

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only  
received JUL 2 1984  
date entered AUG 3 1984

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic St. Peter's Mission Church and Cemetery

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number n/a W of Cascade n/a not for publication

city, town Cascade vicinity of

state Montana code 30 county Cascade code 013

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Catholic Diocese of Great Falls

street & number 121 23rd S. P.O. Box 1399

city, town Great Falls n/a vicinity of state Montana 59405

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cascade County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Great Falls state Montana 59405

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title 1973 Survey of Historic Architecture in Montana. John N. DeHaas, Jr. has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date Nov. 19, 1973  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Montana Historical Society

city, town Helena, state Montana 59620

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

This nomination includes two discontinuous parcels of land upon which are located the original log church building, constructed at St. Peter's Mission in 1875, and the mission's cemetery plot, at a distance of less than one-quarter mile to the west of the church. Although the site of St. Peter's Mission has largely been subsumed as a part of a ranching operation, the rural quality of the immediate setting of the mission church and cemetery has been retained, as both exist with fenced portions of open grazing fields.

The small mission church is a one story, rectangular, hand-hewn log structure with half-dovetail corner notching. Very shortly after the church was completed it was found to be too small for the needs of the Mission and an addition that nearly doubled the size of the building was constructed. Two double hung 6/6 windows are found on both the north and south sides of the building. The gable roof is supported by log purlins and sawn rafters with exposed ends. The church steeple once stood as a tower on a platform built to one side of the building. At one time, the church had a small vestibule projecting to the east but this was removed when the bell tower was added to the building. The free-standing bell tower was attached to the front (east) of the church and the base of the tower now serves as the entry vestibule for the church. The date of the placement of the bell tower atop the church roof is not known. Clapboard siding which matches that used on the steeple was added to the front of the church. The interior walls are finished with vertical tongue and groove siding. The entire structure, both inside and out, has been painted white. The altar was constructed by one of the Jesuit priests stationed at St. Peter's during the late 19th Century.

The mission cemetery is located less than one-quarter mile to the west of the church building. The grave markers date from the 1870's through the 1920's. Although a complete record of the burials at the St. Peter's Mission cemetery is not available, documentation does exist which shows that the cemetery was used for the interment of four Ursuline nuns, a number of Indian and white school children, as well as numerous Metis and white settlers of the area. Given the strong historical association of the cemetery with the Mission, it is included in this submission for listing as a discontinuous part of the nomination.

Only two of the numerous buildings constructed over the twenty-five years of active use of St. Peter's Mission by the Jesuit priests and Ursuline nuns remain. Fires during the early part of the century gutted both the boys' and girls' schools. Their stone ruins stand as reminders of the major educational focus of the missionaries. Historic photographs show that both school buildings were multi-storied, masonry bearing wall structures with Mansard roofs. Adjacent to the existing church building and forming an L-shaped courtyard were a series of one story log cabins with porches that extended the length of each building. The priests lived in these cabins until a multi-storied residence was erected for them and the Ursuline sisters then occupied the cabins. Neither these cabins nor the Jesuit seminary building stand today. To the north of and west of the site of the girls' school stands the two story, log "opera house". The Ursuline nuns emphasized musical instruction and used the opera house for recitals, school plays, and graduation exercises. The opera house is in fair condition and is now used as an animal shelter. Modern ranch equipment buildings have been erected in close proximity to the historic structures and structural remains at St. Peter's Mission. Also, a brick ranch house was recently moved in and placed between the mission church and cemetery. The enclosed site map shows the relative locations of the buildings, foundation remains, and newer ranch structures that are presently found at the site of St. Peter's Mission.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
			<input type="checkbox"/> science
			<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
			<input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian
			<input type="checkbox"/> theater
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1875 **Builder/Architect** unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

St. Peter's Mission, first established in 1859, was the earliest institutional base of operations from which Jesuit missionaries launched their Christianizing campaign among the Blackfeet Indians in northwestern Montana. The small log church, dating from 1875, and cemetery are an important reminder of the activities of these early missionaries and the role they played during the later part of the Nineteenth Century in permanently changing the traditional Blackfeet way of life.

