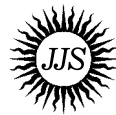




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From Ship to Shore: Food, Drink, and Cultural Encounter in Gregorio Mengarini's Flathead Nineteenth-Century Mission

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Received 31 March 2025 | Accepted 21 July 2025 |

Published online 11 September 2025

Abstract

This study examines the experiences of the Jesuit missionary Gregorio Mengarini among the Flathead people in the mid-nineteenth century, focusing on the practices of eating and the reasons for dietary changes in several different contexts. Drawing on Mengarini's vocation and the shared cultural significance of food, the essay examines historical sources documenting his journey. The travels of Mengarini and his companions, both from Europe to the United States and within the US, highlight the challenges of hunger and dietary restrictions. The Jesuit mission with the Flathead people aimed to establish subsistence agriculture, which often clashed with the local food culture rooted in practices such as root gathering and buffalo hunting. These cultural differences presented considerable difficulties for the Catholic missionaries in adapting. Mengarini's narrative also highlights the arduous conditions the Jesuits faced in the Rocky Mountains, including hunger and travel-related dangers. The article concludes with the eventual demise of the Flathead Mission, emphasizing the challenges associated with introducing a new way of life to indigenous communities. This study offers a nuanced perspective on cross-cultural interactions, subsistence strategies, and the limitations of missionary efforts in transforming traditional ways of life.

¹ My sincere thanks to Seth Meehan for his linguistic revisions and insights on this essay.

Keywords

Buffalo – Evangelization – food – Flathead – travel – Gregorio Mengarini – Jesuit missions

The Vocation of Gregorio Mengarini

Gregorio Mengarini (1811–86) was born in Rome on July 21, 1811, and entered the Roman Province of the Society of Jesus on October 22, 1828.² Under the strong influence of the missionary impulse that Jan Roothaan (in office 1829–53), the twenty-first superior general of the Society of Jesus, gave to the recently restored order, Mengarini was attracted to a missionary career by a direct invitation from the United States. In 1839, during his second year of theological studies in preparation for ordination, he heard a letter read in the refectory of the Roman College from the Naples-born bishop of St. Louis, Missouri, Giuseppe Rosati (in office 1827–43), which moved him deeply. Rosati described a series of recent visits to St. Louis by delegations of Flathead and Nez Perce Indians in search of missionaries to introduce them to Christianity. These highly publicized visits, which had previously attracted American Protestant missionaries to Oregon Country, also attracted European Jesuits. Mengarini immediately asked Roothaan for a missionary assignment. The following year, after completing his theological studies and ordination, the twenty-nine-year-old priest was accepted for “his virtues, his knowledge of languages, and his knowledge of medicine and music.”³

There are important and detailed sources about Gregorio Mengarini. First, there is an account Mengarini wrote in Italian during his long missionary life, preserved in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu and translated into English by Gloria Ricci Lothrop in 1977.⁴ Then there is a document written by Mengarini at the end of his life, which was published in the *Woodstock*

2 For biographical data on the Jesuits mentioned in the text, I refer to *Necrologia Patrum ac Fratrum in Societate Iesu Defunctorum*, available at the web address <https://jesuitarchives.org/catalogus-defunctorum/> (accessed April 27, 2025). Another open-access online resource is: <https://jesuitonlinenecrology.bc.edu/> (accessed April 27, 2025).

3 Gerald McKeivitt, “Gregorio Mengarini (1811–1886): North American Missionary and Linguist,” *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu* 61, no. 122 (1992): 171–88, here 173.

4 ARSI, *Provincia Missouriiana, Missio Montium Saxonorum (Miss.)*, 1001-VII, *Residentia Sanctae Mariae apud Têtes Plates 1843–1850*, 7 (fols. 1–22), *Memorie delle Missioni delle Teste Piatte contenenti brevi nozioni così antiche che moderne di tutto ciò che riguarda questa nazione in particolare*; Gloria Ricci Lothrop, trans. *Recollections of the Flathead Mission: containing Brief*

Letters and later re-published by Albert J. Partoll.⁵ It is plausible to assume that Mengarini based these last memoirs, written more than forty years after the first events, on written notes (perhaps the very ones preserved today in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus).

These sources allow us to focus on a very important moment in Jesuit culture: the organization of time in the common rooms, especially during meals in the refectory. As Mengarini writes in his memoirs, a letter from Bishop Rosati of St. Louis reached the Jesuit Superior General Roothaan in 1839: "It was the voice of a suffering heart," Mengarini remembered, "repeating the call of the Divine Master: *Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci.*" (The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few). "The children from the western desert of America" had come to Rosati, he continued, asking for someone "to bring them the bread of salvation," but he had no one to send. The bishop promised to do everything in his power to alleviate their plight and asked Roothaan for help from Rome.⁶ Mengarini was a theology student at the Roman College at the time, and when the appeal was read out publicly in the refectory, he was deeply moved. It seemed to him like "a manifestation of God's will concerning me." He thought about the matter, asked for guidance from above, offered himself, and was accepted. He was instructed to expedite his examination, and after passing it in January 1840, he was ordained a priest in March.⁷

Mengarini had to wait some time until the journey was arranged. In the meantime, a confrere, James Cotting (1812–92), also applied for the same mission and was accepted by Roothaan as well. Together they set off for Leghorn (Livorno) on the feast of St. Luigi (June 21, 1840) with "the kind wishes of friends and the blessing of Fr. General." However, they encountered delays there, and their ship, the *Oriole*, did not set sail for Philadelphia until July 23.⁸ Undeterred, the young men continued in their delayed journey, one sparked by their hearing of a single letter.

Observations, both Ancient and Contemporary, concerning This Particular Nation (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1977).

- 5 Gregory Mengarini, "The Rocky Mountains: Memoirs of Fr. Gregory Mengarini," *Woodstock Letters* 17 (1888): 293–303; 18 (1889): 25–42; Albert J. Partoll, "Mengarini's Narrative of the Rockies," *Frontier and Midland* 18 (Spring 1938): 193–202; (Summer 1938): 258–66.
- 6 Jan Philipp Roothaan, "On Desire for the Missions," *Renovation Reading*, revised and enlarged edition (Woodstock: Woodstock College 1931), 58.
- 7 Mengarini, *The Rocky Mountains* 17 (1888): 298–99; the reference to will directly evokes Ignatian language, including that related to the relationship with food: [*Autobiografia*], in Ignatius de Loyola, *Monumenta Ignatiana ex autographis vel antiquioribus exempis collecta, Series quarta, Tomus primus* (Matriti: Typis Gabrielis del Horno, 1904), 31–93, here 49–50.
- 8 Mengarini, *Rocky Mountains* 17 (1888): 299.

