

ST. JOSEPH'S MISSION SITE

at Slickpoo, Idaho



St. Joseph's Mission Rectory and Church about 1890.

A CLASH OF CULTURES



Journey to the grounds of St. Joseph's Mission and imagine a different way of life. A time when two cultures - the Nez Perce and Euro-Americans - were confronted by conflicting lifestyles held sacred by both. A time when Nez Perces were challenged to

accept, reject, or adjust to the new ways. Some of these clashes in culture included religious practice, use of the land, family structure, language, and provision of food, clothing, and shelter.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

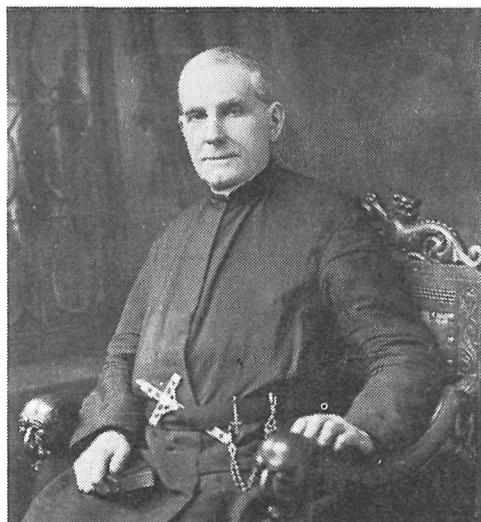
The early seeds of Catholicism were planted by Iroquois Indians who had resettled among the Flathead Indians of Montana. Eager to learn more about the medicine and power of the "white man's religion" four successive delegations of Flathead and Nez Perce tribesmen traveled nearly 2,000 miles to St. Louis, Missouri, seeking Jesuits, or "Blackrobes".

In 1831, the news spread like wildfire among Christendom. Protestants were quick to respond and, in 1836, sent Marcus and Narcissa Whitman to the Cayuse (at present-day Walla Walla, Washington) and Henry and Eliza

Spalding to the Nez Perce.

Father P.J. DeSmet, a Jesuit priest, spearheaded the Catholic response by establishing the Rocky Mountain Missions in 1840. A pioneer with visionary zeal, DeSmet developed grandiose plans for a network of Indian missions throughout the Pacific Northwest. By 1865, nine such missions were operating when Father Joseph Cataldo, S.J. arrived at the Coeur d'Alene Mission of the Sacred Heart.

FATHER CATALDO ARRIVES



Father Joseph M. Cataldo, S.J.

The Nez Perce request for their own Blackrobe was finally granted when Father Cataldo was sent to Lapwai in 1867. Protestant opposition to Cataldo's request to teach in the government school caused a delay in establishing a Catholic Mission. While waiting, Father Cataldo pioneered the first church for whites in northern Idaho, St. Stanislaus in Lewiston.

At last, Father Cataldo was granted permission by the Indian Agency to

build the first Catholic church for the Nez Perces and Arrow Beach was selected for the site. Tensions increased between the Spalding Mission and the Cataldo Mission. After two floods, Father Cataldo was invited by Chief Weeptes Sumpq'in (Eagle Shirt) to relocate the Mission on his land at present day Slickpoo, Idaho, in November, 1874. In 1877, the Nez Perce War broke out just as Father Cataldo was appointed Superior of the Rocky Mountain Missions.

THE MISSION GROWS

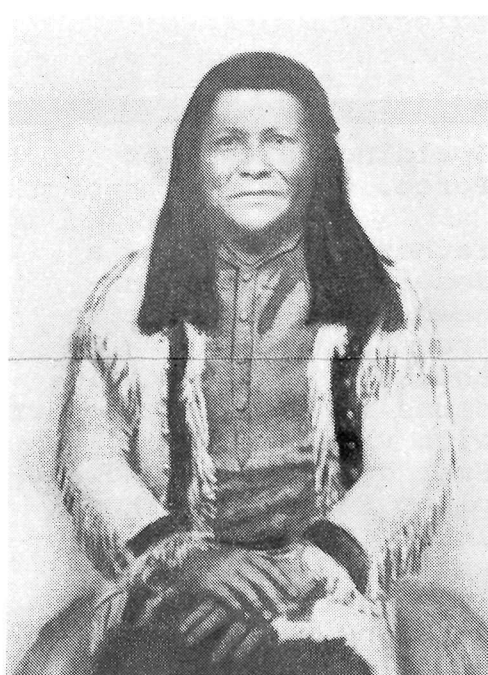
The discovery of gold in Pierce, the accelerated arrival of permanent settlers, and the forced move to reservation lands were negative influences that helped diminish the Nez Perce's interest in Christianity. Father Cataldo sought to counterbalance this trend by education. He built reservation boarding schools which would in turn be feeder schools for a projected college. The new Mission became a boarding and day school for the Nez Perce, although white children also attended. Later Cataldo founded Gonzaga College in Spokane, Washington.

