

117th Anniversary Establishing St. Mary's Mission Noted

HAMILTON — The Rev. Martin Florian, pastor of St. Mary's at Stevensville, and the Rev. C. E. Byrne of St. Ignatius, Sunday celebrated the 117th anniversary of the coming of Father DeSmet to Stevensville in September 1841 and the establishing of St. Mary's Mission.

Father Byrne brought with him Mother Superior Antoinette, Mother Camilla, Mother Imelda, Mother Cecilia, Mother Immaculata and Mother Loyola. They had charge of the young people, including choir boys and altar attendants, who were their pupils at the Ursuline Convent which Mother Superior said was both mission and parochial. There were three and four generations represented in the Salish tribal group and several members of neighboring tribes were in the company.

When Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet came to the site of the present town of Stevensville it was at the request of an Iroquois Indian, Big Ignace, and others of the Salish people. The Belgian-born "blackrobe" built a mission of cottonwood logs and raised the cross in the area that now surrounds Ft. Owen to the north. There he and the other Jesuits who came with him taught Christian living and the needful things of life that go along with it, food production by farming and grinding grist from grain, developing water power for lumber making and for irrigation of the primitive fields.

Father Ravalli, coming first in 1845, and staying five years, came back in 1866 to build the present church and was the ministering priest at St. Mary's until his death nearly 20 years later. The departure of the Salish or Flatheads for the new reservation came in 1891, a few years after Ravalli's time had ended.

Among the company of Indian members of the Catholic faith to gather at St. Mary's historic mission, now a shrine of the Bitter Root Valley, were a few gray-haired tribal personalities who left the valley in 1891 with their fathers and mothers for the new home on the Jocko reservation in the Flathead Valley. There was Sophie Moiese, 93, who was born in the Stevensville area and who was baptised by Father Antony Ravalli at the little St. Mary's chapel, and she said her Salish father was William Qul-ki-ki. Also attending were Mary Ann Combes, 76, and her sister, Mrs. Big Sam, 78, daughters of Louie Pierre; Octave Marigeau, 72, who was born the year her people moved to the Jocko, she said; Jerome Lumprey, nearing 90, who visited the Gallagly Springs 4-H camp in June 1957 with Chief Paul Charlot, and the tribal interpreter, Eneas Granjo, his white braids framing his kind old face as he greeted friends at the mission.

For Lucy Finley, last of the Charlot family, there was sadness in the home coming. She is 78 and was born in the Bitter Root, a daughter of Chief Martin Charlot and sister of the late Chief Paul Charlot.

"They are all gone now, all my family," she said and the tears came as she recalled her father leaving the Bitter Root Valley the Salish had called home.

The Indians worshipped again in the little white log mission where they had been baptised as children and took part in the procession after the mass, marching to St. Mary's churchyard just west of the chapel, where Father Ravalli's grave is marked by a tall granite shaft erected by the state in tribute to his many years of work among the Indians.