfort." Once she went 36 miles over terrible roads to treat a seriously ill Indian, whom she restored to health. On the return trip they had to drive their horses and buggy through a forest fire, and with luck made it back to the Mission. But as soon as they arrived there the best horse of the team dropped dead! She spent 52 years at St. Ignatius and is buried in the St. Ignatius Catholic Cemetery. While the other Sisters were learning Salish she did the baking for the entire Mission population.

"The Sisters saw it a Christmas present from the Child Jesus when a young widow, Sabine of the Pend d'Oreilles, and her two girls [aged 4 and 5 years old] came to live with them on December 28th of that year. "Of all the Indians she had rejoiced more than anyone when the Sisters arrived

in the Mission." For six years she was a sort of associate member of the community, invaluable as an interpreter and fellow-worker. The pioneer Sisters used to tell the rest of us, "The Fathers asked Sabine to stay with the Sisters and hunt for them!" She probably taught them how to eat bitterroot and find the berries." She spoke French, a language she probably learned in the fur trade, so she was able to interpret for the Sisters. She acted as the boarder mistress on the first floor of the little cabin, her first boarders were the daughters of Louis and Emily Brown, of Frenchtown, both girls could speak French and English. They stayed until the spring of 1865. The third student to stay there was the wife of Lachlan McLaurin of Fort Connah, a few miles away. She was listed as M. Grant. "Mrs. McLearen stayed at the school only until February 23, 1865. She was fifteen years old. Together with the two Brown girls, she was registered in the "Tribal Column" as Metisse. Mrs. McLaurin was a daughter of Richard Grant, HBC trader at Fort Hall, Idaho. From MISSION VALLEY NEWS, July 1, 1976, page 13--"The Sisters of Providence - 1864-1976---by Sister Providencia, S.P.; "A Shining from the Mountains, Sister Providencia Tolan, S.P., 1980, page 91.

"Mrs. Sophie Finley Revais came to stay with the Sisters in March, 1865, with her three year old daughter. For a time there were ten boarder girls. The group had to eat meals in relays. The problem was dishes...." From THE MISSION VALLEY NEWS, July 1, 1976, page 13, "The Sisters of Providence - 1864-1976 by Sister Providencia, S.P.; "A Shining from the Mountains, Sister Providencia Tolan, S.P., 1980, page 91. Sophie was the daughter of Francois "Penetzi" and Penama (Philomene) Finley, and the wife of Charles Revais (Rivet). Her daughter was Theresa Sophie Revais who later married Henry Haake Felsman.

Sophie is credited in one story of discovering gold in the 1850s:

"No one printed the intimate little story of the actual discovery as told by Benetsee's daughter Sophie to her children. One day as her father lay sick at the family's camp, Sophie used to confide, that he sent her off on an errand. Tired and hot as she returned, she stopped at a little creek to wash her face in the cool water; noticing the pretty black sand with glittering flecks, she took some of it to Benetsee, wrapped in her headscarf." Flathead and Kootenai; pp. 314-315.

Two of Peter Skene Ogden's grandchildren also attended the school, they were Marie and Sarah Ogden, the daughters of Michel Ogden, and had come with their mother Angelique Bonaparte Ogden.



St. Ignatius Indian School, St. Ignatius, Montana, c. 1914 L-R: Pe-na-ma or Penama, most likely Sophie Finlay's mother; Sister Mary of the Infant Jesus; Sophie Finlay (1842-1921), daughter of Francois ("Penetzi") Finlay, the man credited with finding the first gold in Montana.

During these times things were very tough for the Flathead Agency and the St. Ignatius Mission and all the people that looked to them for food and support. Sometimes U.S. government supplies would languish at Fort Benton warehouses because no one at the Agency could send a wagon after them. For several years in a row the grasshoppers had destroyed the crops in the valley. Buffalo became scarce. It is said that the Indian Agent was in the habit of issuing two pecks of potatoes to each family to keep them from going hungry during these times.

