

CHAPTER XIII

THE POTAWATOMI MISSION OF COUNCIL BLUFFS

§ I THE POTAWATOMI

The earliest known habitat of the Potawatomi was the lower Michigan peninsula. Driven thence by Iroquois invaders, they settled on and about the islands at the mouth of Green Bay, Lake Michigan, where they were met in 1634 by Jean Nicolet, reputed the first white man to reach Wisconsin. Later they moved south, displacing the Miami and occupying both shores of Lake Michigan from between about Manitowoc on the west and Grand River on the east and settling southward as far as the Wabash. Their lands comprised territory in Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan, with some fifty villages, including those on the sites of Milwaukee, Chicago, and Grand Rapids¹

Of Algonkin stock, the Potawatomi were blood-relations of the Ottawa and Ojibway or Chippewa, with whom they appear to have formed at one time a single tribe². The Potawatomi ("fire-makers," "people of the fire-place"), may thus owe their name to the circumstance that they separated from the other two tribes and built a new "fire," which in Indian parlance is to set up as an independent tribe. They were in the main hunters and fishers, tilling the ground but sparingly and this only for a meagre harvest of maize. They were, moreover, a fighting race and as a consequence frequently in conflict with the whites and with the other tribes. They supported the French against the British in the great struggle between the two powers for

¹ James Mooney in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 12 320. The spelling of Indian tribal names, except in cited passages and documents, will conform to government usage as exemplified in Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (2 v, Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, 1912). In most Indian tribal names, as in Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Kansa, there is only one form for both singular and plural. The official "Potawatomi" is of uncommon occurrence in print, usage favoring the spelling "Pottawatomie," as "Pottawatomie County, Kansas."

² "According to the tradition of all three tribes, the Potawatomi, Chippewa and Ottawa were originally one people, and seemed to have reached the region about the upper end of Lake Huron together. Here they separated, but the three have sometimes formed a loose confederacy, or have acted in concert and in 1846, those removed beyond the Mississippi, asserting their former connection, asked to be again united." Hodge, *op cit*, 2 289

Canada and the West and under the picturesque hero Pontiac, son of a Chippewa mother, and an Ottawa by adoption, they continued the struggle against the British until 1765. On the other hand, in the Revolutionary War they made common cause with England, as they also did, under their leader Tecumseh, in the War of 1812.

Between the Potawatomi and the seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries there were numerous contacts from the first arrival of the latter in the Middle United States. St. Isaac Jogues and Father Charles Raymbaut, the first Jesuits to penetrate as far west as Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, 1641, met representatives of the tribe. Marquette also made acquaintance with the Potawatomi in the course of his journey from Green Bay to the Illinois country. In 1669 Father Claude Allouez opened near the head of Green Bay, Wisconsin, the Mission of St. Francis Xavier for the neighboring Potawatomi, Sauk, Foxes and Winnebago, while many years later, if one may credit tradition, for documentary evidence is lacking, he founded on the St. Joseph River near the Indiana-Michigan line the most important of all the old-time centers of evangelical effort on behalf of the Potawatomi. Here on the St. Joseph Jesuit missionaries continued to minister to this favored tribe well into the second half of the eighteenth century. Later years saw the mission restored at the hands of diocesan priests.

By the treaty of Greenville, 1795, the Potawatomi agreed to sell to the United States a tract of land six miles square lying at the mouth of the Chicago River, a tract destined to become the territorial core of the great metropolis of the Middle West.³ On August 7, 1826, only thirty-one years later than the treaty of Greenville, occurred the first election in the history of Chicago. The names of the voters on this occasion, thirty-five in number, indicate that fully three-fourths of them were Indians and mixed bloods. The names include those of Daniel Bourassa, Antoine Oulmette, Francis Lafromboise Sr., Francis Lafromboise Jr., Joseph Lafromboise, Claude Lafromboise, Joseph Pothier, Jean Baptiste Beaubien, William Caldwell, and Alexander Robinson.⁴ The names have significance in the present history, for they recur at a later period in the ministerial records of Jesuit missionaries on the western frontier. By the treaty of Chicago, concluded September 26, 1833, and ratified February 21, 1835, the united bands of Chippewa, Ottawa and Potawatomi (or the United Nation, as they came to be called) ceded to the government all their lands along the western shore

³ The Potawatomi of St. Joseph on their removal to the Osage River district (1838) and later to the Kaw River reserve (1848) again came under the care of Jesuit missionaries.

⁴ These names occur *passim* in the Sugar Creek and St. Mary's mission registers.

of Lake Michigan, five million acres in all, receiving in consideration about a million dollars in promised annuities, educational funds and other monies and, in addition, a grant of five million acres of land on the left bank of the Missouri River.⁵ To this new home, represented on the map of today by a considerable section of southwestern Iowa bordering on the Missouri, the Indians agreed to move immediately on the ratification of the treaty, or, as regarded their lands north of the Illinois state-line, after a term of three years.⁶

In 1835 a delegation of Potawatomi under the conduct of a Mr Gordon visited the Iowa reserve. They found it more remotely situated than they had supposed and rather uncomfortably close to the Sioux and other bellicose tribes of the upper Missouri.⁷ In consequence of the unfavorable reports of the prospectors, the emigrant bands of the United Nation, on leaving Illinois and the adjacent states, took a southwesterly course that brought them towards the junction of the Kaw and Missouri Rivers and even beyond the latter stream into the Indian country proper. About four hundred of them, who had emigrated with the Kickapoo, and about seventeen hundred later emigrants were in 1837 in an unsettled, and most of them in a miserable condi-

⁵ The text of the Chicago treaty of 1833 is in Kappler, *Indian Affairs and Treaties*, 2 402. A discussion of its terms and of the circumstances which attended its signing may be read in Quaife, *Chicago and the Old Northwest, 1673-1835* (Chicago, 1913), pp 348-368. But cf also James Ryan Haydon, *Chicago's True Founder, Thomas J V Owen* (Chicago, 1934). The Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi were together officially designated in government reports as the United Nation. However, as an Indian agent at Council Bluffs observed, the designation was a misnomer, the fact being that the group of Indians described collectively as the United Nation were almost exclusively of Potawatomi stock. Reports emanating from the Indian Office at this period distinguished carefully between the United Nation (Council Bluffs Potawatomi) and the Potawatomi of Indiana (St Joseph and Wabash bands), who were settled during the period 1837-1848 on the Osage River reserve. The Council Bluffs Potawatomi also went frequently by the name of the Prairie band, while their kinsmen of the Osage River reserve were called Potawatomi of the Woods (*Potawatomi des forêts*). In 1848 both Osage River and Council Bluffs reserves were abandoned and the two sections of the Potawatomi tribe gathered on a common reserve on the Kaw River a few miles above Topeka. The commissioner of Indian affairs in his report of November 28, 1848, refers to the United Nation or Council Bluffs Potawatomi as the "Chicago Indians," many of their leading men having come from Chicago or its vicinity.

⁶ Roughly, the new Potawatomi reserve extended about ninety-five miles north from the Iowa line along the Missouri River and about the same distance on an average along an east-west line.

⁷ McCoy, *The Annual Register of Indian Affairs within the Indian (or Western Territory)*, (Shawnee Baptist Mission House, Indian Territory, May, 1836), p 20.

tion.⁸ It was not until 1837 that the Potawatomi emigrants finally reached and settled down on their proper lands. Two detachments of them arrived that year by Missouri River steamboats at Council Bluffs, followed not long after by the main body of the nation, who moved up the east bank of the Missouri from their first halting places in the neighborhood of Leavenworth and the Blacksnake Hills.⁹ The last parties of the United Nation to join their fellow-tribesmen on the new reserve arrived in 1838.¹⁰

§ 2 NEGOTIATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT

In the course of his western prospecting trip of 1835 Father Van Quickenborne made his first acquaintance with the United Nation. The meeting was a providential one, for it was to lead to the opening of a mission on their behalf.

