

ST. STEPHEN'S MISSION

Fremons County December, 31, 1890.

ST. STEPHEN'S NO.

Copy of letter of Rev. P. M. Ponziglione, S. J., to  
Rev. J. P. Frieden, S. J., Provincial of the Wisconsin  
Province.

Very Rev. J. P. Frieden,

Father Provincial,

In answer to your circular of the 6th instant I will state all that can be said concerning the St. Stephen's Mission.

To our glorious Pioneer of Wyoming, Father Peter Defnet, of happy memory, the honor is due of having been the first who brought the good tidings of the gospel of peace to the Arapahoe Indians, whom he met on one of his Missionary excursions through these Rocky Mountains in 1851. Circumstances did not allow him to stop with them but for a few days, and during that time he baptized over 300 children of that nation. Being bound to leave, he promised these Indians that he would return to visit them, but this he could never do on account that his services were needed by the Superiors in duties of greater importance. At last, in 1884, through the earnest request of Rt. Rev. James O'Connor, Bishop of Omaha, the Provincial of the German Province of New York was induced to receive this mission, and he sent Father John Jutz to establish it.

Father Jutz came here with one Coadjutor Brother, and having picked out a nice spot of land not far from the confluence of the two main rivers, he built a small frame house, lived in it for a few months, but being continually annoyed by the threats of some wicked Indians, in November of 1885, he left his house in the care of an Indians chief and returned to his Province.

The Provincial of the German Province, wishing to preserve that Mission, but having no one whom he might at that time send to retake possession of it, requested the Provincial of the Province of Missouri, Father Rudolph Meyer, to send here some one, promising that after two months he would re-assume the care of that mission. To comply with his wishes, Father Meyer dispatched in a great hurry two from Kansas, Father Paul E. Ponziglione and Brother John J. Milkullin. Both reached this place on the 26th of June, 1886.

Father Paul M. Ponziglione had considerable difficulty in getting back the property Father Jutz had left in the hands of the Indian Chief. Having secured his title on the ground, the Father began to improve the house. The Provincial of the Western Province, not being able to send anyone to that mission, as he had promised to do, Father P. M. Ponziglione, after two months, began the building of a large brick building to be used as a Convent for the education of Indian girls. In the month of

September, Father F. X. Kuppens came here from St. Louis, Mo., to replace Father Paul M. Ponziglione, who returned to Kansas.

The locality the Father had chosen for the Convent having proved to be undermined by water, Father Kuppens, took down the whole building, which was almost finished, and in 1888 rebuilt it on better ground. On the first of January 1889 that great structure being perfectly completed, a few Sisters of Charity opened in it an Indian Boarding School for the children of that nation.

The Indians favored the school, and the number of Arapahoe children there were at the school from the first of January to the 30th of June was 90. After two months of vacation a new term was to begin on the first of September, but unexpected difficulty did not allow the school to be opened. In February 1890 Father Kuppens was recalled to St. Louis, and Father Ignatius Panken, who had come out about the middle of January, replaced him as Superior. In March, Father Paul M. Ponziglione returned to that Mission to be an assistant to Father Panken. On the 18th of March at last the school was opened, and the number of Arapahoe Boarders received from that day to the end of June amounted to 30. During the two months of the following vacation, the Sisters of Charity left us. We were in hopes of getting some other Sisters before the beginning of September to teach our children and take care of the convent, but were disappointed, and were bound to hire secular ladies to take care of the school and house.

The Indians were displeasèd when they saw that we had no Sisters, but by degrees became reconciled with the change and brought us their children. From the first of Last September to this 31st day of December, the number of our Indian Boarders has amounted to 92. The school has proceeded tolerably well, and the behavior of the pupils has been satisfactory.

Rev. dear Father, this is the plain simple story of St. Stephen's Mission from its origin to the present day.

Paul M. Ponziglione, S. J.