



## De Smet's Illustrator: Father Nicolas Point

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Article Summary: McDermott identifies the amateur artist whose lithographs illustrate De Smet's travel letters. He also signals the existence of unpublished Point sketches showing details of De Smet's trip west.

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Photographs / Images: Chimney Rock; church and rectory, Westport; Kanza Village; Mission Ste Marie Chez Les Tetes-Plates; passage d'un ravin bourbeux; St. Mary's Mission; Soda Springs; the Lodge Pole; great buffalo hunt

## DE SMET'S ILLUSTRATOR: FATHER NICOLAS POINT\*

BY JOHN FRANCIS McDERMOTT

THE quaint lithographs which illustrate the travel letters of Father De Smet add considerable charm to those famous narratives of the 1840's, but who knows the artist of the original sketches? It is no fault of the public that Father Nicolas Point, S.J., has remained uncelebrated in the annals of western art, for he was not a professional artist and the reproductions on stone do not carry his name. Yet this unpretentious amateur made a very extensive record of scenes on the plains and in the Rockies, thirty-six of his sketches being used to illustrate two books by his Superior and hundreds more remaining in manuscript.

In 1843 Pierre Jean De Smet's *Letters and Sketches with a Narrative of a Year's Residence among the Indian Tribes*

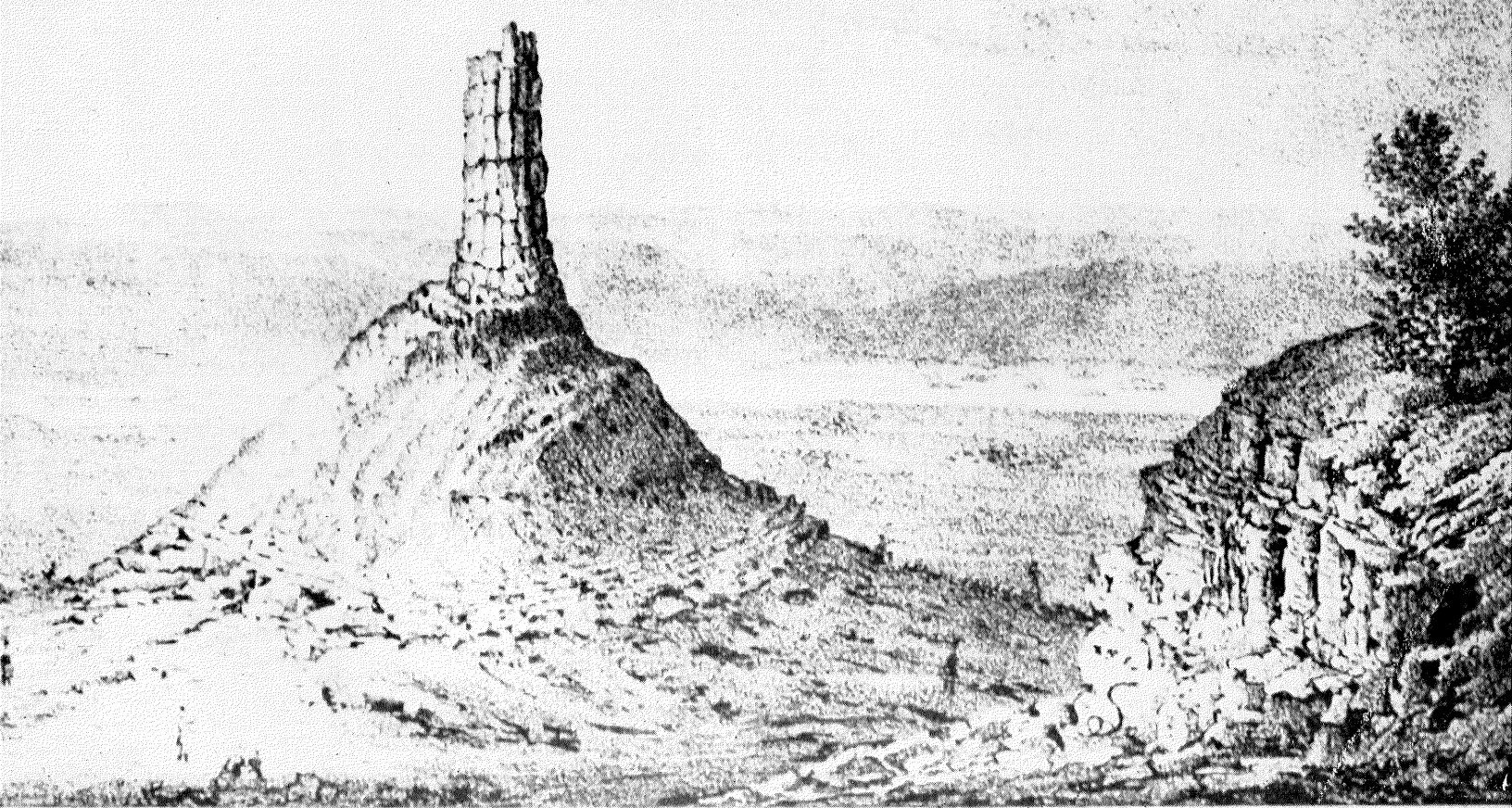
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\* The best account of the artist is that by Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J.: "Nicolas Point, Jesuit Missionary in Montana of the Forties," *Chapters in Frontier History* (Milwaukee, 1934), 136-157. For permission to reproduce the sketch of Westport I wish to thank Loyola University, Chicago. I am grateful to Clarence E. Miller, Librarian of the Mercantile Library of St. Louis for the generous use of its copies of the De Smet publications referred to in this article. The picture of St. Mary's Mission was given me by Joseph P. Donnelly, S.J., of St. Louis University. Father Donnelly is now at work on a translation of Point's reminiscences to be published, with many of the original sketches, by the St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation in 1953.

