



POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY, KANSAS

ST. MARYS MISSION

James Pritchard

1849 May 8

“... In about 10 miles from where we started this morning we came to a Catholic mission, surrounded with a number of Indian wigwams. ...”

*****Pritchard was headed to California. Due to many treaties, various Potawatomi groups moved west at different times. At first the federal government moved various Potawatomi groups to Leavenworth area and to Iowa. Later more Potawatomi were moved to northeastern Kansas and to areas in eastern Kansas that would have been approximately between the current towns of Ottawa and Mound City. The government next moved the ones between Ottawa and Mound City to the area of Uniontown. After only a year, these Potawatomi were removed farther west to St. Marys area. **Source:** Burgess, Barbara. “The Vermillion Crossing”, *Overland Journal* , 9(3) (fall 1991), 26-32. quote on p. 29.

Lorena L. Hays

1853 May 10

“[May] 10th Came by the Catholic mission to day. There is a log church in the shape of a cross. most of the best houses were white washed and the place had a very neat appearance. The Indians dress very fine in broadcloth but wear their clothes in rather an odd and slovenly manner. Had a bad road, or rather, a good many small creeks to cross all of which are deep sloughy places. There is timber on most of these creeks. We are not yet off the Caw river bottom. The country is beautiful to behold, and also good farming country. Grass does not seem so plenty. There is such an immense sight of stock passed over it. I wish we were five or six days earlier. ...”

*****The above mentioned party seems to have passed on through St. Marys, but some passing wagons did take a rest stop near the mission, on what is now private property of a Catholic community along Highway 24. On the south side of Highway 24 in eastern St. Marys, across the street from that Catholic campus, is a large state historical sign titled “St. Marys”. This tells of the Potawatomi, of the Catholic mission, and of the Oregon Trail. One nineteenth-century building that was an Indian agency building where Potawatomi received payments from the federal government still stands on Mission Street to the north of Highway 24. That building is part of a complex of buildings called the St. Marys Indian Pay Station Museum. Lorena Hays was in a party of families that had left Barry, Illinois to relocate in California. When Hays writes



of her passing through St. Marys, she speaks derogatorily about the manner in which the Potawatomi wore broadcloth clothing. As is often the case, many see any others who act differently than themselves as inferior, rather than as just different. The Potawatomi Indians themselves obviously would have thought that they themselves were wearing broadcloths in a quite appropriate manner. **Source:** Hays, Lorena L. *To the Land of Gold and Wickedness: The 1848-59 Diary of Lorena L. Hays*. Edited by Jeanne Hamilton Watson. St. Louis: Patrice Press, 1988, quote on p. 154.