

## **DeSmet Monument**

On Sunday, July 5, 1925, eighty-five years to the day that the first Mass was held in Wyoming, the unveiling and dedication of a monument, commemorating that ceremony and perpetuating the memory of the men who conducted the service, was held near Daniel, Wyoming.

The historical significance of that day's event was signified by the presence of the State Historian, Mrs. Cyrus Beard, who made the trip into Green River valley from Cheyenne for the express purpose of attending the dedication.

The monument stands on a promontory commanding an advantageous view near the mouth of Horse Creek where the creek empties into the Green River. It stands a replica of an altar with the cross facing the wide expanse of territory to the north and west and bearing the inscription, "Holy Mass was offered here for the first time in Wyoming by Father DeSmet, July 5, 1840." Only a few feet from the base of the monument is erected a flag-pole and from its top flows the American Flag. Their erection will henceforth serve as a marker for the original "Oregon Trail" and will remind passersby of the "Prairie of the Mass" as this spot has been known.

On July 5, 1840, Father DeSmet solemnized the Sacrifice of the Mass at an altar erected on an eminence overlooking this junction of the Horse Creek and the Green River. A large number of Indians, trappers and fur traders were gathered together for the occasion. The traders came from as far east as the Missouri River and the trappers from the Canadian lands. The Indians were from the many tribes which roamed the lands adjacent to the Rocky Mountains and included a delegation of the Flatheads who had traveled over 800 miles to escort Father DeSmet to their tribal home in Northern Oregon. The most reliable authority places the number in attendance at this rendezvous at about 2000.

Eighty-five years later on a Sunday morning, the Rt. Rev. P.A. McGovern, Bishop of Cheyenne, celebrated the Mass, assisted by Rev. Anton Schiffrer of the North Side Roman Catholic Church of Rock Springs. Following the Mass, the dedicatory address was given by Rev. Michael Kenny, S. J. Father Kenny, who has made an intensive study of the life of DeSmet, is for New Orleans, La., and was a founder and for many years, editor, of "America."

Pierre Jean DeSmet was born in Belgium in 1801. He came to America in 1821, at the instigation of a Catholic priest, Father Nerinck, who had spent several years as a missionary in Kentucky and who at this time returned to Belgium calling for recruits to go into Kentucky or into the far west. DeSmet, who volunteered, chose the work among the Indians. He came from a wealthy Belgium family and was the twelfth of sixteen children. He was a student and scholarly in general as well as ecclesiastical erudition [sic].

He first came to White Marsh, Md., but soon began his overland trip to the west. When he reached St. Louis, then but a village, he began his life's work. During his life he traveled farther by foot, canoe, or snowshoe, than any other person in history. General Chittenden, U.S.A., who wrote, "Life and Letters of Father DeSmet," estimated that he traveled by land and sea, in the interest of the Indians, 260,000 miles.

He laid the foundation and developed the entire Jesuit Province of the west. He soon became a public character throughout the United States for he was directly the means of peopling, the vast areas west of the Missouri with agricultural settlers, and at the instance of the United States government, on five different occasions, he acted as pacificator of revolting Indian tribes and always with success.

Among the Indians he became known as the "Great Black Robe" and his priestly robes soon became his passport from tribe to tribe, irrespective of the degree of their paganism or the extent of their hostility.

Father DeSmet died in 1873 and was buried at Florissant, St. Louis, where half a century before he had laid the foundation of the Jesuit province and the missions of the west.