I had the consolation of falling in with a party of Pottowatomies sent by their nation to inspect the new lands which the Government had given in exchange for the old. The Pottowatomie, Chippewa and Ottawa Nations having inter-married on a large scale, go at present under the name of the United Nation of the Chippewas, Ottawas and Pottowatomies. Under this name they have made a treaty with the United States Government that obliges them to go and reside on the left bank of the Missouri a little above the Kickapoos. They were formerly dispersed over a vast territory out of which have been carved the states of Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. Our Fathers had several posts among them, two of which, St. Joseph and Arbre Croche, are still in existence. The last named prospers highly. Frequent mention is made in the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* of the mission as also of the virtues of the tireless missionary who presides over it. In the deputation I met were several Catholics, one of them being the chief (of the nation). They told me it would be highly beneficial to them to have a mission in their new country, that they could not all go to Arbre Croche, that the lands assigned them by government were their only means of subsistence, that there the annuities would be paid and the protection of the government secured to them. Once the mission was established, other Catholic Indians would come and join them. Friends of ours in a position to judge impartially of the real condition of things, far from challenging these reasons for the mission in question, supply new ones. According to

⁸ *Idem*, 1837, p. 23.

⁹ *RCIA*, 1837. The report of the commissioner of Indian affairs was not issued separately at this period, but was embodied in the senate documents for the respective years.

¹⁰ *RCIA*, 1840. According to this source the emigration of the "Chicago Indians" (i.e., the United Nation of the Ottawa, Chippewa and Potawatomi) began in 1835 and terminated in 1838. The entire number of Indians in the Council Bluffs sub-agency prior to 1840 was 2,734.

them, we should thereby render a distinct service not only to the natives, but to the entire Catholic church of the United States¹¹

In September, 1835, Van Quickenborne was in Washington to secure government subsidies for his projected Kickapoo and Potawatomi schools. His petition was addressed to Secretary of War Lewis Cass and, as far as it referred to the Potawatomi, read as follows:

In answer to your favor of 16th inst. I have the honor to state

1 That I am prepared to open a Mission with a school in the Indian country in the following places: 1 on the land of the Kickapoos in the vicinity of Cantonment Leavenworth; 2 on the land assigned to the united nations of Chippewas, Ottawas and Pottowatomies at such places as the nations may choose as sites for their villages.

3 I will be enabled to have the school opened for the Pottowatomies and commence a missionary establishment as soon as they shall have removed to their own country, & after 15 months from the 1st of January next I will have it in my power to reinforce the new establishment with an additional number of three Missionaries, which number will justify the opening of several schools in that numerous nation, at those places that may be considered most eligible.

The hope is fondly entertained [?] that the Catholic establishment will, in a great measure, subserve the views of Government in relation to the removal of the Indians from Michigan. A number of Chippewas, Ottawas and Pottowatomies was converted by French Catholic missionaries to the Catholic faith, to which they continue to be strongly attached. This new establishment will be conducted by clergymen of the same faith. The fact of a Catholic church being built for them on the borders of the Missouri river and of a Catholic Mission and school well attended will, it is supposed, at once remove the difficulties which the Pottowatomies of St. Joseph's and some Chippewas have made to the last treaty, in which, on account of their religion, they objected to go to the West, & wished to settle around Arbre Croche merely because of the Catholic establishment there existing.

I am confirmed in this statement by what I was told by the deputation of the Pottowatomies, whom I saw at Cantonment Leavenworth last sum-

¹¹ *Ann Prop.*, 9:101. The Potawatomi mission on the St. Joseph River stood on the river bank a few miles north of the Indiana line and close to the town-site of Niles, Michigan. (Cf. Paré, "The Mission of St. Joseph," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, June, 1930.) The mission was reopened in 1830 by Father Stephen T. Badin, a large number of converts being made among the Indians. The Ottawa mission at Arbre Croche was on the east side of Lake Michigan some distance below Mackinaw. The Potawatomi met by Van Quickenborne in 1835 were of the group of "Chicago" Indians assigned to the Council Bluffs reserve under the treaty of 1833. The Catholic chief that figures in the missionary's account was Alexander Robinson. He did not remain with the Potawatomi in the West, but settled on his reservation on the Desplaines River near Chicago, where he died.

mer when they came visiting the tract of land assigned to them. Those of the deputation that were Catholics, and Robinson, their chief, was of that number, said, that if a Catholic establishment were made in their new place of residence, it was their opinion that those of St. Joseph's and the Catholic Chippewas and Ottawas would come and join them, to which circumstance they seemed to look with great fondness, stating, erroneously however, that if they did not come they would have no share in the annuities.

The same assistance from Government is respectfully asked for this establishment as for the first and as in the treaty with the united nations of Chippewas, Ottawas & Pottowatomies a school fund has been created, it is respectfully requested that the proceeds accruing to them of the west, be appropriated to the establishment.¹²

This petition of Father Van Quickenborne's was referred by the secretary of war to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Elbert Herring, who replied a few days later, granting an appropriation in favor of the Kickapoo school, but refusing the one asked for on behalf of the Potawatomi.

In regard to a school among the United Nations of Chippewas, Ottawas and Pottawatomies

The treaty of September, 1833, which was ratified in February, 1835, provided for the appropriation of seventy thousand dollars "for purposes of education and the encouragement of the domestic arts." In accordance with the wishes of these Indians, this sum has been invested in stock. This stock bears an interest of five per cent, of which the first payment will be made in January next. As the sum must be expended West of the Mississippi, the Department considers it proper that the interest, which shall accrue prior to the settlement of these Indians in their own country, shall also be invested. As the emigration will not probably be completed within two years, no definite arrangements will now be made for the application of this fund. At a proper time the Department will determine what part of it shall be applied for the support of schools, and what part to the other objects, indicated by the general clause, "the encouragement of Domestic arts." The wishes you have now expressed on the subject will then be respectfully considered.¹³

The Kickapoo mission and school having become a reality in 1836, Van Quickenborne, while residing there, again came into contact with the United Nation. He visited them in their camp on the east bank of the Missouri opposite Fort Leavenworth, where on January 29, 1837, he baptized fourteen children of the tribe, all under four years of age. The first child to receive the sacrament was Susanne, daughter of Claude Lafromboise and a Potawatomi woman, and she had for

¹² Van Quickenborne to Cass, Washington, September 17, 1835 (H)

¹³ Herring to Van Quickenborne, Washington, September 22, 1835 (A)

godfather the business chief of the tribe, William Caldwell, the Sauganash or Saukonosh ("Englishman"), a conspicuous figure in early Chicago history¹⁴ Caldwell stood sponsor for two other infants Other sponsors on the occasion, their names duly recorded in the baptismal register of the Kickapoo Mission, were Claude Lafromboise, Toussaint Chevalier, Joseph Chevalier, Francis Bourbonnet and Michael Arcoite As a matter of fact, though the circumstance, if he knew it, could scarcely have impressed him as particularly significant, the missionary had before him a group of ex-citizens of Chicago, some of whom appear on the poll-book of the election of 1826, the first in the history of the metropolis¹⁵

Father Van Quickenborne died without having realized his plans for a Potawatomi mission But the project was not suffered to lapse. Father Verhaegen, superior of the Missouri Mission, wrote under date of August 5, 1837, to the secretary of war

While at Washington in September 1835, the Rev Mr Van Quickenborne solicited the favor of forming an establishment among the Pottawatomies and stated what the Society would be able to effect towards the accomplishment of the benevolent views of the Government for their civilization The application was then premature I believe it is no longer so Permit me therefore, dear Sir, to renew the petition which was then made I am ready to send to them two missionaries with a teacher General Games held lately a council during which the subject of this my application was discussed by the chiefs and the principal men of the nation, they expressed a great desire to have a Catholic establishment among them and they will shortly send you a petition detailing the grounds on which they base their application¹⁶

¹⁴ Garraghan, *Catholic Church in Chicago, 1673-1879*, pp 39-41 Cf also Haydon, *Chicago's True Founder, Thomas J V Owen* (Chicago, 1934), *passim*

¹⁵ Father Van Quickenborne's baptisms among the Potawatomi near Fort Leavenworth in January, 1837, were entered by him in the *Kickapoo Register* now in the archives of St Mary's College, Kansas The location of the Potawatomi camp was within the limits of the triangular strip of land along the east bank of the Missouri subsequently known as the Platte Purchase Though this tract was not included in the reserve assigned the Potawatomi by the treaty of 1833, the tribe on leaving Chicago were conducted thither by the contractors in charge of the emigration, presumably because the Indians could not be induced to occupy their Iowa lands, which report had led them to believe were undesirable The Potawatomi, however, were never anything but trespassers on the Platte Purchase territory and were compelled at length (1837) to vacate it and move up into their officially assigned reserve in southwestern Iowa Cf Babbitt, *Early Days at Council Bluffs* (Washington, 1916), p 26 For data concerning the religious status of the "Chicago" Potawatomi, see Garraghan, *op cit*, pp 59-60

¹⁶ Brigadier-General Edmund Pendleton Games, active in the War of 1812 and the Indian wars in Florida Father Verhaegen had made his acquaintance in St Louis

Col Benton promised me to lay before the Department several questions on which I consulted him I trust, dear Sir, that, actuated by the earnest desire which the Government has always manifested for the welfare of the Indian, you will have the goodness to consider the subject ¹⁷

The petition of the Potawatomi chiefs read as follows

To his Excellency, the Secretary of the War Department

The petition of the undersigned chief and warriors of the Pottowatome nation respectfully represent

- 1 That in the course of a few months everything necessary for their permanent location in their new lands will be procured and that agreeably to the benevolent intentions of the Government they are disposed to better their situation by the introduction of the domestic arts and education among them
- 2 That a school being necessary for the instruction of their children, they wish to see one established among them with the least possible delay
- 3 That they desire this school to be conducted by missionaries sent to them by the Catholic Missionary Society of Missouri, because many of the nation have embraced the Catholic religion and will by this arrangement be enabled to enjoy the comforts of their religion
- 4 That the common feeling of the nation is in favor of the Catholic clergy, who, speaking the English and the French languages, can fully second the execution of the plan which the Government proposes to itself for the amelioration of their nation

Signed in the presence of
 B D Moon, Capt 1st D
 Wm McPherson
 B Caldwell
 B R Hunt, Agt

Wa Bon Su
 Pierish Le Claire
 [10 signatures]
 Fountain Blue on the East
 Side of the Missouri
 near Council Bluffs,
 12th September, 1837 ¹⁸

¹⁷ (H) Thomas Hart Benton, United States senator from Missouri, 1821-51, had several years earlier come into relations with the St Louis Jesuits through his efforts to obtain for St Louis University a township of land to serve as a basis for an endowment fund See Chap XXXIV, § 1

¹⁸ (H) The Catholic Missionary Society of Missouri was a name occasionally attached in official papers and correspondence of the period to the Jesuit Vice-Province of Missouri, which, however, was never legally incorporated under this name

Wa Bon Su (Wah-bon-sch, Wabansa) and Pierish (Pierre) Le Clair (Le Claire, Le Clerc) were chiefs prominent in Potawatomi history Wa Bon Su remained

The Potawatomi petition, duly marked with the crosses of the chiefs, was sent to Father Verhaegen, who in turn transmitted it to the secretary of war Months passed by without any answer coming from Washington. Meanwhile, Father Christian Hoecken of the Kickapoo Mission was advised from Council Bluffs that the Indians were anxiously awaiting the missionary The materials for a church were at hand. A tract of land was promised to the fathers and the old fort or government issue-house offered to them for a residence by the commanding officer, Col Kearney The author of the *Annual Letters* for 1837 noted that everything, as far as concerned the Society of Jesus, was ready for the opening of the mission The only thing lacking was the sanction of government.¹⁹

For some reason or other the sanction of the government continued to be withheld At length Verhaegen, not brooking any further the delay at Washington, determined in the spring of 1838 to press the business in person at the capital Two days before setting out he acquainted Bishop Rosati with the purpose of his journey

I have just arrived here [St Louis], with the intention of going on to Washington, to leave for Louisville The interests of the Indian Mission make this trip absolutely necessary I have written to the Government officials, but to no purpose, these gentlemen know how to keep silence, when their plans require it More than seven hundred Indians who have become Catholics urgently demand a Catholic establishment in their midst The Government promised it to Father Van Quickenborne and now the letters I wrote to the Secretary of the Indian Bureau remain without an answer

at peace with the whites in the Black Hawk War of 1832 He was one of the orators of the Potawatomi delegation that went to Washington in 1845 to negotiate favorable terms for the cession of the Iowa reserve "Stately old Wah-bon-sch, with the snows of eighty winters on his head," so he is described by Richard Smith Elliott, the Indian agent who conducted the delegation to Washington Elliott, *Notes Taken in Sixty Years* (St Louis, 1883), p 198 Pierish Le Clair, a half-breed, was present at the Fort Dearborn (Chicago) massacre of 1812 and in the capacity of interpreter negotiated the terms of the surrender A daughter of his, according to Elliott, was educated in the Sacred Heart Convent of St Louis Le Clair was also one of the Potawatomi orators that appeared in Washington in 1845 to discuss the cession of the Iowa reserve to the Government "Pierish Le Claire, in Indian lingo, was to refer to some former treaties, the promises of which had not been kept by the government, and was to expatiate on the charms of the country about Chicago, where the frogs in the marshes sang more sweetly than birds in other parts—a land of beauty which they had ceded to the government for a mere trifle, although it had been their home so long that they had traditions of Perrot, the first white man who ever set foot upon it, two hundred years before" Elliott, *op cit*, p 208 Pierish Le Clair died on the Kaw River reserve, March 28, 1849, attended in his last moments by a Jesuit priest from the Potawatomi Mission of St Mary's

¹⁹ *Litterae Annuae*, 1837 (A)

I shall make the ears of the guilty ones tingle a bit Besides, experience has convinced me that without many privileges, the work of spreading the Faith among the Indians cannot succeed These privileges I shall try to obtain ²⁰

The season of navigation had scarcely opened when on March 10 Father Verhaegen left St. Louis for the East. The Mississippi River steamer that carried him had her wheels roughly used by the ice-floes that continued to move down stream. From Wheeling he travelled by stage over the Alleghanies. There were three feet of snow in the mountain districts and the stage-driver was hard put to it to keep to the obliterated highway. At length on March 23, thirteen days out from St. Louis, Verhaegen was safely lodged at Georgetown College.

Without loss of time he set himself to the business that had brought him to Washington. With his friend, Senator Benton, for escort, he presented himself with a carefully drawn-up petition at the War Department. But the secretary of war was ill at his residence, and an interview with him could not be arranged. The two Missourians proceeded then to the White House and here Benton introduced his Jesuit friend to President Van Buren, who conversed pleasantly with him for half an hour. Joseph N. Nicollet, well-known French scientist and explorer in the United States government service and a visitor at St. Louis University in the course of his western travels, took a lively interest in Verhaegen's plans ²¹. He tried several times to arrange a meeting between the father and the secretary of war, but the latter's illness continued to stand in the way. But he did succeed in inducing Brigadier-General Gratiot to take a hand in the affair. ²² Accompanied by the General and bearing a letter of introduction from Benton, Verhaegen now called on Commissioner of Indian Affairs Crawford and laid before him his plans for a Potawatomi mission. A communication from the commissioner dated the following day informed the superior that his petition had been granted. In particular, he was to be allowed to establish a mission-post among the Potawatomi and to visit either personally or through his subordinates all the tribes settled within the limits of the Indian territory. In one particular only did

²⁰ Verhaegen à Rosati, St. Louis, March 8, 1838 (C)

²¹ Joseph Nicolas Nicollet, born in Cluses, Savoy, July 24, 1786. Explored the valleys of the Red, Arkansas, Missouri and upper Mississippi Rivers, of which last-named stream he determined the sources. Letters addressed by him to Father De Smet are in Chittenden and Richardson, *De Smet*, 4: 1549, 1552.

