

Fort of the Lakes (or House of the Lakes)

Cottingham, Mollie E. "A History of the West Kootenay District in British Columbia," MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1947,

provides two maps, one drawn from the work of de Smet, which shows St. Peter Station on the west side of Upper Arrow Lake. The other map is from Turner-High and purports to show "The Range of Upper and Lower Bands of Kootenay Indians." The latter map seems to show the Lakes as part of the Kootenay.

In April, 1838, the Reverend Francis Norbert Blanchet was placed in charge of the Catholic Mission of Oregon and directed to convert the Indians in this vast territory. In May he and Rev. Modeste Demers set out from Montreal. They would eventually reach Fort Vancouver in November. On October 14, 1838, they departed from Boat Encampment at the Columbia's Big Bend. They were traveling with a Hudson's Bay Company brigade, which gave them free passage, and expected to have four boats waiting there for them, but there were only two, so it was decided that a third of the party would wait at Boat Encampment until one boat could return for the rest. At the time, the Hudson's Bay Company was constructing a trading post on the shore at what was then the head of Upper Arrow Lake, and called House of the Lakes, McKay's House, or Fort of the Lakes. Anthropologist David Chance has located this post near today's Arrowhead opposite Galena Bay. Fort of the Lakes was also called McKay House for John McKay.¹

The two missionaries set off down the Columbia and a succession of rapids. An account of trip published later by Blanchet included the following information.

The distance from Big Bend to the House of the Lakes is 165 miles, which were run in ten hours; two hours on the 14th, six on the 15th, and two on the 16th of October.

They safely passed the dangerous rapid known as the Dalles of the Dead on the 15th.

¹Bagley, Clarence B. *Early Catholic Missions in Old Oregon*. Seattle: Lowman & Hanford Company, 1932, pp. 23-25.

Bouchard, Randall T. And Dorothy I. D. Kennedy. *First Nations' Ethnography and Ethnohistory in British Columbia's Lower Kootenay/Columbia Hydropower Region*. Prepared for the Columbia Power Corporation; Castelgar, British Columbia, August 2000, p. 77, citing:

Chance, David H. "Influences of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Native Cultures of the Colville District," *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 7(1, Pt.2); *Memoir* 2, Moscow, Idaho, 1973, pp. 3, who called it "an ephemeral post."

Pryce, Paula. *'Keeping the Lakes' Way': Reburial and the Re-creation of a Moral World among an Invisible People*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, p. 44.

"The Story of the Colville Mission," ("probably by Father George Weibel"). Gonzaga University Archives, p. 2.

Pash, Joseph J. *History of the Immaculate Conception Parish in the Colville Valley*. Colville: Rev. Joseph Pash, 1962, p. 1.

Layman, William D. *River of Memory: The Everlasting Columbia*. Collectors' Edition. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006, p. 106 (in section drafted by Eileen Delehanty Pearkes) also identified the location of St. Peter Station as being near Arrowhead and being called "*kwespits'a7* [Buffalo Robe]" by the Lakes. This suggests that Fort of the Lakes was constructed at a site where the Sinixt had previously traded with neighboring tribes.

The boats were no sooner arrived at the House of the Lakes than one of them was unloaded, and sent back to the relief of the party left behind. The House of the Lakes being still in construction, the missionaries encamped as usual under their tents.²

The two missionaries would spend eighteen days at the House of the Lakes,³ conducting the first Catholic missionary work in the region.

The first week was spent in prayer, celebration of the Mass, teaching the Indians, singing canticles and evening exercises. The Indians of the Lakes soon came to visit the priests, anxious as they were to see and hear the *Blackgowns* so often spoken of by the Canadians. They were found to be of a mild, peaceable character and well disposed to receive the words of salvation. They being the first sheep of the vast fold entrusted to their care, the missionaries took pleasure in instructing them, speaking of God, of the creation, of the fall of angels and man, and of the Redemption by the Son of God. The Indians listened with attention, assisting at Mass with awe; and before the return of the boat, they brought their children (17) to be baptized, regretting not to have the same happiness to make their hearts good. It was painful to the missionaries to leave them unbaptized.⁴

The Catholic missionaries entered the names of at least thirteen Lakes who had been baptized, including Marguerite, “natural child of Plitchouegge Chief of the Indians of the Lakes and of Kwildimalkes a woman of the country...,” and also Josephte and Isabelle, both children of the Plitchouege, Chief of the Lakes. They also baptized a child of John McKay, who was listed as “Post master of Fort of the Lakes.”⁵

In 1839 Demers provided a description of the Lakes in a letter to a Catholic official in Quebec. Under the heading “Lake House,” Demers said,

The first savages we saw are called *Lake Indians*. These

²Bagley, Clarence B. *Early Catholic Missions in Old Oregon*. Seattle: Lowman & Hanford Company, 1932, p. 25.