Listening to edifying readings in the refectory was an important aspect of Jesuit education. The rule for all who sat at the table was a traditional one from the religious and monastic orders: those who ate should be silent and listen to readings that nourished both the soul and the body. Ignatius himself instructed his brothers to remain silent during the entire meal, unless “for some necessity” they had to exchange a few words in a low voice with their table companion.⁹ The Constitutions stipulated that a few books, preferably pious and not complicated (*potius pius quam difficilis*),¹⁰ should be read and that prayers and sermons could be recited and listened to in silence by those present. Permitted readings included the biographies of brethren, especially those who were active in the mission, the lives of saints, letters from missionary places, normative texts of the Society, and instructions from the superiors general. This reading served to edify young novices and students in the colleges as well as Jesuits who had already completed their training.¹¹ For Gregorio Mengarini, reading Rosati’s letter to Roothaan was a turning point in his personal life. This is certainly a fundamental point for the food culture in the Society of Jesus. If we follow Mengarini’s life, we find other examples related to the food and other routine activities of the Jesuits, starting with those related to travelling: firstly, the difficulties of provisions, secondly, the great difference in eating habits and the type of conviviality that prevailed in the refectories of the colleges and professed houses compared to the experiences of a Jesuit missionary on the road and seas.

Traveling

One of the most challenging aspects of the transatlantic voyage was its unpredictable duration, which was often subject to many unforeseen events, including potential encounters during navigation or the vagaries of the weather. After nine days of coastal sailing, the *Oriole*, in which the two young Jesuits were embarked, began its Atlantic voyage, but a hurricane soon took the ship far off course, and the planned three-week crossing extended to eight weeks. The storm severely damaged the sails. As the lockers emptied and

9 *Conclusiones aliquorum patrum circa puncta a S. Ignatio proposita*, in Ignatius de Loyola, *Monumenta Ignatiana, Series Tertia, Vol. IV, Regulae SI (1540–1556)* (Roma: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1948), 194–96.

10 *Constitutiones*, P. III, c. 1, n. 5.

11 Claudio Ferlan, “Food and Jesuits in the Early Modern Western World,” *Il capitale culturale* 20 (2019): 219–44, here 236–37.

provisions ran out, the crew sought to battle hunger plaguing all aboard the *Oriole* by fishing for dolphins, sea turtles, and sharks and by soliciting bread from passing ships. On some occasions, the ships that approached had nothing to share. In another case, a dolphin was caught, but its meat was tough and tasteless. Despite efforts to eat it, even in death, the dolphin proved a fearsome opponent to the passengers' sharp teeth and even sharper appetites, according to Mengarini's memoir. There were not only dolphins, but also food that was known to come in unknown forms: the Ocean remained an unfamiliar place. Some sea turtles appeared as dark, floating objects scattered across the calm and peaceful ocean surface. The crew realized only later that they were sleeping sea turtles. A boat was lowered into the water, and the captain and four sailors quietly approached one of the slumbering creatures. With a deft move, the captain turned the turtle onto its back, and as it clawed at the air in confusion, it was tied up and brought aboard. Another turtle was caught in a similar way, but its companions, sensing danger, disappeared into the depths of the ocean. The smaller turtle was soon made into an excellent soup, while the larger one was kept alive until the *Oriole* finally reached Philadelphia.

Shark fishing, however, had confronted the passengers with the superstitions of the sailors, as Mengarini noted:

Once, while we were in want, a shark was caught; and the cook, having taken some slices from it, prepared them nicely and served them up at the table. They tasted well to the hungry palate, but the captain, ordering shark cooked and uncooked to be cast into the sea, exclaimed with horror: "Do you not know that those who eat of the flesh of a shark shall be eaten up by sharks?" Indeed, we did not know that any such penalty had been decreed against shark-eaters, but what we did know was that we were hungry.¹²

Due to the long voyage, the hardships of fishing, and the difficulty of obtaining resources during the journey, the diet for all on board was eventually limited to a few inches of dried sausage each day. The diet was especially a challenge for Cotting. According to his confrere, the young Italian Jesuit could not properly acclimate to the new tastes and suffered daily from stomach pains.¹³

The landing in Philadelphia was no more cheerful. Despite Mengarini's general fluency in multiple languages (excluding English), few people understood

¹² Mengarini, *Rocky Mountains* 17 (1888): 299–300, here 300.

¹³ Ricci Lothrop, *Recollections*, 65; Gerald McKeivitt, *Brokers of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 51–52.

either him or Cotting. Moreover, the costs of housing and food in the city were unexpectedly high, and additional complications as their journey continued only embarrassed the two Jesuits. In later years, Mengarini recalled with chagrin his first evening train ride in the United States, between Philadelphia and Baltimore. The locomotive seemed to speed through the darkness before stopping suddenly. Gregorio watched in amazement as the other passengers rose from their seats and began to leave the train. Unaware of local customs, the two Jesuits discovered that the travelers were simply eating hastily at nearby tables.

“Come,” said Mengarini to Cotting, “let’s follow their example.” Cotting hesitated, though, and, when he finally sat down at a table, he protested: “It’s all conjecture. We were really hungry, but we didn’t know what to do.” As soon as the two Jesuits had taken their seats, a noise signaled the departure of the others, who disappeared into the darkness. What should they do? Mengarini tried to look for information by asking two passengers if they spoke French, but he had no luck. Then they heard shouts, and a man “muttering unintelligibly” finally dragged them behind him onto another train. They had only had to change trains to cross a river and continue their journey. Once in Baltimore, Mengarini and Cotting had difficulty asking for directions to their destination. Mengarini recalled trying to communicate in five different languages before finally finding a Canadian who directed them to the Jesuits’ residence at Georgetown. Here they were warmly received by the brethren, and after a few days of rest, they continued their journey to St. Louis, this time by boat and under the guidance of the English-born Jesuit Father John Larkin (1801–58), and a younger Brother.¹⁴

The experiences Mengarini and Cotting encountered at sea and on the train in the summer of 1840 were similar to those of another European Jesuit, Nicolas Point (1799–1868), who, a few years later, on his own journey, would briefly become Mengarini’s own missionary companion. Reading about the work of Francis Xavier motivated the French-born Point to join the Jesuits in 1819 and instilled in him a desire to serve abroad. A chance to fulfill that wish arose in 1835 with the invitation of another US bishop for Jesuits to establish a college in Kentucky. Point and three other Jesuits received the assignment: Father William Murphy (1803–75) and the coadjutors Philippe Ledoré (1800–81) and Michel Jary (1793–1836). They departed from the French port of Le Havre on October 18, 1835, and their journey was arduous and lengthy, lasting fifty-seven days before they arrived in New York. Like Mengarini and Cotting later, they faced dwindling supplies while at sea and realized that

14 Mengarini, *Rocky Mountains* 17 (1888): 300–1; Ricci Lothrop, *Recollections*, 66.

fishing was of vital importance. On November 18, they reached the shores of Newfoundland and began fishing to replenish their dwindling supplies. In a few minutes, they caught twenty-five huge cod, each weighing over forty-two pounds. While they were pulling the net ashore, though, the captain fell into the choppy sea. Just in time, Ledoré threw him a line that saved his life.¹⁵

For the four European Jesuits, once safely in the United States, the train ride (and the meals on board) was an unforgettable experience. They left Philadelphia on the morning of December 29, 1835, and took the train west to the small town of Columbia on the Susquehanna River (Pennsylvania). Full of anticipation, they disembarked to enjoy a sumptuous lunch included in their railroad tickets. Both Murphy and Point later commented on the event. Point expressed surprise at the Americans' hearty way of eating, while Murphy was fascinated by their obsession with punctuality. Sharing a table with an English preacher, the Jesuits were enjoying their meal when suddenly a whistle sounded, signaling all passengers to return to the train. Stunned, the five European men hurriedly tried to get back on board, shouting and running at full speed. Everyone else around them laughed at their frantic response, prompting them to laugh along but also to eat on the go from then on. Although Murphy took the situation with humor, he also noted that almost all Americans suffered from digestive problems, which they referred to as 'dyspepsia.'¹⁶ In sum, crossing the Atlantic and moving within the United States involved great danger, misunderstanding, and disorientation, starting with what to eat and how to do it.

Mission in St. Mary's

Let us now turn back to Mengarini and Cotting, who, after their eventual arrival in St. Louis, joined the Belgian Pierre-Jean De Smet (1801–73) in his preparations for the mission among the Flathead tribe. The origins of this missionary project date to 1831,¹⁷ when four indigenous Flatheads or Nez Percés traveled to St. Louis to ask for help from Catholic missionaries who were

15 Cornelius M. Buckley, *Nicolas Point, S.J.: His Life & Northwest Indian Chronicles* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1989), 85.

16 Buckley, *Nicolas Point*, 90–91.

17 The story is told in various texts, many referring to Gilbert J. Garraghan, *The Jesuits of the Middle United States* II (New York: America Press, 1938), 236–47; for another source see Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J. 1801–1878* I (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905), 289–92.

willing to go as far as their homeland in the Bitterroot Valley (now Montana). They had encountered Catholicism some fifteen years earlier after meeting a group of twenty-four Iroquois (a tribe that had first met the French Jesuits two centuries earlier). These people had gone west to find a place to live and were adopted by the Flatheads. The leader of the Twenty-Four was named Ignace La Mousse (known as Big or Old Ignace),¹⁸ and he had first taught the Flatheads the rudiments of Christianity and told them about the Jesuits. Because of the good relations between Flatheads and Nez Perces and the inconsistency of the sources, it is impossible to determine exactly the composition of the small group of eastward travelers that had reached St. Louis from the Bitterroot Valley in 1831. What is certain is that their initial request for missionaries was unsuccessful. The Catholic Church was not yet organized enough in St. Louis to support a mission in such distant and hard-to-reach places.¹⁹

The Flatheads were not discouraged, however, and arranged a second and third expedition, both led by Old Ignace and both failed. The second took place in 1835, when Old Ignace was joined by two young sons. We know that the Jesuit Ferdinand Helias (d'Huddeghem, 1796–1874) baptized them in St. Louis on December 2, 1835, noting their ages: ten and fourteen. When Old Ignace returned to the Rocky Mountains with his children, however, no missionary joined with him. The third expedition of 1837 ended tragically: it was surprised and wiped out by several Sioux groups; Old Ignace was among the victims. In 1839, however, a fourth expedition was organized, and the religious desires of the Flatheads and the resources of the Catholic Church were finally reconciled. Two young Flatheads, Pierre Gauché and Young Ignace, together with a group of trappers, reached St. Louis. There, they met Bishop Giuseppe Rosati. The city in Missouri had been established as a diocese with the pastoral care of a vast territory that extended westward not only into the Rocky Mountain region, but also into Oregon Country (corresponding to present-day Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and western Montana). Unlike previous meetings, this time the bishop assured the two Flatheads that some missionaries would soon reach their land. It was on this occasion that Rosati wrote to Roothaan the letter that was to be read to Mengarini and other young Jesuits in the refectory of the Roman College.

18 Alvin M. Josephy Jr, *Nez Perce Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 124–25.

19 The modest scale of local missionary infrastructure is noteworthy here: *The Catholic Almanac: or, Laity's Directory, for the year 1833.... embellished with a portrait of the Venerable Archbishop Carroll* (Baltimore, MD: Published by James Myres, 1833), 48–49.

The person chosen to establish first contact with the Flatheads in their homeland was Pierre-Jean De Smet. On March 27, 1840, he set out from St. Louis for the Rocky Mountains. He reached Westport by boat, traveling along the Missouri River. Here he joined a group of trappers from the American Fur Company who were setting off for the annual rendezvous on the Oregon Trail, during which hunters traded goods both among themselves and with Native Americans. On June 30, 1840, the wagon train arrived at the site chosen for the rendezvous in what is now southwestern Wyoming, where ten Flathead warriors were waiting for the Jesuit to escort him to their main camp at a place called Pierre's Hole. During this expedition, De Smet witnessed one of the cornerstones of Native American food culture: the buffalo hunt.²⁰ Jesuit reports in later years often detailed this practice and emphasized that it posed a challenge to establishing missions.

De Smet returned to St. Louis on December 31, 1840. His report, which he sent to Bishop Rosati and the local Jesuit superior Peter Verhaegen (1800–68), was very optimistic and strongly recommended the establishment of a mission among the Flatheads.²¹ His judgment proved convincing, and the indefatigable De Smet traveled to Louisiana to secure the financial support needed to organize the mission. He managed to raise approximately \$2,000. Meanwhile, his confreres in St. Louis were discussing who should accompany him in establishing the new mission. The chosen ones were Fathers Mengarini and Point (while Cotting would remain in St. Louis), and Brothers Joseph Specht (tinsmith, 1808–84), William Claessens (blacksmith, 1811–91), and Charles Huet (carpenter, 1805–56). After an adventurous overland journey, the group arrived in the Bitterroot Valley, Montana, in September 1841. There, they founded St. Mary's Mission, the first of a series of Jesuit outposts in the Pacific Northwest.²²

Many sources recount this journey, including accounts by De Smet²³ as well as other expedition members. Some emphasize the importance of people from diverse backgrounds gathering and eating together in fostering good relations between those who were supposedly destined to be on opposite sides, such as Catholics and Protestants. For example, we read in the diary of the Methodist

20 John J. Killoren, *"Come, Blackrobe." De Smet and the Indian Tragedy* (Saint Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), 58–64; Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels* 1:204–7.

