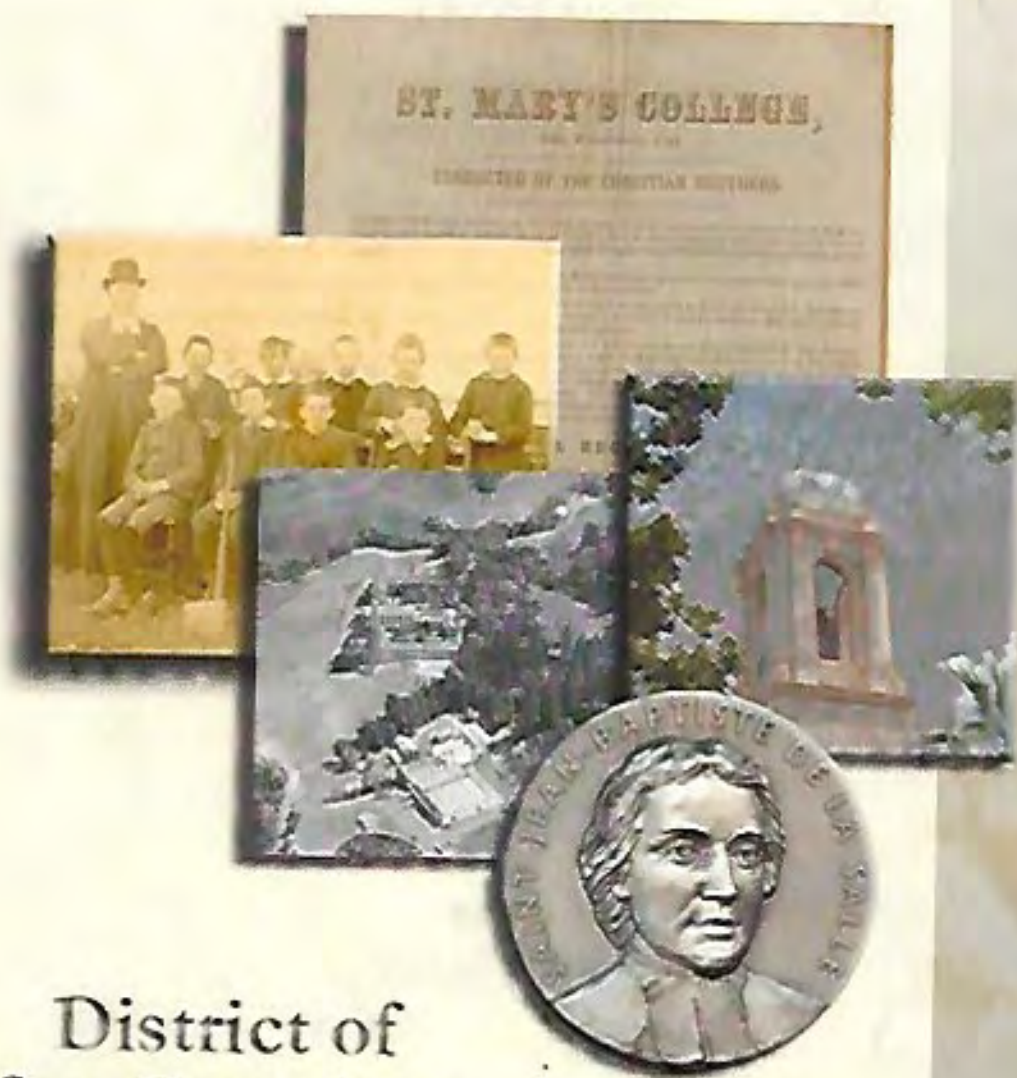


*The De La Salle  
Christian Brothers  
on the West Coast*



District of  
San Francisco

Andrea Miller, District Archives

1740 Years

*The  
De La Salle Christian  
Brothers  
on the West Coast*

140 Years in the  
District of San Francisco

Andrea Miller  
District Archivist

2008

## INTRODUCTION

This is the story of a fascinating chapter in the history of the Lasallian educational mission – a chapter that tells the ongoing story of Lasallian education on the Pacific coast of the United States. The story begins in 1868, when men who devoted their lives to Catholic education in the tradition of John Baptist de La Salle answered the urgent call of the first archbishop of San Francisco. Their official name was “the Brothers of the Christian Schools,” *Fratres Scholarum Christianarum*, or more simply, “the Christian Brothers.” (Today they are referred to as the De La Salle Christian Brothers.) Venturing boldly onto the long journey from New York, these Brothers, who themselves were immigrants from Europe, joined the flow of other immigrants to the west, bringing with them a tradition of effective education that had been developed over the course of nearly two centuries.

This year, the western province of the Christian Brothers – officially named the District of San Francisco -- marks its 140<sup>th</sup> year. On August 10, 1868, the first group of Brothers sailed through the Golden Gate and set foot in San Francisco, where the Archbishop wanted them to take over the struggling little college he had founded, called Saint Mary’s. The first few months were not auspicious, and yet from today’s perspective, we can see that the challenges they faced – finding money, retaining students, maintaining facilities – are perennial in any educational mission. Dynamic leadership, innovation, and persistence allowed this small group of men to achieve surprising results, and through the ensuing fourteen decades, through massive demographic changes both in the population of the West and in the population of the Brothers, their commitment to the Lasallian educational mission has allowed the District to answer the call in every epoch.

Today, Lasallian education under the auspices of the District of San Francisco is available in Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona, in one college, ten high schools, and one fourth-through-eighth-grade academy. There are also neighborhood tutoring centers in Oakland and Napa, and an animal husbandry program for at-risk youth in the Napa area. The District of San Francisco continues to make history, having founded four new schools in the past ten years, and continues to develop devoted Brothers and Lasallian Partners to take part in the mission. The District will continue to provide Catholic education in the Lasallian tradition to the West and to fulfill the mission of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to bring “a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the mission which the Church has entrusted to it.” Archivist Andrea Miller’s re-telling of our district story helps us remember where we came from and portrays those who preceded us in that mission in the West.

When Mother Theresa of Calcutta addressed the Christian Brothers in Rome, she noted: “People are hungry, especially the young. They are hungry for God and you are here to satisfy that hunger. Be faithful to the great gift that God has made you to be teachers, educators, light— His light in the world among young people. The future of the world depends on what you do.” This call to educators was true in the days of those pioneer Brothers, and it remains true today.

J. A. Gray  
Director  
Office of Communication  
Mont La Salle  
September 2008

## Table of Contents

- Chapter 1:* The Beginnings of the San Francisco District
- Chapter 2:* The Founding Brothers of the San Francisco District
- Chapter 3:* The Early Years of Saint Mary's College
- Chapter 4:* Early Schools in the San Francisco District
- Chapter 5:* A New Century Brings New Challenges
- Chapter 6:* The Latin Question
- Chapter 7:* After the Latin Ban
- Chapter 8:* The Christian Brothers Winery
- Chapter 9:* History of the Novitiate
- Chapter 10:* Vatican II and the New Millennium





## The Beginnings of the San Francisco District



When Joseph Sadoc Alemany was named Archbishop of the sprawling frontier Archdiocese of San Francisco in 1853, he immediately began to strengthen the fledgling system of Catholic education that existed at the time. Among his goals was the establishment of a college for young men that would not only nourish their faith but would also provide vocations, fostering a "home-grown" clergy he felt was necessary for the survival of the Church in the frontier state. Long before the cornerstone was laid for his new college of Saint Mary's, Alemany began a campaign to bring the Brothers of the Christian Schools to San Francisco to take on the management of this project. It would take more than ten years and a pilgrimage to Rome before the determined prelate realized his goal.

At the time of the Archbishop's first plea in 1856, the Christian Brothers had been established in the United States for only eleven years and numbered about 200. The United States Province was having difficulty enough meeting demands of its burgeoning schools on the East Coast, so the thought of shipping precious staff across the continent seemed impossible. However, Archbishop Alemany was persistent. After several polite refusals from both the North American Provincial and the Superior General of the Institute, he made the difficult journey to the Vatican in 1867 and put his request directly to the Pope. This effort finally succeeded. Brother Patrick, Visitor of the United States District, was directed to provide the requested personnel. Selecting eight Brothers, he placed them under the direction of Brother Justin McMahon who, at the age of thirty-four, would become the first Visitor of the District of San Francisco. Apart from \$800 provided by the San Francisco Archdiocese for their passage, the group received no other financial backing, leaving to Brother Justin the challenge of managing the growth and survival of the venture.

