

# ST. MARY'S MISSION

OMAK, WASHINGTON

August 14th, 1961.

The City Editor.  
Yakima Daily Republic.

Dear Sir;

We of this Mission boarding school intend to mark the 75th year of the founding of the Mission, by the Rev E. de Rouge S. J. The Diamond Jubilee will be celebrated September 24th, this year. In and around the City of Yakima, we have many good friends. Perhaps some notice in your fine Newspaper would help us to acquaint those friends of the Celebration of the 75th year of this Mission. With this in mind I am forwarding this brief sketch of the founding of the Mission. If you see fit I would greatly appreciate your printing this or some part of it, as may suit your purpose and approval.

With sincere thanks for any consideration you may be able to give, and for your kind attention,

I remain

*Joseph A. Balfe S.J.*  
Rev. Joseph A. Balfe S.J.  
Superior- St. Mary's Mission.



[Enclosure. 14 Aug 1961]

## DIAMOND JUBILEE OF ST. MARY'S MISSION

Omak, Washington

1886 - 1961

Father Joseph A. Balfe, S. J., Superior of St. Mary's Mission and Boarding School, near Omak, Washington, announced the Diamond Jubilee of the Mission, which will be held on Sunday, September 24, 1961. Father Stephen DeRouge, S. J., a French Count and Jesuit Missionary, founded the Mission among the Okanogan and the Colville Indians in 1886. The Mission, conducted by the Jesuit Fathers, houses approximately 120 children from all parts of the Colville Indian Reservation. Two assistant priests, Fathers Gordon L. Keys, S. J., Principal, and Joseph L. Obersinner, S. J., Brother Benjamin Troutman, S. J., and seven Sisters of the Dominican Order comprise the faculty of the Mission.

The Most Reverend Bernard J. Topel, D. D., of the Catholic Diocese of Spokane, will be present; also, the Very Reverend Alexander F. McDonald, S. J., Provincial Superior of the Jesuits in the Northwest. A luncheon for the clergy and visitors follows the Mass. In the afternoon, there will be an open house permitting the visitors to inspect the mission buildings. Indian tribal dances will take place on the property. There will be a pictorial display of early Mission days in the gymnasium. At 3:00 PM, a historical pageant, written and directed by Father James Linden, S. J., of Gonzaga University, will give a tableau history of the 75 years of the Mission. The Most Reverend Francis D. Gleason, S. J., D. D., formerly Superior of St. Mary's Mission in 1946-1948, and now Bishop of all Northern Alaska, is expected to attend the Jubilee celebration.



When Father DeRouge first visited the Okanogan Chelan country in 1886, the "Blackrobes", i. e., the Jesuit Priests, were not entirely unknown to these tribes. As early as 1842, Father Peter Jean DeSmet, S. J., had visited them on the western side of the Columbia River. After St. Paul's Mission had been founded among the Colvilles in 1845, St. Francis Regis Mission, near the present town of Colville, Washington, was established, and St. Joseph's Mission among the Yakimas in 1871. Priests from these distant points occasionally visited the Okanogan Valley.

The pioneer missionary among the Okanogans was Father Urban Grassi, S. J., who first visited them in 1873. His reception was definitely hostile until he convinced the chief that he had not been sent from Washington but rather from God. These Indians had fought with Kamiakin's Yakima warriors in defiance of Governor Stevens' reservation treaty, and consequently were extremely hostile toward the Government.

Father Grassi's work suffered much because the Indians had been led to believe that he was in league with the white officials and it was extremely difficult to convince them otherwise. Yet, his third visit ended with the baptism of four members of that tribe and succeeding visits gradually increased the fold and accustomed the Indians to the sight of the "Blackrobes". Still his successor, Father James Vanzina, S. J., while preaching among these same people, had the unpleasant experience of narrowly escaping death by stabbing.



In the year 1886, shortly after Father DeRouge came from St Francis Regis Mission to work at Ellisford, above Tonasket, his efforts were stopped there when fire swept through his buildings.

The "Bearded Father" then went south and found a motley group of Indians under Chief Alex Smitkin, Chief George, and Chief Moses. They had settled peaceably around Omak Creek during Chief Joseph's Nez Perce War of 1877, hoping to avoid ill consequences if Chief Joseph were defeated. For the most part, his proselytes were suspicious pagans controlled by medicine men and Father DeRouge was an outsider. They met his stern visage and flaming zeal for their conversion with coldness and mistrust. After building a simple log chapel on the banks of Omak Creek, he set about fighting their superstitions, but they were not about to be converted and eventually Chief Moses and other irate members of the tribes called a council to decide whether he should be ordered out of the country.

The Council was held on the banks of the creek, and while it was in session an Indian child fell into the swift water and carried downstream. The Indians stood by helplessly, but Father DeRouge plunged into the current and rescued the child. His action ended the council and he was not only permitted to stay, but was urged to do so by all. Through the influence of the friendly Chiefs, Chief Smitkin, always a good friend of Father DeRouge, and Chief Snowjack in whose dwellings Father had lived, a few Indians sold him parts of their allotments, and St. Mary's Mission proper began.



The following year, 1888 to 1889, Father DeRouge returned to France.

While there, he secured part of his inheritance and returned to build St. Mary's Mission. He made several trips to France, however, to obtain the money needed to begin building St. Mary's Mission. His first buildings were a building acquired in 1886, a log chapel built on the creek in 1887, and a house with chapel. The present church, built in 1889, was dedicated in 1915. The Indians built the main altar, but the two side altars were imported around Cape Horn from friends of Father DeRouge's in France.

In 1893, Bishop Juniger asked the Indians to build a school, and the Indians then did most of the work. Another building begun in 1902, and expanded through the years, contained the Sisters' convent and the girls' dormitory, dining room, and classrooms -- the girls' section of the Mission. In 1909, St. Mary's College was constructed. It was the boys' section of the Mission and housed facilities for the boys' dormitory, dining room, classrooms, large chapel, library, museum, and the fathers' quarters.

To staff the girls' school, Father DeRouge organized his own community of teachers, called the Ladies Missionaries of St. Mary's Mission whom he recruited in various eastern cities. At one time, there were as many as twelve of the Missionaries at the Mission. The Dominican Sisters were brought to the Mission in 1935 by Father Celestine Caldi, S. J.. The four Missionary Ladies who were left joined the Dominican Order of Sisters. Two of the original group are still living, Sister Michael at St Dominic's Convent in Spokane, and Sister Mary Ann at St. Martin's Hospital in Tonasket.



To staff the Boys' High School and College, Father DeRouge acquired the help of a few laymen plus five or six French Christian Brothers. Fourth graders began their study of foreign languages and not a few boys who left the mission college entered the junior year of college elsewhere. A special attraction of the college was the museum with its many specimens of taxidermy stuffed by the Indians themselves. The Mission had a good band under the direction of Mr. St. Onge. Noted bands often entertained the Indians in the Mission's bandstand and the Mission baseball team was the best in the valley.

In the early days, the Mission was largely self-supporting. Much of the land was purchased from friendly Indians who gladly surrendered parts of their allotments on the Colville Reservation for the cause of the Mission, among them, Chief Smitkin and Chief Snowjack. Extensive gardens, both vegetables and flowers as well as many orchard trees were cared for by the Indians. A herd of 90 beef cattle culled from various Indian herds once supplied all the meat that was necessary.

To care for the sick among his Indians, Father DeRouge erected a hospital in 1911. Thus, the Indians of the Colville Reservation received medical attention until the hospital was discontinued for lack of funds. This former hospital burned in 1957.

At his death in 1916, Father DeRouge was confident that his labors were bearing fruit among the Indians he loved. Father DeRouge built churches at the following places: Loomis, Chopaka, Republic, Waterville, Chelan, one near present site of Wenatchee, Ellisford, and in the vicinity of Okanogan.



His successor, Father Celestine Caldi, S. J., Superior from 1916 until his death in 1937, witnessed the burning of St. Mary's College in 1919. For a few years, the Mission population dwindled. The convent and girls' section was made over to include classrooms and a dormitory for the boys until Father Caldi replaced the fire loss with the present brick and stucco cement buildings during the years 1921 to 1933 -- dormitories, classrooms, faculty house, and a gymnasium. The corrugated tin roofs will testify to his fear of more fires. Those who attended the Mission during Father Caldi's time well remember his love for labor. Under his supervision, the boys devoted part of their free time to woodcutting for the many stoves and to garden labor because the Mission was striving to be self-supporting. The girls, of course, always had a variety of domestic duties to occupy their attention.