21 Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels* 1:327–30.

22 Wilfred P. Schoenberg, *A History of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1987), 58–62.

23 Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels*, 1:289–304.

minister Joseph Williams, who was also on a missionary journey when he encountered the Jesuits:

One of the company was a Catholic priest, a Mr. De Smidt [De Smet], who was extremely kind to me and invited me to come and eat supper with him that night and the next morning brought me some venison.²⁴

One stop on the long journey for the Jesuits was Fort Hall, where Commandant Francis Ermantinger (a Protestant) invited them to dine several times. De Smet summed up the end of the expedition as follows:

After a journey of four months and a half on horseback through the desert, and in spite of our actual want of bread, wine, sugar, fruit, and all such things as are called the conveniences of life we find our strength and courage increased, and are better prepared than ever to work at the conversion of the souls that Providence entrusts to our care.²⁵

De Smet stopped only briefly at the new mission, dedicated to St. Mary, and soon resumed his numerous travels. First, in the fall of 1841, he traveled to Fort Colville (today in Washington) to procure new supplies for the mission. Then, in the spring of 1842, he went to Fort Vancouver. Here he was to speak with Augustin Magloire Blanchet (1797–1887)²⁶ about future work in Oregon. The supply of food was a central issue of their discussions, as was the diplomatic potential of shared meals: good relations could be established at the table with other missionaries, or at least with men who held important positions but were not Catholic. The hardship of overland travel also served as a shared experience that could bridge differences. However, the Jesuit missionaries, having completed their travels, faced a new challenge in terms of diet: would they adapt to the eating habits of the peoples they sought to evangelize and among whom they would settle? The question was of central importance in many respects: materially and economically, certainly, but also spiritually, as the link between food and religion is a constant in many religions, not just Christianity.

24 Joseph Williams, *Narrative of a Tour from the State of Indiana to Oregon Territory in the years, 1841–42* (New York: The Cadmus Book Shop, 1921), 33.

25 Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels* 1:315.

26 He was the first bishop of the now-defunct Diocese of Walla Walla, in Oregon County, between 1846 and 1850.

The Food Culture of the Flatheads

Mengarini's memoirs describe, among other things, the food culture of the Flatheads. It was closely tied to their nomadic lifestyle. Many Jesuit efforts to alter the food culture of natives sought to encourage sedentarism over mobility (the resources collected by De Smet in Louisiana were used for this purpose). However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful, as we will see later. One of the first notes that Mengarini wrote concerned the difficulties in organizing subsistence agriculture. The soil was far from easy to cultivate—naturally arid, strewn with large stones (hidden beneath the surface of the land, often breaking plows and rendering them useless), plagued by persistent droughts, and frozen for months. Arable lands were only found along the rivers, which, however, were usually located at great distances from each other. The exceptions to these disappointing efforts were those directed at the cultivation of wheat, barley, oats, and some potatoes:

We have succeeded in growing no legumes except for peas. Unfortunately, these and the wheat, which could yield much nourishment, are completely destroyed in the bloom of their growth by storms, causing those who come to this country to apply to themselves the biblical condemnation: *In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane* (In the sweat of your brow you will eat your food, Genesis 3:19).²⁷

A later note by De Smet, dated September 6, 1846, struck a more optimistic tone—likely because he was writing to his provincial, aiming to demonstrate progress and secure additional support for the mission. He wrote that the soil yielded abundant harvests of wheat, oats, and potatoes (and not just a few), while the prairie could feed thousands of cattle.²⁸ A year earlier, another Belgian Jesuit, Adrian Hoecken (1815–97), who also served as missionary in the Rocky Mountains a few years after the founding of St. Mary, had written that the harvest of wheat, barley, peas, corn, and potatoes was abundant, so that the mission of St. Mary produced more than was necessary for mere subsistence: evidently the efforts of the Jesuits at the mission had borne some fruit.²⁹

Later, Jesuit accounts noted that cleanliness was not a hallmark of the mountain tribes' cooking and eating habits. Men and women rarely washed

²⁷ Ricci Lothrop, *Recollections*, 187–88.

²⁸ Letter of De Smet to Father Provincial, in Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Early Western Travels 1748–1846*, xxix (Cleveland: Arthur Clark Company, 1906), 321–42, here 322–25.

²⁹ Ricci Lothrop, *Recollections*, 188.

their pots and pans, and often used their straw hats (without the leaves) as bowls during meals. But the dietary habits of the missionaries, out of necessity, resembled those of the natives. In addition to a variety of vegetables from their garden, their diet included dried buffalo meat and its tallow, roots, and berries. There was also plenty of fish from the river, venison, elk meat, and birds. The children were especially fond of carrots. They often sneaked into the garden in early summer to nibble on young carrots. Although the Jesuits were usually very protective of their gardens, on which they depended for survival, they turned a blind eye to this kind of theft. They found that the children simply could not resist their craving for carrots.³⁰

During the Bitter Root Moon in mid-May, the Flatheads held a Thanksgiving dance at the Medicine Tree in the southern part of the valley before gathering the valuable bitterroot. The root, which gave the Flathead country its name, has a slightly bitter but not unpleasant taste. They cooked it with meat and dried it for winter provisions. Its medicinal qualities were also recognized by other tribes. When the prairie turned blue with blooming camas in late June (the month of camas bloom), the Flatheads went to the Camas Prairie to gather the onion-like roots of the blue camas plant. Women immediately began digging up the bright bulbs. The camas was probably the most common dried food source for the Indians, second only to bitterroot. Although the freshly harvested root was somewhat bland, after a drying period of several days and a complicated two-day cooking process, it became one of the few sweet foods that could be preserved for the winter. In late summer, the women and children gathered berries, which they crushed, along with the seeds, until they were fine enough to eat comfortably. These berries were mixed with tallow and meat to make pemmican. The mixture was heated and, while still soft, poured into a leather container (a parfleche) for later use. A half-pound of pemmican could feed a man for an entire day. Meanwhile, also once a year, the missionaries sent Indian couriers with packhorses to Fort Vancouver to bring back provisions and, hopefully, mail. Several times, enemies stole the much-needed provisions, and the couriers were wounded.³¹

Because of struggles by the Jesuits to introduce new agricultural opportunities, the Flathead's dietary habits remained primarily tied to the buffalo, supplemented by berries and root crops. The Jesuits faced a major obstacle in their missionary project: the constant travel required for hunting disrupted continuous catechesis, as hunters were often away for long periods. In the

30 Lucille H. Evans, *Good Samaritan of the Northwest*, Anthony Ravalli, S.J., 1812–1884 (Stevensville: Montana Creative Commons, 1981), 75; Schoenberg, *History*, 39.

31 Evans, *Good Samaritan*, 75–77.

spring and summer, the Flatheads lived in the Bitterroot Valley and subsisted on camas roots, berries, sheep, goats, elk, deer, and small game. In June and July, the men crossed the mountains to hunt buffalo, which were important not only for meat but also for the desperately needed hides. As many as fifteen to twenty hides were needed to build a single Indian hut, and they were also used for numerous other items, including kettles, boats, saddles, shields, clothing, and bedding. The bones of the buffalo, meanwhile, were used for tools, hair for decorations, sinew for whips and bows. The buffalo hunt was also of symbolic and economic importance: buffalo hides were an easily traded commodity. Sales of buffalo hides to the American Fur Company rose from 67,000 to 110,000 between 1800 and 1848, and in the latter year, merchants from St. Louis bought 25,000 buffalo tongues destined for gourmets around the world.³²

Hunting parties were well organized: scouts led the way, and guards communicated the movements of the herds by imitating the cries of birds and other animals, as well as through sign language. Additional messages were conveyed by arranging sticks in various patterns along the trail, which could be easily interpreted by the rest of the group. After the berry season ended in early fall (September and October), the entire tribe moved to the plains near the upper tributaries of the Missouri River, returning in March or April to dig bitter roots. During the winter months, however, the main focus was on surviving the buffalo hunt.³³ In many instances, the Jesuits accompanied hunting parties to maintain their rapport with these groups, strategically utilizing favorable opportunities to provide religious instruction and cultivate closer personal relationships, particularly with tribal leaders.³⁴

Nicolas Point left an impressive description of the movements involved in organizing the hunt:

The use of about twenty horses. Some fifteen parallel trails, formed by dragging wigwam poles, wound between two chains of mountains, which sometimes drew together to offer at close range a view of what was most majestic about the wilderness, sometimes separated to reveal a series of infinitely varied and distant perspectives. This is what was called the great hunting trail.³⁵

32 Ricci Lothrop, *Recollections*, 104.

33 Ricci Lothrop, *Recollections*, 103–5.

34 ARSI, *Miss.* 1001, I–VII, *Residentia Sanctae Mariae apud Têtes Plates 1843–1850*, 4 bis.

35 Nicolas Point, *Wilderness Kingdom: Indian Life in the Rocky Mountains: 1840–1847: The Journals & Paintings of Nicolas Point, S.J.*, trans Joseph P. Donnelly (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 43.

And how did the tireless hunters feed themselves during their expeditions? Mengarini tells us, with a mixture of admiration and alarm. They formed small groups (three, five, ten people) to hunt deer or roe deer themselves, but also to lie in wait for possible enemies. The hunters returned to camp after dark and ate a piece of meat (raw or cooked) if they had caught game. If not, they satisfied their hunger with a few roots, went to sleep, and were ready to resume work the next day. Accidents on the hunt were not uncommon: some fell off their horses, some died, and others suffered serious injuries. Snow and dust posed a serious risk to their eyes. Water was a major problem: hunters often drank foul, stale water, exposing themselves to the great danger of serious infections.³⁶ For the missionaries, the challenge was twofold: on the one hand, they had to immerse themselves in a culture that was completely opposite to their own (not only in terms of food); on the other hand, participating in the hunting expeditions required physical exertion and an ability to adapt that was completely unfamiliar to men from Europe and completely unfamiliar with the terrain, climate and herd in northwestern America.

The risks were certainly not limited to the hunting expeditions, as Mengarini himself experienced firsthand. In December 1842, while at the St. Mary's Mission, he was struck down by a "long and painful illness" caused by excessive cold, which prevented him from digesting any food. In his memoirs, the Italian Jesuit asks himself: how could he describe the cold in winter? He recalls a memory: it was impossible to say Mass unless a fire was kept burning on the altar, otherwise the water and wine would freeze.³⁷ Wine was in great scarcity that winter. It was not only used for the Mass, but also as medicine, according to the medical knowledge of the time. Mengarini recalled that he felt a great craving for wine, but it was a precious commodity. He thus restricted himself to a thimbleful for Mass, even foregoing liturgical ablutions. However, his need was so great that, trusting in Providence, he divided the available wine into two portions. One he kept for the celebration of Mass, the other he used as medicine.³⁸

Due to his illness, he spent the whole winter "in a state of continuous languor." Nevertheless, Mengarini continued to fulfill his pastoral duties, "with an empty stomach and with my whole body as cold as ice": he celebrated Mass, taught the catechism, and heard confessions of many people. Mengarini

36 Ricci Lothrop, *Recollections*, 209–11.

37 Mengarini, *Rocky Mountains* 17 (1888): 307.

38 Ricci Lothrop, *Recollections*, 61, 201; see also a letter of Mengarini, dated Vancouver, September 9, 1844: "Missione tra i selvaggi delle Teste Piatte," *Annali di Propagazione della Fede* XVIII (Lione: Presso gli editori degli Annali, 1846): 301–13, here 307–8.

suffered so severely that after six months, a young Iroquois failed to recognize him and asked if the young Father had departed—so emaciated and altered was he by his diet of boiled roots. But Mengarini later recognized that this diet of bitter roots—and the aid of a local woman—had been his salvation:

I was almost at the death door when an old Indian woman came to me, bringing with her some boiled roots. “Eat,” she said. But I felt no inclination to eat, and would have refused; my stomach revolted at the idea of taking such food. The woman, however, was not prepared to take a refusal. “Eat,” she repeated, and I had to obey. The roots were bitter, but I had to eat them. My vomiting, dizziness, and lightheadedness ceased, and soon I was well again.³⁹

New Jesuits in the Rocky Mountains

Even before enduring the hardships of this brutal winter, Mengarini had faced a new type of challenge in the fall of 1842. De Smet ordered Point to leave St. Mary’s and establish a second mission among the Nez Percés together with Brother Huet. In truth, Point would have preferred to do his missionary work among the Blackfeet, a wish based on his experiences hunting bison. The Flatheads’ hunting-based, nomadic way of life had prevented the Jesuits from organizing a permanent and self-sufficient mission along the lines of the Paraguayan Reductions.⁴⁰ This was Point’s goal. Moreover, the Blackfeet’s ferociousness encouraged Point to engage in the more difficult but also more demanding pastoral work. He believed that the conversion of the aggressive Blackfeet would serve as an example for other tribes. However, his superior’s plans were different, and Point had to obey.⁴¹

De Smet, far beyond these missionary labors, launched a recruiting campaign across the United States and Europe to ensure the continuity of the Rocky Mountain Mission. By October 1842, he had reached St. Louis to recruit new personnel and gather new material. His efforts proved so successful that De

39 Mengarini, *Rocky Mountains* 18 (1889): 36–37; ARSI, *Miss. 1001, I–VII, Residentia Sanctae Mariae apud Têtes Plates 1843–1850*, 2 bis, fol. 3.