Kowrach, Edward J. (ed.) *Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon by Most Rev. Francis Norbert Blanchet*. Fairfield, 1983, pp. 44-45, 47, and 49-50.

Norbert Blanchet. *Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon During the Past Forty Years (1838-1878)*; Portland, Oregon: February 7, 1878, pp. 7-9 and 16.

³Tod, John. to James Douglas, March 1839. Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg. D.4/106 fos. 17-18, was on the same journey and referred to the House of the Lakes as “McKay’s.”

⁴Bagley, Clarence B. *Early Catholic Missions in Old Oregon*. Seattle: Lowman & Hanford Company, 1932, p. 25. The Chief of the Lakes’ name is spelled two different ways in the record.

⁵Catholic Church Records. 1972. *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: Vancouver*. Vol. 1. Translated by Mikell De Lores Wormell Warner. Annotated by Harriet Duncan Munnick. St. Paul’s Ore.: French Prairie Press, 1972, pp.13-15.

first of the large fold committed to our care correspond well to the description given us of them by the Canadians, who had been for some time telling them of their own chiefs—the black robes—and had given them the hope that some of them would arrive and give them a knowledge of the Master of life, He who made them, “*Kaekouten tshouten.*” We can easily imagine with what joy they received those chiefs for whom they had been so long waiting. For 17 days we remained at the House of the Lakes and labored in this new vineyard, which promised from the very beginning of our visit to bear abundant fruit. After the first instruction...those who had little children hastened to bring them for Baptism, “to have their hearts made good.” They regretted that they, themselves, could not receive the same happiness.

Demers continued that the Lakes hoped a priest could come among them soon.⁶

English, Cathy to Edward J. Kowrach. January 7, 1985,

I have recently become involved in a project to compile a parish history, as part of the 50th Anniverary [sic] Celebrations of our Diocese in 1986.

When I wrote to the diocesan Archives for information I was sent, among other things, this picture of the Mission Cross at Arrowhead, a copy of which I am enclosing for you.

If this was indeed the cross erected by Fathers Blanchet and Demers, then Arrowhead was most likely the site of “House of the Lakes.” Of course, Arrowhead is now flooded, but it may be possible to determine the approximate site of the cross, by discovering the location of the sawmill.

The author of the article, B. R. Atkins, was a local historian.

I wrote to the Provincial Archives in Victoria, but they had very little information.

I hope that this picture is of interest to you. I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

Attached is a photograph with a caption which says, “First Mission Cross in the northwest mainland, erected near Arrowhead by Fathers Blanchet and Demers in October 1938 [sic, 1838]. It stood at that site, over an old burying ground until 1898 when a spur track was built through its

⁶Bagley, Clarence B. *Early Catholic Missions in Old Oregon*. Seattle: Lowman & Hanford Company, 1932, p. 48.

Kowrach, Edward J. (ed.) *Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon by Most Rev. Francis Norbert Blanchet*. Fairfield, 1983, p. 66, provides the same quotation.

location to a sawmill. Picture was taken in 1897.” The picture was “submitted” by B. R. Atkins on March 25, 1938, apparently at the centennial of the placing of the cross.

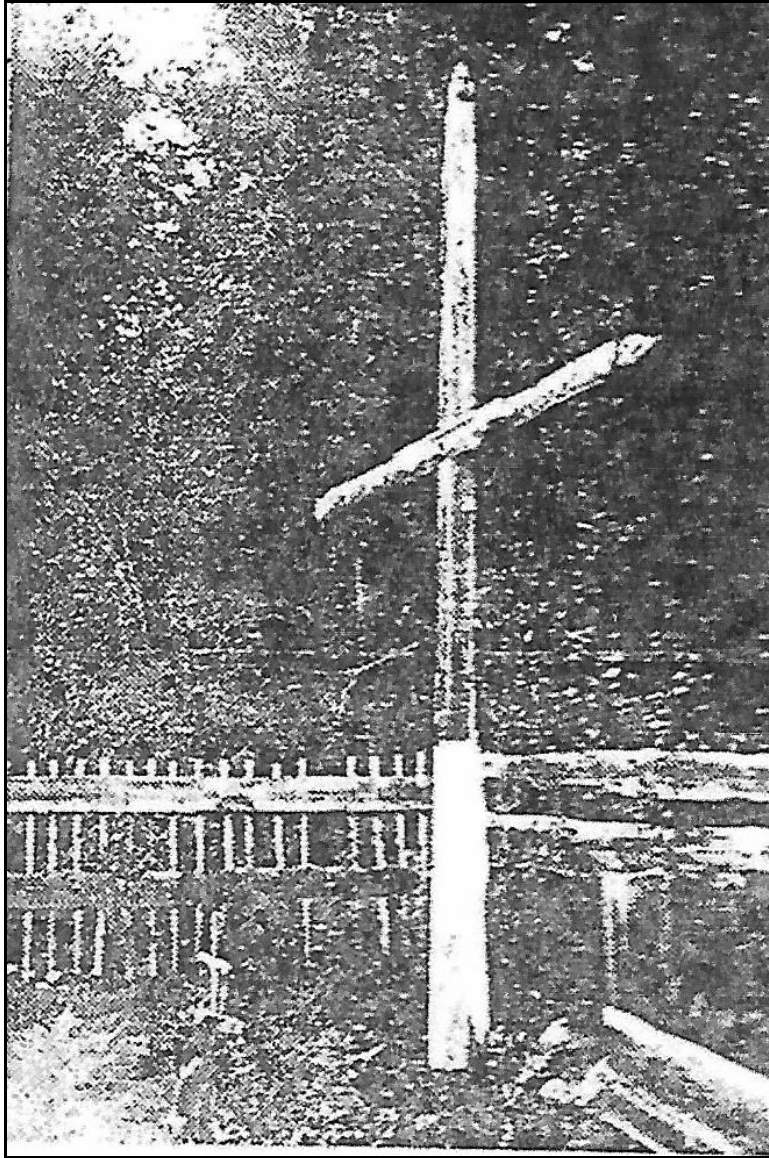
Atkins apparently authored the page attached by English titled “The Arrowhead Cross,” which reads:

This picture was taken, 1898, at the (1838) “House of the Lakes”, of Rev. Fathers Blanchet and Demers, which became Arrowhead in 1895. The oldest old-timer then there could not tell its origin- the common answer was- “we call it the Indian graveyard.”

Evidently of Christian Indian fur-trade voyageur design- their only making tool an axe- and whose custom it was to raise such crosses to comrades lost in the Columbia Rapides- and to doff their caps as they passed them- its pictured condition shows Christian continuance of such regard and reverence; if, indeed, such is its origin, which seems substantiated by these references:

Paul Kane, “Wanderings of an Artist,” 1847,- referring to the recovery of some bodies from an earlier Death Rapids tragedy, says the crosses were raised over them there and at (now) Arrowhead.

Walter Moberly, “Rocks and Rivers of B. C., 1865- says, “that year: I saw at the head of he lake (Arrows), a large wooden cross; it was to the right of the mouth of the river, a short distance away.” Then recounting the recoveries of the remains of Paul Kane’s tragedy, he concludes, “They were buried under this Cross.



Layman, William D. *River of Memory: The Everlasting Columbia*. Collectors' Edition. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.

On page 106, Layman includes the following quote from Eileen Delahanty Pearkes.

At a place the Sinixt call *kwespits'a7* [Buffalo Robe], the lake becomes river again, cresting and ebbing around a small island of cottonwoods while the current swells over gravel bars littered with chinook spawn. The name hints at the exchange long ago of salmon for the hides of an animal foreign to mountains, or of dried berries for sweetgrass, a plant that sways in a different wind. The Sinixt trade with their neighbours—the Ktunaxa, Secwepemc, and Okanagan—all along the valley, linking the river with oceans of grass or sage that lie beyond the mountains.

In 1838 the “black robes” arrive. Fathers Blanchet and Demers offer mass in the village, opening their arms to the splendid view. By 1900 the railway coming south from Revelstoke has reached the place settlers have named “Arrowhead,” for the scores of stone tools they found scattered on the shore.

Pryce, Paula. *'Keeping the Lakes' Way': Reburial and the Re-creation of a Moral World among an Invisible People*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

pp. 44-45. Pryce locates Fort of the Lakes (or McKay House) at the north end of Upper Arrow Lake, citing *Catholic Church Records*, pp. 13-15. In her footnote on p. 164 (fn9), she says that “According to the Jesuits of the Québec Mission (1955: 7-9), *la maison des lacs* was under construction in October 1838. She also says Fathers Demers and Blanchet called the place “wretched,” she says as a result of the drownings upstream. She provides no reference for this.

Warner, Mikell de Loes Wormell (trans.) and Harriet Duncan Munnick (annotations). *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: Vancouver Volumes I and II and Stellamaris Mission*. St. Paul, Oregon: French Prairie Press, 1972.

A-28:

Fort of the Lakes

The fort was under construction when the priests passed through bringing the recovered bodies of three children, for burial there. It was situated on the Arrow Lakes that interrupt the Columbia above Kettle Falls. John McKay was in charge of the post at that time.

B 129 John McKay was postmaster of Fort of the Lakes

Names of those baptized by Demers and Blanchet in 1838 at “Fort of the Lakes.”

