

Pilgrimage Honoring Fr. Rasle Sunday

Madison. — The fourth annual pilgrimage to the site of the martyrdom of Rev. Sebastian Rasle, S.J., will take place here Sunday, with appropriate exercises at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

It will commemorate the 218th anniversary of the death of this famed missionary at the hands of hostile Indians, which occurred on August 23, 1724. The Rev. W. Edmund FitzGerald, S.J., superior of the Jesuit Community at Portland will be the speaker of the occasion.

Solemn Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament will be celebrated at the rustic altar erected near the historic monument which was dedicated by Bishop Fenwick of Boston on August 23, 1833.

In the preceding paragraphs, we have seen what a great race the American Indian was. Now, we will consider the factors which contributed to the downfall of these great and proud tribes - how they were reduced from monarchs of two continents to their present mere status of "the vanishing American". It is a sad study and one which rightfully brings one to a feeling of shame and remorse for the cruel acts of his ancestry. Chamberlain, famed anthropologist, says, "The ill treatment of the American Indian by the whites has often been such as to stamp with eternal dishonor the conquering race." How true this is! The shameful abuses, heaped upon the simple-minded natives of this continent by the invading white men, are deserving of unending condemnation and these injustices should ring in the ears of all of us as long as we are in possession of this stolen paradise!

How indignant we are when we read about that terrible man, that unrighteous being, that horrible demagogue, namely Adolph Hitler, breaking one treaty after another with small, helpless nations. -- "Why, nothing like that has ever before been heard of in the world!," we declare. "One must be the anti-Christ to do such acts as he does", others say. Oh, how blind we are to the truth! We hurl ceaseless condemnations in Hitler's direction, yet we ourselves are descendants of none other than similarly harsh, cruel treaty-breakers. Ah, yes! In our own veins flows the blood given us by these ruthless land-grabbers, who massacred innocent Indians and victimized them through broken treaties, land-robbing and commercial swindles!

The guilt lies not alone upon the English but also upon the French, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese. These European nationals have sought at times to erase whole tribes from the face of the earth.

While the evil side of the scales lays heavy with the ill-treatment of the American Indians by the whites, yet we can place on the good side of the balances at least the great work of the missionaries of all faiths among the American natives. Of course, the cruelty of these national groups nullified much of the efforts of these faithful men of God. The missionaries of the

Jesuit branch of the Roman Catholic church did remarkable work among the Indians of North America and the natives undoubtedly would have been nurtured along the greater religious faith, and higher civilization and culture, had not the pressure and strenuous life of the whites doomed them to utter helplessness. We must not acknowledge that the United States government, through its Department of Indian Affairs, has for many years sponsored and encouraged better treatment of Indians still within our borders. The grave injustice to a noble race has been done however and it is too late - far too late - to right the wrong.

Perhaps it would be well, at this point, if we reviewed one of the most dishonorable acts of the first white settlers, the merciless massacre of a small, peaceful tribe of Abnaki Indians and their beloved missionary priest, Rev. Fr. Sebastian Rale. No Indian methods have ever surpassed the treachery employed by the English soldiers who committed this atrocious crime. It occurred in the year of 1724 and the victims were the Norridgewocks whose village was located at Old Point in Maine. The Norridgewocks were known to be more peaceful than any other branches of the Abnaki tribes. This was due in large part to the great influence for good which Father Rale had among these Indians during his long ministry in their midst. Through his efforts, these tribesmen had been trained in the ways of peace and in seeking a livelihood by hunting and fishing and not by raids and bloodshed. No doubt the kindly Father led many members of the tribe into becoming members of his faith. These innocent natives, piloted by a spiritual man who may not have realized the cruelty and selfish ambitions of the Europeans who came to these shores long after he did, did not bear the whites the ill feeling and contempt which deservedly should have been theirs.

At any rate, Father Rale and his faithful band of followers were pitilessly massacred on a Sunday morning in that fateful year. The Indians, as was their custom, left their firearms and other weapons in their wigwams, and all attended

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the morning worship service in the small chapel which they had erected under Father Rale's supervision. A sizeable company of English soldiers had made its way up the lower reaches of the Kennebec River the night before. Knowing the Sabbath custom of the natives, the soldiers concealed themselves in the forest on the summit of a nearby hill, overlooking the Indian centre. When all were in church and the service was well under way, the heavily armed soldiers swooped down on the village. Taken by surprise while worshipping their God, these harmless Indians were helpless to defend themselves. The soldiers had easy targets and slaughtered men, women and children in rapid fashion. They set fire to the chapel and to the entire village, causing complete destruction. Some of the natives managed to reach the Kennebec but most of these were shot and killed while swimming up the river, only a very few making a successful escape.

~~Father Rale, the last to leave the chapel, was shot and killed as he~~ stepped outside. To this great missionary, who spent the best of his years with these natives whom he loved and who also departed from this life with them, has been erected a suitable monument, paying tribute to his noble efforts and recording the occurrence of this outrageous perpetration of one of the most hideous mass crime in the world's history.

The Old Point Massacre, as it is commonly called, is only one of many such uncalled-for attacks made by the English and French upon offenseless, small Indian tribes.

As the result of the so-called American-Indian warfare, which was prolonged over a long period of years, the Indian race vanished rapidly until a time came when these once proud and fearless natives were completely humbled into submission by their English, French, Dutch and Spanish conquerors. In later years, following the American Revolution, as the States of the Union were united under one flag and domination of the red man in America was subsequently completed, reservations were set aside by the United States govern-

ment for the homes of these conquered peoples.

Their noble spirits humbled beyond repair, these victims of a supposedly superior civilization began an existence to which they were hitherto unacquainted. Once at liberty to go wherever they pleased in the pursuit of life and happiness, these defeated peoples were forced to take up their abode within limited areas. From time to time the old spark was renewed in these brave Indian hearts and there were uprisings on the plantations but detachments of United States soldiers were always speedily dispatched to the scene and again the Indians, still far too inexperienced at armed warfare, and too poorly equipped, were quickly subdued.

Not only did the Indian spirit slowly reach the grave but so also was the Indian physically brought to a new low through ill contact with the whites. Like the diminishing hordes of wild buffalo on the western plains, the Red Man is vanishing into the dim past. In fact, the disappearance of wild buffalo, after the coming of the White Man, was fateful for some tribes. Likewise the "fur trading" between the whites and the Indians was fateful for the latter. Lured into trading valuable furs for cheap jewelry and whiskey (all too often the latter), many changes for the worse were wrought in the lives of the aborigines. It was one of the saddest days in Indian history when the American natives were first introduced to strong liquor by our European ancestors, who came to this continent.

Gradual deterioration of the Red Man came about not only by conquest, by abuse, and by liquor, but also by fusion with the white race. According to Chamberlain, the intermingling of the American Indians with the intruding white race has been much greater than is generally believed. Many of the early settlers, especially trappers and traders, mingled freely with the native women. Inter-marriage was common in many parts of the United States. This was particularly true in the Northwestern section of the country and in Maine.