40 On this topic see Frédéric Dorel, “A Romantic Invented Tradition: Restoring the Seventeenth-Century Paraguayan Reductions in the Nineteenth-Century Rocky Mountains,” in *Crossings and Dwellings: Restored Jesuits, Women Religious, American Experience, 1814–2014*, ed. Kyle B. Roberts and Stephen Schloesser (Leiden: Brill, 2017): 99–139.

41 Buckley, *Nicolas Point*, 209–11; on the obedience in the Society of Jesus, see Claudio Ferlan, *The Jesuits: A Thematic History* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Jesuit Sources, 2023), 34–36.

Smet personally escorted Hoecken as well as Father Peter De Voes (1797–1859) and Brother Peter McGean (McGinn, 1812–77)⁴² to Westport in April 1843. Shortly afterwards, on June 7, 1843, De Smet traveled from New York to Europe, hoping for similar triumphs, and he had good reason to be hopeful. His earlier requests for personnel sent by letter had already been successful. Roothaan had sent Fathers Joseph Joset (1810–1900), Pietro Zerbinatti (1809–45), Tiberio Soderini (dates unknown), and Brother Vincenzo Magni (dates unknown) to the Rocky Mountains. They left the French port of Le Havre on March 20, 1843, bound for New Orleans. After landing in that city, the four sailed up the Mississippi and reached St. Louis on May 18, 1843, where they stayed for a long time; on April 23, 1844, they sailed to Westport and celebrated Mass at Saint Mary's on October 7. Soderini was the only one who remained in St. Louis.

In the meantime, De Smet was on his way back to the United States. On January 9, 1844, he sailed from Antwerp on the (appropriately named) ship *Indefatigable* together with Jesuit Fathers Giovanni Nobili (1812–56), Michele Accolti (1807–78), Antonio Ravalli (1812–84), Louis Vercruysse (dates unknown) and Brother Francis Huybrechts (1798–1872), as well as six members of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. They arrived in Fort Vancouver on August 5, 1844, after crossing the Atlantic, passing through the Strait of Magellan, and sailing up the Pacific from south to north. It had been an important journey, especially for the women religious on board. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur had been founded in 1818 on the initiative of Julie Billiard (1751–1816) and Françoise Blin de Bourdon (1756–1838), two French women who had soon moved to Belgium (Namur to be precise) to avoid the interference of the French Bishop of Amiens. Above all, Billiard gave the sisters a clearly missionary character and encouraged their willingness to become involved all over the world, particularly in the education of young girls. This attitude had found favor with De Smet, who had become acquainted with the Congregation in his native Belgium during his travels through Europe.⁴³ The Congregation's presence in the United States would expand significantly in those years, and their collaboration with the Jesuits—by whose Constitutions they were in some way inspired—was consolidated.

The long voyage of the *Indefatigable*, on which De Smet and his companions traveled from Antwerp to Fort Vancouver between January 9 and August 5, 1844, was a significant example of nutritional hardship, but also of adaptation. The ship had been ready to set sail since December 12, 1843, but fog and

42 Schoenberg, *History*, 28.

43 Dana Lee Roberts, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press 1996), 326–29.

headwinds forced it to remain in port, exacerbated by failed attempts to weigh anchor.⁴⁴ The first nutritional concern arose even before departure: the black coffee served in the galley was so undrinkable that De Smet decided to obtain a goat from a nearby farm. When he returned with an unruly goat, two nuns began milking it. Apparently, the goat behaved well during the long journey, and its milk made the coffee more palatable.⁴⁵

At three o'clock in the afternoon on January 9, the ship set sail. To avoid the inevitable seasickness, Captain Moller advised the passengers to eat well, drink a good glass of wine with their meals, and get plenty of fresh air. However, the first symptoms of seasickness were already noticeable at supper. Led by Father Louis Vercruysse, the guests rose from their seats at the shared dining table almost simultaneously. The future missionaries struggled to adjust their steps to the rolling motion of the ship and grabbed benches and chairs until they reached the door and climbed the stairs. Once on deck, they retched violently, like a steam engine's exhaust. "O misery! Misery! Who would have thought it?" muttered Vercruysse in his pain. Shortly afterwards, he shouted: "Goodbye to my supper! There goes the tea, the biscuits, the cheese ..." Several more attacks quickly followed, leaving him completely exhausted.⁴⁶ On the third day of the journey, Michele Accolti had stomach problems. In his memoirs, he described it not as seasickness, but as mild indigestion caused by pork, although he had eaten little of it. He remedied it by drinking a glass of seawater, a remedy he had read about in a medical book, and which proved effective.

Yet, the Jesuits faced more than just dietary adaptations. The motion of the sea was too violent to celebrate Mass on January 18, 1844, but everyone still received Communion and gathered for dinner for the first time since leaving Antwerp. Mealtimes during the voyage, though, reflected a certain frugality: at 7 am the sailors had coffee, at 10 am they had lunch ("déjeuner à la fourchette," as Accolti writes in his memoirs), at 3 pm they had coffee again, and at 6 pm tea. Dinner was a rare luxury.⁴⁷ Such was the daily routine as the ship's journey extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The ship reached Valparaiso, Chile, on April 12, 1844, and they disembarked the next day. After about twenty

44 Michele Accolti Gil details his journey in a letter stored in ARSI, *Miss.* 1001-IV, *Iter Oregonense PP. Desmet, Accolti, Nobili, Vercruysse, Joset, Soderini, Zerbinatti* (oct. 1842-1844); this letter has been partially edited by Giuseppe Lovecchio, *Alla scoperta della storia ignota di Padre Michele Accolti Gil* (Conversano: Arti Grafiche Scisci, 2001), 85-113. Other sources: Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels* 2:408-44; Evans, *Good Samaritan*, 29-48; Mary Dominica McNamee S.N.D., *Willamette Interlude* (Palo Alto, CA, Pacific Book Publishers, 1959), 51-103 (the point of view of the sisters).