“The Providence Chronicle reporting on the conditions at St. Ignatius during 1865 tells of the Sisters privations:

“We are far from having material things not only helpful but necessary. All supplies had to come from St. Louis, Missouri, which supplies arrived one year from the request Thus for nearly a year we were without a frying pan. We had to cook in the open fireplace with great difficulty. We also suffered greatly from the cold ... During an entire year we had only one table which served for the needs of all: Sisters, girls, lady patients.”

“Each group had to wait its turn at the table. “The dishes consisted of none other than the dozen or so goblets which we had used on our journey from Walla Walla ... These were the only utensils we had for a long, long time after our arrival.

One of the older Sisters who knew Mother Infant Jesus used to tell a story illustrating that the founding Sisters had even an even greater privation. There was the lack of salt, for the first six years. One miner from Fort Benton rose horseback to the Mission during the severely cold winter of 1865. He has carried salt in a small sack in his pockets. In 1866 the Indian Agent managed to get them some financial help from the U.S. government.

“In the 1870s St. Ignatius Mission was a large and bustling establishment, quite a contrast to the quiet backwaters of St. Mary’s Mission. ... “In this period St. Ignatius boasted a wood-frame church, a farm, a gristmill, and a sawmill operated by the Society of Jesus and a girls’ boarding school and a day school for boys operated by the Sisters of Charity of Providence. In 1875 the girls’ boarding school had twenty-eight pupils while the boys’ day school had only an irregular attendance. The wooden mission church, constructed in 1864, was forty by one hundred feet with a belfry over one hundred feet tall. Held together with wooden pins, the church was in the Roman style with clerestory, columns, and apse. In the 1890s it was replaced with a brick structure that is still standing.” Letters from the Rocky Mountain Indian Missions – Father Philip Rappagliosi” edited by Robert Bigart, University of Nebraska Press, 2003, pp. xxix-xxx. Nearly 800 Pend d’Oreilles lived near the Mission in loghouses. “A Shining from the Mountains, Sister Providencia Tolan, S.P., 1980, page 98. In 1872 there were six boys and 23 girls in the St. Ignatius schools.

“In 1871 Colonel Wheeler, a member of the Hayden Geological Survey Party, visited the St. Ignatius Mission. He wrote: "We were surprised at the extent of the farming operations carried on. All the grain and corn, potatoes and other vegetables, cattle and horses, butter and cheese needed for several hundred people are produced here by the labor of the Indians under the superintendent of the brothers. The mission. . .is entirely self-sustaining." Hayden, F. V. "Statement of Colonel Wheeler," in *Preliminary Report of the U. S. Geological Survey of Montana and Portions of Adjacent Territories, 1871*. Washington, D. C., 1872. Volume II, 251-152

Also in 1871 Angus McDonald ordered his son, Duncan, to close Fort Connah. An 1869 joint commission of British and American representatives had reached an agreement settling Hudson Bay's claims. The era of the fur trade, in decline for thirty years, was definitely over.

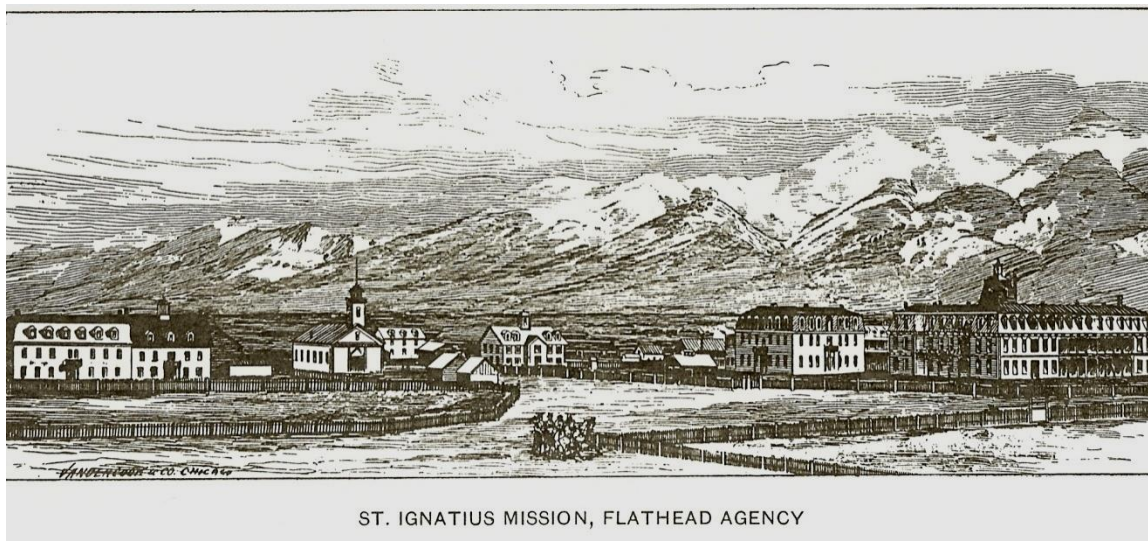
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In 1874 the Mission at St. Ignatius began receiving contract subsidies from the federal government for their schools. For each of the next four years \$2100 was paid. This was increased to \$4,000 per year in 1878. Beginning in 1890, payment was made on a per student basis. The federal subsidies did not cover the costs of the schools, which the Mission had to raise themselves. For example, in 1882 the government paid \$4,000 but the religious society spent another \$9,700. <http://www.flatheadreservation.org/timeline/1860.html>

