

# Missionaries

for pelts decreased as fashionable Europeans lost interest in fur, and aboriginal communities became less nomadic as they turned to farming and raising cattle.

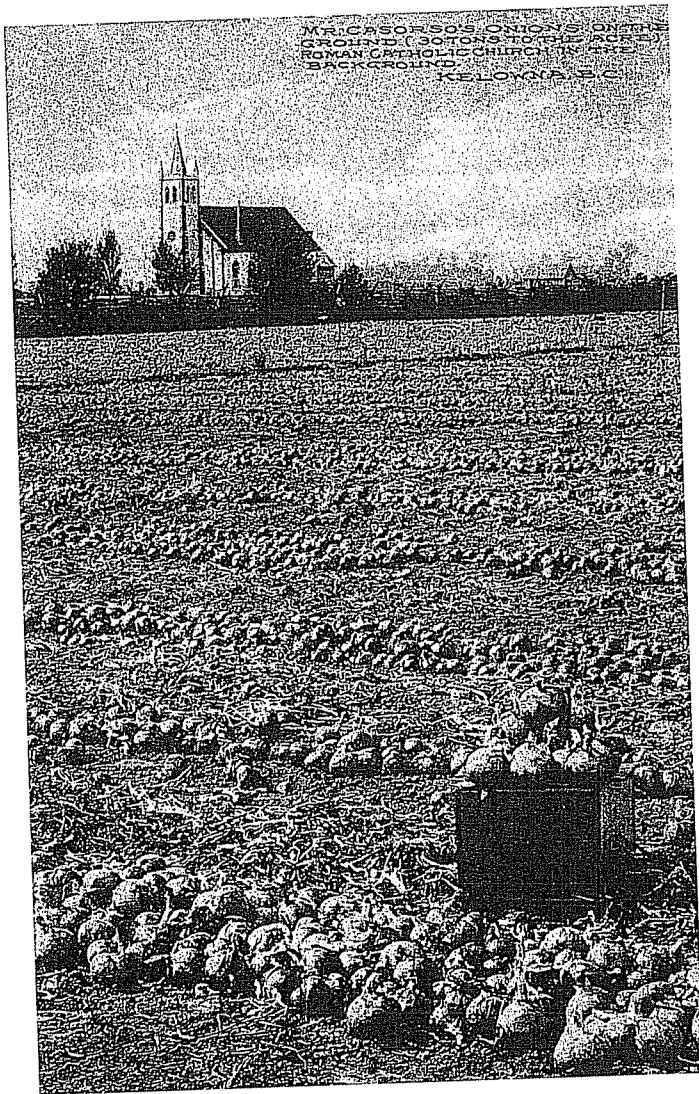
Today, a map showing remnants of the Okanagan Brigade Trail is available to the curious who want to search it out along Westside Road, across Okanagan Lake from Kelowna. Part of the trail is on private land—some has been built on or planted—while other sections have vanished. Occasionally a marker will appear on a tree, identifying the "F.B.C. Fur Brigade Trail." In West Kelowna, at the intersection of Highway 97 and Old Okanagan Highway, a cairn marks the high point of land where the local indigenous peoples and the brigade traders carried on their business. Otherwise, there is little evidence of the Okanagan's short-lived involvement in Canada's fur industry.

## GOD FOLLOWED - Early Missionaries

By the time the last of the fur brigades passed through the Okanagan in 1847, Protestant missionaries were already well established in the Oregon territories. The Catholic Church needed a presence in the new land but was so short of priests that it had to appeal to France for assistance. Twenty-four-year-old Charles John Felix Adolph Pandosy



Father Pandosy's first building was a log chapel with living quarters above. The larger building beside it was a root cellar with walls of parallel logs built four inches apart and packed with earth to insulate the fruits and vegetables stored for the winter. | KELOWNA PUBLIC ARCHIVES 7075



M. RICASORSO'S ONIONS ON THE  
GROUND (30 TONS TO THE ACRE)  
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN  
BACKGROUND. KELOWNA, B.C.

Father Pandosy's second building, the Church of the Immaculate Conception, was built of sawn lumber and had a bell tower and Gothic arched windows. The Casorso onion fields are in the foreground. | KELOWNA PUBLIC ARCHIVES 4642

was part of a small group of Oblates who left their motherhouse near Marseilles in 1847 and sailed to the New World.

Pandosy was from a prosperous landowning family in Provence, yet took vows of poverty and devotion when he joined the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). An unlikely candidate for mission work, the young man had excelled in Latin and French literature and was recognized for his beautiful singing voice. Pandosy, however, wanted more than a cloistered life and welcomed the opportunity to venture off to an unknown world. Once in New York, the small party of Oblates joined a wagon train and travelled across the sparsely populated continent to Fort Walla Walla, in present-day Washington state.

Pandosy was soon ordained and became known as Father Charles Marie Pandosy OMI. The young priest worked and lived among the Yakama tribe, where he learned their language and taught them to plant and harvest, and then baptized them into his church. He could not have anticipated such a life: there were few comforts, he lived with loneliness and isolation, and he persevered through immense hardship. It wasn't long before hostilities escalated as settlers thought he was siding with the Yakamas and the Yakamas thought he was aiding and abetting the settlers. Militias were sent in to protect the newcomers and soon local wars escalated into massacres as both sides fought to the death. It became impossible for Father Pandosy and his colleagues to remain in the American territories.

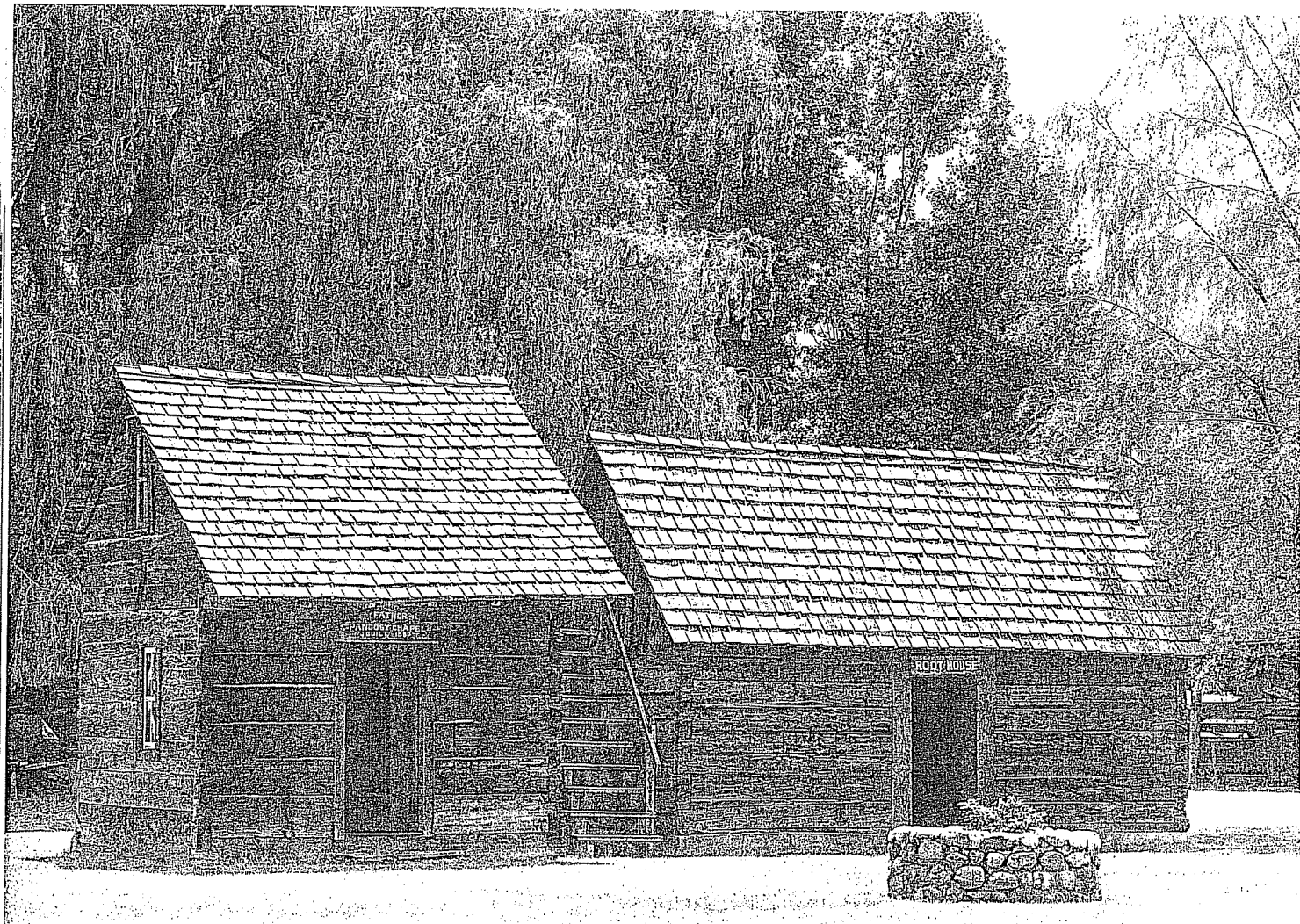
The Washington missionaries were called to Esquimalt on Vancouver Island in the summer of 1858. Pandosy stayed for the winter and began planning to start anew in the colony of British Columbia. The young priest briefly returned to Colville, just across the American border, in the spring to gather supplies and find settlers who were willing to join him in establishing a new mission in the Okanagan Valley. Cyprienne and Theodor Laurence, French Canadian brothers who had been involved in the fur trade, and Cyprienne's wife, Therese, from the Flathead Indian Reservation, agreed to accompany him, as did