of the *Rocky Mountains* was published in Philadelphia with twelve black and white lithographic plates done by P. S. Duval. A preface by the publisher (M. Fithian, 61 N. Second Street) identified the elaborately symbolical frontispiece (inscribed "J<sup>s</sup> Queen Del.") as "from the pencil of one of the Indian Missionaries." No mention, however, was made of Point's name, though in the text there is reference to his skill as a draughtsman. Eleven of the twelve pictures curiously enough are credited to "J<sup>s</sup> Queen del." and "Geo. Lehman, del." Since the original drawings are identifiable as Point's work, these signatures can only mean that Queen and Lehman re-drew the sketches for the lithographer.

The first text illustration, entitled "Worship in the Desert," represents an open-air mass celebrated by De Smet on 5 July 1840 at the rendezvous on Green River. Since Point did not go out to the mountains until a year later, he must have drawn this picture from De Smet's account of the occasion. The other plates in this volume, however, must have originated from sketches in Point's portfolio. They can certainly be paralleled by passages from De Smet's letters beginning in May, 1841, when Point left Westport to accompany his Superior to the mountains. We see first on this journey a "Kanza Village" and an "Interior of a Kanza Lodge"—the latter view reminds us of Seymour's similar sketch done twenty-two years earlier, except that Point's is very much a domestic scene.