Father Balfe, Superior from 1937 to 1940, saw the convent and the girls' quarters burn in July 1938. He then converted a new but unused well-built gymnasium into quarters for the Sisters, convent, chapel, dining rooms, and kitchen suitable for the school population.

Most Reverend Bishop Francis Gleeson, S. J., DD, was Superior in charge until consecrated Bishop of all Northern Alaska in 1948. In recent years, two fine gymnasiums succumbed to fires; today a quonset type built by Father Paul Corkery, S. J., affords fine playroom for the children who are very fond of basketball. Each year, the Mission boasts a fine basketball team -- no wonder! Even the tiniest tot soon becomes a veteran at sinking baskets.



Grades from 2d through the 8th are taught at St. Mary's, and the regular course of studies for grade school is followed; in addition, courses in Home Economics for the girls where they learn to prepare food and cook. They are also instructed by competent teachers in sewing and needlework. A 4H Club and a fine Boy Scout Troop have been organized, with instructions for the youngsters in camping, first aid, etc. Recently, the Troop won many honors at the Camporee, when Troops from this region and Canada met last Spring. Other forms of athletics, basketball, baseball, etc., find enthusiastic boys and girls taking part.

The Mission Glee Club annually makes an appearance on the local radio stations under the direction of one of the Sisters.

The Indian children have an aptitude for drawing and painting. In recent years, several of the boys and girls have won awards in such drawing contests as "Keep Washington Green". In 1959, a 5th grade girl placed 3rd in the State-wide competition in this contest.

Each year, an excursion to the local orchards finds several of the children under supervision, gathering apples and other fruits from the orchards of the friends of the Mission. This is accomplished after-school hours and since it is an outing, it is much enjoyed by the children.

St. Mary's Mission is proud of her illustrious alumni, not to mention too many, a few, such as the following: At St. Martin's College near Olympia, Pascal Sherman, a St. Mary's student, won a scholarship to the Catholic University of America in Washington, D. C. Today, he is a coordinator in the Veterans' Bureau in the nation's capitol. Bill Hill was once an Okanogan County Commissioner. Louis Wapoto, another alumnus, is an attorney in Chelan.



The Mission district includes many Indian families, who assist at religious services in St. Mary's Mission Church or in other churches which the Mission Fathers tend, in East Omak, Disautel, Nespelem, and Inchelium. Some parishioners till their own tracts of land, tend their own cattle, or are employed in lumber mills on or near the Reservation. Each year, from its beginning 75 years ago, the Mission enrolled as an average 100 children in its school, all as full-time boarding pupils.

Outside the office in a garden of flowers stands a statue of a missionary baptizing an Indian. Below there is a plaque which reads:

"To the sainted memory of dear Father DeRouge's labors for the salvation of the American Indian. This statue is erected by Wilhelmine F. Coolbaugh - PAX. December 3rd, 1924. -- Rev. Father DeRouge, S. J., - Born 1860 - Died 1916. Founder of St. Mary's Mission, Omak, Washington, where he dedicated 30 years of his life to apostolic work among the Indians. Pray for us."

The faculty members make every effort to encourage the children to continue their education on thru high school, and college, and annually endeavor to obtain as many scholarships as possible at local high school<sup>s</sup>, and in nearby cities, v.g. Spokane, Seattle. Several children already have and are attending those schools.



[Antanum]

St. Mary's Mission  
Omak, Washington

Sept 30<sup>th</sup> [1961]

Dear Click:  
Your article in The Yakima Republic  
on our mission was very good. I liked the  
early historical data especially. From 1940  
to 1943 I had been Pastor in St. Joseph's  
Church there, so knew some of that early  
history. The baptismal records went  
back 100 years - by 1940 - so I'll



Many of these names of former Priests  
in that locale. Often visited the old  
Ahtanum mission site, we had a picnic  
there once, I'm happy to see they are  
mindful of the old mission, and  
pleasant memories to me. Hope to  
see you when I get into your City  
Again thank you for your fine article  
all good wishes, Sincerely

To Joseph A. Balf Jr.