an unnamed Flathead man who was so devoted to Father Pandosy that he and his wife decided to follow the priest to the new land. William Peon (or Pion), a Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islander, one of many who made their way to the west coast on the sailing ships that reprovisioned on the islands, agreed to pack the small party into the Okanagan Valley.

Following the Okanagan Fur Brigade Trail across the new international border, Pandosy and his party made their way northward until they reached the Native village at the south end of Okanagan Lake. Once there, Therese was called upon to convince her uncle, Chief Capot Blanc, and the other chiefs from the area that the priest and her husband intended to help improve the Natives' condition and should be allowed to settle their valley. The Hudson's Bay Company had rarely encouraged settlement, and the traders and trappers who had previously passed through the valley hadn't created a problem for local aboriginal groups. Settlers, however, were another matter, and those who had arrived earlier with the idea of staying had been threatened by the chiefs and ordered to move on. Therese, perhaps as an enticement, added that if the chiefs did not agree to her request or harmed her companions, her uncle, Capot Blanc, would have to accept responsibility for her care. It took a few days, but she prevailed.

Instead of following the established trail, the party chose to travel along the rocky, mountainous east side of Okanagan Lake. The route took them through the "Grand Canyon"—likely Wild Horse Canyon—and onward to the south end of Duck Lake (near Winfield today). Father Pandosy and his party arrived in the fall of 1859 and declared they had at last reached the site of his new mission. The winter was bitterly cold and the snow was uncommonly deep. Game was scarce, and with no time to build shelter or gather provisions, the party lived in tents, slaughtered their horses for food and survived on the diet of the local peoples: berries and roots, baked mosses and native teas.

