

## Oblate Order in The Yakima Valley: 1847 - 1856: a summary

Though the priests of the Oblate order were important to the early development of Yakima County between 1847 and 1860, the information about them is scattered, fragmented, and sometimes contradictory. The names and locations of their missions and their beginning dates and closing dates are not always available. Even the names and numbers of the missionaries are elusive. They did not keep journals, publish books or provide newspaper reports. Their first language was French, their language used in religious services was Latin, the language of their mission members was Sahaptin, and their business transactions were in English. They did exchange some correspondence and keep church reports in French. Others wrote of them in their journals. But because they were in a remote area they were not often seen by other settlers and travelers. The records are few. Some of the reports are confusing. Locations and distances are identified only by the vaguest geographic descriptions and suggestions of mileages and directions such as two weeks travel by ox drawn wagon, or "about a league"? Several different missions were named St. Joseph's, and several St. Mary's; two were St. Rose, and some had a second or third name as well. The term "Yakama or Yakima Mission" was sometimes used to refer to the overall missionary effort and, at times, to identify a particular location. Two different priests were named Blanchet. At least six different spellings were used for Fr. Pandosy's name. Indian words were written phonetically using some rather creative spelling.

The five authors listed in the bibliography provide translations of some of the French and Latin language documents and correspondence. This brief summary is heavily indebted to each of them for translated material and for their reports. Each of their works - a series in a journal of history, a biography, a history of the regional Jesuits, and two Ph.D. dissertations - are important additions to the historical literature of the region. The journal of Major Granville O. Haller, at the University of Washington Library, and the correspondence of Capt. James J. Archer, from the Maryland Historical

Society have been useful for tracing the travels of Fr. Pandosy in 1856. Although secondary material, vague geographic descriptions, multiple translations and fragmentary information are used, the dates of major events and the locations are as accurate as allowed, yet some of the exact dates of major events and the precise locations could be questioned.

The Oblates chose an area that was remote even by Oregon Territory standards. Overland travelers in the 1840's and 1850's stopped at Ft. Colville, Fort Walla Walla, or The Dalles, then traveled down the Columbia River to the Willamette and Fort Vancouver area settlements. Others came by sea and traveled only as far as Vancouver. Few remained at Walla Walla. Forty years earlier, Lewis and Clark had traveled up the Columbia to the mouth of the Yakima River, but hadn't explored it. David Thompson, George Simpson, and other explorers had traveled past the mouth of the Yakima River, but hadn't stopped. The Oblates had traveled from Ft. Walla Walla, crossed the Columbia River above the Yakima River and continued into the unexplored Indian country where there were no settlers, missionaries, or governments, and only infrequent visitors.

They were in the Territory during a time of fierce danger and turmoil. The first group of Oblates arrived at Walla Walla only a few days before the killings at the Whitmans' mission at Waiilatpu. Throughout the period of the Indian wars they traveled between and among the Indians and the Army. Some attended the Walla Walla gathering for the 1855 treaty. They were in the Territory when Indian Agent Bolon was killed, and when the decisions were made about the national boundary with Canada, when Hudson's Bay Company Fort Vancouver was closed and moved to Victoria, and when Jason Lee's Oregon missions were closed and Lee died.

Some of the mission buildings they constructed were burned, others were abandoned. When the last Oblates left in 1859, no structure existed that any of the Oblates had built in Yakima country. They did

stay at and conduct missionary activities at St. Pauls Mission at Kettle Falls which has since been relocated and restored. Perhaps the most important part of their legacy is that there is no Oblate grave site. During a period when settlers, missionaries, soldiers, trappers, Indians, and others were killed by gun shot, drowning, horse riding accidents, burned, starved or were frozen, all Oblates survived. Although they had severe sickness, a broken shoulder, one nearly drowned, another shot off a finger, and though hunger and starvation were often nearby, the Oblates all survived and moved on to new assignments or traveled back to France.

## The Beginnings

The founding Priest of the Catholic Oblate order of Mary Immaculate was Fr. Eugene de Mazenod, born August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1782 in France. A congregation of five men petitioned to become a missionary society at Aix, France, June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1816. As the order grew and a seminary was established, missions were sent to Toronto and to England.

The Oblate chapter on Oregon Territory began in 1845 when Bishop Blanchet requested priests for missions in Oregon. The request was accepted by Fr. De Mazenod in 1847 and he selected five men to go to Oregon. Fr. Pascal Ricard was designated the Superior of the mission. Jean Charles Jean Baptiste-Felix Pandosy (who took the name Marie Charles Pandosy), Eugene Casimir Chirouse, Br. Celestin Verney, and Br. Georges Blanchet, made up the first group of five men.