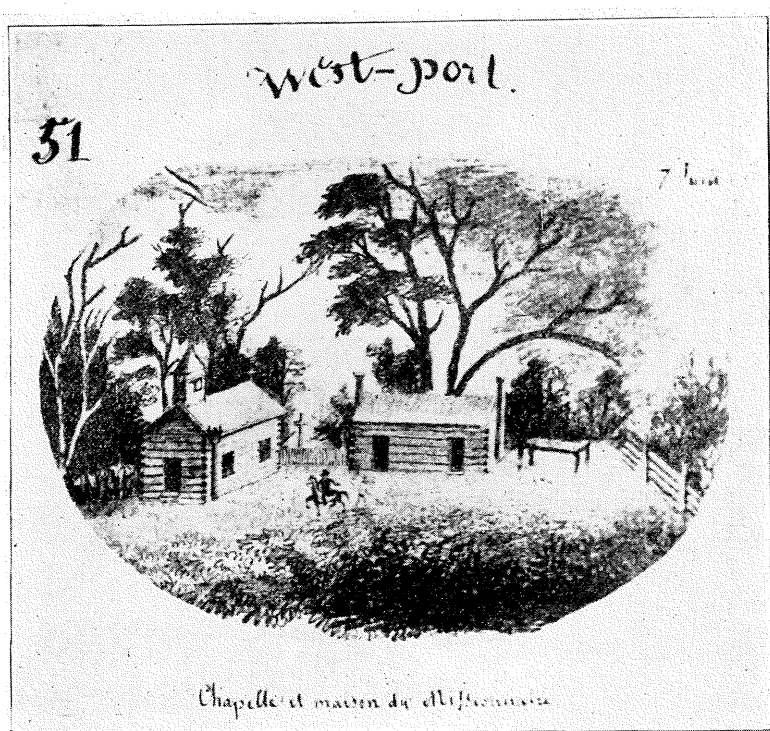
Next, we are given the famous "Chimney Rock," a "View of the Rocky Mountains," the "Devil's Gate," and "Soda Springs"—land marks destined to become very familiar during the 1840's. These views must have been done in 1841, since Point remained in the mountains until 1847 and had no further opportunity of sketching them. They may possibly claim, therefore, to be the first recorded views of these famous locations on the Overland Trail. "Fording the [North Fork of the] River Platte" illustrates some of the difficulty of travel in those days. A group of "Sheyenne Warriors" and a representation of the "Indian [Flathead] Mode of Travelling" give variety to the illustrations. The last picture (drawn on stone by the lithographer, rather than re-sketched



Chimney Rock

P. S. DUPAT LITH. PARIS

Chimney Rock (From De Smet's *Letters and Sketches*, 1843,)



The Church and Rectory of Saint Francis Regis at Pennsylvania Avenue and Eleventh Street, Kansas City. Sketched by its pastor, Father Nicolas Point, S.J., in his *Souvenirs des Montagnes Rocheuses*, Archives of Saint Mary's College, Montreal. (Courtesy Loyola University Press.)



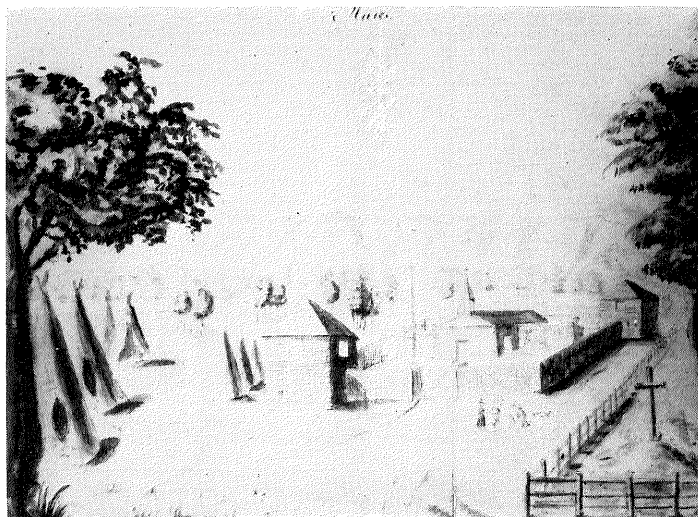
From DeSmet's Letters and Sketches, (1843).

From DeSmet's Letters and Sketches, (1843).

## KANZA VILLAGE

From DeSmet's *Letters and Sketches*, (1843).





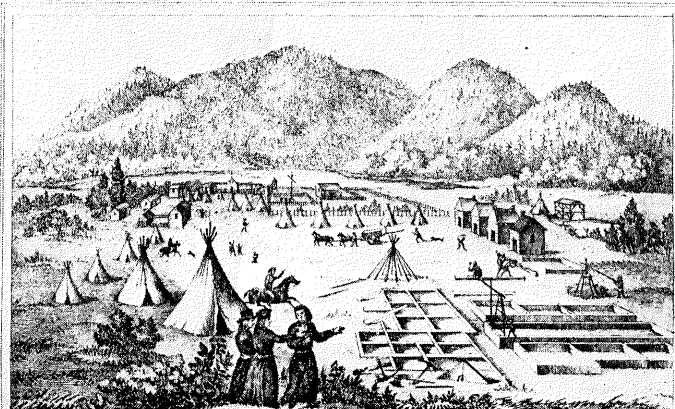
Below: From De Smet's *Missions de l'Oregon* (1848).