45 Evans, *Good Samaritan*, 29; McNamee, *Willamette*, 24.

46 Evans, *Good Samaritan*, 31-32.

47 Lovecchio, *Alla scoperta*, 101.

days of rest, the travels resumed on May 2. Eight days later, they made another stop in Callao (Lima) and left the Peruvian port on May 26. Since their departure from Antwerp, the rats on the ship had increased tenfold. So, during the passengers' absence while in port, a general fumigation had taken place, resulting in the suffocation of no less than 1,500 rats. This intervention certainly benefited the quantity and quality of the food supplies, which had been threatened by the rats' growing presence. Other threats remained, of course. Back on board, and especially from July 17, the travelers experienced a constant alternation between discomfort and joy as the wind was either contrary or favorable to their journey. Their supplies were running low, so they limited themselves to rice boiled in water with salted meat, which gave off an unpleasant odor. Around July 25, it was announced that even this soup would soon be unavailable as water became increasingly scarce. Finally, on July 28, the ship sighted the Oregon coast. They successfully entered the Columbia River on July 31, although the captain was not entirely clear in his navigation and had chosen a risky passage. Father Ravalli noted the captain's drunkenness—a coping mechanism for his health anxieties. While waiting to disembark, they received a visit from the natives and a trader sent fresh salmon and potatoes, gifts they gratefully accepted after their recent privation.

Upon arrival at Fort Vancouver, where dinner was waiting, Father De Smet blessed the table and said grace, as was customary in America when a priest was present, even in a Protestant household. Dinner at Fort Vancouver was served to the sisters in their private rooms, while all the men were invited to the palatial dining hall. There they enjoyed a multi-course meal, beginning with a delicious fish soup, followed by roast venison, a variety of vegetables and luscious fruits, with apple pie and cheese for dessert, all accompanied by wine. Although McLoughlin, chief factor and superintendent of the Columbia District of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver, only occasionally drank a small glass of wine, he toasted his guests to their arrival in Oregon country. A Scottish bagpiper, positioned behind the host's chair, provided the background music for the meal. After the elaborate meal, the men retired to the smoking room, known as the Bachelor's Hall, as women were not permitted. The visitors marveled at the room's collection of literary classics, newspapers from London and Edinburgh, medical books of great interest to Father Ravalli, and an exhibition of Indian arms and curiosities. The grueling journey had ended with a celebratory feast shared with new, important people—a fitting reward for their trials, although work also awaited the missionaries in Oregon.

De Smet soon summoned Mengarini to the Willamette Valley, where a meeting of Jesuit missionaries was to be held. The Italian Jesuit reluctantly obeyed, as he did not like traveling at all, probably due to the various difficulties

(including with food) he had experienced on previous expeditions. Mengarini's aversion to travel was well-founded. In the year prior to the sea voyage of the *Indefatigable*, Mengarini had himself experienced a harrowing ordeal, marked by the fear of starvation, which he recounted in his memoirs. They allow us to highlight the difficulties of the overland journey between missions, or more precisely, between a mission and a meeting point. In the spring of 1843, the Italian Jesuit set off with some companions and a group of Native guides to meet Father De Vos, who had arrived with some confreres to strengthen the mission and establish additional ones, as previously mentioned. On the way back, a Jesuit Brother got lost and was sure to find the campsite where the guides had gone ahead to prepare a meal. After wandering through the woods, the Brother concluded that he had taken the wrong road. Mengarini ordered the guns to be fired, but received no response. The Indian guides were miles away, and the path the group had taken led directly into Blackfoot territory. Any response to their calls would probably have come from a band of Blackfoot Indians, and it was far better to hear no response than to expose themselves to such a dangerous encounter. They therefore had to spend the night without food or shelter. Mengarini and his companions were quite hungry, as they had not eaten since the morning and had spent the whole day on horseback. Father De Vos kept his sense of humor and was more inclined to laugh and joke. Mengarini, frustrated, called out to Brown, a member of their party who was not a Jesuit, "O Brown, here is a knife and a spoon but nothing to eat!" which prompted De Vos to reply, "O Brown, here is a knife and nothing to cut!" This camaraderie sustained them throughout the evening, despite their fatigue and discomfort. Eventually, the rain came, making sleep impossible. Finally, morning came, and with it the great hunger. They decided to retrace their steps to the point where the path had branched off.

Meanwhile, at the campsite, their companions were concerned about their welfare. The guides had prepared the food and kept reheating it, but Mengarini's group had not arrived. As night fell with no sign of them, the companions sent an Indian to look for them and urge them to hurry. He was carrying about a pound of bread, not knowing how far they had strayed from the path. Fortunately, he was more concerned with finding them than with his provisions. He retraced their steps, spotted their tracks, and followed them throughout the night. Just as they were getting ready to leave in the morning, they saw him approaching. Overjoyed to know they were safe, the Indian shared his bread with them and told them that the path they had taken led directly into Blackfoot territory. Following his lead, they took the shortest route back to the campsite, running and galloping whenever possible and taking shortcuts through the undergrowth, despite leaving bits of their clothing and themselves

in the brush. They reached camp in the afternoon, too exhausted to eat, and fell asleep immediately. The next morning, they awoke refreshed, though very hungry. After a meal, they continued their journey.⁴⁸ This example, one among many, illustrates how Jesuit missions would have faced severe food insecurity without local hunting and gathering networks.

Isolated in an almost inaccessible valley, the Jesuits of St. Mary's Mission had to navigate through a maze of mountain passes and waterways that separated one mission from another. When the road was good, which was rarely the case, the pack animals could cover thirty-five to forty miles a day.⁴⁹ The journey between St. Mary's and Coeur d'Alene Mission, for example, about 240 miles, could hardly be made in eight days of travel from sunrise to sunset. Seventy-two rivers had to be crossed. The rough terrain wore down horses' hooves after a single trip. In winter, the trails were covered in deep snow, and in spring, the runoff caused flooding. Another eighty rivers had to be crossed between the Coeur d'Alene Mission and the second St. Ignatius Mission among the Kalispel. Due to food shortages endangering both men and livestock, the Kalispel mission was moved in spring 1854.⁵⁰

The End of the Flathead Mission

At Fort Vancouver, De Smet and Mengarini labored to secure supplies for St. Mary's—a task growing harder as prices soared. The return journey was particularly arduous for Mengarini, as an early-winter storm caused the death of his horses. They perished from cold, exhaustion, starvation, and likely overloading—their cargo included two massive stones destined for the construction of a mill.⁵¹ The heavy load would bear fruit the following year, however, after Antonio Ravalli reached St. Mary's in October 1845.

