

St. Paul's Mission

Coulee Dam National Recreation Area
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Oldest Standing Church On the Upper Columbia



The First Missions

Fort Colville*, a British trading post, was established in 1825 by the Hudson's Bay Company. It was located near Kettle Falls, site of the summer fishing camps for local tribes. At the fort, Sunday Services were held along with other European religious practices. The traditional ways of the tribes were soon effected. Tribal ceremonial dances occurred on the Sabbath and included prayers and hymns.

In 1831, a Nez Perce and Flathead delegation went to St. Louis seeking missionaries to instruct the Rocky Mountain region tribes in European religious practices. As a result, that same year, a mission was established on the Willamette

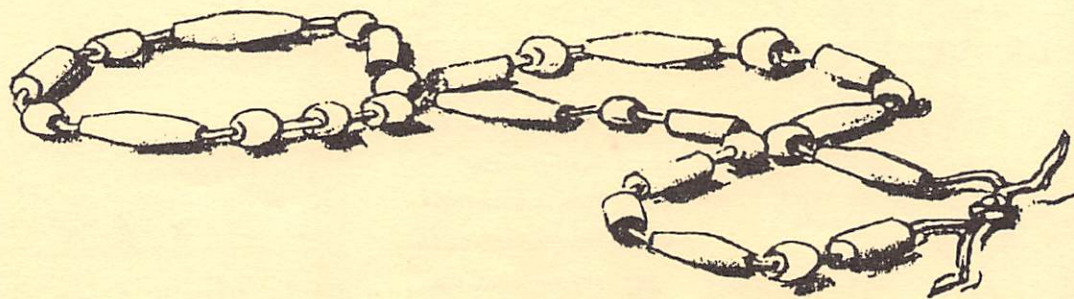
River in the Oregon country. With the establishment of this mission and promotion of rich farming opportunities by missionaries, settlers arrived to homestead.

Archibald McDonald, the chief trader at Fort Colville, knew that with the arrival of settlers hunting grounds and game would diminish. As a result, fur trade would decline. For this reason, McDonald did not want a mission near the fort and suggested a location to the south in the Colville Valley. Two years later, Tshimakain, a mission between Fort Colville and Fort Walla Walla to the south was established. With few results, Tshimakain failed after 10 years.

Mission at Kettle Falls

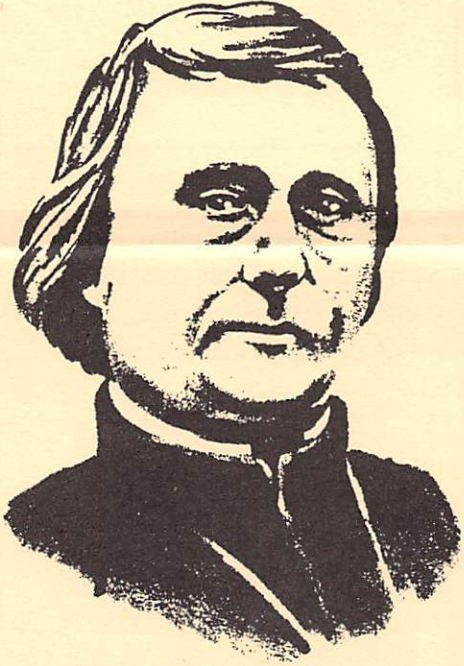
On November 6, 1838, the Catholic missionaries, Fathers Blanchet and Demers, arrived at Fort Colville and received a warm welcome from the local tribes. They stayed three and a half days and in that time held the first Catholic mass in the inland northwest. Nineteen were baptized and classes were held. Although

Blanchet and Demers continued to the mouth of the Columbia, they promised that at least one of them would return. The following year, Demers returned to find a man named Brown instructing the tribes and leading them in prayer. Immediately Demers recognized the potential for a permanent mission.



