OREGON
Historical Quarterly

SPRING 1996

SPECIAL ISSUE:
Catholic Missionizing in the West

COVER: Fr. Pierre-Jean De Smet made his first foray into Indian territory of the Rocky Mountain West in 1840, then led the first Jesuit missionary party to the region, establishing St. Mary's mission, in 1841. Though St. Mary's closed in 1850, De Smet's continuing popularity among Native groups prompted the U.S. government to exploit the priest's peacemaking offices over the next several decades. Brig. Gen. William Harney, given command of the Oregon Department in 1858, became embroiled in the Yakima Indian War of 1858–59. The general asked Father De Smet to gather some Native leaders for peace talks, and the group arrived at Fort Vancouver in the spring of 1859. Harney was apparently satisfied with the outcome, because he sent De Smet and the Indians on a tour of some Willamette Valley towns—at government expense. A Portland settler invited the party to his home for dinner, and on that occasion this picture was taken. Seated (left to right) are Victor Happy Man, of the Kalispels; Alexander Man without a Horse, Pend Oreilles; Adolph Red Feather, Salish; and Andrew Seltis, Coeur d'Alenes. Standing are Denis Thunders Robe, Colvilles; Bonaventure, Coeur d'Alenes; De Smet; and Francis, an Iroquois associated with the Salish. (OHS neg. OrHi 624)

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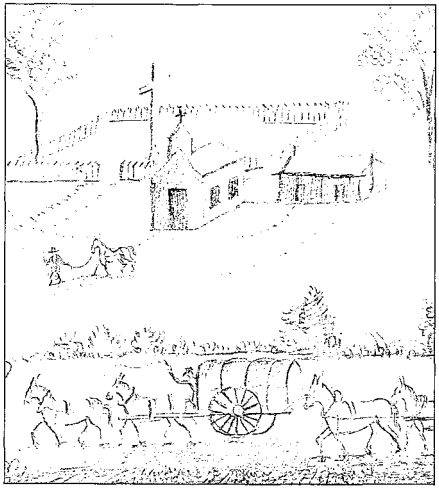
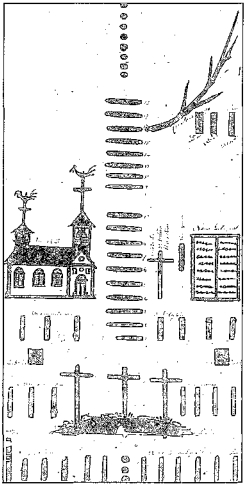


The Jesuit party embarks from Westport.

Fr. Nicolas Point's vision of "false idols."

Point the artist: Fascination with everyday life.



Portion of the 1840 OHS Catholic ladder.

Father Nicolas Point: Missionary and Artist

By Thomas M. Rochford

This painting, captioned "A Good Family of Gros Ventres," includes an apparent self-portrait of Jesuit missionary-artist Fr. Nicolas Point (on the right). It is likely that the image represents a story recounted by the priest about the baptism of the young son of a Gros Ventre chief. Point described how the chief borrowed the priest's crucifix, made a long invocation over it, and then put it into his child's hands. The mother directed her son to press the cross to his heart, and, Point wrote, "It seemed at this moment he experienced, in a sensible way, the effect of the sacrament." (Courtesy Archives des Jésuites, St-Jérôme, Québec)

THOMAS M. ROCHFORD *directs the communication office in the Jesuit order's national headquarters in Washington, D.C.*

BEGINNING WITH the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804–06, a steady stream of large government-sponsored exploratory parties and smaller private expeditions charted and described the geography, peoples, plants, and animals of the trans-Mississippi West. During the nineteenth century the "field artist"

would become an integral part of these well-organized expeditionary teams: Samuel Seymour was the first such artist with a congressional appointment when he accompanied Maj. Stephen H. Long's Yellowstone expedition in 1819; and although Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied otherwise traveled lightly when he visited the Indian people of the upper Missouri in 1833, he did employ the Swiss artist Karl Bodmer.[1]

The art of Nicolas Point provides a rare look into the Catholic missionary experience in the West.

Fr. Nicolas Point served as field artist for the Jesuit missionary expedition to the Native peoples of the Columbia Plateau in 1841. During the six years (1841–47) he spent with the Salish at St. Mary's mission, the Coeur d'Alenes at Sacred Heart mission, and the Blackfeet at Fort Lewis, Point executed thousands of drawings in pen-and-ink or pencil, along with some watercolors. Approximately six hundred drawings are known and identified; no one knows how many more might have "disappeared" as gifts to Indians or to friends in St. Louis or Europe.

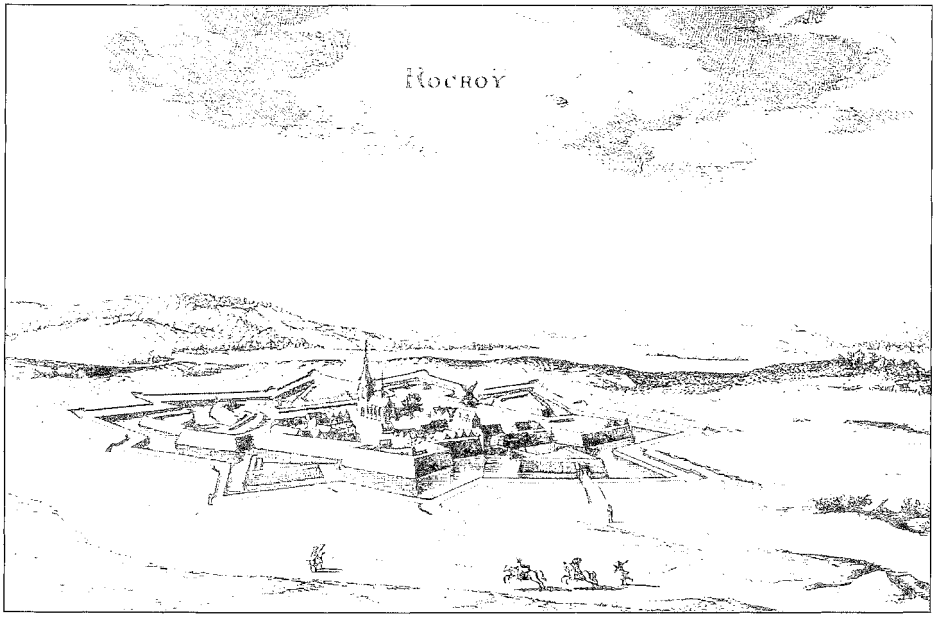
Point had no formal art training, and his early sketches seem at first glance to be as limited artistically as the Jesuit missionary enterprise was limited financially; yet he proved to have more talent than anyone could have expected. Point lived these six years in a part of North America where traditional Indian life remained strong (and was as yet undocumented by any other artist), and he stayed long enough to capture in his art the daily life of his Native parishioners.

Nicolas Point was born in 1799 in the small town of Rocroi, which was located within the battlements of an important French fortress not far across the border from Waterloo, Belgium. In 1643 Rocroi became famous for its role in the first victory of the emerging French nation over the Spanish empire of Charles V. Within the walls of the star-shaped fortress a large garrison lived in quarters that opened directly onto the streets of the town. The church faced a small central plaza where all the streets came together like spokes in a wheel. Even though the town was laid out with geometric neatness, the resident soldiers, as well

as the bars and brothels serving them, made Rocroi a challenging environment for an orderly home life—especially for a widow, such as Madame Point, with three young children.

Despite the town's atmosphere and the government's attempt to suppress the Catholic church after the French Revolution, Madame Point was resolutely religious. Since her family was poor and her town had no schools, she arranged to have her eldest son, twelve-year-old Nicolas, take a position as clerk in the office of a lawyer who managed the fortress's finances. This Monsieur Briois was especially pleased with the precise penmanship of his young clerk; and subsequently an officer who passed through the law office took an interest in sponsoring young Point's education in Paris. Madame Point, however, refused this offer because she deeply distrusted the "Parisians," whom she regarded as irreligious and corrupt. Traces of his mother's fierce readiness to defend family and church surfaced in Nicolas Point throughout his life.[2]

Madame Point also encouraged her son's early interest in drawing:

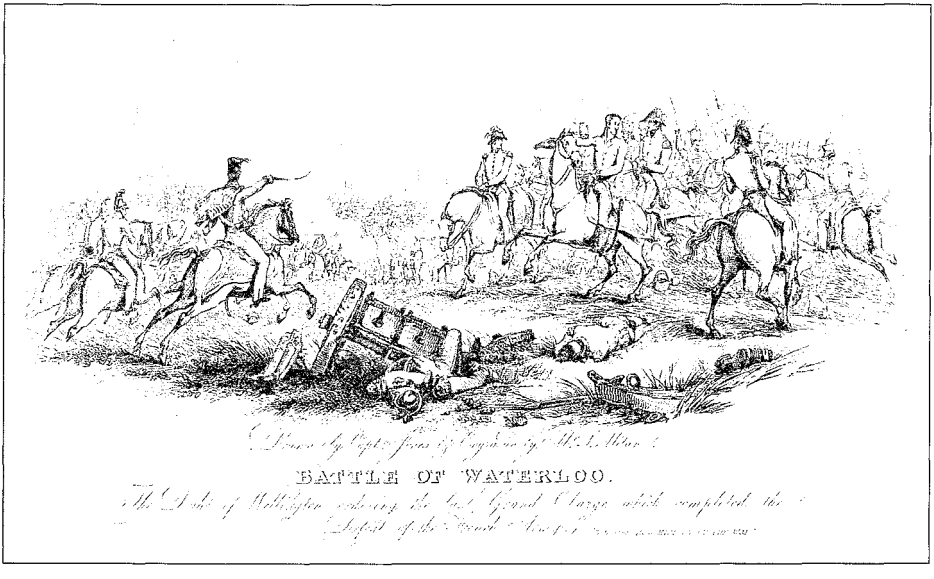


During his youth, spent in the French fortress town of Rocroi (also spelled Rocroy), Nicolas Point developed meticulous penmanship while employed as a law office clerk. That precision later flourished in Point the artist, whose drawings were finely detailed. (Author's collection)

> Even as a child I felt compelled to reproduce on paper whatever struck my fancy. My mother, realizing that this instinct might be useful, procured the necessary equipment and encouraged my talent. God rewarded her care, as He did all her sacrifices during her widowhood to further the education of her children. The result was that all of us were attached to our home, removed from dangerous company, and attracted to the religious life.[3]

Despite his interest and natural talent, though, Point had no opportunity for formal art training. If he had been raised in Paris, Rome, or another of the larger Italian cities, he could have learned from the painting and sculpture decorating churches and public buildings there. But he came of age in a remote border fortress.

Nevertheless, growing up in a major military post *was* educational in that it allowed Point to meet soldiers who had traveled the world and participated in epoch-shaping events. These heroes of Napoleon's Grande Armée, with their glittering uniforms and polished boots, had many stories to tell—stories also reported in booklets and broadsheets, and frequently illustrated with woodcuts and copper-plate engravings of battle scenes. Point would

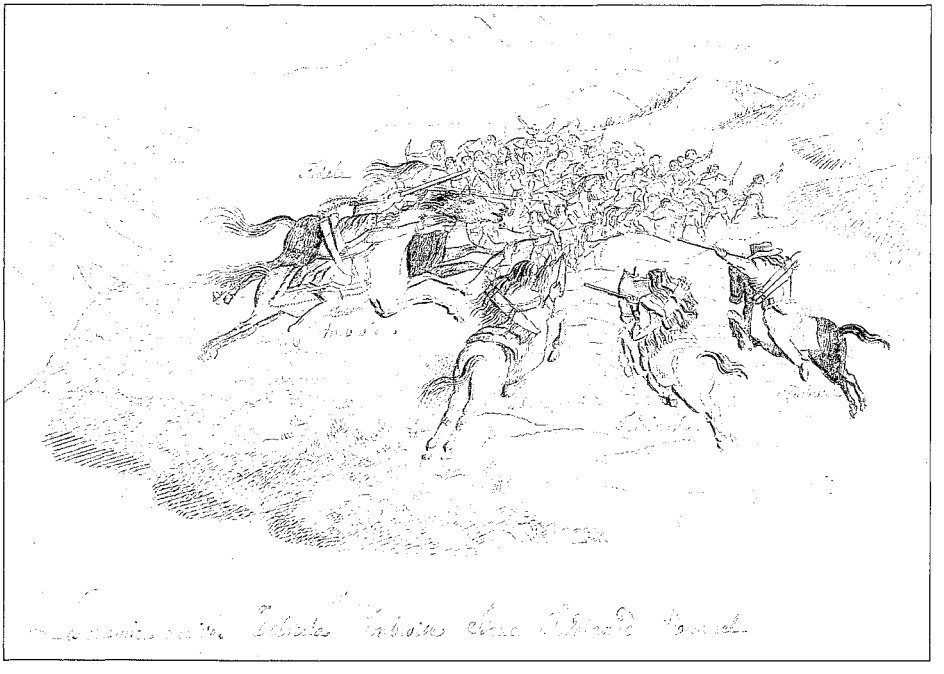


Living in France during the Age of Napoleon, young Point was exposed to military grandeur and heroism—and to the artwork that glorified it. This image of the Battle of Waterloo (from C. H. Gifford's *History of the Wars Occasioned by the French Revolution*) was typical of the era. It shows a mounted French soldier on the attack, sword defiantly aimed at the enemy. Point would later reproduce that pose in his drawings of American Northwest Natives. (Author's collection)

certainly have come in contact with such illustrations during his formative years, and probably they, along with religious holy cards, provided early models for his artistic work.

Point's extensive and spirited drawings of Salish-Blackfeet battles give evidence of an enduring interest in military affairs that likely grew out of his boyhood environment at Rocroi. His admiration for Indian valor is clear in a comment he made about a pitched battle between Salish and Blackfeet warriors in the spring of 1846. On this occasion, when the Salish routed a force four times their number, losing only four against twenty-one Blackfeet dead, Point commented: "So ended that glorious day. And indeed glorious it was, comparable for them to Condé's victory at Rocroi."[4]

Point joined the Society of Jesus in 1822 with dreams of becoming a missionary to North America. Dismissed from the novitiate after just seven months, he reentered in 1826 following em-



In drawing this Salish charge against their foes, Point placed five warriors—whose baptismal names were Fidele, Ambrose, Isaac, Ferdinand, and Manuel—in heroic poses reminiscent of the popular imagery of the artist's childhood in Napoleonic France. (From *Sacred Encounters: Father De Smet and the Indians of the Rocky Mountain West*; courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

ployment in a Jesuit school as a layman. Point then followed a traditional course of Christian humanistic studies, which stressed Latin and Greek subjects but gave little attention to the visual arts.

After finishing his training in 1831, Point taught at Jesuit schools-in-exile in Fribourg, Switzerland, and Le Passage, Spain. During these years he became an enthusiastic disciple of Fr. Jean-Nicolas Loriquet, whose curriculum, based on the study of Latin grammar and literature in combination with French literature, was being adopted in Jesuit schools around the world. Assigned to the bayous of central Louisiana in 1835, Point's task was to found a new school at Grand Coteau. Jesuit leaders in the order's St. Louis headquarters had been frustrated with the inability of Catholic boys on the frontier to appreciate the European approach to education, and they hoped that a stronger French tradition in Louisiana would produce more capable students. Point, for his part, was determined to implement his mentor's "Fribourg system."

While Point began to put into practice Loriquet's educational method, he threw himself even more enthusiastically into ambitious architectural plans for the new St. Charles College in Grand Coteau. Although his imagination was expansive, his drawings were very precise—as meticulous, in fact, as the documents he had so carefully penned in the law office in Rocroi.

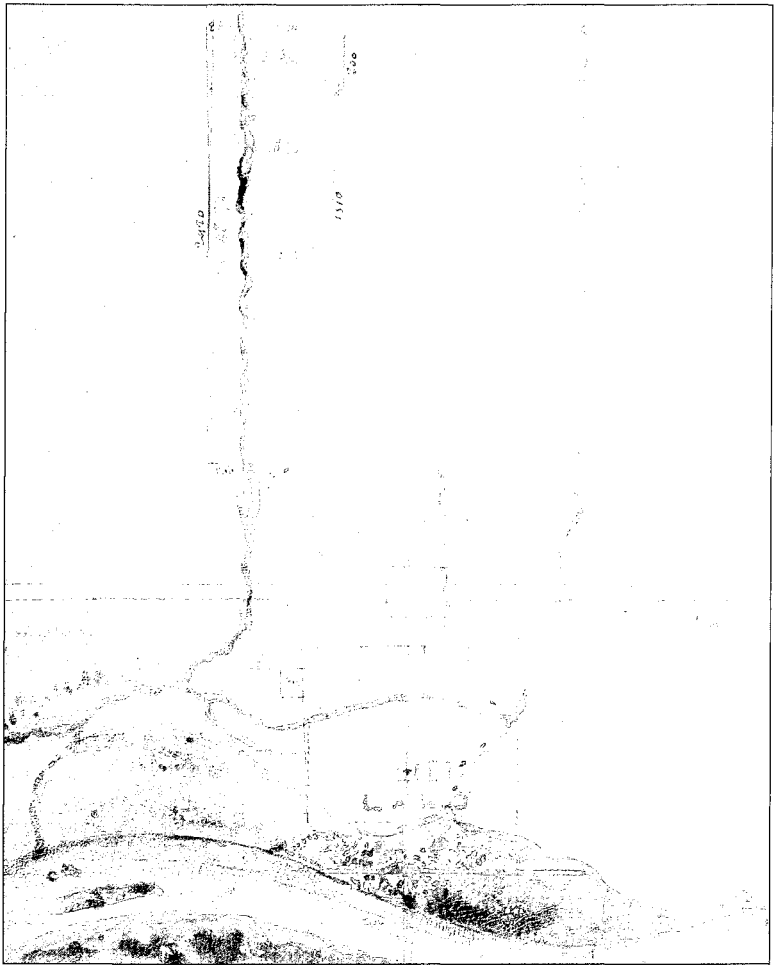
A pattern that would prove typical in his life asserted itself in Louisiana, where Point became embroiled in educational disputes with fellow Jesuits (some of whom questioned the relevance of Latin to the sons of planters). Point lost the bureaucratic battle and was removed as head of the school, but he moved closer to what would be his more lasting achievement by becoming available for a new assignment. Fr. Pierre-Jean De Smet of St. Louis was at that moment recruiting Jesuit colleagues for a new mission to the Indians of the Rocky Mountains, and he added Point to his missionary band.

On the journey from Westport to the Bitterroot Valley, Point struggled with depression over his failures in Louisiana. Writing long letters in defense of his conduct, his behavior became increasingly erratic. Finally, De Smet invited him to be the missionary expedition's field artist, mostly as a way to divert him from his gloom and keep him busy. Point needed little encouragement:

> The sight of these vistas awakened my early artistic interest and I found myself beginning to sketch mountains, lakes, streams, forests, flowers, the birds, and the beasts. . . . The products of my brush, in many ways still very primitive, had at least the good effect that they contributed in some small measure to the innocent

amusement of the company. Father Pierre Jean De Smet, then my superior, would often say: "Father, here is something beautiful; sketch it for me."[5]

Point's first drawings were rough pencil sketches with little personality or vividness, partly because the missionary party's rapid pace did not allow time for more than quick studies. Nevertheless,



Point's maplike reconstruction of the site where the Jesuits hoped to erect their first Rocky Mountain mission. The Catholic priests chose this location in the Bitterroot Valley because it provided timber for construction, water for agriculture, and two mountain ranges for protection from both Blackfeet Indians and the weather. The large river at the bottom of the map is the Bitterroot, which runs south to north (right to left). (De Smetiana Coll., Jesuit Missouri Prov. Arch., St. Louis)

even in these earliest drawings Point captured important detail in his subjects. For example, a drawing of food being prepared accurately depicts a cast-iron kettle on a tripod over a fire, a long-handled skillet, and a cast-iron grill for baking bread. Point's trees, however, were more conventional, and people appear almost as stick figures in these early drawings, which serve essentially as a pictorial diary—illustrating river crossings, prominent features of the landscape, and details of flora and fauna.

