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WESTPORT

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Students Restore Historic Site

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Perhaps no other road in the world has captured the imagination of young and old alike as has the Santa Fe Trail. The students of Notre Dame De Sion are lucky enough to have the trail cut across their school campus. We think that after you read this story you'll agree these young people have more than earned the right to be custodians of a section of the famous old trail.

It will be no ordinary, end-of-school outing when 95 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students from Notre Dame De Sion ride down Westport Road in covered wagons, stage coaches and horseback on Saturday, May 13. The ride will be a well-deserved celebration for these students who for months have been doing hard, manual labor to restore one of Westport's important historic landmarks.

Last fall, Notre Dame De Sion Middle School teachers, Thomas D. Myers and Kendall C. Simon, were looking for an away-from-the-classroom project to enhance their students' history lessons about Westport and the Santa Fe Trail. They knew that part of the famous old trail cut through the school's campus. They knew, too, that a spring in the southwest corner of the campus (near Gillham Road and Locust) was a trail landmark where travelers stopped to refresh themselves and cool their sweating horses, often camping overnight in what is now Gillham Park.

In 1931, the Sisters of Notre Dame

De Sion built a grotto over the spring. It is an exact replica of the grotto at Lourdes, France where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to 14-year old Bernadette Soubirous. (*The Song of Bernadette*, a 1943 movie, is the story of the girl's life.)

Bernadette told Mary she needed proof to convince her elders that the miraculous appearance had actually occurred so the Virgin told the girl to scratch the ground. She obeyed and a spring bubbled up beside her. The next morning a rose was blooming beside the spring. The spring at Lourdes is visited by thousands of pilgrims each year, many of whom are hoping to be healed by the spring's waters.

The sisters of Notre Dame, finding themselves owners of another famous spring, evidently felt it would be appropriate to duplicate the Lourdes grotto over the spring that refreshed the pioneers who helped open the American West.

Although they had the help of a mason, the sisters did most of the work

on the grotto themselves, personally selecting and adjusting each rock to create the effect they desired. An exact reproduction of the statute of Our Lady of Lourdes was placed in the niche to the right of the arch.

For 40 years after its completion the grotto at Notre Dame De Sion was the site of graduation ceremonies and a place for meditation and study. During the past decade, however, because of lack of funds and because there have been fewer sisters to attend to its upkeep the grotto and spring have been neglected.

Myers and Simon decided that restoration of the grotto and the clearing of the area around the spring would give the children a real-life experience which would be a valuable supplement to their academic study of Westport and the Santa Fe Trail.

The two men admit that the project was almost outrageously ambitious. "By just looking, you couldn't really know there was a grotto there at all," Simon noted. "It was covered with

weeds, dirt and even small trees and the 1977 flood dumped about a foot of dirt on the area." The statue of Our Lady of Lourdes had disappeared completely and is presumed to have been stolen by vandals.

When the two teachers suggested the project to their students they warned them that the work would not be easy, that it was difficult even to reach the grotto. They told the children that if they decided to take on the task they were to have it finished in time for a rededication of the grotto on May 13, which would be the fiftieth anniversary of its original dedication.

The students accepted the challenge and last September they began work on the 100 by 40 foot area, cutting saplings, pulling weeds, shoveling dirt, moving rocks, often wading more than ankle deep in mud. Work continued throughout the winter whenever the weather permitted.

As they dug their way through layers of dirt the students discovered a concrete walkway which sloped down from the main part of the campus to the grotto. The spring itself, which once bubbled out of a rock ledge, has been bricked up, probably due to contamination of the water. At the bottom of the two-foot deep pool beneath the spring the students found a sewer, clogged with debris, which lead to Gillham Road.

Simon and Myers notified the city's Pollution Control Department and the department cleaned the sewer. The spring's water will be tested and it is hoped that it will eventually be allowed to flow freely again.

The children planted prairie grass on the slope above the arch of the grotto and landscaped the surrounding area with grass, shrubs and flowers, many of which are already in bloom.

"At one time or another, we probably had the use of practically every garden tool owned by the kids' parents," Simon commented. Both teachers said they helped with the restoration, but stated emphatically that most of the work was done by the students.

While work on the grotto was progressing, Myers, Simon and other Middle School teachers were conducting a remarkable array of creative classroom projects.

There is the Great Santa Fe Pizza Race for example. On the wall of the sixth and eighth grade rooms are huge maps tracing the trail's 790-mile route from Westport to Santa Fe. All of the children in both grades are participating in the race by doing special projects which earn them points and make it possible for them to progress along

the trail. Each student moves a mile for every five points earned. "I have told my students that I will take the first four to reach Santa Fe out for pizza," said Myers.

The teachers have designated a number of ways in which points may be earned. A student who brings in a fact about the trail earns five points. One student, for example, reported the fact that the starting point of the Santa Fe Trail was at Franklin, Missouri in 1822, changed to Arrow Rock in 1823 and moved on up the river to Fort Osage in 1924.

New words added to a student's vocabulary while studying about the trail also earn points. One student learned the word scurvy, which was an illness many travelers contracted on the trail because they were unable to get enough fresh fruit and vegetables.

One of the school's halls has a large display of rubbings which students have made of Westport's historic marker. Each rubbing is worth points in the pizza race.

Some of the students came up with ideas of their own for earning points. Gretchen Cool remembered that the Santa Fe Trail crossed her grandparents' farm in Oklahoma and that the ruins were still visible so she wrote asking for a picture of the trail. Her grandparents sent it along with a picture of an old buffalo wallow which remains on their farm.

Tim Devine and Frank White have earned a lot of points by illustrating the facts which their fellow students have brought to class. (See cartoon by Frank White.)

Alexis Petri, Gretchen Cool and Heather Tarrant are putting out a weekly newspaper written as if it were being published in the early days of Westport. The girls call their paper *The Border Star Weekly* because, they explained, that was the name of a newspaper in Old Westport. There are stories based on news items from the old *Border Star* and on information gleaned from the *Farmer's Almanac* and various historic sources. One story describes an outbreak of typhoid on the trail. Another reports that the value of goods moved over the trail in 1822 was \$15,000,000.

Richard Morrison earned points by producing a slide show made up of photographs which he took of Frontier display at the Kansas City Museum.

No one knows for sure yet who will be the second, third and fourth pizza-eaters but Carolyn Nelson, whose points carried her triumphantly into Santa Fe early in April, has already established herself as the fastest traveler on the trail. One of her special, self-

signed projects was to write letters to the chambers of commerce of seven cities along the trail asking for literature about each city's relationship to the trail.

The Great Santa Fe Pizza Race is only part of the academic program about Westport and the Santa Fe Trail. Pertinent films from the public library's film collection have been shown and Westport historians have been invited to speak to all three Middle School classes about the trail, the history of Westport and the history of Kansas City.

Under the guidance of social science teacher, Pat Cole, seventh and eighth grade students are playing an ongoing game in which they pretend to be travelers on the trail. They assume family roles, choose supplies for their trip (always considering what supplies were available in the 1800's and taking into consideration the space limitations on their wagons).

The students keep diaries as they travel and make decisions necessitated by unexpected occurrences. They find out each day what fate has in store for them, just as Monopoly players discover by drawing a card whether they will receive \$200 or go to jail. Perhaps one of the travelers will be bitten by a rattlesnake or perhaps a wagon will burn.

Social studies classes have also heard readings from *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, which presents the Indians' point of view of the period.

It is the custom at Notre Dame D'Sion to set aside a 90-minute period on Friday afternoon during which students from all grades participate in a special project. For the last five weeks before the rededication of the grotto this period will be used to teach students some of the crafts which were practiced on the trail. They will learn to sew and will make the frontier costumes they will wear on their celebration ride through Westport. They will also learn to cook over an open fire, to make candles, etc.

It would be impossible to describe all of the creative (or back-breaking) tasks performed by the 95 Middle School students in connection with the restoration of the grotto and their studies about the Santa Fe Trail. Many of the tasks were assigned by their teachers but many were self-assigned. Some of the students, for example, have elected to raise \$700 to buy a new statue of Our Lady of Lourdes and one student has arranged for his father to set the new statue in cement so that it cannot be stolen.

This article would not be complete.
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The Hyde Park Festival

"Hyde Park: Where Family and Home Come Together" is the theme of the fifth Hyde Park Festival, scheduled for Memorial Weekend, Saturday and Sunday, May 23 and 24. According to Joyce Murray of the festival committee the theme reflects the growing numbers of families with children now choosing to live in the neighborhood which is known for its magnificent old homes, dramatic improvements and enterprising young people. Joyce said, "This year we wanted to highlight the fact that this is a neighborhood with families with kids as well as singles."

The festival will feature tours of eight homes, a street fair on Janssen Place, lots of free entertainment at the houses and on Janssen Place, and a good bit of food and drink.

Hours are 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day and ticket prices are: adults \$3.00, senior citizens and youth under 12 \$1.00 on the day of the event; advance tickets are \$2.50 for adults and

75¢ for youth and senior citizens. Groups of 15 or more may purchase tickets for \$2.25 each. All proceeds are used to support the neighborhood organization's activities and a variety of service projects and organizations.

Joyce indicated the eight homes are the best ever and that the route is the easiest to traverse although free transportation is provided. Among the homes this year is an 1897 Victorian literally saved from the wrecker's ball and now fully restored, several homes brought to the height of contemporary living with sensitivity to the original character, and a couple of more modest homes which feature some of the excellent cabinetry and woodwork found in the larger mansion-size homes on the tour.

Advance tickets are on sale at Westport Tomorrow, Classical Westport, Plantiques, Frameworks, Penny Lane, the Dishrack, and Home Savings and Safety Federal Savings and Loan offices.

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without mentioning the students of the fourth grade who, though not officially part of the Middle School project, have helped clean the grotto area. The fourth grade has also assumed the special task of cleaning the rock planters at the gate of the school and filling them with plants which have been carefully nurtured in the fourth grade room until they are ready to be moved outside.

On the night of May 12, members of the sixth, seventh and eighth grades will camp out overnight near the spring, cooking their food over an open fire as did the travelers on the old Santa Fe Trail. By 9 a.m. the next morning, after cooking and eating breakfast, they will form their parade, follow the Santa Fe Trail to Old Westport and return to the school in time for the rededication ceremonies at 11 a.m.

The sisters, the teachers, the parents, the school alumni and the civic leaders who attend the ceremony will undoubtedly be filled with pride as they view the accomplishment of the children. However, only the children themselves will know how many wheelbar-

rows of dirt and brush had to be hauled away, how many scratches were sustained while saplings and underbrush were being cut, how many blisters developed while weeds were being pulled.

If by some miracle those indomitable early travelers who stopped at the spring could attend the ceremony, they would no doubt approve the new generation of Americans which took upon itself the almost overwhelming task of restoring the grotto at Notre Dame De Sion. ●

Alcoholics Anonymous to Hold Convention in Westport

Memorial Weekend of 1981 will mark the first national gathering of Alcoholics Anonymous in the mid-part of the country. The convention is expected to bring more than 500 persons to the convention center at St. Paul's Episcopal Church at 40th and Main in Westport.

Organizers of the event say speakers, panelists, and workshop leaders will be participating from all over the

country. Local members will be hosts and hostesses, and they hope the convention will become an annual event in Kansas City.

Information may be obtained by calling 756-0770. Registration is \$25.00.



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