## The Journeys

The five left Le Havre, France February 4, 1847, and arrived at New York April 2<sup>nd</sup> after a stormy crossing. They traveled on to St. Louis, where they first met Bishop Blanchet - who was not expecting them - and after twelve days of preparations, left for Oregon on April 27. Young reports, "...the Oregon Oblates did not appear preoccupied to seek important information concerning the land or the people they were sent to evangelize.....they did not seem overly concerned...even with their own

survival." He adds later, when describing their living in Oregon, "They were not good at caring for themselves and had no natural talents at wilderness living." Kowrach quotes from Bishop Blanchet's journal about the first day's journey of four miles with their sixteen oxen,(8 yoke), and three wagons. "None of my men know how to drive oxen..they shout, they beat the poor beasts again and a g a i n - nothing moves. They change them about; ..their success is the same...What misery!" Several oxen were not suitable, and were replaced with three more yokes of oxen; two more were purchased later in the journey. They continued on with the wagon train reaching Fort Walla Walla on October 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>, 1847. Fr. Brouillet wrote of and the loss of three yoke o foxen and some materials due to the exhausted condition of their animals. Fr. Blanchet traveled ahead and had arrived on September 5<sup>th</sup>—

### The Missions

1.) The Oblates soon set out to find a location and open a mission. Four missionaries left Fort Walla Walla on October 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup>, 1847, crossed the Columbia River and traveled toward the site recommended by Fr. Ricard that had been suggested by the local Indians. The site would have been reached on October 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> as they traveled about two weeks with a wagon drawn by two yoke of oxen. They reported the site was about a league (three miles) above the mouth of the Yakima River. A later writer reports the site as midway between the towns of Mabton and Toppenish, making it near the site of Satus. Though they had second thoughts about the location, about their ability to live in the county and about converting the Indians to Christianity, they remained. Joined by two workmen they began to build St. Rose of Chemna. The mission, also known as St. Rose of Simcoe and as St. Rose of the Yakimas, began in 1848, was occupied intermittently until officially closed by Fr. Pandosy on March 28, 1859. There are also some reports of it being abandoned after a few years.

Fr. Ricard became ill and returned to Fort Walla Walla. On November 29, 1847, the killings took place at the Whitman Mission at Waiilatpu above Fort Walla Walla. The missionaries abandoned St. Rose

and went to the fort for safety, then returned to complete the mission in July. Young wrote that they had been at St. Rose for three weeks in November, 3, 1847.

2.) The second mission, Immaculate Conception, or St. Mary's, was located on the Manashtash Creek near its confluence with the Yakima River, near Ellensburg. Brother Blanchet and Brother Verney had begun building in January, 1848. Fr. Pandosy's tenure at Immaculate Conception was from 1848 to August, 1851 when it was closed and he relocated to St. Josephs on the Ahtanum. Schoenberg wrote that the St. Marys mission was destroyed during the war and Fr. Pandosy returned in 1856 to rebuild it. In his correspondence of August 16, 1856, Capt. J. J. Archer wrote to his mother from the army camp in the Kittitas Valley - though he doesn't label the location other than "camp on Yakima River"- and notes that they were 16 miles north of Wenas. His company remained in the camp for over two weeks resting and exploring the valley. He does not mention any mission or other structure.

From Major Haller's journal, it appears Fr. Pandosy traveled with his company from before July 1, 1856 to September 15, 1856 when the journal ended. In his writing, Haller mentions Fr. Pandosy being present every few days, dining with the officers, saying mass, and negotiating and translating for Indians. The unit, with Fr. Pandosy, traveled from the Wenatchee River to Fort Simcoe by way of the Kittitas Valley. They camped where "a nice branch of cold water entered the Yakima." (the Manashtash?). There is no journal entry between July 11<sup>th</sup> to July 25<sup>th</sup>, the period they were in the Kittitas Valley. No mention is made of a mission, rebuilding, etc. The time they were in Kittitas Valley would have provided opportunity for Fr. Pandosy to dispatch his letter dated July 18, 1856 from "Mission de la Conception." Kowrach, in discussing this period in the Kittitas Valley introduces several details. Pandosy wrote that the "converts were as fervent as when we left them.. " ". after ten months of complete absence of the missionary". Apparently no Oblate had visited after September, 1855.

Kowrach states "Father Pandosy discovered that the Immaculate Conception Mission had been burned to the ground." Kowrach then wrote, "He returned to the Ahtanum Mission and found it completely in ashes, all his gardens destroyed." (This had occurred nearly a year earlier). They continued on to Ahtanum Creek on the 26<sup>th</sup> where Col. Wright, Major Haller, Major Garnett, Captain Archer and Fr. Pandosy were all present. According to Major Haller's record, Fr. Pandosy left the Army camp at the Naches River on August 28, 1856, for three days to visit his grain field on the Ahtanum to arrange for the grain to be harvested. Fr. Pandosy was in the Kittitas Valley in August, 1856, but there is no indication that he was rebuilding the mission that the Oblate Vicarial Council had decided to close in 1851 or '52.