²² Brigadier-General Charles Gratiot (1786-1855), soldier of the War of 1812, and member of one of the pioneer families of St. Louis. He was for a period inspector of West Point and chief engineer of the army engineering bureau in Washington. It was under his direction that Col. Robert E. Lee constructed certain works on Bloody Island in the Mississippi to protect the harbor of St. Louis.

his negotiations fail His petition for a subsidy on behalf of a Potawatomi school was denied on the ground that the tribe had not as yet occupied the land assigned to them by government treaty

§ 3 THE OPENING OF ST. JOSEPH'S MISSION

His mission thus accomplished, Father Verhaegen started at once for the West An incident of common occurrence in steamboat traveling before the Civil War marked his homeward journey. The steamer on which he was a passenger was one hundred and ten miles from St Louis when one of its boilers burst. Fortunately the engineer's presence of mind enabled him to give warning of the impending danger and the accident passed off without loss of human life, the disabled craft being towed to shore by passing steamers On April 25, only six weeks since his departure from St Louis for the East, Father Verhaegen called a meeting of his official advisers, Fathers Elet, De Theux and Van de Velde, in St Louis University and laid before them the results of his visit to Washington All were of opinion that a Potawatomi mission should be started without delay at Council Bluffs, and Fathers Verreydt and Paillasson with Brother Mazzella were named for the initial staff Later, at De Theux's suggestion, privately communicated to the superior, Father De Smet was substituted for Paillasson²³ The altered choice had significance, for it marked the almost accidental entry into the Indian mission-field of the United States of one destined to become perhaps its most conspicuous figure General William Clark, always sympathetic to the Jesuit Indian missions, lent encouragement and support to the new venture He at once prepared the passports necessary for whites entering the Indian country and instructed the sub-agent at Council Bluffs to lend the fathers all possible protection and aid them to the best of his ability to make their enterprise a success²⁴

²³ *Liber Consultationum*, May 2, 1838 (A) "Father De Smet had lived almost six months in the novitiate with complete satisfaction to all and was burning with a desire to go among the Indians In the opinion of the Fathers it did not seem possible to choose anyone better fitted for that new undertaking I accordingly chose him and in order to inspire him with greater constancy in taking up and carrying through so arduous a work, I permitted him on the advice of Fathers De Theux and Elet to make his vows before his departure" Verhaegen ad Roothaan, July 20, 1838 (AA) First vows in the Society of Jesus are regularly taken only after the expiration of the two years of probation De Smet apparently was admitted only to what are called "vows of devotion," binding on the individual but with no reciprocal obligation assumed by the Society

²⁴ His issue of passports to Verreydt and De Smet was the last service General

Preparations to equip and send out the missionary party were now made with surprising rapidity. Only eight days had elapsed since Verhaegen's return from Washington when he left St. Louis, May 2, 1838, on the steamer *Howard*, in company with Fathers De Smet, Helias, Eysvogels and Brother Claessens. Of the party De Smet was the only one bound for Council Bluffs. Helias was on his way to the vicinity of Jefferson City, there to inaugurate a period of missionary and parochial activity extending over thirty-five years. Eysvogels was to replace Verreydt at the Kickapoo village, while Claessens was to replace Mazzella at the same post. The voyage up the Missouri was not without incident. On the fourth day the steamer's engine broke down, with the result that the engineer had to leave his disabled craft and return to St. Louis to repair the broken fitting. Meantime, Sunday came and the passengers, about a hundred in number from various parts of the United States, asked Father Verhaegen to preach for them in the ship's cabin. He agreed, inviting them at the same time to suggest a text. They gave him the words of *Ecclesiastes* (XI, 3), "If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it lie." The father was not disconcerted. "Like a good soldier in the field," he says in narrating the incident, "I had my arms with me." He adjusted his text to the subject of purgatory and preached for an hour to an interested audience. After a delay of several days, the engineer was again with his boat, which once more started up stream. She had made about forty miles, when the machinery collapsed a second time. There was no way out of this fresh predicament but for the engineer to return again to St. Louis with the fitting that had caused all the trouble. Fathers Verhaegen and Helias got off the boat at Independence, while Father De Smet and his two companions were left on board to watch the baggage and continue their way by water as far as Fort Leavenworth. From Independence Helias returned to Westphalia, near Jefferson City, while Verhaegen, having purchased a horse, made his way overland to Fort Leavenworth. He arrived there four days after leaving the steamer and somewhat later the steamer herself put in at the fort. Leaving Father De Smet to superintend the landing of the party's baggage, he proceeded with Father Eysvogels and Brother Claessens to the Kickapoo mission-house. Early the next morning he sent a horse to the fort for De Smet, but the latter in his eagerness to reach his colleagues had started off on his own account, only to lose his way in the tangled woodland. It was De Smet's introduction to the perils of the Indian country. Late in the

Clark was called upon to render to Catholic missionaries, as he died shortly after, September, 1838

afternoon he found himself to his great relief at the Kickapoo mission-house, only some five miles distant from the fort ²⁵

There was doubt at first whether the two fathers and the brother assigned to the Potawatomi would be able to find a steamer to take them the rest of the way to Council Bluffs. Fortunately, the *Wilmington*, a government transport, was soon to leave Fort Leavenworth for the upper Missouri. On May 25 the missionary party accordingly left Fort Leavenworth on board the *Wilmington* and arrived at Council Bluffs on the afternoon of May 31. On their way up stream they had passed through the country of the Kickapoo, Sauk, Iowa and Ottawa. The physical aspects of the region as well as the characteristics and manners of the Indians fell under De Smet's accurate observation. He was, indeed, a born observer with a talent for literary portrayal surprising in one who never made a profession of letters. The account which he wrote to Father Verhaegen immediately on his arrival at Council Bluffs was the first in the long series of descriptive and narrative sketches of Indian missionary life that were to be read with eager interest by thousands on both sides of the Atlantic.

We arrived among the Potawatomes on the afternoon of the 31st of May. Nearly 2,000 savages, in their finest rigs and carefully painted in all sorts of patterns, were awaiting the boat at the landing. I had not seen so imposing a sight nor such fine-looking Indians in America, the Iowas, the Sauks and the Otoes are beggars compared to these. Father Verreydt and Brother Mazelli went at once to the camp of the half-breed chief, Mr Caldwell, four miles from the river. We were far from finding here the four or five hundred fervent Catholics we had been told of at the College of St. Louis. Of the 2,000 Potawatomes who were at the landing, not a single one seemed to have the slightest knowledge of our arrival among them, and they all showed themselves cold or at least indifferent toward us. Out of some thirty families of French half-breeds two only came to shake hands with us, only a few have been baptized. All are very ignorant concerning the truths of religion, they cannot even make the sign of the cross nor say a pater or an ave. This, as I suppose, is the cause of their great reserve toward us. They change their wives as often as the gentlemen of St. Louis change their coats.

A fortnight after we arrived we discovered one single Catholic Indian, he came to see us and asked our blessing. We tried to get him to stay with us, he knew his prayers well and could serve us for a catechist.