On July 16, 1868, the Brothers boarded the *Ocean Queen* in New York. Of the group, only one was a native-born American; the others were immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and Switzerland.

An article in the *New York Tablet* for that date records the event:



Brother Justin McMahon,  
Founding Visitor

*"Brother Justin, the Director of the group, has been highly esteemed wherever he has been stationed because of his earnest discharge of the duties entrusted to him and by his warm attachment to friends and pupils. Brothers Cianan and Gustavus, who accompanied him, are also widely and favorably known and will soon make their influence felt on the western coast. The departure of these eight Brothers, while a gain for the West, is certainly a loss to the East. As a tribute of appreciation to those who were leaving them, the Brothers of Manhattan College prepared a surprise for the travelers at the time of their departure. On the eve of sailing, Brother Jasper, Prefect of the college, got in readiness the college boats. Next morning, he issued a hasty call to some special friends, including Father Breen and the Professors of the college. At nine o'clock, the little yacht slipped her moorings and sailed down the Hudson to the foot of Canal Street where the Ocean Queen lay at anchor.*

*"The stirring notes of the college band soon attracted the passengers on the steamship, but it was some time before the Brothers made their appearance, as they scarcely felt in any mood to listen to the merry music of some excursion barge, which they most likely deemed the college yacht to be. The stalwart figure of Brother Jasper, attired in the religious garb of the Brotherhood, soon caught Brother Justin's eye, upon which all the Brothers on board quickly went to the ship's side. Though it was difficult to distinguish the expressions of surprise and gratification they uttered, there was no mistaking their emotions when the sweet, sad notes of "Home, Sweet Home" reached their ears. The cheers and waving of hands and handkerchiefs on board the college boats fully attested the cordial love the escorting party entertained for the departing Brothers, and this enthusiasm for their friends affected them so deeply that not a few had to withdraw from the public to give vent to their feelings in secret. At one o'clock the Ocean Queen steamed majestically from the wharf and was accompanied by the yacht to the Narrows. The trip down the bay was enlivened by the strains of the band as it played the popular airs of the day.*

*"The powerful engines of the larger vessel soon widened the distance between her and her tiny convoys. And a final adieu was waved to Brother Justin and his companions who waved back again and again, no doubt with widely mingled emotions."*

The first leg of the voyage on the *Ocean Queen* delivered the group at Aspinwall (now Colon) on the morning of July 26th. The following afternoon, the Brothers used train and wagon to cross the Isthmus. A later account by Brother Jasper Fitzsimmons reported that "The voyage was uneventful, save for the scenery en route crossing the Isthmus of Panama. The monkeys cavorting in the trees amused the passengers." On July 28, the travelers boarded the *Montana*, a wooden, side-wheeler steamship. Along with 618 other passengers, 176 bags of mail, 27 sheep and one calf, they began the two-week voyage up the coast. Late in the evening of August 10, 1868, the *Montana* sailed into San Francisco Bay.



Saint Mary's College, San Francisco, 1868

The very next day, the pioneers met Archbishop Alemany, whose persistence had brought about their assignment. With little delay, the group loaded its baggage into carriages and made the five-mile journey along Old Mission Road to the grounds of Saint Mary's College. There, Brother Justin accepted the keys and the responsibility for the school, thus beginning the long chapter of the Christian Brothers' works on the West Coast of the United States.





## The Founding Brothers of the San Francisco District

The Intrepid Brothers who pioneered the San Francisco District were fairly young men, ranging in age from 22 to 39. Their varied personalities and skills left lasting impressions on Saint Mary's College and on the district they founded in 1868.



**Brother Justin McMahon**, the founding San Francisco Visitor, had already made a name for himself in the New York District. Born in Ireland in 1834, he came to the United States as a young man and entered the novitiate in Montreal at the age of 20.

After completing his religious and academic formation, he began his teaching career at the Brothers' Calvert Hall in Baltimore. His talents for administration were soon recognized, and he served as principal and director of various high schools and colleges on the East Coast. Among his greatest achievements was the founding of the first Catholic chapel on the grounds of West Point (1899). Brother Justin established a reputation as an astute political observer and worked actively to promote Catholic educational interests. Asked to recruit Brothers for the new San Francisco District and the operation of Saint Mary's College in 1868, his energy, dedication, public relations skills, and the foresight to found feeder schools served the new project well. In 1879, after eleven years in San Francisco, Brother Justin was called back to the New York District to serve as Visitor. He died in 1912.