Below: From De Smet's *Voyage aux Montagnes Rocheuses* (1844).

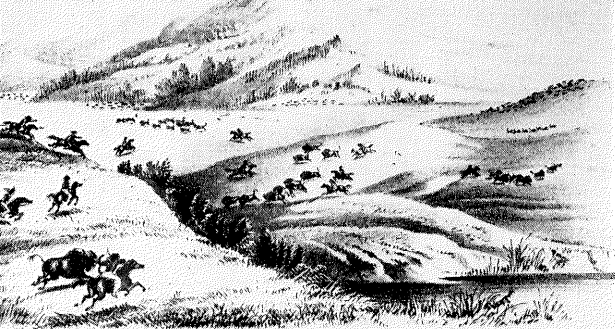


Passage d'un ravin bourbeux.

Above: St. Mary's Mission (Courtesy Joseph P. Donnelly, S.J.).



MISSION ST. MARIE CHEZ LES TETON PLAINS



PALO HUNT. — VIEW OF THE MUSKIE-SHELL MOUNTAINS. (See Letter 24. N° 6)

Above: From De Smet's *Oregon Mis-*  
*sions* (1847).

Below: From De  
Smet's *Oregon Mis-*  
*sions* (1847).



SODA SPRINGS

Above: From De Smet's *Letters and*  
*Sketches* (1843).



THE LODGE POLE (Indian Name)

Great Chief of the Flat-heads.

VIOTTE (in Baptism.)

Letter 28



by Queen or Lehman) represents an "Apparition" of the Virgin to an Indian boy.

A French edition of De Smet's book (*Voyage aux Montagnes Rocheuses et un annee de sejour chez les tribus indiennes du vaste territoire de l'Oregon . . .*) published at Malines in the spring of 1844 adds to the complexity of tracing Point's contribution to the pictorial reporting of the Far West. Some of the lithos are credited to the lithography of Vandebossche at Alost, but on more than half the name of the lithographer is omitted; however, they all appear to be from the same hand. Point's name appears on none of the illustrations, nor does the name of any other delineator. The French preface merely announced that De Smet in authorizing this edition had placed in the hands of the publisher a map and "une vingtaine de dessins faits sur les lieux memes."

The frontispiece to this French edition is a bust portrait of De Smet. The vignette on the title page purports to be a view of a mountain mission, but looks more like an European's concept than one of Point's sketches "on the spot." The first of the illustrations is a "Vue de St. Louis du Missouri." This was *not* the work of Point: it is J. C. Wild's "View of St. Louis from the Illinois Shore" published in his *Valley of the Mississippi Illustrated* (St. Louis, 1841-42). The eleven scenes (not counting the frontispiece) of the American edition are reproduced here. In addition there are seven pictures that must have been drawn on stone from Point originals: "Kants armes en guerre"; "Sacrifice d'une jeune Scieuse chez les Pawnees" (this one could *not* have been done on the spot, for the incident took place in 1837, three years before Point had gone as far as Westport, Missouri); "Buttes qui ressemblent a des Chateaux"; "Passage d'un ravin bourbeuse" (for this illustration there is an original sketch by Point in the Jesuit Provincial House at St. Louis); "Corinthienne, Josephine, Dominicale" (three mountain flowers); "Jeune Americain poursuivi par un buffle"; and "Ste. Marie aux Tetes-plates." The plates in this French edition, all in color, are the same size as those in the American; they vary from three to three and one-quarter inches

by five and three-eighths to five and seven-eighths. An Italian edition, published at Palermo in 1847, was illustrated with eleven black and white lithos copied from the Philadelphia edition.

