



Street Stories

D'Herbomez Drive

GPS: [49.1483,-122.2915](#)



Bishop Louis Joseph D'Herbomez chose as his Episcopal Motto: Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos which means: If God is with us, who can be against us).

Mission Community Archives 0284-1998-01

One day in 1887, Bishop D'Herbomez stood on a rocky ledge in Mission. The head of the local Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) took a vow: If he lived to return from a journey he had to make to Rome, he would build a shrine to Mary, mother of Jesus, on the very spot where he stood.

Louis Joseph D'Herbomez was born in Brillon, France on January 17, 1822. Joining the OMI (an order of Catholic missionaries) in 1847, he was described in a report by Father Jacques Santoni as "...a young man full of good qualities. I am not exaggerating when I say that he is a saint: pious, charitable, humble, obedient, totally devoted to his vocation, very solid, blessed with good health and almost Herculean strength. What a good candidate for our missions in either America or Asia!"

Following his ordination to the priesthood in 1849, he was sent to do missionary work in Oregon and Washington State. However, due to ongoing tensions between Natives and Americans, the missions were abandoned and in 1857, D'Herbomez came north and founded a mission in Esquimalt (1857-1864).

On December 14, 1863, Rome divided the diocese by separating the BC mainland into the new vicarate apostolic of New Westminster and appointed D'Herbomez as the first vicar apostolic, a position he held until his death.

D'Herbomez was ordained a bishop in

October of 1864 and established a residence in New Westminster.

The following year, the new bishop visited Mission for the first time and was so enchanted by its beauty that he decided to live here rather than at his designated residence in New Westminster.

One of D'Herbomez's favorite places for privacy and contemplation was the rocky ledge behind the mission buildings. The place reminded him of the famous grotto in Lourdes, France, where it is believed the Virgin Mary appeared before a peasant girl. Hence, he vowed to call the shrine the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes if he returned from Rome.

Despite his ill-health, D'Herbomez did return to Mission after his trip but sadly, did not live to see his vow fulfilled. He died of cancer on June 3, 1890, and was buried, as he had fervently desired, here in Mission.

He made provisions in his will for the erection of the shrine and in 1894, the grotto—a small, white building roofed with a silver dome and topped by a white cross—was completed. Visible from the Fraser River, the grotto soon became a well-known landmark. Due to its deteriorating condition, the grotto was demolished in 1965. Fortunately, it was rebuilt in 1996 and stands once again to remind us of this bishop and his life.

By David Buss; edited with additions by Val Billesberger