Construction of St. Paul's

In the summer of 1840, Demers, having returned from Fort Colville, received word that Catholic missionaries were working at the headwaters of the Missouri River. With the thought of gaining some assistance, he sent a message eastward. At the same time a Jesuit priest, Pierre Jean DeSmet, was coming west and stopped at Fort Colville. In 1841, Demers dropped Fort Colville from his regular rounds leaving the area to DeSmet. DeSmet became Superintendent of the missions in the Rocky Mountains but continued to return to Kettle Falls every summer. McDonalds' influence declined and in 1845 DeSmet founded the first Catholic mission at the falls, erecting the first St. Paul's church which was made of boughs. DeSmet then left to found another mission, leaving Fathers Adrian Hoecken and Anthony Ravalli in charge. Father Ravalli supervised the construction of a new crude frame church built of rough logs and brush to replace that built by DeSmet.



Fr. Jean Pierre DeSmet



Fr. Peter Joseph Joset

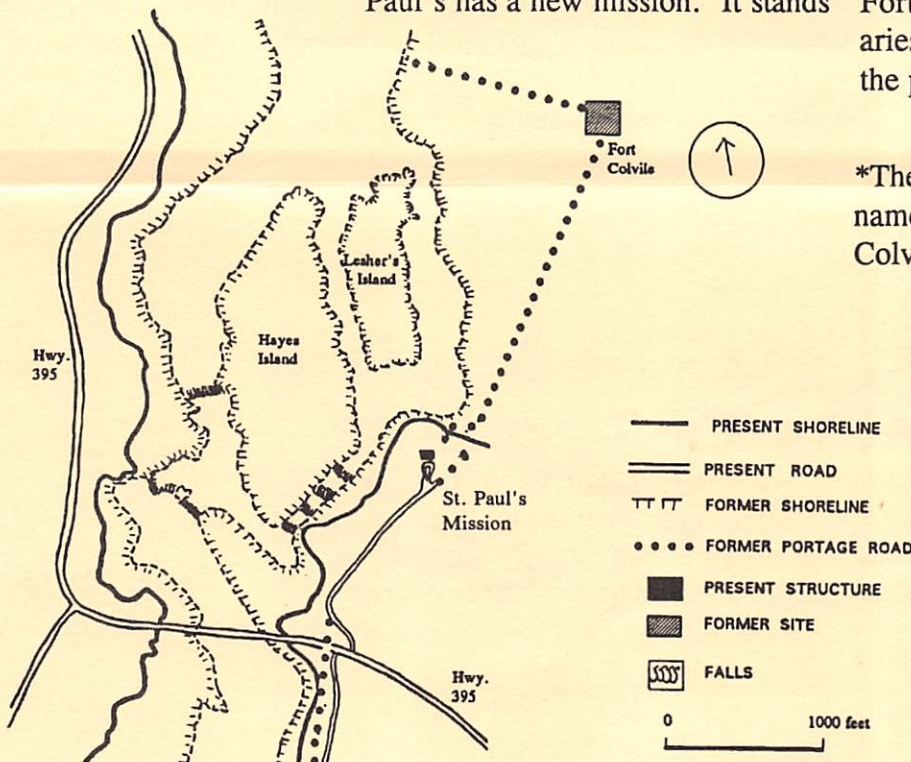
Father Joset, who replaced DeSmet as Superintendent of the missions in the Rocky Mountains, had a new permanent chapel and residence constructed in 1847. For a few years things went well with the church. But, with the settlers came

diseases, particularly measles and smallpox. The tribes related the sicknesses to the settlers and conflicts began. In 1854, a saloon was constructed near the mission and in 1855, the discovery of gold brought more settlers to the area. As a result, the Native Americans lost interest in European religion and St. Paul's Mission was closed temporarily. Reopened in 1862 by Father Joset, the church once again was used on a regular basis. On August 14, 1875 the last service was held at the mission. The church fell into disrepair and in 1939, Father George and a concerned citizens group restored the building to match the permanent chapel constructed by Father Ravalli.

A New Mission

The restored church was donated to the State of Washington in 1951 and then turned over to the National Park Service in 1974. As one of the oldest standing churches in the State of Washington, St. Paul's has a new mission. It stands

as a reminder of the importance of this area to the many tribes who gathered at Kettle Falls for the salmon runs, to the trader's who were attracted by the chance for fur trade with the local tribes at Fort Colville, and to the missionaries who changed the lifestyle of the people of the northwest.



*The local tribes of the same name prefer the spelling Colville.