

Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 14: CHINOOK AND YAKAMA GRAMMARS PUBLISHED IN MONTREAL

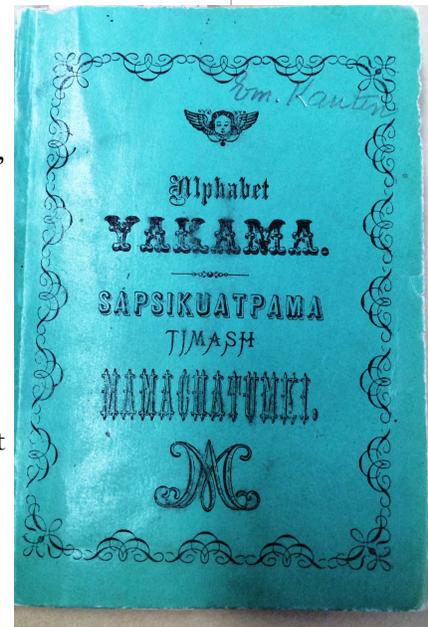
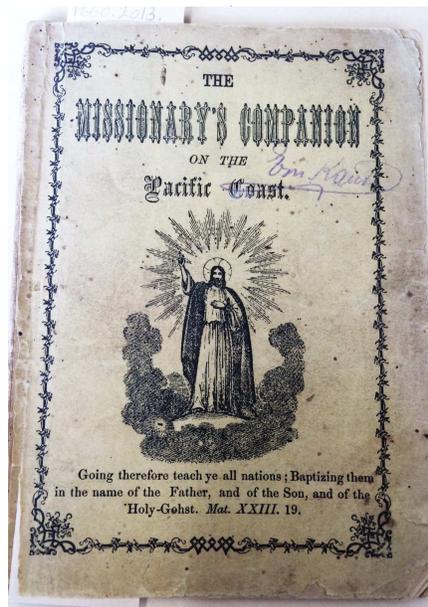
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The early history of the Archdiocese of Seattle is written not in English, nor in Latin, but in French. In a very real way, the foundations for the Church in the Northwest, from Alaska to Portland, were laid by a man who never set foot in the region: Ignace Bourget, the second Bishop of Montreal.

Bishop Bourget exerted an enormous influence on the Church—and everything else—in French Canada. Born in Lévis, Quebec, in 1799, he was ordained at 23 and was appointed coadjutor Bishop of Montreal at the early age of 37. He became Bishop in his own right in 1840, reigning until 1876, and exerting an extraordinary influence on both sacred and secular matters throughout Quebec. In his politics, Bourget was an ultramontanist, a staunch defender of the rights and authority of the Pope. This tendency got him into hot water with the civil authorities and ultimately with Rome as well. “Believe me,” he wrote to Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet, “the bishop’s thorns here are longer and sharper than those in Oregon.”

In his spirituality, Bourget was an apostle. Under his leadership, the Diocese of Montreal became an evangelizing diocese, providing priests and bishops for the West, including F. N. Blanchet of Portland and our own A. M. A. Blanchet, as well as Modeste Demers of Vancouver. It was Bourget who brought to the Americas missionary communities from France, like the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He also established new religious communities—he is honored as a co-founder of both the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary and the Sisters of Providence, which began with a mission of service among the poor of Montreal, but which, within a few years, became missionary communities, sending sisters all over the west.

For decades, the bishops, priests, and women religious in the diocese were almost exclusively French Canadian, a direct result of Bourget’s missionary zeal. The Church in the Pacific Northwest depended heavily on French Canada not only for personnel, but for financial and spiritual support as well. “Your letter of April last... gave me great joy,” wrote Bishop Blanchet to Bourget in February, 1850. “You cannot imagine how such words of consolation, of wisdom & news—especially ecclesiastical news—gladden us, isolated as we are



The Missionary's Companion on the Pacific Coast and Alphabet Yakama, published in Montreal in 1871 and 1872. Courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

from cultivated people for months at a time. We always wait impatiently for the Montreal Express.” Blanchet’s Vicar-General, Father Brouillet, made his account book for the early missions do double-duty as a scrapbook—careful pages of accounting alternate with clippings from the Montreal papers relating the words and deeds of Bourget and Pope Pius IX!

This close connection with French Canada is especially in evidence in two rare booklets treasured in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle. *The Missionary's Companion on the Pacific Coast*, a grammar and prayer-book in the Chinook Jargon originally written by Modeste Demers in 1838 and 1839, was published in Montreal in 1871. The following year, the *Alphabet Yakama* was published by the Sisters of Providence in Montreal. Secular grammars naturally focused on the language of trade and work and were not of much use to the missionary priests and sisters. These booklets are intended to allow the missionaries to share the Catholic faith with native peoples as quickly as possible. They include translations of prayers—the Creed, the Our Father, and the Hail Mary—of rites, especially the rite of Baptism—as well as hymns sung in new languages to familiar tunes like “Adeste fideles.” There are also many texts set to long-forgotten French tunes like “Loin de Jésus que j’aime” which must have been dear to the hearts of the French Canadian missionaries.

These fascinating little booklets—small and thin enough to fit easily in a missionary’s breast pocket—give us a vivid glimpse of the work of the early missionaries. They also show us that the headquarters of missionary work in the Pacific Northwest was not Rome, but Montreal.

—Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy

Want to know more? Read Selected Letters of A. M. A. Blanchet, Bishop of Walla Walla and Nesqually, available in the Cathedral Bookstore. And be sure to get your copy of *Journey of Faith, the illustrated history of the Archdiocese of Seattle!*