Once the missionary party arrived in the Bitterroot Valley in October 1841, they faced the immediate challenge of constructing houses for themselves, building a chapel before winter set in, and translating Catholic prayers into the Salish language. Point, meanwhile, soon found that his interest in art and pedagogy worked together:

> At the end of a five months' trip on horseback, we had to turn our attention to the task of Christianizing the savages [Natives]. One might think that then no further opportunity for sketching would arise. However, brief experience showed that the savages [Natives]

This subchief of the Spokane Valley band of Coeur d'Alenes, baptized Pierre Ignace, helped bring Catholic missionaries to his people. As shown here, the chief added a crucifix to his customary clothing. His Native name was Bull of the Mountains, signifying the great physical strength for which he was known. Also a noted orator and storyteller, he died in 1854 at the age of eighty. (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

> learned more quickly through their eyes than through their ears, whereupon I made a great effort to speak to them through pictures. In order that there might not be any lack of decorum in our instructions, silent preaching was elevated to the dignity of scenic representations. Some scenes showed the mysteries; others, the sacraments; some represented the precepts; others, prayers. Still others depicted the great virtues and the vices. Finally, there was one large scene, called the "Way of Heaven" because in it one saw, together with the important series of laws given to man, the succession of periods from the Old and New Testament, all of which summarized Christian doctrine. This method of instruction had two noticeable advantages. While the truths entered their souls through their eyes, the great virtues were infused into their hearts.[6]

As he continued drawing, Point began to find his own style. He settled on an oval shape for most of his work, but tried various techniques, sometimes using line drawings with solid ink washes, other times using heavy cross-hatching. Some drawings have a dense black tonal range; others are light and delicate, with little shading or cross-hatching to model the forms. His profile portraits of Salish and Coeur d'Alene leaders were done in pencil, with attention to surface texture.

Only a few color paintings from this period, mostly watercolors, survive in collections at the Jesuit Missouri Province Archives in St. Louis and the Washington State University Archives in Pullman. Point subsequently created brightly colored paintings that appealed greatly to the Blackfeet Indians, whom he visited in the winter of 1846. In addition, a collection of over two hundred miniature color paintings exists in the Jesuit French Canada Province Archives in St. Jérôme, part of the illustrated memoirs to which Point devoted himself in his final eight years. Published in 1967 in the form of a book called *Wilderness Kingdom*, these later paintings tend to be more clumsy than his earlier drawings, and feature paint laid on heavily in broad areas with little or no modeling. The delicacy of the pencil and ink Rocky Mountain sketches (as well as the earlier color washes) is missing in these Canadian paintings.

DURING HIS SIX YEARS in Montana and Idaho, Point pursued a variety of subjects in his drawings. The earliest series of pencil sketches covers the 1841 overland journey; however, except for a single series of dark ink washes of an unidentified location, relatively few landscapes were produced after that trip.

Indeed, Point seems to have been more interested in what people did than in where they lived. Hunting and warfare fascinated him, and he rendered detailed scenes of Salish buffalo-hunting methods and warfare between the Salish and the Blackfeet.

In an illustration of Salish hunters pursuing wild fowl, Point placed eight figures around a pond or small stream: One hunter uses a spear, another grabs a bird by the wing, another uses bow and arrow. Some birds escape, but the hunters appear successful. A drawing titled *Travail des femmes après la chasse* (Women's Work after the Hunt) shows the methods by which women cured and decorated buffalo hides. The small drawing is crowded with information. On the left, women have staked the hides out on the ground and are scraping them. Finished cured-leather samples of the work, such as decorated parfleches used to store pemmican and other food, can be seen in the center of the drawing. The hills drawn at the lower-right side indicate that this "women's work" was probably done out on the hunting grounds. An equally complex drawing from the same period shows different games played by children.

The Coeur d'Alene chief Temelposemen's conversion to Christianity in 1842 is reported in ten ink drawings, beginning with one showing the chief in the forest during a vision quest, surrounded by animal spirits. Other drawings in the series depict Temelposemen taking the name Ignace upon his baptism, accepting the cross, receiving the final anointment upon death, and then being buried. This series features a dark tonal range that comes from heavy cross-hatching; it also uses many of the icons that show up repeatedly in Point's work.

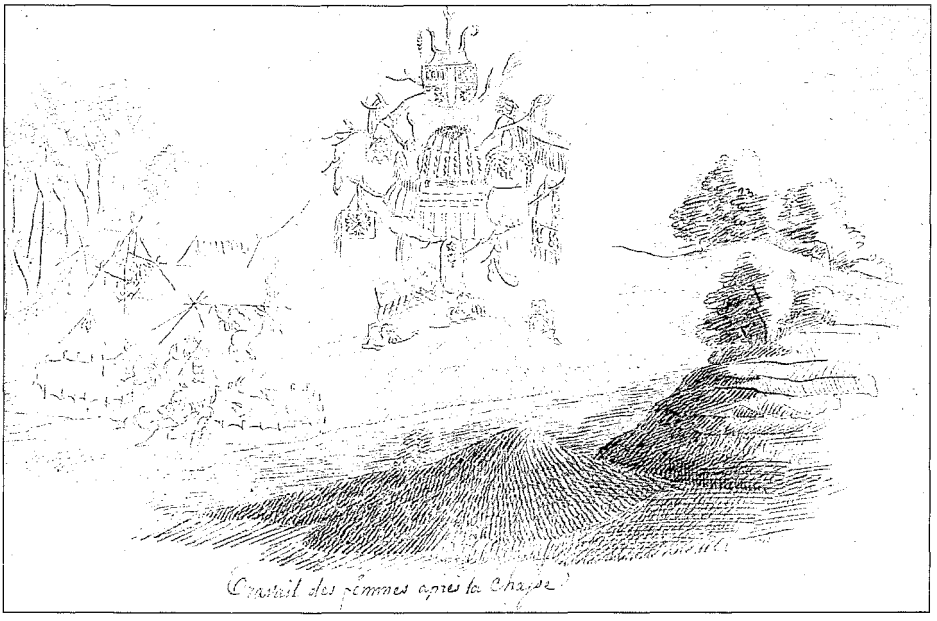
A standard vocabulary of common visual symbols runs through Point's artwork. The "IHS" symbol, which stands for the name of Jesus, appears frequently at the top of a shaft of light coming down on people at a moment of grace. A heart with a band of thorns represents the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and a heart pierced by a sword stands for the Immaculate Heart of Mary. People are often depicted holding rosaries in their hands as a sign of their new faith.