During his years at Immaculate Conception, Fr. Pandosy made several trips to Kettle Falls, Fort Colville and St. Peter's Mission. When Fr. Chirouse visited him at Manashtash in August, 1848, he found him disheveled and unable to care for himself, but with care from Fr. Chirouse, he regained his health. For the winter of 1848-49 he was joined by Br. Verney. The next winter, neither Fr. Pandosy nor Br. Verney were at the Manashtash mission. Fr. Pandosy went to join Fr. Chirouse at Holy Cross in October, 1849; Br. Verney had moved to the Willamette River in 1849 - 1850. Brother Verney's garden, planted in January, 1849 was the first in the Kittitas Valley.

3.) In July, 1848, Fr. Chirouse also opened St. Joseph of Simcoe located at Aleshecas. Aleshecas was an area north of the present Wapato, near Sawyer. The word translates as "turtle-land", suggesting an area of ponds or sloughs. It was also known as Saralpus. Schoenberg wrote that the mission at Aleshecas was the location of the first garden in Yakima Valley. It was closed in 1851 when Fr. Chirouse left for the Umatilla, and was abandoned in 1852.

4.) Fr. D'herbomez started building the St. Josephs at Ahtanum, near the village of Kamiakin in June, 1852. The Ahtanum Mission was built into a large, well established complex. During the Indian Wars when the priests were suspected of supplying gunpowder to Indians, soldiers burned and pillaged the mission in November, 1855. On September 12, 1856 Capt. J. G. Archer, en route to Simcoe from Kittitas wrote from "Camp on Ahtanum River, W. T.", "...this morning at 10 o'clock I arrived here and as soon as my mules were unpacked I rode up to the Catholic mission (two and one half miles) to look at Father Pandosi's garden and wheat fields (now deserted and trampled down)..."

5.) The fifth Oblate mission in Yakima country was opened during the winter of 1848, also by Fr. Chirouse. He had traveled with Kamiakin's band to their wintering grounds on the Yakima River and established Holy Cross of Simcoe. The building measured 18 x 36 feet. Its location is variously identified as a day's travel from St. Rose, in the lower Ahtanum Valley, and is shown on a crude map being below St. Rose. At the time, it appears the entire region north of the Simcoe Mountains and south of Ahtanum Ridge was referred to as the Simcoe Valley. Holy Cross was probably located somewhere between St. Joseph of Simcoe and St. Rose of Simcoe.

6.) A temporary mission was opened during the winter of 1849 at Moxee (or "mok-see"), called Wane-pe, for the band of Chief Teias. Fr. Pandosy was there in August, 1851.

Between 1848 and 1852, the little band of Oblates had established six missions along a sixty mile section of the Yakima River. Beginning at St. Rose, they were living in tents in the bitter cold. Their accommodations and chapels progressed to being stick structures covered with adobe mud. Winthrop, visiting St. Josephs on the Ahtanum in 1852, reported, "The mission was a hut-like structure of adobe clay plastered upon a frame of sticks", "...a mud chamber twelve feet square." Bischoff, quoting from

Painter's Journal described the Ahtanum mission as a "pole and mud hut". Young reports, "Saint Rose, Immaculate Conception, Saint Joseph and Holy Cross...were little more than wilderness huts, sparse and uninviting" , "...a one man hovel." During the winter of 1848, Fr. Pandosy and Br. Verney remained at Immaculate Conception on Manashtash Creek. It was described as "terribly cold" with 6- 7 feet of snow. The two Oblates huddled within their cabin, but the wind penetrated the walls day and night. Their chapels and houses became much more elaborate and somewhat comfortable. Chirouse wrote in 1860, "Finally we were architects." He went on to boast about the economy of the stick and mud huts and how functional they were. Lieutenant Sheridan described the Ahtanum mission as a "comfortable log house of good size...and a log cabin residence of the priest."

By the time the war began in 1855, the section of the Ahtanum was a site of considerable activity. Kamiakin's village was at the west end and extended eastward through the gardens and corn fields nearly two miles to the mission. The mission, with gardens, pasture, animal pens, and grain fields extended further to the east, and the army camp, though used intermittently, was about 1-2 miles from the mission. It was large enough to provide bivouac space for hundreds of men and horses and pack mules. Archer's correspondence shows he was at the Ahtanum Camp at least four times with the army troops. In one letter he reports over three hundred men in camp including fifty packers and herders. The whole complex would have been 5-6 miles along the stream.