Although the Flatheads had been growing wheat at the mission since the first harvest in 1842, the grain was initially either boiled or roasted. Crushing wheat in hollow stones or grinding it through coffee mills yielded a poor-quality flour substitute. Once a year, a small amount of flour was imported from Fort Vancouver or Fort Colville to bake altar bread, but this was

48 Mengarini, *Rocky Mountains* 18 (1889): 39–40.

49 In Michele Accolti's May 1854 detailed report, there are comprehensive reflections on distances and associated issues: ARSI, *Miss.* 1002–1 (1852–1884), *Memoria dello Stato delle Missioni ai Monti Sassosi nell'Oregone, scritto da padre Accolti nel maggio 1854*, 6.

50 Schoenberg, *A History*, 89–91; 145–46.

51 Schoenberg, *A History*, 35.

sometimes not enough for the whole year. Father Ravalli, therefore, set about building a mill to produce flour for domestic use when arriving at the mission. Through Ravalli's tireless work with Brothers Claessens and Specht, and of Peter Biledot, a French-Canadian mechanic who had traveled with Mengarini from the Willamette Valley, they constructed a miniature water-powered gristmill. The twelve-inch stones could grind a dozen bushels of grain a day into flour; according to his fellow Jesuit missionary and early chronicler of the mission, Lorenzo Palladino (1837–1927), the first flour mill in what is now Montana was built through the ingenuity and mechanical skill of Antonio Ravalli.⁵²

Pietro Zerbinatti had been commissioned to assist Mengarini in his mission among the Flatheads, but he tragically drowned in September 1845. Father Zerbinatti's death led to Ravalli being appointed Mengarini's companion and assistant at the Flatheads. Ravalli began his journey from St. Ignatius Mission, accompanied by Native American guides. They traveled from dawn to dusk, covering twenty to thirty-five miles a day. When they arrived at a suitable campsite, everyone helped to unsaddle the horses, fetch wood, light a fire, set up Father Ravalli's tent, and prepare dinner. The evening meal required little preparation. The Indian in charge boiled water and added a little flour, fat, and salt to make gamine. With a bit of bread, meat, or dried salmon, it became a feast. However, they could not rely on the Indians to provide the provisions, because the missionaries believed that the natives were incapable of restraining their appetites. Although Ravalli had started with a good supply of flour, fat, and salmon, he found himself six days from the end of the journey when he ran out of provisions due to a lack of caution.⁵³

Early reports of the mission to the Flatheads were full of optimism and enthusiasm. The first signs of a change in the Indians' attitude toward the Jesuits date from the fall of 1846. When Ravalli returned from the buffalo hunt, he wrote to Roothaan that many warriors were beginning to behave differently. They resumed old habits related to their traditional religion, began to shun the missionaries, and refused to help the Jesuits obtain food, selling them only small quantities of poor-quality dried meat. Ravalli's later correspondence (1848–49) was inconsistent: sometimes he was happy about a good climate, other times he complained about new problems. In short, his reports did not offer a stable assessment.⁵⁴ The situation there was fluid, therefore, and

52 Lawrence Palladino, *Anthony Ravalli, SJ, Forty Years a Missionary in the Rocky Mountains (Obituary)* (Helena, MO: Geo. E. Boos & Co., 1884), 59–60.

53 Evans, *Good Samaritan*, 63–64.

54 For example: ARS1, *Miss. 1001-VII, Residentia Sanctae Mariae apud Têtes Plates 1843–1850*, 5, 8, 9.

uncontrollable by the Jesuits. By 1850, Ravalli warned Roothaan that the rift between missionaries and Indians had grown unbridgeable. The Flatheads had moved their tents away from the mission, resumed wild dancing and gambling, and refused to sell supplies to the missionaries. They traded exclusively with a Hudson's Bay Company agent who was openly hostile to the Jesuits. Attempts to warn Superior Joset, who was later replaced by Accolti to lead the Rocky Mountain missions, were unsuccessful. Mengarini embarked alone down to the Willamette River seeking Accolti—a grueling nine-hundred-mile ordeal. Instead, he met Joset a little closer, at the Coeur d'Alene mission. Meanwhile, Ravalli became increasingly concerned for his own safety at St. Mary's. On September 7, 1850, while most of the warriors were out hunting, fifty Blackfeet warriors arrived at the mission gates and frightened the Jesuits, but eventually left without attacking them. When the Flathead warriors returned, they were stunned to find the missionaries still alive. With supplies dwindling and the Flatheads still refusing trade, Ravalli then decided to flee the mission and seek refuge with the Nez Percés, perhaps the only native group he could trust. In the meantime, Mengarini managed to convince Joset that the situation at St. Mary's was too dangerous to maintain.⁵⁵ The superior thus shuttered the mission after nine years.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The Jesuits, spanning centuries and continents, faced profound challenges during their journeys to distant missions. Travel was not merely a logistical necessity but a defining feature of nineteenth-century missionary life—physically and culturally demanding. For European missionaries bound for the United States, the perilous Atlantic crossing—marked by hunger, disease, and unfamiliar food—was only the beginning. Upon arrival, their trials continued: supply shortages forced them to rely on fishing, hunting, and foraging, while

55 ARSI, *Miss.* 1002-1 (1852–84), 6, *Memoria dello Stato delle Missioni ai Monti Sassosi nell'Oregone, scritto da padre Accolti nel maggio 1854*. This memorial (unnumbered folios) also contains Accolti's harsh assessment of Ravalli, in Italian: "Exceptionally kind-hearted and full of love for the savages, he was nevertheless prone to severe nervous attacks and perpetually tormented by an unruly imagination, which constantly made us fear he might descend into physical madness and furious madness at that. Even during his early novitiate years, he had been sent home due to similar concerns, while his second brother had entered the novitiate at Sant'Andrea only to be dismissed for similar reasons, later dying in the house of the insane." My translation.

56 Garraghan, *Jesuits II*, 375–92.

unfamiliar local foods posed practical and cultural challenges. At mission sites, they confronted alien customs—unfamiliar ingredients, foreign flavors, and novel foodways, like Native American buffalo hunts—that reshaped their daily lives. For the missionaries, this demanded a dual adaptation: embracing a culture alien to their own, including its diet, while joining grueling hunting expeditions. They struggled to adapt to the Northwest's unfamiliar terrain, climate, and wildlife. This dual challenge underscored the extent to which their mission required both cultural and physical resilience.

Future research on Jesuit food culture and mission history holds rich potential. Key avenues include communal meals' social impact, alcohol's dual role in bonding or conflict, and the ecological legacy of European farming in Indigenous communities. Food production costs, culinary evolution, and shifting diets also invite fresh study. This essay highlights food culture as a vital lens for reconstructing the lived experiences and cross-cultural encounters of Jesuit missionaries. Embedded in the interconnected histories of the Old and New Worlds, these narratives reveal food's dual role as sustenance and cultural mediator.