Mr C[aldwell?] though far advanced in years, seems to be a very worthy honest man, he is well disposed towards us and ready to assist us. The half-breeds generally seem affable and inclined to have their children instructed, and we receive many tokens of affection from the Indians them-

²⁵ Account in French by Father Verhaegen dated St. Louis, June 20, 1838, and reproduced in abridged form in the *Ann Prop*, 1838.

selves, they come to see us every day. The chief has given us possession of three cabins and we have changed the fort which Col. Kearney has given us into a church.²⁶

²⁶ CR, *De Smet*, I 157, 158 (The edition of De Smet's letters by Chittenden and Richardson is hereinafter cited as CR, *De Smet*). Caldwell's village was distant about four miles north slightly by east from the steamboat landing, which was in a deep bend of the Missouri. The straightening out of this bend some years later brought Lake Manawa into existence and left the river-bank at a further distance from the village of two or three miles. Caldwell's camp or village was laid out within the present town-limits of Council Bluffs and, it would appear, around the government block-house as a centre. This block-house was built under instructions from Col. Kearney of Fort Leavenworth, by Company C of the First Regiment of Dragoons, Captain D. B. Moore in command, sometime between August and November, 1837, for the purpose of affording protection to the Potawatomi from hostile tribes to the north. The block-house, having served for a while as an issue-house for government supplies, and being found no longer necessary for the purpose for which it was built, was turned over by Col. Kearney to the Jesuit missionaries, who converted it into a chapel, the first house dedicated to Catholic worship in western Iowa. In Charles H. Babbitt, *Early Days at Council Bluffs* (Washington, 1916), p. 59, is a supposititious picture of the "Old Block-house." "By this picture attempt is made to depict the old blockhouse as it probably appeared when completed by Captain D. P. Moore in 1837, together with the blunt nose of bluff whereon it stood. No portholes are shown because there was no reason why any should have been originally provided. United States troops did not ordinarily employ cannon in the control of the Indians at that early day, and it is not probable that the same was furnished the Potawatomies for their protection. The building was a simple hewn-log structure, twenty-four feet square, without openings on the north and west sides except loop-holes for small-arms fire. After it came into the possession of the Jesuit missionaries small windows were cut in those sides, which were afterwards taken by some to have been portholes for cannon fire. The folly of such belief is apparent upon consideration of the size and character of the building, and what would probably have happened to the occupants had a large gun been fired from within. No frontier block-house, even at the largest of the government military posts, appears to have been constructed with a view to firing cannon from within. When cannon were provided for such posts they were usually mounted outside the buildings in bastions especially designed for the purpose." Besides the block-house, the missionaries were in possession of three little cabins, the gift of Caldwell. "We have a fine little chapel, twenty-four feet square, surmounted with a little belfry," De Smet wrote July 20, 1838. "four poor little cabins, besides, made of rough logs, they are fourteen feet each way, with roof of rude rafters, which protect us from neither rain nor hail, and still less from snow in winter." In 1839 the chapel was enlarged and in the same year a new house was built by the missionaries.

The location of the block-house and other mission-buildings has been definitely ascertained. The "Old Fort" or "Mission House" with other buildings used for mission purposes stood upon the west half of the southwest quarter of section 30, township 75 north, of range 43 west, fifth principal meridian. Babbitt, *op cit*, p. 57. Francis B. Cassilly, S. J., Creighton University, Omaha, who investigated the site at the end of 1916, writes in his monograph, *The Old Jesuit Mission of Council Bluffs* (Omaha, 1917), p. 2. "Our story is concerned with this spur of

On August 20, 1838 Father De Smet communicated to Verhaegen further particulars on the progress of the mission

I think I told you, the first time I wrote you, that I had already baptized twenty-two persons. Today the number of those upon whom I have had the consolation of conferring holy baptism amounts to seventy-six, among whom I reckon thirty-four adults of ages from twelve to sixty years. I am sure your Reverence would be touched to see with what fervor these good Indians assist at the holy sacrifice and with what docility they listen to our instructions. For my part, I assure you that I see the work of God in it, and that I feel penetrated with gratitude toward those who, by their prayers, cease not to obtain for us from heaven these unexpected successes. One of our first conquests for Jesus Christ was the spouse of the head chief of the Potawatomi nation. She enjoys the greatest consideration among the Indians, and I venture to hope that her example will have a great influence upon the rest of her compatriots. Since I could not at the beginning express myself with sufficient facility, I was obliged for several weeks to make use of an interpreter. As soon as I found her well enough instructed and disposed, I admitted her to the sacrament of regeneration, which she received with all signs of the liveliest faith and the most ardent piety. Eight other persons, who had imitated her example, shared her happiness.

A short time afterward, on the 9th of August, a young person of eighteen years of age, who had long been sick, came over six miles to see me. She seemed in a state of extreme exhaustion when I saw her in the church. "Father," she said, "I have a great presentiment that my end is near, I know that you are the Great Spirit's minister, and I have made a great effort today to come and beg you to show me the road that leads to heaven." I spent several hours in instructing her in the most essential dogmas of our holy religion, and as I found her fully disposed to receive holy Baptism, I thought it my duty to bestow it upon her at once. I have never seen a person so self-possessed, so modest, so deeply touched during the administration of the holy sacrament. After the ceremony she said to me "Oh! now, until

land, which may well be called a sacred spot, for on it tradition and reliable historical documents tell us rested the first church and school of Council Bluffs and Western Iowa. The location of the mission buildings and attached graveyard was mainly in the two blocks now bounded by Broadway on the north, Voorhis Street on the south, Union Street on the east and Franklin Avenue and State Street on the west. Pierce Street intersects the site. No doubt the graveyard, which is mentioned by Father De Smet in his correspondence, and which continued in use after the abandonment of the mission, overlapped these boundaries, as the finding of bodies indicates. On the northern block the Clausen residence, an old-time building, stands approximately on the site of the old mission-church, the rear block is now occupied by the Pierce public school." Very close to the mission-site was a spring, probably the one still existing at the foot of the hill a few feet southwest from the corner of Broadway and Union Streets. The Catholic mission at Council Bluffs appears under the name "St. Joseph's" in letters written thence by De Smet. In a letter of his of much later date (1867) the mission is referred to as "St. Mary's," no doubt by mistake.



St. Joseph's Mission, Council Bluffs, Iowa The buildings (old blockhouse and fort) as they appeared in 1855 Sketch by George Simon in *Annals of Iowa*, 2 594 (1896)

my last breath, I shall love the Great Spirit with all my heart, and shall honor his good Mother with a daughter's love Oh! I am happy in this moment!"

On the 13th of the same month, an Indian woman brought me her little child, who was sick, praying me to baptize it "Alas!" said the poor woman, "I had another son, and he died without having received this favor, and it would break my heart should this one be likewise exiled from the paradise of the Great Spirit" Among those whom I have baptized are a Protestant lady and her child, she is now one of the most fervent of Catholics, all the others are Indians or half-breeds, who do not know even the name of our holy religion There are a few families besides who are preparing to receive the same favor My companion, Reverend Father Verreydt, lately visited a village belonging to the mission, where they promised to let him baptize all the little children

The feast we have just been celebrating in honor of the assumption of the glorious queen of heaven will never be forgotten in this mission, it was celebrated in a poor wooden church, but I can assure you that no place in the world ever offered a more consoling spectacle nor one more agreeable to the Almighty and his most holy mother.

In the afternoon of that day I baptized eleven adults and a little Indian girl who was sick Three of these adults had already reached their fiftieth year, five were twenty, and three about fifteen years old All exhibited during the ceremony a great deal of piety and fervor Afterward we sang together several canticles to praise and bless the Lord's mercies At the close of the ceremony, four couples received the nuptial benediction according to the Catholic rite All who were present were so touched with what they had seen and heard that, yielding to the grace of the Holy Spirit, they demanded urgently to be instructed Among this number was an old Indian woman belonging to the great medicine band, who, as soon as she reached home, immediately destroyed her medicine bundle Going toward evening to visit a newly converted family, we were agreeably surprised and edified to find all the adults and several others besides assembled to recite in common the most fervent prayers, and to thank the Lord for the signal favors that he had granted them that day I cannot conceal from you, dear Father, that in no circumstance of my life have I ever felt, myself, more joy and consolation than in this happy moment ²⁷

²⁷ CR, *De Smet*, 1 168 Schools for the Potawatomi children were maintained by the missionaries, but without government subsidy Expenses of the mission as recorded by Verhaegen in his *Report on Indian Missions* (Baltimore, 1841), were \$1,476 78 for 1838 and \$1,342 60 for 1839 "We have opened a school," De Smet informed Father Roothaan a few weeks after the arrival of the missionaries, "but for the lack of larger quarters we are only able to receive some thirty children Twice a day we give an instruction to those whom we are preparing for baptism" CR, *De Smet*, p 164 The *Annual Letters* for 1839 give a rather glowing account of the results obtained in the school The boys, as everybody acknowledged, were changed into entirely new beings People marveled to see so many boys studying from morning to night, singing hymns composed

To his mother in Belgium Father Verreydt, who was superior of the mission, wrote informingly about his Potawatomi flock. He deplored particularly their uncleanly habits for they never bathed and vermin was rampant among them. At the same time they showed certain excellent traits which might well put even the most polite of white people to the blush. They never got out of temper in conversation or argued or interrupted others or obtruded themselves into other people's affairs. As a result, the tribe seemed to enjoy a virtually unbroken peace and long stretches of time were known to pass without a single quarrel taking place among its members. The one menace to this happy condition of things was drink, the effects of which upon the Indians were so revolting as to beggar description. In their drunken orgies and brawls they made for one another's noses, and Father Verreydt affirms that more than a hundred of the Potawatomi were lacking this important member. What appalling evils the Indian abuse of liquor brought in its train shall presently be seen with more detail.²⁸

§ 4 A SHORT-LIVED MISSION

In the event the Catholic missionaries among the Potawatomi of Council Bluffs were not to achieve any substantial measure of success.

by the missionaries, reciting the rosary, and assisting at religious instructions twice a day. So tenacious was the memory of the boys that they could remember prayers heard only twice. A choir made up of forty of their number sang hymns in English, French, Latin and Potawatomi. No other school except the Catholic one was kept on the reserve. Sub-agent Cooper's report dated in the fall of 1840 has the following: "Schools there are none here under the authority of the government. There are two Roman Catholic priests residing within my agency, of good moral character, who set a good example to the Indians and half-breeds. They have a chapel, and school and teacher, and have several young Indians in the school, who are coming on pretty well." Senate document, 26th Congress, 2nd Session, vol. 1, page 397. A letter of Cooper's to Joshua Pilcher, superintendent of Indian affairs at St. Louis, reporting that he was unable to secure any boys from his agency for the Choctaw Academy in Kentucky, as he had been requested by the Indian Office to do, makes complaint that Potawatomi parents were averse to patronizing any but Catholic schools. "I then urged strongly the cause of objecting, but was not able to draw it from them. I feel it my duty to give, in my opinion, the cause of the opposition I have met with in the case. It is the undue and unbounded influence of the Catholic religion among the people—they being all Roman Catholics and determined not to patronize anything that is not of that persuasion—I have tried to pick up the boys throughout the country, but have met with an entire failure." Cooper to Pilcher, May 14, 1840. Letter Book of the St. Louis Superintendency of Indian Affairs, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. The Choctaw Academy plan met with disfavor from non-Catholic missionaries also. Cf. *infra*, Chap. XXII, note 65.

²⁸ Verreydt à Madame Verreydt, October 26, 1838. Archives of the North Belgian Province, Society of Jesus.

The drink evil assumed frightful proportions in the tribe, frustrating the labors of the missionaries and making it unlikely that permanent good could be effected. Graphic accounts of the havoc wrought among the Indians by liquor are to be found in a journal of Father De Smet, whose testimony on the subject is corroborated by testimonies of like tenor from Father Verreydt and the Indian Agent, Stephen Cooper.

May 30 [1839] Arrival of the steamer Wilmington with provisions. A war of extermination appears preparing around the poor Potawatomes. Fifty large cannons have been landed, ready charged with the most murderous grape shot, each containing thirty gallons of whiskey, brandy, rum or alcohol. The boat was not as yet out of sight when the skirmishes commenced. After the fourth, fifth and sixth discharges, the confusion became great and appalling. In all directions, men, women and children were seen tottering and falling, the war-whoop, the merry Indian's song, cries, savage roarings, formed a chorus. Quarrel succeeded quarrel. Blows followed blows. The club, the tomahawk, spears, butcher knives, brandished together in the air. Strange! astonishing! only one man, in this dreadful affray, was drowned in the Missouri, another severely stabbed, and several noses lost. The prominent point, as you well know, the Potawatomes particularly aim at when well corned.

I shuddered at the deed. A squaw offered her little boy four years old, to the crew of the boat for a few bottles of whiskey.

I know from good authority that upwards of eighty barrels of whiskey are on the line ready to be brought in at the payment.

No agent here seems to have the power to put the laws in execution.

May 31 Drinking all day. Drunkards by the dozen. Indians are selling horses, blankets, guns, their all to have a lick at the cannon. Four dollars a bottle! Plenty at that price! Detestable traffic.

June 3 A woman with child, mother of four young children, was murdered this morning near the issue-house. Her body presented the most horrible spectacle of savage cruelty, she was literally cut up.

June 4. Burial of the unhappy woman. Among the provisions placed in her grave were several bottles of whiskey. A good idea if all had been buried with her.

June 6 Rumor. Four Iowas, three Potawatomes, one Kickapoo are said to have been killed in drunken frolics.

June 18 Arrival of a sub-agent, Mr Cowper [Cooper]. His presence seems to keep the whiskey sellers in some awe. (Don't know what he might or will do.) Secure the liquor in cages. The many murders committed act powerfully upon the minds of the Indians. They begged the agent in council to prevent the poison being brought among them.

Aug 8 Arrival of the St Peter's with the annuities.

Aug 19 Annuities \$90,000. Divided to the Indians. Great gala. Wonderful scrapings of traders to obtain Indian credits.

Aug 20 Since the day of payment, drunkards are seen and heard in all places. Liquor is rolled out to the Indians by whole barrels, sold by white men even in the presence of the agent. Wagon loads of the abominable stuff arrive daily from the settlements, and along with it the very dregs of our white neighbors and voyageurs of the mountains, drunkards, gamblers, etc., etc. Three horses have been brought to the ground and killed with axes. Two more noses were bitten off and a score of other horrible mutilations have taken place. Two women are dangerously ill of bad usage.²⁹

In a letter written in July, 1839, to a Carmelite nun, superior of the Orphanage in Termonde, Belgium, Father De Smet's native town, the missionary recurs to the never-failing topic of the Indian's fatal weakness for liquor.

Our congregation already amounts to about 300. At Easter we had fifty candidates for first communion. I recommend, in a very special manner, these poor Indians, that they maintain their fervor. The dangers and scandals which surround them are very great. I have remarked in one of my preceding letters that one of the principal obstacles to the conversion of the savages is drinking. The last boat brought them a quantity of liquors. Already fourteen among them are cut to pieces in the most barbarous manner, and are dead. A father seized his own child by the legs and crushed it, in the presence of its mother, by dashing it against the post of his lodge. Two others most cruelly murdered an Indian woman, a neighbor of ours, and mother of four children. We live in the midst of the most disgusting scenes.

The passion of the savages for strong drink is inconceivable. They give horses, blankets, all, in a word, to have a little of this brutalizing liquid. Their drunkenness only ceases when they have nothing more to drink. Some of our neophytes have not been able to resist this terrible torrent, and

²⁹ From a letter to a "most dear friend" dated Potawatomi Nation, Council Bluffs, December, 1839. Text in CR, *De Smet*, I 171. "The civilization of these tribes has made but little progress within the last year. There is neither farmer nor school-teacher employed by the Government in this agency, and but one blacksmith and his assistant, a half-breed. They cannot supply near all the wants of the Indians, and their shop and buildings are in bad condition, the Government having furnished no means for the erection of these buildings. The principal reason of these people not progressing farther in civilization is *ardent spirits*, which are kept along the line of the state of Missouri, and conveyed into the Indian country by the half-breeds. The whiskey trade has increased double this season and cannot be prevented by your Indian agents, unless they can have aid from the Government. The Indian will sell anything for liquor, not infrequently bartering off his horses, guns and blankets for whiskey. This practice is increasing rapidly, and the ruin of the nation certain unless a stop can be put to the introduction of spirituous liquors." Report of Peter Cooper, October 2, 1841. For Father Verreydt's testimony see *infra* in this same section.

have allowed themselves to be drawn into it I wrote an energetic letter to the Government against these abominable traffickers Join your prayers to our efforts to obtain from Heaven the cessation of this frightful commerce, which is the misery of the savages in every relation ³⁰

In the same letter from which the preceding extract is cited Father De Smet records the sinking of a steamer within sight of Council Bluffs with considerable supplies on board for the missionaries and the Indians

First I will narrate to you the great loss that we experienced towards the end of April Our Superior sent us from St Louis, goods to the amount of \$500, in ornaments for the church, a tabernacle, a bell, and provisions and clothes for a year I had been for a long time without shoes, and from Easter we were destitute of supplies All the Potawatomi nation were suffering from scarcity, having only acorns and a few wild roots for their whole stock of food At last, about the 20th of April, they announced to us that the much-desired boat was approaching Already we saw it from the highest of our hills I procured, without delay, two carts to go for our baggage I reached there in time to witness a very sad sight The vessel had struck on a sawyer, was pierced, and rapidly sinking in the waves The confusion that reigned in the boat was great, but happily no lives were lost The total damage was valued at \$40,000 All the provisions forwarded by Government to the savages were on board of her Of our effects four articles were saved a plough, a saw, a pair of boots and some wine Providence was still favorable to us With the help of the plough, we were enabled to plant a large field of corn, it was the season for furrowing We are using the saw to build a better house and enlarge our church, already too small With my boots I can walk in the woods and prairies without fear of being bitten by the serpents which throng there And the wine permits us to offer to God every day the holy sacrifice of the Mass, a privilege that had been denied us during a long time We therefore returned with courage and resignation to the acorns and roots until the 30th of May That day another boat arrived By that same steamer, I received news from you, as well as a letter from my family and from the good Carmelite superior ³¹

On April 29 Father De Smet took passage on the *St Peter's* a steamboat of the American Fur Company, then making its annual trip to the Yellowstone to carry supplies to the Indians and bring

³⁰ CR, *De Smet*, 1 184

³¹ *Idem*, 1 183 Chittenden and Richardson conjecture that the wrecked steamer was the annual boat of the American Fur Company to the mouth of the Yellowstone Though its name cannot be identified in the list, "Steamboat wrecks on the Missouri River" in the *Annual Report of the Missouri River Commission* for 1897, it was very probably the *Private*, which was reported by the *St Louis Republican* under date of May 6, 1839, as having been snagged and lost seven miles below Council Bluffs It would appear that the boat was subsequently raised

down their furs in return. His plan was to visit the Yankton Sioux in their village some three hundred and sixty miles above Council Bluffs, there to do a little missionary work as also to attempt to bring about relations of amity and peace between the latter and the Potawatomi, who ever since their arrival at Council Bluffs had lived in mortal dread of their aggressive neighbors to the north. De Smet found on board the boat an old acquaintance, Joseph N. Nicollet, who had lent his services to Father Verhaegen during the latter's visit to Washington to secure government aid for the Potawatomi mission.³² Nicollet was then on his way to the upper Missouri region, having, during the preceding year, made an exploring trip with great success to the sources of the Mississippi. Accompanying him were Lieutenant John C. Frémont, the "Pathfinder," and Charles A. Geyer, a German botanist of distinction in the scientific world. De Smet had a high regard for the ability and scholarly attainments of Nicollet, but not more than the facts seemed to warrant. "His work will be a treasure for the literary world. He is a very deeply learned man and a liberal Catholic at the same time, who examines his subject on the spot and spares neither time nor pains nor his purse to go to the bottom of the matter he writes upon. He made me a present of several instruments, thermometers, barometers, compass, etc., to take observations during the summer, to aid those he was making in the upper country."³³

Having in the course of the voyage instructed and baptized on board the steamer a woman and her three children and heard the confessions of a number of voyageurs bound for the Rocky Mountains, De Smet arrived May 11 at the Yankton village. Here he met the Yankton chiefs and warriors in council and was hospitably entertained by them at a feast, at which he took occasion to discuss with them the principal object of his visit, which was the establishment of a durable peace between them and his spiritual children, the Potawatomi. His

³² *Supra*, note 21.

³³ In his "*Report intended to illustrate a map of the Hydrographic Basin of Upper Mississippi River, made by J. N. Nicollet while in employ under the Bureau of the Corps Topographical Engineers*" (Senate document No. 237, 26th congress, 2nd session), Nicollet testifies to the accuracy of the barometric observations made by De Smet at Council Bluffs. "The station at Camp Kearney, Council Bluffs, was occupied by the venerable missionaries, Rev. Messrs. De Smet and Verreydt. I furnished them with a barometer, well compared with that of Dr. Engelmann at St. Louis, and my own and delivered it at their missionary-station in good condition, Mr. De Smet, with whom I had passed some days of travel on the Missouri, soon made himself acquainted with the manner of taking observation, and proved it, in furnishing me with a four-month series, made with a care that the most scrupulous examination could only confirm and embracing the period between the 17th of May and 17th of September, 1839, an interval during which I was exploring the Northwest."

efforts met with success. He persuaded the Sioux to make presents to the children of the Potawatomi warriors they had killed and to agree to visit the Potawatomi and smoke with them the calumet of peace. In the evening of the same day on which the council was held, he explained the Apostles' Creed to the Indians and baptized a number of their children. His mission thus accomplished, he seized the first opportunity of returning to Council Bluffs, making the down-stream voyage in the only craft he found available, a dugout, or hollowed-out log, ten feet long by one and a half wide. Guided by two skillful pilots, and travelling from four o'clock in the morning to sunset, the frail bark covered the three hundred and sixty miles to Council Bluffs in three days³⁴

From the baptismal and marriage registers of St. Joseph's Mission at Council Bluffs may be gathered data concerning the ministry of the fathers during the three years the post was maintained. The baptisms during this period number three hundred and eight. The first recorded is that of Elizabeth Catherine Bourbonné, a Potawatomi, June 9, 1838. She is the first person whose baptism at Council Bluffs is attested by documentary evidence. All baptismal entries up to February 8, 1840, are in Father De Smet's handwriting. Caldwell, principal business chief of the nation, was god-father to John Naakeze, baptized December 29, 1838, at the age approximately of one hundred and two. The last baptism in the mission-register is in Father Eysvogels's hand and bears date July 17, 1841³⁵

The first entries in the marriage-register are dated August 15, 1838. On that day Father De Smet joined in Christian wedlock Pierre Chevalier and Kwi-wa-te-no-kwe, and Louis Wilmot (Ouilmette) and Maria Wa-wiet-mo-kwe³⁶. These are the earliest certified marriages in Council Bluffs. The marriage ceremonies performed by De Smet at the mission numbered twenty in all, the last being dated January 5, 1840. Father Christian Hoecken, the founder in 1838 of the Catholic mission among the Osage River Potawatomi, after a stay of several months at the novitiate whither he had returned from his Indians broken down in

³⁴ CR, *De Smet*, 1 190

³⁵ The Council Bluffs register is in the archives of St. Mary's College, St. Marys, Kansas. While stationed at Council Bluffs, De Smet baptized the Omaha chief Logan Fontanelle, then a child, and his mother, daughter of the Omaha chief, Big Elk. CR, *De Smet*, 4 1532

³⁶ Louis Wilmot (Ouilmette) discharged for a while the duties of government interpreter for the Council Bluffs sub-agency. His relative (probably father), Antoine Ouilmette, whose name is perpetuated in the Chicago suburb, Wilmette, has been reputed that city's earliest white settler, having settled there according to his own account in 1790, concerning which claim, however, doubts have been raised.

health, was attached to St. Joseph's Mission in the summer of 1840. Four marriages are credited to him in the mission-register, the earliest dated August 6, 1840, and the last January 28, 1841.

In the summer of 1839 arrived at Council Bluffs two young Flathead braves. They were making the long journey from their homeland west of the Rocky Mountains to St. Louis for the purpose of securing Catholic priests. It was a challenge to De Smet's adventurous zeal, and, disappointed as he was with conditions on the Potawatomi reserve and the prospects of future missionary labor in that quarter, he eagerly offered himself to answer the signal of spiritual distress that came at this opportune moment from the remote Northwest. Father Verhaegen, superior at St. Louis, having determined to ascertain what were the hopes held out by the new missionary field thus opened up to his order, dismissed the Flathead delegates with a promise that a missionary would be sent out to their tribe on a prospecting trip early in the coming spring. De Smet now returned from Council Bluffs to St. Louis apparently with a view to seeking medical aid for an ailment that was causing him distress. Having arrived there on the last day of February, 1840, he was commissioned by Verhaegen to undertake the trip to the Flatheads. His status as resident missionary at Council Bluffs had thus come to an end and he entered upon the career of missionary effort on behalf of the Oregon Indians with which his name is especially identified. He left Westport at the mouth of the Kansas for the Rocky Mountains in April, 1840, discharged satisfactorily the object of his visit to the Flatheads, whom he found eagerly awaiting the arrival of Catholic missionaries, and returned home by the Missouri River, making a stop in November at Council Bluffs. Here he found that during his absence conditions had taken on a more discouraging aspect than ever.

The very night of our arrival among our Fathers at Council Bluffs, the river closed. It would be in vain for me to attempt to tell what I felt at finding myself once more amidst our brothers, after having travelled 2,000 Flemish leagues, in the midst of the greatest dangers and across the territories of the most barbarous nations. I had, however, the grief of observing the ravages which unprincipled men, liquor-sellers, had caused in this budding mission, drunkenness, with the invasion of the Sioux on the other hand, had finally dispersed my poor savages. While awaiting a more favorable turn of events, the good Fathers Verreydt and [Christian] Hoecken busy themselves with the cares of their holy ministry among some fifty families that have had the courage to resist these two enemies. I discharged my commission to them from the Sioux, and I venture to hope that in future there will be quiet in that quarter.³⁷

³⁷ CR, *De Smet*, I 158

In the summer of 1841 the situation at Council Bluffs from the viewpoint of missionary endeavor was still discouraging. Writing in July to Father Van Assche at Florissant, Father Verreydt dwells on the conditions which were to result in a few weeks in the definite abandonment of the mission.

Our people here like us very much, but they do not want to listen to our good counsel. Getting drunk is the only fault they have, otherwise, we would live here in Paradise. But now, in the condition they are, it is indeed very disagreeable to live among them. As you are at home in the charming business, could your Reverence not give me a means to make these fellows here sober men and sober women, for women, as well as men, get tipsy whenever they have a chance. Oh, my friend, it looks very bad to see these poor creatures often like hogs wallowing in the mud. I think you have done very well not to have come out to these frontier places, where almost everybody is trying to delude and impose upon these poor creatures. Liquor is brought in here with whole cargoes, which reduces our Indians to extreme poverty, which is, as you know, the mother of all vice. Such is our position here. You may of course pray hard for us all. We cannot help it, patience will not cure the evil, I fear.³⁸

The United Nation or the Prairie Potawatomi had thus disappointed the hopes once entertained of their progress in the ways of upright and Christian living. On the other hand their kinsmen of Sugar Creek, the Potawatomi of Indiana or the Forest Potawatomi, were steadily advancing to the condition of an orderly and edifying Christian community. The conclusion was therefore reached to abandon Council Bluffs as a center of resident missionary endeavor and transfer the fathers stationed there to Sugar Creek. "We have had to abandon the mission of the Potawatomes at Council Bluffs," Verreydt informed the General, "on account of the drink with which the poor Indians are constantly becoming intoxicated and also on account of the war between the Sioux and the Potawatomes."³⁹ In pursuance of instructions received from St. Louis Fathers Verreydt and Christian Hoecken, together with Brothers Mazzella and Miles, bade farewell to Council

³⁸ Verreydt to Van Assche, Council Bluffs, July 2, 1841 (A). Father Verreydt in a letter to the Belgian benefactor of the Jesuit missions in America, M. De Nef, Dec. 6, 1839 (Archives of the Belgian Province, S. J.), speaks of drink as the supreme evil among the Potawatomi, "their ruin, their destruction, the greatest obstacle to their salvation. If it were not for this unfortunate weakness, they would be converted *en masse*. A priest doing nothing else than baptize the Indian children is well employed, he saves an innumerable number of souls, for their manner of life and the great wretchedness which prevails among the Indians causes them to die in great numbers."

³⁹ Verreydt ad Roothaan, April 6, 1842 (AA).

Bluffs in August, 1841, and journeyed to Sugar Creek, which they reached on the 29th of that month. Thenceforth the Iowa Potawatomi were without spiritual aid except for an occasional visit of Father Hoecken from Sugar Creek. In April, 1842, the latter administered four baptisms at Council Bluffs. In November, 1844, he administered twenty more at the same post, all to Indians or half-breeds. In May, 1846, he was again with the United Nation, baptizing on this occasion thirty-eight infants and a dying squaw. This was apparently the last visit of a Catholic priest to Council Bluffs before the closing of the Potawatomi reserve.⁴⁰ Two years later the Indians were removed to their new lands on the Kansas River assigned them under the treaty of 1846. Here they were united with the Sugar Creek division of the tribe and here they came again under the spiritual care of Jesuit missionaries.

⁴⁰ *Sugar Creek Baptismal Register* (F) Richard Smith Elliott, Indian agent at Council Bluffs, in his *Notes Taken in Sixty Years*, p. 180, records his having in 1844 "solemnized the first civil marriage in all Southwest Iowa." The parties to the marriage were the half-breed, Joseph Lafromboise, United States interpreter for the agency, and a Miss Labarg(e). "The Priest [Father Hoecken] had made his annual trip in May and about ten months would elapse before he would come again."

According to Babbitt, *op cit*, p. 57, the Catholic mission-property at the time application was made for the entry of the town-site of Council Bluffs became the subject of controversy between Mrs. S. T. Carey and the Catholic ecclesiastical authorities. The evidence adduced in the long-drawn out controversy before the Indian Office and the Land Department is on record in the files of the Indian Office, Department of the Interior, Washington. Father De Smet, when questioned on the subject in 1867, could give no definite information. "All I could learn of the subject is. Several years after the last missionary among the Potawatomes left that location, he was applied to by the Catholic bishop of Dubuque and ceded to him all the right to the mission claim." CR, *De Smet*, 4. 1534.