In 1877 Peter Ronan took over as Superintendent of the five-year-old Flathead Indian Reservation. In his 1879 Annual Report, he said only twenty Flatheads still lived primarily by hunting. Many farms had been built on the reservation. Ronan believed religion and education were the keys to the Flathead's future, and he supported the Jesuits in their efforts until his death in 1893. <http://www.flatheadreservation.org/timeline/1860.html>

“The 1880s was a decade of growth and expansion at St. Ignatius. The mission was both an agent of change – teaching new skills to help the tribes survive in the post-buffalo economy – an anchor to Christian religious power prized by the Salish people for fifty years. The priests and tribal leaders worshipped together but did not always agree on how the tribes should adapt to the changing economic and political milieu. Church festivals became major tribal gatherings that helped strengthen the community; at the same time, the nineteenth-century European ideology that permeated the St. Ignatius schools worked to supplant Salish and Kootenai culture and undermine tribal languages.” “A Pretty Village – Documents of Worship and Culture Change, St. Ignatius Mission, Montana, 1880-1889,” edited by Robert J. Bigart, Salish Kootenai College Press/University of Nebraska Press, 2007, p1.

Big festivals were normal at Christmas, Easter, and St. Ignatius Day, with at least a 1,000 people celebrating the holidays for a week at a time. “Since tribal members spent much of the year scattered on farms or in small camps hunting or harvesting roots and berries, the church holiday gatherings became opportunities to strengthen tribal society and identity”. “A Pretty Village,” R. Bigart, p 3. Bob Bigart goes on to say that it was a time to renew friendships, visit, talk politics, court and listen to the speeches of the chiefs and tribal judges.



Sabine Creek “Leave Saint Ignatius and follow Highway 93 south a short distance, ‘till where the Joe Crawford place lies on the north bank of a small stream; and across the highway the Harvey Krantz place is on the south of the stream. Here somewhat between the two properties you cross Sabine Creek. At one time a neat highway sign, reading. “Sabine Creek”, marked the creek, but vandals or cattle have knocked it down.

One summer a blue heron lived on the creek right by Highway 93. He apparently got plenty of small fish and grubs, for although shy of passing traffic, he managed to survive. The old-timers tell that there have always been fish – plenty of fish in Sabine Creek although it rises from springs in the hills south of town [St. Ignatius].

Not too long ago, Sister Helen, of the Providence Sisters, often fished Sabine Creek with success. When the highway ran to the south of Pleasant View Cemetery, one sometimes saw Sister Cecelia wearing the traditional habit of the Ursuline nuns, fishing in Sabine Creek to add to the Friday menu.

Sabine, where did that name come from? It ran through old Pete Sabine's land and it is possible that's where the name began. Once when Joe Crawford was hauling the town's first fire-fighting equipment out of Sabine Creek I asked why the creek was named Sabine. Joe replied, "After the Sabine woman." Sorry we did not discuss the matter further for I believe that this almost forgotten story be be the answer.

