

EXCERPTS

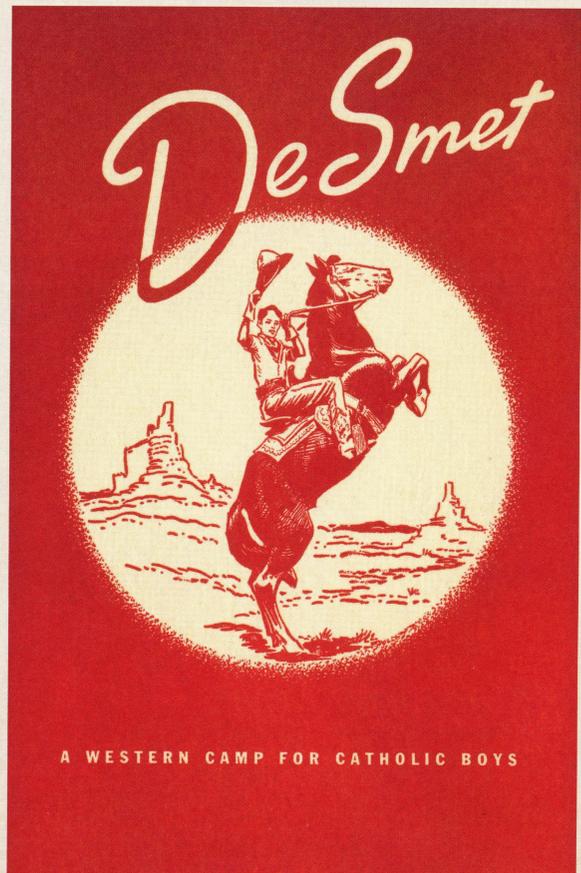
from the ARCHIVES

Nicholas Kemper '06, Archivist

Summer: that special time in a young student's life when responsibilities from the past school year dissipate into the hot and humid air, and late nights are surpassed by even later mornings. Some students work, some travel, and some don't do much of anything at all. But if you had been a student at St. Xavier in the 1930s, you might have found yourself heading out west—to Camp De Smet.

Founded by Jesuits in 1925 and named after the famous Jesuit missionary and "friend of Sitting Bull," Pierre-Jean De Smet, Camp De Smet was situated at the St. Francis Mission on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. Students from Jesuit schools across the United States were encouraged to spend eight weeks of their summer at De Smet, a place where "boyhood's wildest imaginings find glorious fulfillment" and where young men acquired "a depth and breadth of character and thought not to be gained from books."¹

Upon arrival each camper was assigned a horse, a trusty steed who became a constant companion throughout the summer. In addition to mastering the equine arts, students spent their days praying, swimming, boxing, fishing, and hiking; more adventurous campers could even try their hand at branding cattle, busting broncos, or wrestling steers. Evenings were typically reserved for tamer pursuits: viewing films, singing songs, and camping under the vast night sky. The Camp De Smet experience culminated with the Black Hills trip, a two-week 1,000-mile trek on horseback through South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska. Along the way, campers stopped at Mount Coolidge, Sylvan Lake, Evan's Plunge Hot Springs, and the famous Old West towns of Deadwood, Rapid City, and Cheyenne.



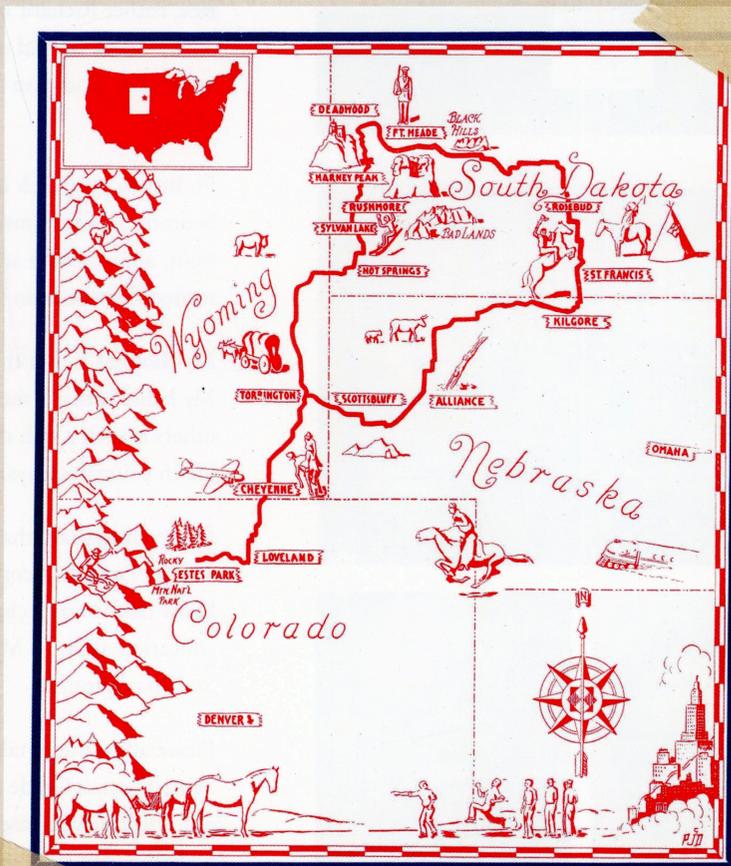
Camp De Smet brochure cover, c.1930s. Courtesy of the Jesuit Archives and Research Center, St. Louis.

The end of summer signaled the end of camp, and students dispersed to their diverse points of origin. St. Xavier campers, as one anonymous St. X student remembered in 1932, "were shipped home to 'Good Old Cincinnati.'"²

Camp De Smet ceased operations in the summer of 1942. By that time, the romanticized notion of a long-gone "frontier life" had given way to the grim realities of the Second World War. But the memories and experiences of De Smet lived on with the campers. "Being out there on my own was so exciting, and everything was so new. We saw rodeos and airplanes and cowboys," remarked Robert Rielly, St. X class of 1938. "It was everything a boy could've wanted."³

Known St. Xavier attendees
of Camp De Smet:

- Robert Rielly '38
- Joseph Warren '38
- William Topmoeller, SJ '39
- Richard Winterman '39
- Jim Cramer '41
- Ray Gudmens '41
- John Kelley '41
- Andy Rohan '41
- Bill Geoghegan '42
- Elmer Shard '42
- Clarence Dorger '43
- Rohan Kelley '43
- Edwin Stenger '43
- Francis Dorger '45
- John Glaser, Jr. '45
- Thomas Finn '45
- Edward Kelley '46
- Kevin Kelley '47



Black Hills excursion route. Courtesy of the Jesuit Archives and Research Center, St. Louis.

Special thanks to Ann Knake at the Jesuit Archives and Research Center in St. Louis for providing additional material for this article.

¹ "DeSmet: A Western Camp for Catholic Boys," brochure c.1930s. Missouri Province Archive, Box 3.0248, Jesuit Archives and Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

² The Conqueror, Vol. 2 No. 2, October 27, 1932. Student Publications Collection, St. Xavier High School Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

³ Partners Magazine, Summer 2002. Wisconsin Province Archive, Box 3.0046, Jesuit Archives and Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri.