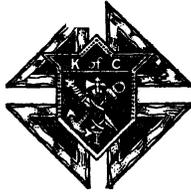


JULY 5th, 1840

JULY 4th, 1940



Knights of Columbus of Wyoming Rock Springs, Wyoming

Father Pierre Jean DeSmet

Pierre Jean De Smet was born in Belgium on January 30, 1801. He came to America in boyhood, joined the Jesuit Society at an early age, and early in life took up missionary work among the Indians of what is now Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska. At the age of thirty his health became impaired and he returned to his native land.

Immediately upon his return to this country he was appointed as a missionary to the Flathead Indians. Leaving St. Louis with the American Fur Company on April 5th, 1840, he reached Green River on June 30th and on the following Sunday (July 5th, 1840) Father De Smet, in the presence of about two thousand Indians, trappers and traders, celebrated the first Mass in what is now the State of Wyoming. The trappers erected an improvised altar of native rocks, decorated it with the wild flowers of the prairie, and the spot, part of which is now the cemetery of Daniel, Wyoming, is often referred to as "The Prairie of the Mass."

Up to 1846 his life was what might be called a private one, though crowded with stirring dangers from man and beast, mountain and, flood, and marked by the successful establishment of numerous stations over the Rocky Mountain regions in what is now Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, the Dakotas, Washington and Oregon, until it was said that "he knew every foot of the country."

His writings had made him famous in both hemispheres, and his seemingly instantaneous ascendancy over every tribe of Indians with which he came into contact caused the United States Government to look to him for help in its difficulties with the red men, and from 1846 to 1870 we find him vested with a public character, acting as a pacificator for the Government and intermediary for the Indians, both of whom acknowledged him as "the sincerest friend." During this period he brought about sixteen lasting treaties with various tribes, many of them difficult to argue with cruel savages. General Stanley says: "Father De Smet alone of the entire white race can penetrate the cruel savages and return safe and sound." On behalf of the Indians he crossed the ocean nineteen times, pleading their cause before popes, kings and presidents, and, by actual calculation, travelled 180,000 miles on his errands of charity. He died at St. Louis, Missouri, on May 23, 1873.

In 1925, the ground upon which Father De Smet said his first Mass on July 5th, 1840, was deeded to the diocese of Cheyenne. During the early part of that year, the Wyoming KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS erected thereon a granite altar-shaped monument which was dedicated on Sunday, July 5th of that year by the Rt. Rev. P.A. McGovern, Bishop of Cheyenne. In spite of constant rain and bad roads, a crowd of more than 400 persons assembled and at 9:00 A.M., his Grace, assisted by the Rev. A. Schiffrer celebrated open-air Mass on the newly-erected, monument. Rev. Michael Kenney, S. J., of New Orleans, La., delivered the dedicatory sermon.

The grounds and monument were placed in charge of Kemmerer Council No. 2337 and Rock Springs Council No. 2441 and they arranged it so that Mass was said there on the first Sunday in July each year. During the past few months, a baldachino was built around and over the monument to give it protection against winds.

Coincidentally, this year, Wyoming celebrates the 50th anniversary of its statehood, at a time when its Catholics have arranged for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the celebration of the first Holy Sacrifice of the Mass within its confines. All roads will again lead to the De Smet Monument on July 4th, this year, when

the Rt. Rev. Bishop McGovern will celebrate a pontifical High Mass, assisted by his Wyoming priests. His Grace, Bishop D.G. Hunt, of Salt Lake City, will be the speaker. The Knights of Columbus are making all preparations to take care of the expected large attendance.