The pairings of light and darkness, sun and clouds, are common visual motifs for the conflict between grace and sin. Point also borrowed heavily from the popular European religious imagination, which often envisioned the grace-sin conflict in the form of angels and devils vying for the souls of human beings. This popular imagery was expressed in the holy cards that Point collected and even pasted into buffalo-hide-covered books, which he used

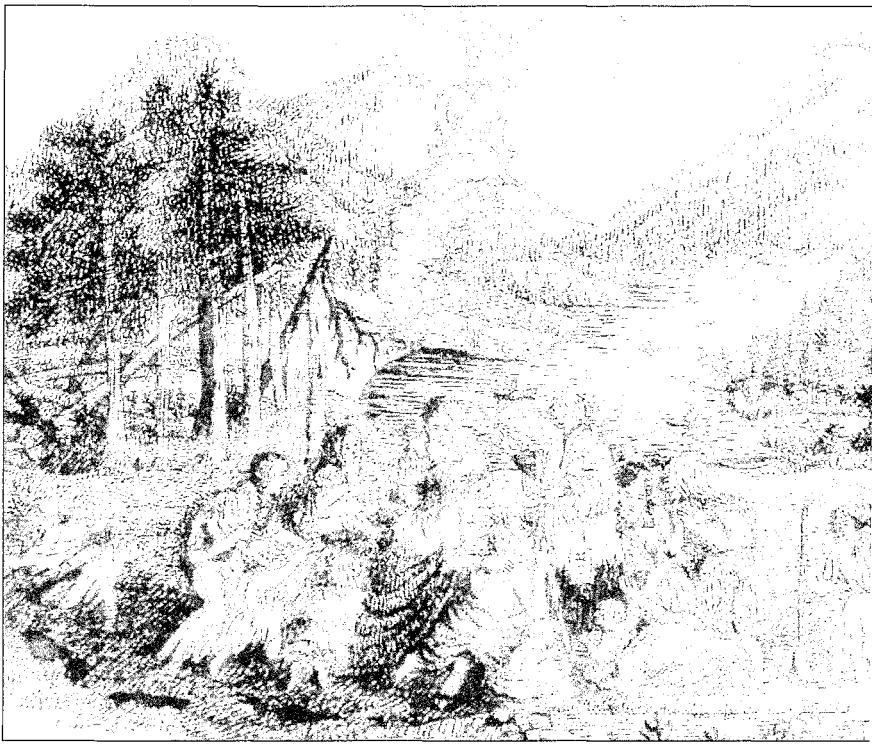
In "Women's Work after the Hunt" (opp. pg.) Point shows the important tasks Native women performed to make maximum use of the buffalo. The meat was stripped from the skin and cooked, either by suspending it above a fire or hanging it in the sun to dry (both methods are shown on the left). The hides were then stretched on pegs (left) and scraped to remove the remaining flesh. After several more rubbing, heating, and soaking processes (center) to smooth the skin, the hide was cut according to its intended use. For a lodge, which required fifteen to twenty skins, sinews from deer carcasses served as thread. Finished items (center, background)—including a rifle scabbard, moccasins, a cradleboard, parfleches, and garments—are shown here on a tree's branches. (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

in his pastoral work among the Indians. From these cards Point took imagery that depicted the forces of evil as snakes threatening people or as horned demons lurking below their targets. Point's use of this visual vocabulary does not express the judgment that his Indian parishioners were demonic but rather the assumption that they were human and, as such, were subject to the same struggle for salvation as Europeans.

Point also portrayed Christian symbols in conflict with Native religion, or replacing Native spirituality. A drawing titled *Conse-*



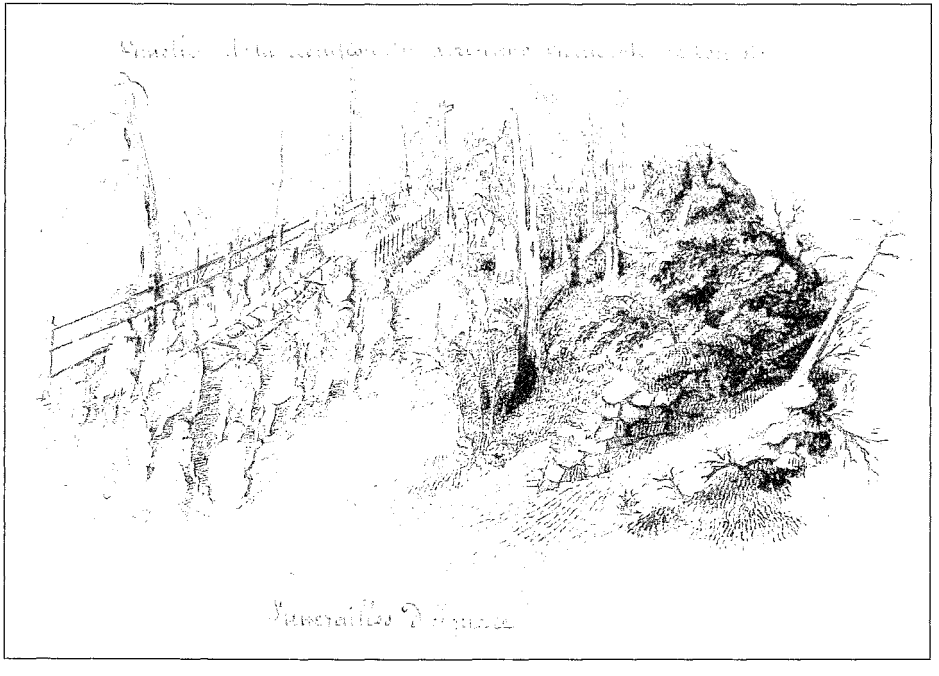
Point's artwork emphasized Indian life, and during the years he lived among various Native groups of the Columbia Plateau the priest carefully studied their everyday activities. In this illustration of eight Salish hunters in quest of waterfowl, Point shows various hunting methods within one large scene, thereby demonstrating a picture-composition technique common among North American Natives. (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

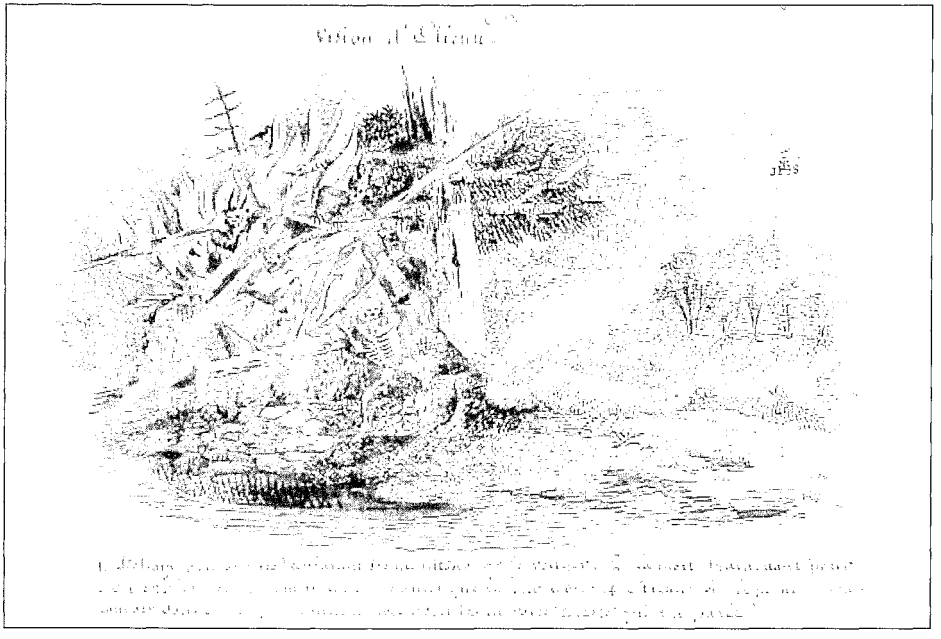


Ignace receives the final sacrament near the Sacred Heart mission's cemetery. As the priest performs the ceremony, light shines upon the dying chief and members of his Coeur d'Alene group. (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

Temelposemen was the first Coeur d'Alene chief to receive Catholic baptism, taking the name Ignace. Point documented Temelposemen's 1842 conversion and the significant Catholic rituals during his lifetime in a series of ten ink drawings. In this rendition of the baptismal ceremony, the chief kneels before the priest, who pours water on Temelposemen's head. The caption (top) notes that the scene took place on the south shore of the great lake of the Coeur d'Alenes. (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

With a helper holding the cross aloft, the priest conducts funeral rites for Ignace. Coeur d'Alenes traditionally interred their dead in bark- or stone-lined graves; they later adopted (via the influence of Iroquois or Chippewas) the practice of building a small death house over each grave. Few Christian burial plots existed at Sacred Heart mission in the 1840s (several are visible to the left of the cross), but more than two dozen can be seen in an 1859 view of the mission drawn by Fr. Pierre-Jean De Smet. (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

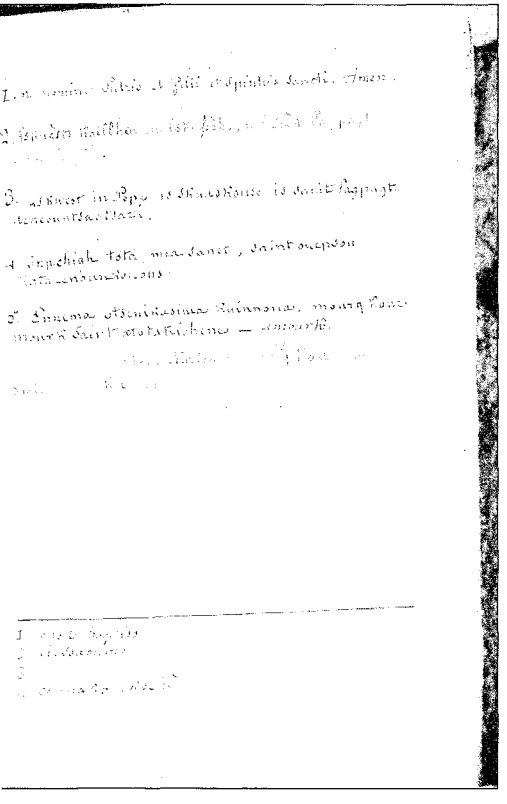




In the drawing above, Point portrays Étienne (Silimoulkelsimm) experiencing a vision that protects him from the evil influences of the Coeur d'Alene medicine man Stellam (left). The convert raises his hand to respond to the light of Jesus (IHS) and heaven. Stellam clashed repeatedly with the Jesuit missionaries, and many pages of Point's letters from the Sacred Heart mission concern Stellam. The devil peering from flames was a common iconographic element in popular Catholic religious imagery of Point's time; devils and angels vying for souls was also a common motif. The drawing's caption says that Étienne was on the verge of falling under Stellam's spell when he heard the call of a celestial voice. (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

cration des armes avant le départ pour la chasse (Consecration of Arms before Leaving for the Hunt) shows warriors gathered together for a blessing in preparation for a hunting foray. In the sky above them is St. Michael the Archangel, patron of war, who holds a spear; St. Raphael, patron of travelers; St. Hubert, patron of hunters, who is portrayed as a deer with a cross between his antlers; and St. Francis Xavier, the Jesuit missionary to the Indies, who holds up a cross in blessing. All of these Christian symbols are arrayed under the power of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Thus Christian patron saints took the place of the guardian spirits of Native religion that traditionally blessed the hunt.

On the other hand, the narrative style of Indian art replaced European pictorial space in several of Point's warfare drawings, suggesting the extent to which parishioners influenced their pastor. The Jesuit Missouri Province Archives possesses seventeen drawings in which Point shows the exploits of individual warriors. Most narrate a single episode of conflict, but four show multiple moments of action in the Indian style. The archives also owns



Occasionally Point made use of the artwork of others, pasting holy cards into buffalo-hide-covered books to help teach Indians about Christianity. The left-hand page shows St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits. Point's text on the right-hand page includes both Latin and a romanized version of an Indian language. (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

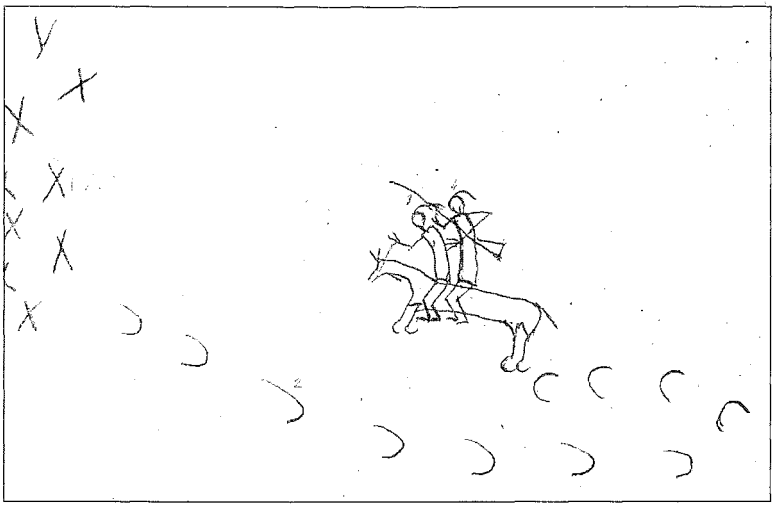
a set of thirteen ledger drawings in which Tchilischemmela, a Salish leader who took the baptismal name of Ambrose, drew the story of his own exploits.[7] Point also drew Tchilischemmela's story, and the parallels are revealing.

In the center of Point's version two figures on horseback struggle with each other for a rifle. To the right, smaller and less fully delineated, one figure aims a bow at another person fleeing on horseback. To the left an even smaller figure on horseback pursues five others across a river. Beneath the drawing Point wrote: "On the same day Ambrose disarms one Blackfeet, breaks a bow at the moment that another took flight, and pursues five others who flee all the way to the river."

The narrative method of this drawing comes directly from Indian art, with its presupposition that the space of one drawing could contain multiple moments of a story. Before 1800 Indian rock art followed a distinctive narrative pattern; designs on lodge covers and war shirts followed the same conventions. In this style only important details that affect the outcome of the story were shown. The artists were not interested in scenery or peripheral decoration, two of the primary concerns for most European artists who visited the Rocky Mountains. Only personal details that identified someone were portrayed, as well as the location of opposing camps. Events in the present tense were usually placed in the middle of the picture. Sometimes the past tense belonged on one side with the future on the other; more often several episodes in the past led up to the present. Hoofprints indicated the passage of time.

Point adopted this method and combined it with his European way of rendering figures. It seems clear that Indians taught Point how to structure a visual space to tell a complex story—relating everything that mattered—with minimal information. In his drawing of Tchilischemmela, for example, Point portrayed the protagonist in his distinctive hat, which identifies him as the figure seated behind his Blackfeet enemy, whose horse he takes after winning the struggle. The hat also identified Tchilischemmela as the one standing on the right whose bow breaks at a critical moment.

Tchilischemmela's drawing shows the same two figures on horseback, with the one behind holding a rifle. Tchilischemmela identified himself with a distinctive feather in his hat, just as Point did in his drawing. Eleven horse hoofprints come from the camp (indicated on the left side of the drawing) and loop back toward the camp; these prints represented the passage of time. Point's composition followed this same pattern, except that he used figures and tree limbs to demarcate different moments of time. He



Point and Tchilischemmela, a Salish leader who took the baptismal name Ambrose, each sketched a version of the same battle incident. Both artists identified the protagonist by his distinctive hat with a tall feather. In the center of Point's version (above) two figures on horseback struggle for a rifle. On the right, smaller and less fully delineated, one figure aims a bow at another, who flees on horseback. On the left, an even smaller figure on horseback pursues five foes across a river. Beneath the drawing Point wrote: "On the same day Ambrose disarms one Blackfeet, breaks a bow at the moment that another took flight, and pursues five others who flee all the way to the river." Tchilischemmela's drawing (top) shows the same two figures on horseback. Eleven horse hoofprints, which represent the passage of time, come from, and then loop back toward, the camp (denoted by Xs). (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

also used classical European composition devices, such as the triangular arrangement of figures and trees that point from one part of the drawing to the next in a circular pattern. Differences in scale and degree of detail also indicate sequential moments.

Point probably picked up this narrative style intuitively as he talked with warriors. Although he considered himself in competition with Native religious leaders, he accepted the Indian peoples' emphasis on military valor—not just capturing it but celebrating it. Whereas many early missionaries abhorred warfare among Native groups, Point presented the exploits of various individuals in a sympathetic manner. Point's drawings of the exploits of Tchilischemmela closely mirror the warrior's own drawing of the same events. These were personal stories, and their being shared implied a relationship of trust and understanding.

During his time in the mountains of the Columbia Plateau, Point grew artistically in other ways as well. His drawings developed an economical flair. Whereas the sketches of the overland journey seem tentative, as though he had to keep working with the pencil to create the picture, later drawings possess a simple, elegant quality. In his drawing *Marche d'une loge* (March of a Lodge), about a family group traveling during the winter, one can see how Point created the leader's horse with a line that changes from thick to thin in a graceful curve (see p. 37). This is an ink line that had to be done right the first time. The artist's sure touch would obviously have been important for someone drawing in the field rather than in a studio, but the technique also shows a deepening artistic maturity and personal expressiveness.

Point remained a miniaturist (most of his drawings are only six inches by four inches), and his early pride in precise penmanship manifests itself in the fine details he created. He seems to have been genuinely most comfortable working on a very small scale, but he also faced the necessity of carefully conserving precious supplies of paper in the remote missions. The discipline and frugality Point knew as a youth continued in the western mountain missions.

Point's most evident technical weakness was his clumsiness with traditional perspective drawing. The awkwardness is evident in his depiction of buildings: The artist did not know how to use a vanishing point, or how to vary the size of subjects to give a realistic sense of three-dimensional space. In his drawing of the construction of Sacred Heart mission, for example, he drew the church from eye level but rendered the building immediately to its right from a higher perspective (see p. 23). Consequently, the

sides of these buildings do not converge on a common horizon line. Point was aware of this shortcoming and referred to his work as "primitive." Although in his time realistic representation was considered essential to artistic value, we are freer today to appreciate the style and individual signature of his drawings.

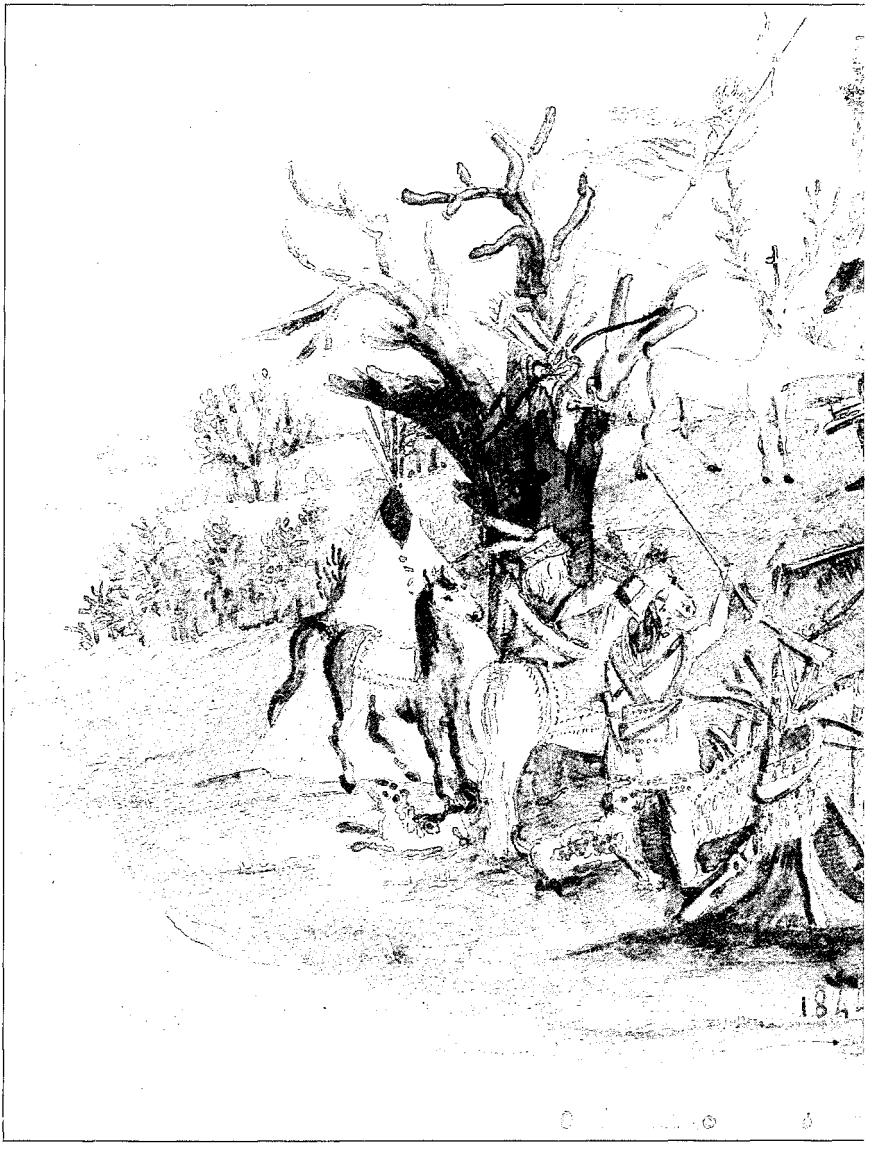
Point's work can be evaluated from several perspectives. First, it should be located within the context of illustrations in nineteenth-century books and newspapers. This process began with the artist in the field who did a sketch, from which an engraver—working with copperplate, wood, or slate—made the finished image to be printed. The original drawings, even though they were necessarily quick studies done without luxury of time or studio, tend to have a liveliness and personality missing in the prints made from them.