Four other of the founding Brothers were also natives of Ireland.

**Brother Cianan Griffin** (1833-1898) had emigrated to Canada as a young man, where he worked as a surveyor before joining the order. His expertise was in teaching mathematics, and his heart was always with the youngest students in his care. A student of Saint Mary's College in its early years told the story of being led to his primary grade classroom by Brother Cianan who promised, "Now, I'm going to give you a very nice Brother, but if he spanks you, you tell me, and I'll spank him."



**Brother Gustavus Fitzpatrick** (1832-1923) had served as head of schools in St. Louis and New Jersey, and brought with him years of administrative experience, a reputation as an excellent teacher, and a strong personality that often clashed with Brother Justin's. He instituted the commercial courses at Saint Mary's College and helped found feeder high schools before being called back to the East Coast province after a few years. Brother Gustavus was the last member of the founding San Francisco Brothers to die.



**Brother Sabinian Downey** (1832-1909) also taught in the commercial and business department at Saint Mary's. He became the college's first treasurer and the young District's third Director of Novices. When he died, he was the last of the eight pioneer Brothers remaining in the San Francisco District.

Only **Brother Dimidrian Higgins** (1836-1869) never had the opportunity to teach out West after volunteering to make the journey; he became ill during the trip from New York and was an invalid on his arrival in San Francisco, dying the year after the founding of the new District.



Three of the pioneer Brothers were immigrants from Germany or Switzerland.



**Brother Pirmian Moller** (1829-1902), a very pious man, had served at schools in the Brothers' Midwest District before joining the group coming west. He became the first Novice Master for the new District and also designed the gardens at the Novitiate in Martinez. Several histories report his practice of annoying his Irish novices by making St. Patrick's Day a period of fast in preparation for the Feast of St. Joseph on March 19. From 1890 until his death in 1902, Brother Pirmian taught German at Saint Mary's College.

**Brother Genebern Steiner** (1844-1907) joined the Brothers in Montreal at age 13 after his family emigrated to Canada from Switzerland. Eleven years later at the age of 24, he was in California serving as the Prefect of Discipline at Saint Mary's College. Brother Genebern also directed a Brothers' feeder school in Oakland, was administrator of Sacred Heart High School in San Francisco, and in 1883, became principal of St. Patrick's Institutue in Sacramento ( now Christian Brothers High School).



Another 24-year-old was **Brother Emilian Petermann** (1844-?). Although he suffered from consumption, he was known for his kind disposition and his expertise in teaching Latin and Greek. He brought to California a substantial collection of books, adding greatly to Saint Mary's College library. After returning East, he left the Brothers in 1877.

Finally, there was the lone American, a 20-year-old novice named **Brother Adrian Denys** (1849-1913). Having a change of heart about his vocation during the journey west from New York, he left the group before they landed in San Francisco and returned East to study law. He resumed his secular name, William Jay Gaynor, served as justice of the New York Supreme Court from 1893-1909, and in 1909 became Mayor of New York City.

The first year in California was often discouraging for the pioneer Brothers. A major earthquake occurred on October 22 of 1868, there was an outbreak of smallpox in the city, and the Brothers inherited difficult teaching conditions at Saint Mary's College. Some of the Brothers talked of leaving the fledgling enterprise, but Brother Justin never flagged. A memoir by an unknown Brother kept in the Motherhouse Archives in Rome records Brother Justin's determination: "He informed them that if they gave up the work, he would carry it on alone, and with the help and blessing of God, succeed. This had the desired effect, and they soon took heart again. The spirit of self-sacrifice and zeal for Christian education made them forget present hardships and hope for a better time."

The founding Brothers also left a mark on San Francisco's geography. Steiner Street is named after Brother Genebern, while streets around the grounds of the first Saint Mary's College form the shape of a bell, and include Justin Drive, College Avenue, St. Mary's Street, Genebern Way, and Agnon Avenue (named after Brother Agnon who founded *The Collegian*, a publication of Saint Mary's College).



Streets around the original site of Saint Mary's College in San Francisco carry names of early Brothers.