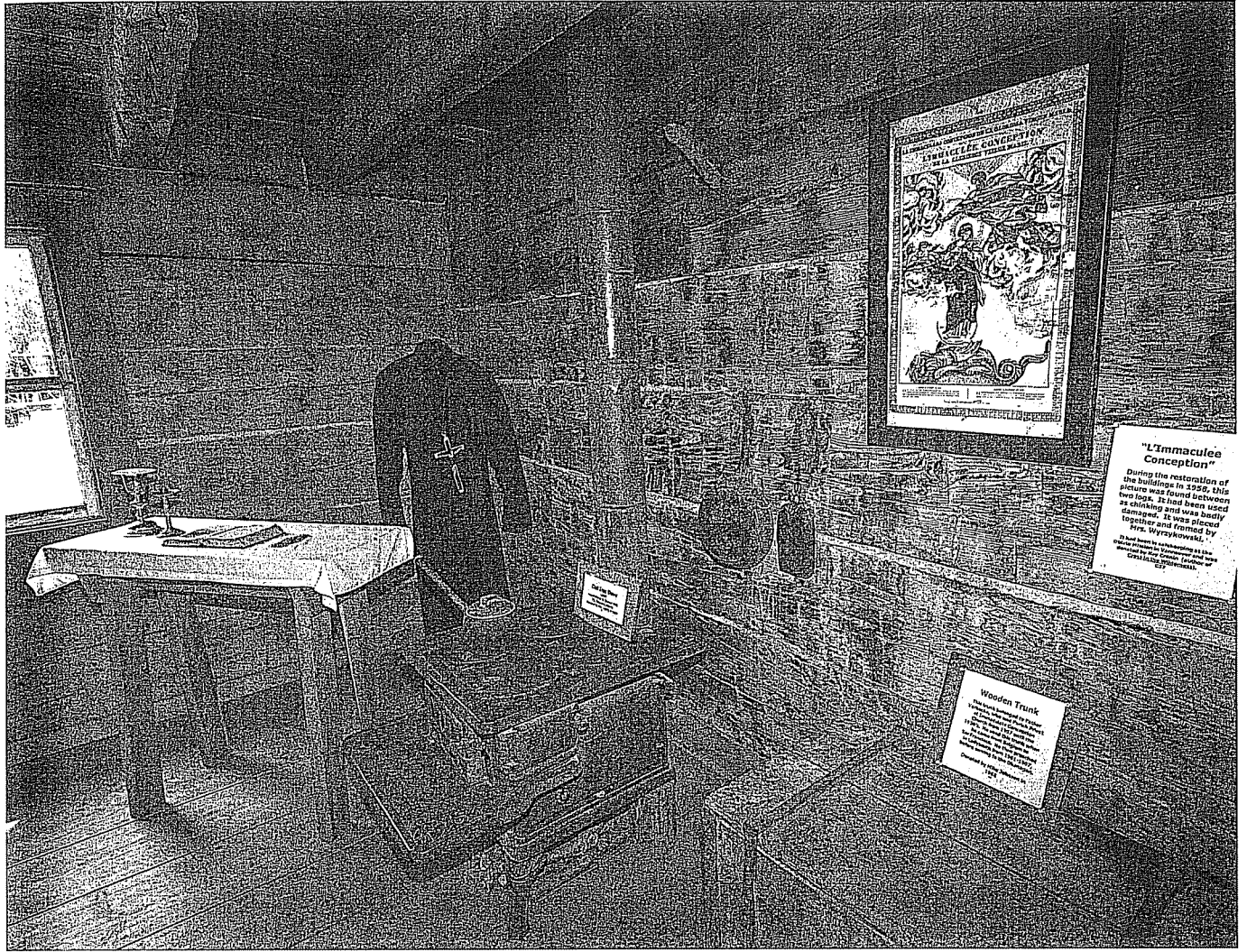
When spring arrived, the area proved too marshy and the group moved to higher ground for the summer and scouted around for a more suitable permanent site. They eventually discovered a broad sweep of flat land a few miles south, near a creek that would soon be known as Mission Creek, and quickly determined that the surrounding land would better meet their needs. Not wanting to spend another winter in tents, the men quickly built a small log house with a church on the ground floor and sleeping quarters above. The Mission of the Immaculate Conception became a reality on the site they called L'Anse au Sable, or Sandy Cove.



#### **Father Pandosy's Mission of the Immaculate Conception**

When Father Pandosy's Mission of the Immaculate Conception was finally closed in 1902, the land was purchased by the Kelowna Land and Orchard Company, then subdivided and sold as potential orchard sites. Two years later, fifteen acres of the Mission's ranch were purchased by Dr. Paul dePfyffer, a Swiss lawyer who had come to the valley to farm. The property was again sold in 1947 and the dilapidated buildings were slated for demolition. A group of concerned people, including the Bishop of Vancouver and the Father Pandosy branch of the Knights of Columbus, rescued and restored the three original buildings. Father Pandosy's sawn wood church was sold to a local Seventh Day Adventist congregation, who dismantled it and moved it to their property in Rutland. It was subsequently destroyed by fire.





In 1954, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate repurchased the two acres of land containing the original buildings. Four years later they re-dedicated the site as part of celebrations recognizing their one hundred years in British Columbia. The Oblates transferred the land to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nelson in 1967, and it was subsequently designated as a BC Heritage Site in 1983.