Many of Point's drawings were used for lithographs in books about the missions, and they look as mannered as other prints of the period; his original drawings, however, retain a distinctive touch that lifts them above the conventions of the genre. They are, moreover, finished pieces, full of fine detail that merits close attention.

A second perspective comes from comparing Point with the relatively small number of artists who portrayed Native Americans and their culture. Although he falls somewhere in the chronological middle of this range of expeditionary artists, his perspective as a missionary gives his work a distinctive look. He is both more at home with his subjects and more in conflict with them.

Point was uniquely interested in the ordinary life of the people among whom he lived. Although he drew some ceremonies, he paid much more attention to details of daily life. As a field artist Point was more the reporter than the ethnographer or the fine artist. He was interested in showing how religion functioned at the center of an integral culture based upon the spiritual. That perspective underlay the organization of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay, and it was congruent with the perspective of the Northwest Indians themselves. On the other hand, because Point was a missionary trying to persuade the Salish, Coeur d'Alenes, and Blackfeet to accept his religion, he was less neutral than an artist such as George Catlin, who pictured Native religious ceremonies without judging them.

Perhaps Point is most unique because of his audience.Whereas other expeditionary artists aimed their Indian pictures at whites, Point's primary audience was initially the Indians themselves. Many of his portraits were drawn as gifts for his models, and his



In "Consecration of Arms before Leaving for the Hunt," Point portrays Christian symbols joining (or perhaps supplanting) Native spirituality. Catholic saints—rather than the Native guardian spirits—oversee the customary hunting sendoff. This depiction contrasts with Point's interpretation of a traditional Native spirit quest (see p. 26). The male

deer in each is placed and drawn in a similar way, but this "Catholic version" features a cross between the stag's antlers, transforming the beast into the symbol of St. Hubert, patron of hunters. (Courtesy De Smetiana Collection, Jesuit Missouri Province Archives, St. Louis)

battle scenes celebrated the warriors whose stories they tell. Most of all, Point was ever the teacher:

> The Indian hardly ever forgets what he has once seen, and if he associates some idea with what he has seen, this idea always recurs to him when the object with which it is associated is placed before him. Hence, his tendency to express all his ideas by images and his facility for speaking by means of signs. It was upon this gift that the instructor based his entire system of instruction, and he was not sorry he did so. He made pictures which represented, by means of various hieroglyphic forms, what is necessary to believe to be saved, what one had to do, and so on. Then, with a long pointer in hand, he explained each one of these truths.[8]

Point continued drawing after he left the Columbia Plateau in June 1847, returning to St. Louis on his way to the Upper Canada mission in Ontario (across the river from Detroit), where his brother Pierre was the Jesuit superior of the mission. In 1848 the artist-priest became superior of the Holy Cross mission on Grand Manitoulin Island at Georgian Bay, in the northern part of Lake Huron. There he worked with Ottawa, Ojibway, and Chippewa people who, in five years, built a large stone church for themselves, following his design. That ambitious project finally fulfilled some of the creative desires Point had had for St. Charles College in Louisiana.

After one other missionary assignment, Point became assistant to the novice master in 1860 at the novitiate near Quebec. There he began to edit and illustrate his memoirs from the Rocky Mountain period. Point hoped to see the illustrated memoirs published during his lifetime; but not until 1967, through the efforts of Fr. Joseph P. Donnelly, did a version appear, under the title *Wilderness Kingdom.*

Point died in 1868 and was interred in the Quebec basilica. His original unpublished manuscript, with images drawn and painted directly on its pages, remains in the Jesuit French Canada Province Archives, which also houses the holy cards and sacramental books used by Point in his western ministry.

WHILE GEORGE CATLIN sought fame and fortune via his gallery of Indian portraits and scenes, Nicolas Point lived quietly for an extended time among the Salish and Coeur d'Alenes. He used his art for missionary teaching, and some of it he sent to Father De Smet to help raise money for the missions. Much

of Point's work has been hidden in archives for a hundred and forty years.

The significance of Point's work as an artist cannot be denied. He recorded a privileged record of Native Americans of the Columbia Plateau before their lives were forever changed. As the first non-Indian artist of the region, he drew portraits, studied hunting methods, illustrated Christian doctrine, and portrayed the life of a missionary with a distinctive personality and an expressive quality that transcended the genre of journalistic drawing that served as his model.

Notes

Pages 47-68

1. William H. Goetzmann and William J. Orr, *Karl Bodmer's America* (Lincoln, NE 1984).

2. Joseph P. Donnelly, ed. and trans., *Wilderness Kingdom: Indian Life in the Rocky Mountains, 1840–1847. The Journals and Paintings of Nicolas Point, S.J.* (New York 1967), 14-18.

3. Ibid., 12.

4. Cornelius M. Buckley, *Nicolas Point, S.J.: His Life and Northwest Indian Chronicles* (Chicago 1989), 272.

5. Donnelly, *Wilderness Kingdom*, 12.

6. Ibid.

7. This series of drawings by Tchilischemmela is the earliest series of ledger drawings from the Rocky Mountains. Frontier artist George Catlin collected a single ledger drawing in 1832, but Tchilischemmela's work is unique because it is an identified series of one man's story. It was probably done in the 1840s, but the exact date is unknown.

8. Donnelly, *Wilderness Kingdom*, 94.