News Report - The San Francisco Morning Call, October 22, 1868



"Yesterday morning San Francisco was visited by the most severe earthquake the city ever experienced. The great shock commenced at 7:53 A.M. and continued nearly one minute, being the longest ever known in this region. The oscillations were from east to west, and were very violent. Men, women, and children rushed into the streets-some in a state of semi-nudity and all in the wildest state of excitement. Many acted as if they thought the Day of Judgment had come. For a time the excitement was intense, and the panic was general."

## The Early Years of Saint Mary's College

Until the Brothers' arrival in 1868, Saint Mary's College struggled for survival. Financial problems caused by debt and over-estimation of donations plagued Archbishop Alemany and the first two Presidents, Father Harrington and Father Grey. Enrollments rose and fell like the tides, and tuition payments that were often made in goods and produce rather than cash did little to bolster the perilous financial situation. While the clergy that were placed in charge of the school were very capable, they were often distracted by other concerns. Clearly the college needed the attention of religious who were dedicated to education; it was this situation that Archbishop Alemany was convinced the Brothers of the Christian Schools could remedy.



St. Mary's College on Old Mission Road

When the academic semester opened in August of 1868 under the eight pioneer Brothers, the college was \$75,000 in debt, and of the 49 students who had enrolled in June of that year, only 34 appeared for the first day. With characteristic action and practicality, Brother Justin took advantage of every opportunity to advertise the change in school administration. An article in the *San Francisco Alta Californian* reported:

*"We learn from these gentlemen that their object is to give a thoroughly practical education to those confided to their care. They appear to understand in what education really consists and how important it is to train our youth in such a manner that they will be able on leaving college to take their place with credit in the counting house, the mining district, in law or medicine."*

An astute business mind, Brother Justin also arranged for the college prospectus to be published in the local papers for thirty days running. It advertised that Saint Mary's offered over thirty courses in commercial, scientific and classical studies. Like many other colleges of the nineteenth-century West, it offered classes for primary grades through university level. Tuition was \$60 per academic year for day students, and \$250 for boarding students (a fee which included washing of their laundry). Extra fees were charged for music and drawing courses. Boarders were required to bring at least three suits of clothing, handkerchiefs, towels, and table napkins. A student's day was rigidly scheduled: between rising at 6 am and lights out at 8:30 at night, the young men had unvarying hours set for study, class, prayer, meals, and recreation. Parents remarked that they had only to look at their watches to know what their sons were doing at any hour during the day. The Brothers believed that their close and vigilant supervision would provide the proper environment to enhance learning:



*"Living in the same house, sitting at the same table, presiding at the recreations, and, as far as possible, forming a family circle with their pupils, it is reasonable to suppose that the Brother can easily gain their confidence, and thus be in a position to direct them more successfully in their studies. The discipline, though mild, is sufficiently energetic to maintain good order."*

Students were not allowed off-campus unless they were accompanied by a Brother or had special permission, and since their personal allowances were kept in the school office, they had little means to get around in the city. Some escape from confinement on college grounds came on Thursdays when younger Brothers organized field trips and hikes. In spite of close supervision, the young men were like boys of any period and place and found opportunity to indulge in frowned-upon activities. John Cosgrave, a student at the time,

recalled that the playground was where ". . . the boys spent their noons and recesses . . . and, I am sorry to say, they sneaked out to get a fugitive whiff of a cigarette as often as possible. It was astonishing to what lengths the boys went to get a smoke."

A manuscript written by Brother V. Cyril, titled *The Christian Brothers of the District of San Francisco, 1868-1900*, records a mock mercantile business as part of the College curriculum. "The room in which Mercantile Business was carried on in Old Saint Mary's was situated on the second floor and behind the platform which served as a stage for entertainments. It was fitted up with an intricate system of cages and wickets in imitation of a regular banking house. Not only were the external features of the firm introduced into Saint Mary's, but there also went with them the entire method of banking. Behind the cages, the Paying and Receiving Tellers did a lucrative business in College currency." This last must have been an innovation in business classes on the Pacific Coast at that time, as it was featured in the 1877-78 school catalogue on page 11: "By a system of fictitious values, a college currency, and offices for the various kinds of business, the instruction in this department is as practical as it is possible to make it outside of real business."

Before public relations came to be a common term, Brother Justin recognized its importance. In the middle of the academic year, he arranged for the press to be brought to Saint Mary's in carriages, shown the campus, and informed of its aims. Throughout later years, the public was invited to graduation ceremonies, where students presented recitals in music and public speaking and where they were quizzed in front of the audiences. These efforts brought results. By the second year of the Brothers' administration, the student body had tripled, and the faculty had expanded.