A hundred and some years ago, in 1864, the Sisters of Providence came to teach the Indian children and care for the sick. They lived in a small, four room house, now standing by the Catholic Church. A young widow, Sabine of the Pend d'Oreilles, with her two daughters came to live with the Sisters. Sabine was one of the first volunteer workers in Saint Ignatius; for as we today volunteer work in our church, so Sabine volunteered her services in 1864. She lived with the Sisters for six years, doing the hunting for them, showing them the eatable berries and roots, and helping with their work. She undoubtedly fished Sabine Creek, so that there were fish on Friday. Not only did she supply meat for the table, but served the Sisters as an interpreter.

The Sabine woman's sympathies extended to the orphans. She raised, along with her own, one and maybe two orphan girls. One of these girls was the grandmother of Annie Cope. You, who knew Annie Cope, will remember that she was a Sabine.

In 1879, when the Montana legislature sought to restrict Indians to reservations, Peter Ronan protested that the Indians were an industrious community and needed to leave the reservation to sell cattle and produce, as well as to conduct civilized business. Then Major Ronan cited the widow Sabine as an example. Who after selling more than two hundred head of cattle, went to Missoula to bank her money for her children's education.

One source says university education, but as the first Montana State University building was not in use until 1891, she may have saved money for a different education.

What do you think? Isn't it historically possible that Sabine Creek was named after the widow Sabine?"

Early Days by Miss Beaver, Mission Valley News, St. Ignatius, Montana, March 1, 1978, page 4.



Taken by Chalk Courchane



Taken by Chalk Courchane

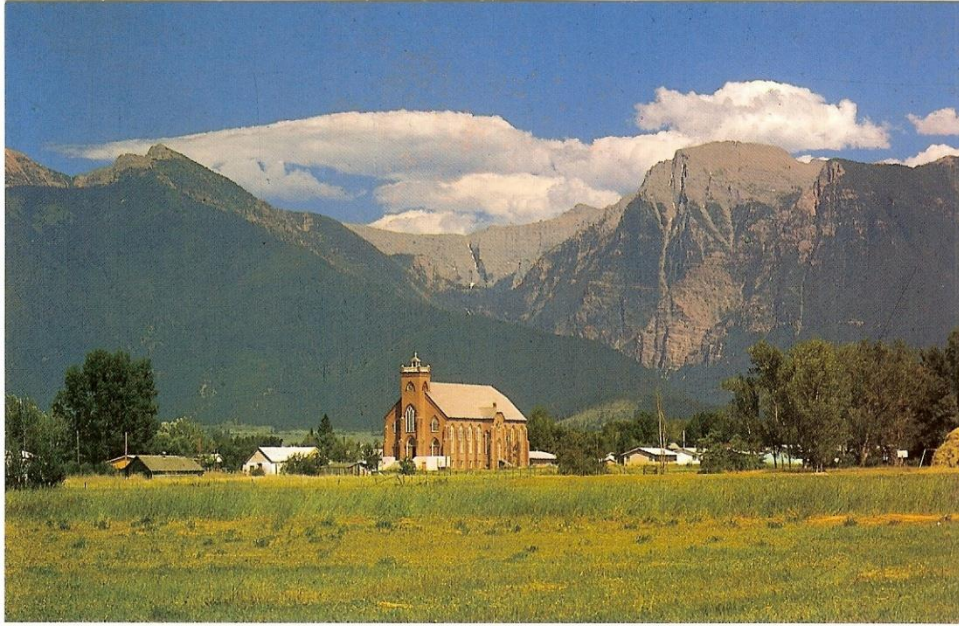


Taken by Chalk Courchane



Taken by Chalk Courchane





St. Ignatius Mission, Montana

Post Card – Smith Western Company



Taken by Chalk Courchane



ALTHOUGH LOCATED BETWEEN the sometimes busy town park and the Mission Church, where visitors stream in and out daily and services are frequent, only

tranquility and past memories seem to occupy corner of the Mission Church property housing museum, early residence, statues and well tended flower borders.

Sept. 29, 1982 mvd