John McKay is listed as “Post master of Fort of the Lakes.” At least thirteen Lakes names are listed as being baptized, including Marguerite Plitchouegge, “natural child of Plitchouegge Chief of the Indians of the Lakes and of Kwildimalkes a woman of the country...,” and also Josephite and Isabelle Plitchouege, both children of the Chief of the Lakes. [13th to 14th pages]

Pearkes, Eileen Delehanty. *The Geography of Memory: Recovering Stories of a Landscape’s First People*. Nelson, B. C.: Kutenai House Press, 2002.

P. 27, lists *kwespits’a7* [Buffalo Robe] as being at the head of the lake near where Fort of the Lakes was constructed.

P. 19 shows Beaton (location near McKay House [Fort of the Lakes])

Raufer, Sister Maria Ilma, O.P., *Black Robes and Indians on the Last Frontier: Introduction of Catholicism into the Colville Country* (Colville, Wash.: Statesman Examiner Publishing, 1992) [first published 1966],

Blanchet and Demers among the Lakes in 1838. (22, citing Bagley, pp. 23-28 and 48)

Bagley, Clarence B. *Early Catholic Missions in Old Oregon*. Seattle: Lowman & Hanford Company, 1932.

The House of the Lakes was being constructed by the fur traders of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Lake Indians soon arrived,

...anxious as they were to see and hear the *Black-gowns* so often spoken of by the Canadians. They were found to be of a mild, peaceable character and well disposed to receive the words of salvation. They being the first sheep of the vast fold entrusted to their care, the missionaries took pleasure in instructing them, speaking of God, of the creation, of the fall of angels and man, and of the Redemption by the Son of God. The Indians listened with attention, assisting at Mass with awe; and before the return of the boat, they brought their children (17) to be baptized, regretting not to have the same happiness to make their hearts good. It was painful to the missionaries to leave them unbaptized. (25-26)

Twelve of the party drowned in a capsized boat. The missionaries said goodbye to the “Indians of the Lakes and left for Colville. They baptized Indians there and then went to Fort Okanogan. There they also made baptisms. (27)

House of the Lakes was visited in 1840 (48?)

Kowrach, Edward J. (ed.) *Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon by Most Rev. Francis Norbert Blanchet*. Fairfield, 1983.

The Bishop of Juliopolis asked the HBC to take two priests to Oregon in one of their canoes. (44) George Simpson said okay if they settle north of the Columbia. (45) Demers and Blanchet are appointed. (46) the missionaries stop at House of the Lakes (47) the House of the Lakes was still under construction. Lakes Indians began to come into their camp. Seventeen children baptized. Twelve dead when boat capsized. (49) Wallace the English botanist caused the boat to capsize. On to Colville and Okanogan. (50)

Bouchard, Randy and Dorothy Kennedy. "Lakes Indian Ethnography and History," Report prepared for the B. C. Heritage Conservation Branch, Victoria; August, 1985.

[A note signed by Randy Bouchard says the report is not yet complete and contains typographical errors.]

Beaton/Comaplix/Incomappleux River area (82-83)

Arrowhead (83-85)

"MacKay's House" or "Fort of the Lakes" was constructed near Arrowhead. James Douglas said it was being constructed in October, 1838. (84)

Galena Bay (867-87)

Trout Lake/Lardeau River (87-89)

Halcyon Hot Springs (89)

Fosthall Creek (89-91)

Watson, Bruce McIntyre. *Lives Lived West of the Divide: A Biographical Dictionary of Fur Traders Working West of the Rockies, 1793-1858*, Volume 2. Kelowna, British Columbia: Centre for Social, Spatial, and Economic Justice, University of British Columbia, 2010.

P. 656-657

lists John McKay as postmaster at Fort of the Lakes in 1838. (See additional sources)

Johnson, Kate. *Pioneer Days of Nakusp and the Arrow Lakes*. Nakusp, B. C.: 1951.

Pp. 81-83

The area of Beaton

was known to be an important camping round of the native people for several months of the year, presumably the Kitonaqas of the south Kootenay country. They came earlier in the summer than the

Okinaken band and some may have travelled overland although canoes were mostly used. They were probably used to convey their pelts to the fur post at Frosthall. (81)

[Here Johnson seems to be confused, as Frosthall is on the other side of Upper Arrow Lake] She continues to speculate about types of lodges. Speculation about canoe construction and comments regarding dugout canoes.

The recognized burial ground of migrating Indians was at Arrowhead and was a prominent landmark until the coming of the sawmills in the early part of the 1900s. No trace of it remained after 1911. The country around Beaton provided an abundant food supply and they were loth to leave it when challenged by other native peoples from the Okanagan country, hence the frequent wars of those times bordering the early nineteen century.

Mining in 1880s. A [apparently wood] mill was built in 1901 and burned in 1916. Large red cedar trees in the area. (83)