The Father Pandosy Mission has since grown by another two acres and other historic buildings have been added to the grounds. A celebration of the 150th anniversary of Father Pandosy's Mission was held in August 2010. Representatives from the Catholic Church, the Oblate Order and the Westbank First Nation gathered to acknowledge the remarkable priests whose early arrival transformed the Okanagan Valley. The Mission is located on Benvoulin Road. | STUART KERNAGHAN, XYPHOTOS.CA

The wider area became known as the Mission Valley, after Father Pandosy's Mission at L'Anse au Sable—though many thought "Sandy Cove" referred to the mouth of Mission Creek, not the Mission itself. The settlement had been established at about the midpoint of Okanagan Lake, and the settlers soon noticed that the tillable land surrounding the Mission, and to the north and south, was immense. In a letter to his superiors in France, Father Pandosy wrote that this was the largest valley that could be cultivated in the surrounding countryside, saying, "All who know it, praise it." By the early 1900s, the area became known as the Okanagan Valley.

Soon after Father Pandosy settled, Father Pierre Richard (1826–1907), who had also been in Esquimalt, arrived in the valley for the first of what became a succession of visits. He stayed for varying periods of time and was known as the more practical of the two priests: Father Pandosy taught the Natives to speak French, play musical instruments and sing their Latin masses with such beauty they rivalled the choirs of the great cathedrals of France. Father Richard taught them to build fences, plant fruit trees and a vineyard, and grow the ground crops that would sustain them. In November 1860, Father Richard filed a rural pre-emption claim for the Mission on the Great Lake, noting that the river of L'Anse au Sable was to the south.

The missionaries soon had considerable success converting and ministering to their flock: in just the two years after the Mission was founded, they baptized 121 persons. Father Pandosy worked in the fields, devised ways to irrigate his crops and built a root cellar to store their harvest. A brothers' house was added to the site in 1865 to house the succession of priests who stayed at the Mission, along with those travelling through the area. The following year, a log barn was added to the site. In 1882 a new sawn lumber church was built, which featured five Gothic-inspired windows on each side of the nave and a bell tower.

During these years, Father Pandosy was sent to various other missions around the province, sometimes for two or three years at a time, but he always returned to his home at Okanagan Mission. In February 1891, Pandosy was called to Keremeos to give final rites to a dying parishioner. It was fiercely cold but he was undeterred as he walked through the drifting snow—he had travelled the route several times before, though he was now sixty-seven years old and in somewhat tentative health. After leaving Keremeos, he made it back as far as Penticton, where he was taken in by Chief Francoise of the Penticton Indian Band, as he had become seriously ill. Recognizing the priest's perilous condition, the chief sent for

Mrs. Ellis—the wife of Tom Ellis, one of the area's cattle barons—who was known for her nursing skills. Little could be done and Father Charles Pandosy died on February 6, 1891. He was returned to his Mission on the steamer *Penticton* and buried across the road from his church.

While the Okanagan Mission benefitted from the presence of many priests during its forty-two-year existence, none have been identified as strongly with the place and its history as Father Pandosy. Most of those who served were devout and passionate men who felt they were called by their God to go forth to save, educate and minister to the New World's indigenous peoples. They were true pioneers who suffered privations beyond our present-day comprehension: they were frequently close to starvation, often isolated and lonely, and knew few creature comforts. Clothing, blankets and seeds were hard to come by, and most went barefoot and bare-headed in the summer and used pelts and hides to survive the winters. They worked constantly, walking to their destinations, which were often over the next mountain range or two. Though their physical and mental well-being concerned their superiors, most priests were on their own to make the best of whatever was available. Their abiding faith carried them when little else was available.

The Mission and the community around it continued to flourish after Pandosy's death. The farm grew to about 2,450 acres, and the Mission became the Catholic Church's headquarters for the area from the international border in the south to Fort Kamloops in the north, the Similkameen Valley in the east to the Nicola Valley and Merritt in the west. When the Canadian Pacific Railway completed its transcontinental line in 1885, however, Kamloops became the nearest rail connection. The Oblates moved their headquarters to the St. Louis Mission in Kamloops in 1895. The Okanagan Mission and all related properties were sold to Father Eumelin and other members of his family in 1896. Though Eumelin was not an Oblate, he continued to run the Mission as its priest until 1902, when the original Mission of the Immaculate Conception was officially closed. The land was purchased by the Kelowna Land and Orchard Company in 1906, then subdivided and sold as prime orchard sites.

### **GOLD EVERYWHERE**

The Hudson's Bay Company had been buying gold from the Okanagans for many years, though David Douglas was the first to record its discovery in 1833. Douglas, a Scottish botanist, was collecting specimens for the Royal Horticultural Society while travelling through the area with one