The indefatigable De Smet in 1847 published at New York his *Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845-46*. In the publisher's preface we find for the first time credit assigned to Father Point for his pictures: "The lithographic sketches that accompany this volume, are copied from the original drawings of the Reverend Father Point, S.J., drawings of such exquisite perfection, that they would do honor to any master: and the more admirable, from the circumstance of their having been executed with the pen, in the midst of the privations and difficulties of his remote and arduous missions." Those of us who have seen original drawings by Point cannot quite agree with the editor's high praise, but after all a publisher must be allowed to be enthusiastic over the work issued by his press. It is, however, true that the original work of Point has a naive charm as well as considerable historical value in its early recording of the overland trail and the mountain country.

The lithos in this volume are done in sepia effect with no credit on the plate either to artist or lithographer; they measure two and three-quarters to three inches by five to five and one-quarter. The frontispiece is a costume portrait of "The Lodge Pole," a Flathead chief who had been baptized "Victor." The title page vignette, "Mary Quille in the Battle Against the Crows" (possibly the cover design of a paper bound issue?) shows an Indian girl on horseback, battle axe in hand—a "wild west" effect, indeed. The illustrations proper are almost all either buffalo-hunt pictures or sketches of religious establishments:

1. Announcement of the Discovery of Buffalos
2. The Chief Reports to his Camp, that Buffalos are in Sight
3. The Chief at the Head of his Hunters
4. The Hunters at the Buffalo Feast
5. Mission of St. Ignatius at Kalispel Bay, among the Pend d'Oreilles
6. View of the New Mission Establishment in 1846, Among the Pointed-Hearts

7. Insula or Red Feather. Michel (Flat-head Chief)
8. St. Mary's Among the Flat-heads [not the same as the illustration of this title in the earlier work of De Smet]
9. Interior of St. Mary's Church, Flat-head Mission, *Communion at Easter*
10. Buffalo Discovered
11. A Prayer for Success in Hunting
12. Great Buffalo Hunt—View of Muscle-Shell Mountains

Early in the next year appeared an edition in French of this book (*Missions de l'Oregon et Voyages aux Montagnes Rocheuses . . . en 1845-46*). Van der Schelden of Ghent was printer and P. Van de Steen was the lithographer. The credit to Point was republished. The black and white lithos are approximately three by five inches. As in the several editions of the previous De Smet work the illustrations of the American and French versions do not entirely correspond. All those pictures of the New York edition except numbers 7 and 9 above were reproduced in the French volume. However, in addition we find three not previously published: "Mission St. Paul a Wallamet," "La Croix de la Paix (15 sep. 1845)," and "Interior de l'Eglise du Sacre Coeur chez les Coeurs-d'Alenes." A Dutch edition of this work published at Ghent in 1849 carries the same lithos as the French edition of 1848.

The "partnership" of De Smet and Point as author and illustrator ceases with this second publication, for the latter in 1847 was transferred from the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus to the Jesuit Mission of Canada. After this no drawings by Point were published until Garraghan, the Jesuit historian, used Point's sketch of the church at Westport (1840) as an illustration for his own *Catholic Beginnings in Kansas City, Missouri* (1920). Nevertheless, a great mass of Point sketches exist and wait for publication. The Jesuit Provincial House in St. Louis has a sketchbook containing more than one hundred scenes recorded on the trip to the mountains in 1841 and at the Flathead and Cour-d'Alenes Missions where Point served. Some of these are originals of illustrations in the two De Smet books. A number of them record interesting details of the trip west, many

others picture hunting scenes, still others are concerned with the conversion of Indians. In Canada exist manuscript volumes of Point's memoirs embellished with many drawings. His fingers must always have been itching for the pencil.

As Garraghan made clear, Point "lived with the Indians in their native habitats, shared the discomforts and distress that were their daily bread, followed them in their periodical hunts . . . [he had] an artist's gift for portrayal with pen and ink. The illustrations with which he embellished his [unpublished] literary work range from sketches of Rocky Mountain fauna, flora, and Indian celebrities to portraits of American Fur Company officers and traders and drawings of the Upper Missouri trading posts." Some day this valuable addition to the pictorial history of the West must be published.