To ensure future enrollments, Brother Justin carefully tended to the development of feeder schools, establishing Saint Joseph's Academy in Oakland (1870), Sacred Heart College in downtown San Francisco (1874), and St. Patrick's Institute in Sacramento (1876). To enhance the academic standing of Saint Mary's College, Brother Justin worked toward obtaining a charter. In 1872, one was awarded by the State Board of Education, allowing Saint Mary's to grant degrees. By 1875, Brother Justin could boast, "The college is big, far the largest of any in the state or on the coast."

Four years later in 1879, Brother Justin was called back to the East Coast to take on the responsibilities of Visitor of the New York District. Taking over as Visitor of the San Francisco District was his biological brother, Bettelin McMahon (1830-1920). Brother Bettelin inherited an uncertain financial arrangement concerning the college. For years, negotiations had been in progress with the Archbishop regarding rent and options to purchase the campus. These concerns were resolved when Brother Bettelin purchased property in Oakland at 30th and Broadway and proceeded to construct a new building. In 1889, with the approval of the recently installed Archbishop Riordan, Saint Mary's administration and faculty moved to the new location, finally free from the damp fog and blustery winds of the old San Francisco campus.



**Saint Mary's College, Oakland,  
under construction, 1888**

At the groundbreaking of the new Saint Mary's in Oakland, Father William Gleeson's dedication address spoke to the Brothers' mission: "Brothers, today you take your stand before the community in the great work you propose to accomplish on this coast. Every eye is upon you and much is expected from you. I have no fears for your success. No failure is a word that has not yet been written into your history. Succeed you shall, and Saint Mary's of Oakland shall become an honor to your name and a glory to the Diocese of San Francisco."

#### Brother Bettelin McMahon



Historical accounts disagree about the relationship between Brother Justin McMahon and Brother Bettelin McMahon. While most records refer to them as half-brothers, their baptismal certificates show that they were full brothers, having the same mother and father.

## Early Schools in the San Francisco District

Even as the pioneer community of Christian Brothers was carrying out Archbishop Alemany's plans to establish a solid base of education for young men at Saint Mary's College, they were being petitioned to help in other educational endeavors in the Archdiocese.

All along the western coast of the United States, parishes were seeking religious to staff schools, as had been strongly encouraged by the First Plenary Council of American bishops in Baltimore in 1852. A later council in 1866 directed pastors to hire teachers who were members of a religious order. By 1884, the council decreed that Catholic parents had a duty to send their children to a parochial rather than a public school.

Because so many of the newly transplanted Westerners were Irish, Italian, or German immigrants with a strong Catholic heritage, the demand for Catholic educators was great. As with the dilemma that produced the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the early Visitors of this district were placed in a position of using a limited number of Brothers to meet a growing need for Catholic teachers.

During his tenure as Visitor, Brother Justin McMahon focused his energies on higher education, and from 1868 to 1876, he supervised the foundation of two "colleges." Sacred Heart College, which opened in San Francisco in 1874, and Saint Patrick's Institute (later to become Christian Brothers High School) founded two years later in Sacramento, were really combination grammar and high schools that also offered some collegiate classes. Both fit in with Brother Justin's long-term plan to establish feeder schools for Saint Mary's College and the novitiate. Under his administration, only one elementary school was opened; St. Joseph's Academy in Oakland began in 1870 as a small day school for boys on the novitiate grounds.



Remains of Guadalupe College as seen in 1904



St. Patrick's Institute in Sacramento became Christian Brothers College and later was renamed Christian Brothers High School

Brother Justin also agreed to temporarily staff a small boarding school near Santa Barbara. Begun as a seminary by Bishop Garcia Diego in 1844, Our Lady of Refuge (or *Refugio*, as it was called) was located a short distance from Mission Santa Inez. Later called Guadalupe College, it was the first true college in California and among the first ten Catholic colleges in the United States. In spite of auspicious beginnings, its remote location,



intended to shield the seminarians from the lures of the world, never encouraged a thriving student body. By 1877, when the Christian Brothers responded to Archbishop Alemany's request to assume responsibility for Guadalupe College from the Franciscans,

the school had a very small clientele. In 1882, after Archbishop Alemany sold the surrounding lands, the Brothers withdrew from the school.



