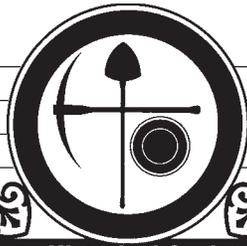


This month's theme:  
**The Jesuits**



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The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

# PROSPECTOR

December, 2005



## The Black Robes

**B**efore the European settlers arrived in America many different types of religious beliefs already existed among the Native Americans. Many of the tribes still practice their traditional religions today. But in some cases, the arrival of the Europeans and their religious beliefs changed the way Native Americans practiced religion. This is the story of the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in the northern Idaho area and how this changed the lives not just of the Native Americans but also of the Jesuits. When two groups of strangers start to live, work, eat, and pray together they sometimes create a common culture

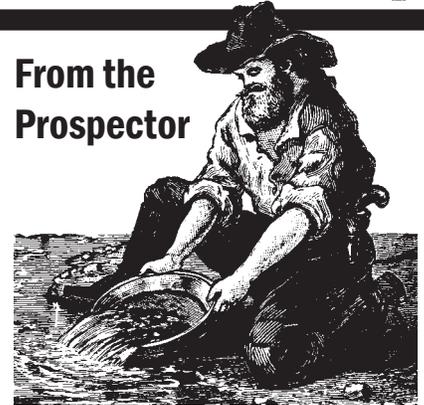
between the two.

The Jesuits were founded as an order of the Roman Catholic Church in 1534. They thought that education was one of the most important goals in life and built many schools. They became excellent teachers and had little trouble "roughing it" in the wilderness of America because they lived modest lives, without a lot of material goods. The Jesuits were known for dressing in simple, ankle length dark robes. This is where their nickname, the black robes, comes from.

The Jesuits came to Northern Idaho in a rather indirect way. Around 1820, a group of Iroquois Indians who were working for the

*Continued on next page*

### From the Prospector



#### Howdy Prospectors!

I was up in Northern Idaho recently, visiting some of my miner friends, when I noticed an interesting building. It looked like an old church built in a forest clearing. My mule and I got in close to investigate and realized that we were at the site of one of the oldest buildings in Idaho, the Cataldo Mission.

Well, I thought, this is just perfect for the next issue of the Prospector Club Newsletter. When we got back in town, the mule and I hit the books and dug into the history of the site. Things turned out to be more interesting than we originally imagined. The story of the mission, isn't just the story of a building, it's the story of two very different cultures meeting and living together. Enjoy this month's issue!

*Lucky Noah*

## The Black Robes Continued

Hudson's Bay Fur Company visited western Montana. Several of the Iroquois stayed after they had finished their work and began living among the Salish Indians. As the men settled in, they started to share stories with each other about their ancestors and history. The Iroquois Nation has roots in the eastern part of America and so some of the Iroquois already had met the "black robes." The Salish and the neighboring Nez Perce, fascinated by the stories, started planning to have some of the "black robes" come and live among them.

It took about ten years, but in 1841, Father Pierre Jean DeSmet and several other Jesuits arrived in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana. They built a small settlement called St. Mary's and

encouraged the Salish people to settle nearby and take up farming. Soon the other Indian tribes in the area, including the Coeur D'Alene, heard of the arrival of the "black robes" and came to see for themselves what all the excitement was about.

In 1842 Jesuit missionary Father Nicholas Point entered what is now Idaho and began living among the Coeur D'Alene and in 1843, the first Jesuit settlement in Idaho was built. The humble mission stood on the point where the St. Joe River and Lake Coeur D'Alene meet. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a

poor location. During the spring thaw the mission often flooded and swarms of mosquitoes were a common nuisance. Still, Father Point went about his work diligently. He encouraged the Indians to take up farming and taught them the rituals and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. His hard work paid off. Within a couple of years, over one hundred Coeur D'Alene became Christians. This does not

safe from spring flooding, but it turned out to be a crossroads of sorts for many travelers who stopped to rest, eat and share stories with the community. The Mission moved once again in 1877 to its current location on the south end of Lake Coeur D'Alene, but the Cataldo Mission is still standing. Although neither the tribe nor the Jesuits live there today, the building has been preserved and is open

daily for visitors.

Life at the mission was an interesting mix of cultures. The Coeur D'Alene people lived by hunting and gathering their food from the wild. The tribe had no written language, but instead used a system of oral storytelling to pass information from generation to generation. And,



*The first Jesuit mission in Idaho*

mean that they necessarily gave up their religious beliefs or way of life, although that may have happened in some cases. More likely, the Coeur D'Alene adopted only some of Jesuit's beliefs, mixing them with their own cultural traditions.

Eventually, the decision was made to relocate the mission and the rest of the community to higher ground along the Coeur D'Alene River just west of the present day town of Cataldo. This new location turned out to be much better than expected. Not only was the mission

of course, the Coeur D'Alene people had their own religious beliefs that included the plants, animals, and land around them. The Jesuits, on the other hand, believed that farming skills were essential to civilization. Their schools emphasized the art of reading and writing. And the Christian religion they practiced came from much different traditional beliefs developed across the ocean in Europe. The story of the Jesuit missions in Idaho isn't just about historic buildings, it is a tale of two different groups of people living together in the harsh wilderness of early Idaho. ❖

*By Glenn Newkirk*





## Next Month's Activities

**N**ow it's your turn Prospectors. We've told you all we know about the Jesuit missions, but there is a lot more out there to learn. Pick from one of the activities below or make up your own project and send it in to our Prospector Headquarters. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's magazine. Remember to include your name, where you're from, and the name of your Prospector chapter. We can't wait to see what you send in!

**Home Made:** Building a mission was tough work back in the 1800's. There were no Home Depots and Wal-Mart's around to buy building supplies and furnishings. Some of the Jesuits, like Father Anthony Ravalli, made ingenious decorations out of everyday objects. Could you do the same? Pretend that you have to decorate a house, but you can't go to the store to buy anything new. Could you make a lamp out of a can? Wall decorations out of newspaper and magazines? Draw us a picture showing how you recycled everyday objects and turned them into homemade furnishings.

**Report from the Field:** Have any of you Prospectors ever visited the



*Father DeSmet*

Cataldo Mission in Northern Idaho? What was it like? What did you see? Unfortunately, not everybody has had the chance to visit this historic gem. Give us a quick report of your visit to Cataldo and tell us what you learned.

**Culture Clash:** The Jesuits and the Cour D'Alene tribe had two very different ways of life. When the two cultures first met, they probably had a difficult time relating to each other. But, over time, the two groups began to understand the differences and similarities between them. How would you react in a similar situation? Pretend you are a future space traveler who meets some human-like aliens on another planet. Although this group looks like you they have a very different culture. Write a short story telling us some of the difficulties you had relating to this new way of life. Does the new culture eat the same food you do? Live in similar homes? What about their clothes? We can't wait to see what you come up with!

Send in your work by January 17<sup>th</sup> to:

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 Boise, ID 83702

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