St. Peter's Mission had been earlier established in a number of different locations, beginning in 1859. Each chosen site proved inadequate for subsistence agricultural purposes or too vulnerable to Indian attack. The fourth and final site for St. Peter's was selected by Father Giorda in the spring of 1866. Situated in a valley east of Bird Tail Rock and the old Mullan Road between Fort Shaw and Helena, St. Peter's Mission was fraught with difficulties at the beginning. Shortly after the missionaries established themselves at this site, a mission herder was killed by hostile Indians. The Jesuit hierarchy ordered all missionaries to remove to St. Ignatius Mission. The priests returned to the area occasionally to administer the sacraments to the Indians, but did not reestablish the mission until 1874. And, once more, St. Peter's was faced with a problem in its location. The southern boundary of the Blackfeet Reservation was moved the very year that the missionaries returned to Birch Creek, leaving the Mission sixty miles outside of Blackfeet country and in the heart of an area prime for white settlement. The missionaries nevertheless persevered under the leadership of Father Imoda and began construction of the log church building in 1875. The church quickly proved to be too small and an addition was put on a few years later. The altar, still in place in the church, was carved by a Brother John.

St. Peter's evolved from a mission into a school for Indian children and then into a boarding school. A small Metis settlement was established in the 1870's in the vicinity of the Mission and a number of these children attended classes at the mission school. The Jesuits, however, faced great difficulty in recruiting children from the Blackfeet Reservation for its school, as parents were reluctant to see their children taken so far from home. As a result, children from a variety of tribes - Assiniboine, Nez Perce, Soteeux, Creek, Gros Ventre, Flathead, Crow, Cheyenne, Snake, and Iroquois - as well as white children made up the population of St. Peter's. Eventually the Jesuit priests and Ursuline nuns were teaching in four separate schools, segregated by both race and sex at the Mission. Over a 25 year period, the mission expanded to include both stone and log buildings that functioned as schoolrooms, dormitories, living quarters for the nuns and priests, an opera house, and numerous ancillary farm buildings.

This nomination includes only the log church building and the discontinuous site of the mission's early cemetery. Fire and neglect have taken a toll on the other buildings at the mission. Foundation remains of the dormitories and classroom buildings are still evident. The opera house has been incorporated into the ranching operations adjacent to the Mission and now functions as an animal shelter. The property included in this nomination is limited to that land owned by the Catholic Diocese at this time. In the future, if neighboring land owners become interested in National Register designation, this nomination may be expanded.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

- Palladine, S.J., Indian and White in the Northwest, Wichisar Publ. Co., Lancaster, PA, 1922<sup>2nd ed</sup>  
 McBride, Sister Genevieve, O.S.U., The Bird Tail, Vantage Press, N.Y., 1974.  
 Schoenberg, S.J., Jesuits in Montana 1840-1960, The Oregon Jesuit, Portland, 1960.  
 Harrod, Howard L., Mission Among the Blackfeet, U. of Okla., Press, Norman, 1971.  
 Hardy, St. Peter's Mission and Castner Falls 1805-1925, Blue Printing & Letter Co., Gt. Falls, 1970

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 1.93 acres

Quadrangle name Simms, MT

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

### UTM References

Cemetary  
 A 

1	2	4	3	0	4	0	0	5	2	3	8	7	5	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

Church  
 B 

1	2	4	3	0	7	2	5	5	2	3	8	8	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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 E 

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 H 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

(See Continuation sheet)  
 T18N, R2W, NW $\frac{1}{4}$  Section 19

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title John N. DeHaas, Jr., Architect and Gregory H. Warner  
 organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 10-28-83  
 street & number #18 6th Street N. telephone (406) 452-8566  
 city or town Great Falls state Montana 59401

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Marcelle Shepoy  
 title SHPO date 6-18-84

**For NPS use only**  
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
Carol D. Shull date 8-3-84  
 Keeper of the National Register  
 Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
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received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 10

Page 1

The nominated property consists of the following two parcels of land:

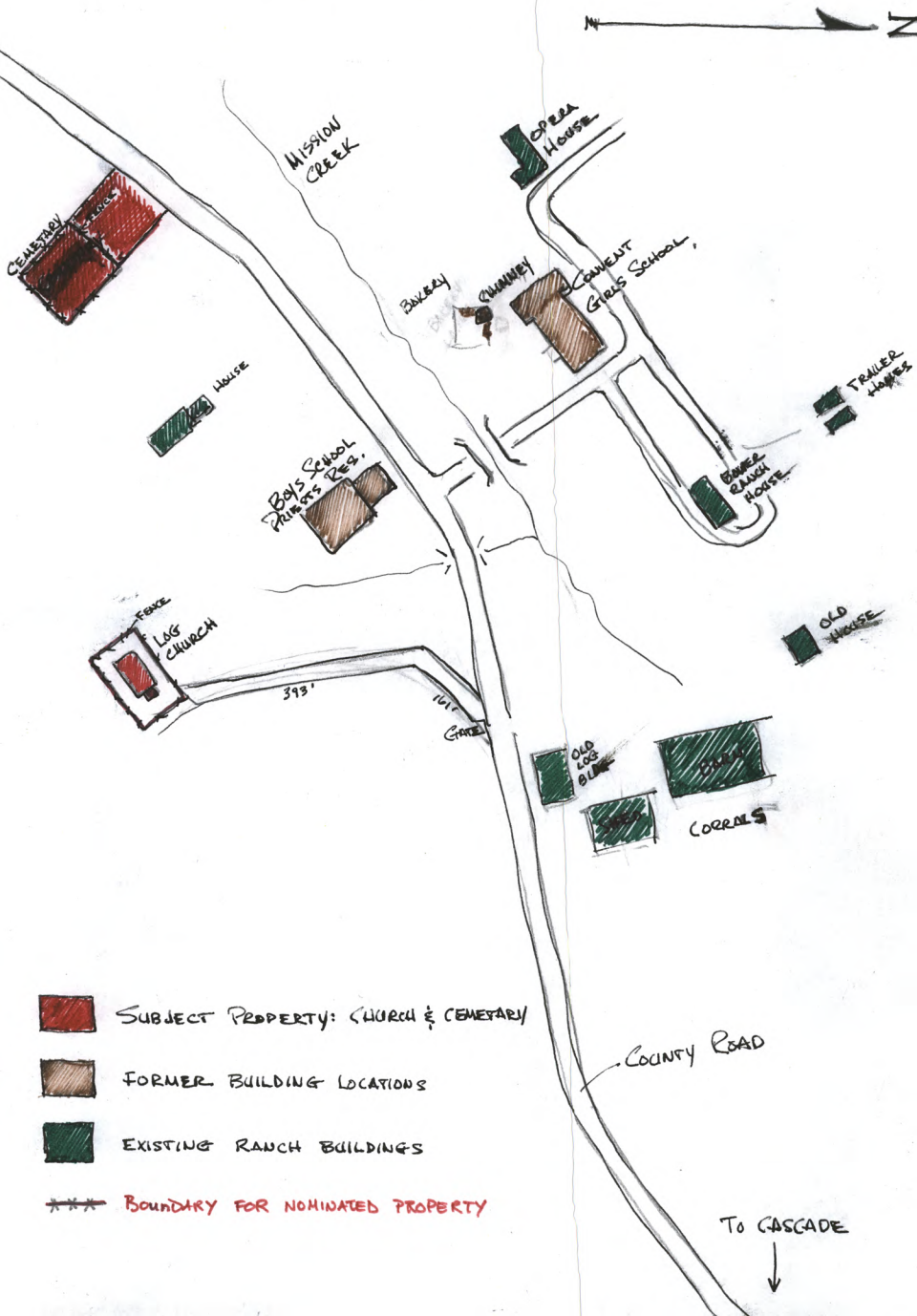
Church:





Beginning at a point which bears North 45° 38' East 1862, feet from the West 1/4 corner of Section 19, Twn. 18 N. Rge 2 W. thence South 46° 0' east 152 feet, thence South 44° 00' West 177 feet, thence North 46° West 152 feet, thence North 44° 0' East 177 feet to the point of beginning, containing an area of 0.62 acres more or less. This tract of land is the site of old log Catholic Church at St. Peter's Mission.

Cemetery:

Beginning at a point which bears North 23° 26' East 844.5 feet from the West quarter corner of Section 19, Township 18 North, Range 2 West, thence North 47° 39' West 294.0 feet to the East right-of-way line of the County road, thence North 37° 30' East 191.0 feet along said right-of-way thence South 47° 39' East 314.0 feet, thence South 42° 21' West 188.0 feet, to the point of beginning, containing an area of 1.31 acres more or less.

# ST. PETERS' MISSION AREA



-  SUBJECT PROPERTY: CHURCH & CEMETARY
-  FORMER BUILDING LOCATIONS
-  EXISTING RANCH BUILDINGS
-  BOUNDARY FOR NOMINATED PROPERTY