Although Father Cataldo pioneered the Mission,

its success was largely due to the Sisters of St. Joseph. In 1903, more Sisters were recruited to maintain the boarding school and church, while others arrived to establish St. Joseph's Hospital in Lewiston.

By 1910, St. Joseph's Mission grounds included a convent, a children's home, and a church building. Fires destroyed the children's dorms in 1916 and again in 1925. Father Cataldo died in 1928. The Sisters of St. Joseph continued to operate the children's home until 1968.

THE NEZ PERCE PERSPECTIVE



Chief Weeptes Sumpq'in
(Eagle Shirt)

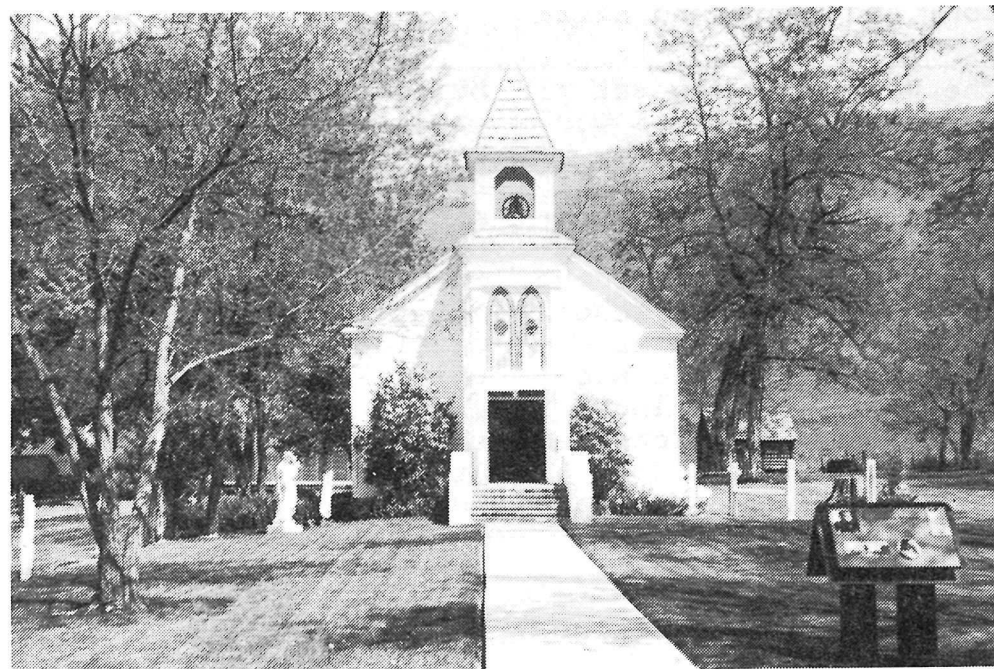
The present day site of St. Joseph's Mission at Slickpoo was given to the Catholic Church by Chief Weeptes Sumpq'in (Eagle Shirt), also called T'simslikpuus, from which Slickpoo is derived. Originally Chief of the Siminekem, a coveted area of land now known as the Confluence of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers, Chief Sumpq'in was forced to move off his land when the treaty of 1863 changed the boundary of the reservation.

The village was resettled at present day Slickpoo. The land was close to root digging areas and the mountains offered plenty of water and game.

Father Cataldo was invited to move his Mission there after the Chief embraced Catholicism.

The Chief wanted to help Father Cataldo get a permanent building further away from the Spalding Mission. The two denominations competed for Nez Perce converts. Each of them told the Nez Perce that their way of worship was better than the other. A Nez Perce historian reports that the Catholics were more accepting of traditional Nez Perce cultural practices and less strict in matters of Church discipline.

ST. JOSEPH'S MISSION TODAY



St. Joseph's Mission is privately owned by the St. Joseph's Mission Historical Society. The Society preserves and maintains the Mission as a part of Nez Perce National Historical Park.

The Mission grounds offer a serene picnic spot or bike-riding destination. An annual Mass, always held on the first Sunday in June, is open to the public. The original church building stands intact today and is open from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Ask at the Park Visitor Center in Spalding for hours of operation.