Before St. Joseph was burned in November 1855, an inventory of buildings and contents was made by Fr. Pandosy and Br. Durieu. A second list was prepared in November, 1856 by Pandosy, Durieu and Jacques, listing the values of the destroyed items. This list shows that the mission was a substantial establishment. During the days of burning and plunder, Major Haller described wagon loads of goods being hauled from the mission. Lieutenant P.H. Sheridan also wrote of his observations of the plunder

of the mission. The reports are reprinted in part by Kowrach, some in French, some in translation. The structures included a house 28 x 16, a small house 16 x 12, a second small house 20 x 16, a chapel 28 x 20, three stables and a shed. Also included was material for a large house 60 x 40, and ten dozen window glasses. A large supply of foods and many horses, oxen, cattle and hens were taken. Tools, trade goods and kitchen ware were lost. The plunder included pigs, vegetables and five cases of wine.

Other Catholic Missions in the vicinity that, though not operated by the Oblates, were important to them. St. Peter's at The Dalles, and St. Anne's on the Umatilla River, near Pendleton and St. Peter's on the Willamette in Oregon City, and St. Xavier on the Cowlitz were all significant in the establishing the Catholic community on the Columbia. Bishop Blanchet used St. Peter's at The Dalles as headquarters, Bishop Brouillet used St. Anne's. St. Anne's on the Umatilla had been built by the Whitman mission as a satellite Presbyterian mission, and was sold to the Catholics when the Whitmans were reducing their mission operation. St. Peter's at the Dalles had been part of Jason Lee's Methodist mission complex and was sold to the Catholics by Dr. Rev. George Gary when he was closing out Lee's missions. St. Anne's was opened November 27, two days before the Whitmans were killed. In 1852, the Umatilla mission was given over to the Oblates with Fr. Chirouse in charge. No regular priest was assigned between 1848 and 1853. It was burned in January, 1856.

### Missionaries

The next Oblate to arrive in Oregon Territory after the first five, was a young French seminarian recruited by Bishop Blanchet, Francois Jean Marie Jayol, who arrived in 1847. Jayol was assigned to western Washington missions. In October 1848 Fr. Honore Timothee Lempfrit, originally from France, arrived from service in Canada. Lempfrit was assigned to the mission on Vancouver Island in June, 1849, then sent to California in 1852 and 1853. He was recalled to France and dismissed from the Oblate Congregation in September 1853. He had not been in the missions in Yakima.

A group of three men direct from France, came to the Oblate Oregon Mission, arriving August 24, 1850. Fr. D'herbomez, Fr. Surel and Br. Janin. In 1855 Fr. Paul Durieu and Fr. Pierre Ricard arrived from France. Ricard returned to France in June, 1857. Ricard had worked with Fr. Chirouse with the Cayuse, Durieu worked with Fr. Pandosy. Three more men arrived to join the missions in western Washington Territory. Fr. Grandidier arrived in 1860 at Olympia and by the end of the year had gone on to the Vancouver Island mission. Brothers McStag and Devires arrived in 1872 and were both assigned to the mission at Tulalip.

## Closure

The priests were being reassigned to missions on Puget Sound by 1855, and being sent on to Vancouver Island and missions in British Columbia. Fr. D'herbomez worked in the Yakima missions from the summer of 1851 to 1854 when he returned to Olympia. In March, 1856, Durieu was assigned to St. Josephs in Olympia, arriving there in May, 1857. In the Fall of '57, Fathers Chirouse, Durieu and Ricard left the Yakima missions for Puget Sound and Tulalip missions, leaving only Fr. Pandosy east of the mountains. Fr. Pandosy was assigned to Fort Colville from March, 1856 until the Summer of 1858, when he left for Esquimalt. He left for Victoria March 28, 1859 and went on to establish a mission in the Okanogan Valley which he started in March, 1859. All the Oblate buildings and lands in Yakima country were apparently abandoned after 1859. In July, 1878, the last of the Oregon Oblates left Washington Territory for British Columbia.

Eight years later, in September, 1867, Fr. J. N. St. Onge took over the St. Joseph site on the Ahtanum. He built a hut for a dwelling, then a log cabin for a church and a residence. In 1868 he recruited John Baptist Boulet to join him. That spring they planted fruit trees they had carried from Vancouver. Father Caruana joined them in 1870. Fr. St. Onge and Mr. Boulet left in 1871. In 1884-5 settlers

claimed the mission land and Fr. Caruana moved to the Catholic Church in Old Yakima. The lands had apparently been reserved for the missions by consensus of the Indians and settlers without any land claims or legal rights being established. Schoenberg reports passing the former mission site and seeing a woman feeding chickens and pigs at the door of the house. In 1909, the Knights of Columbus purchased the three acre site of the mission including the log structures erected by St. Onge and Boulet, and made plans to restore the buildings and build fences. Photographs from 1933 show the main chapel, appearing solid, but with windows boarded and rooftop cross askew, unused and abandoned.

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December 1, 2017