An 1889 class at Sacred Heart School in Oakland

Mary's (1881-1914), Sacred Heart (1886-1901), St. Patrick's (1884-1914) and St. Francis de Sales (1889-1899). In San Francisco, they opened just one parochial school, St. Peters (1886-1953), which proved to be a rich source of vocations for the district. Across the bay, St. Vincent's Asylum for Orphans in San Rafael saw the arrival of a dozen Brothers in 1894. In 1900, the Brothers were welcomed to Holy Cross Grammar School in Santa Cruz.

Calls for help were not restricted to the Bay Area, but came from Oregon and Washington as well. Brothers arrived in Portland, Oregon, in 1886 at the request of Bishop Gross, who, like Archbishop Alemany, was not deterred by initial negative responses from the Visitor. He informed Brother Bettelin that he needn't send the strongest men in the communities; even older Brothers who did not have the stamina to work in the San Francisco ministry would be welcomed. Three Brothers, including an infirm Brother Aldrick McElroy, weathered a difficult voyage up the coast and arrived in Portland in 1886 to find incredibly poor teaching and living conditions. (Brother Aldrick died two months after his arrival.) With characteristic resolve, they successfully developed a school that eventually became Christian Brothers Business College. That success, in turn, led to their assignment to St. James Academy in Vancouver, Washington (1897-1911), and two years later, they also assumed the running of St. Patrick's Grammar School (1899-1920) in Walla Walla, which later evolved into De La Salle Business School.

When Brother Justin was called back to the East Coast in 1879 and Brother Bettelin McMahon became Visitor, focus was redirected to elementary education. (This, in fact, followed more closely the practice set on the East Coast where most early efforts were directed toward elementary schools.) Between 1879 and 1900, Brother Bettelin sent Brothers to twelve such institutions.

In Oakland, the Brothers staffed five parish schools between 1880 and 1889: St. Anthony's (1880-1914), St.



The Brothers' school in Walla Walla, Washington, in the early 1900s.

Pastors who fervently requested the Brothers' help often did not live up to their promises to have adequate housing and facilities in place for the arriving faculty. More often than not, the teachers found buildings in bad repair, non-existent residences, and a lack of even the most basic equipment. Founding Brothers at Walla Walla, Portland, and Santa Cruz camped in the outdoors and lived without furniture for weeks. The school building in Walla Walla had deteriorated to the extent that it was little more than a decrepit shack.



**Brother Vidonius Andrew (top row, center) leading the band of Holy Cross Grammar School in Santa Cruz, 1902**

It was not a life for the faint of heart or weak of faith. Even where facilities were adequate or new, the Brothers faced a daunting workload. Usually only three or four Brothers were sent to staff a school, and sometimes it was just two. Classes were of a size unheard of today—the three Brothers in Portland staffed a school of 140 boys. Former Brother V. Lacion Hannon recalled teaching a "first class" (grades 1, 2, and 3 combined) at St. Anthony's in Oakland that numbered 75 students. Not only were the Brothers required to teach a wide variety of subjects, but they filled in as custodians after school, cleaning classrooms and handling maintenance. All extra-curricular activities fell to them, so they coached sports, taught music, and moderated clubs. On weekends, they often supervised choirs, taught religious education classes, and chaperoned students on picnics. All this was done in the framework of their rigorous community regimen of prayers, Mass, and shared chores which had them rising before dawn and retiring at nine o'clock at night, undoubtedly exhausted.

It was a difficult life, but as they entered the new century, the Brothers would face even more trying times as the District experienced a fall in vocations and grappled with a disagreement with the international Institute.

## A New Century Brings New Challenges

If the first three decades of the Christian Brothers' work on the West Coast brought a sense of accomplishment in the face of numerous challenges, the next thirty years proved to be a discouraging and difficult time. While the San Francisco District had taken charge of thirteen schools between 1868 and 1900, it added only four institutions and withdrew Brothers from ten schools in the years that immediately followed.

A string of physical disasters during this period strained the fragile financial resources of the District. In 1894, Saint Mary's College, which had relocated from San Francisco to Oakland just five years earlier, suffered a ruinous fire, forcing the student body to move back to the old Mission Road building in San Francisco for a year until the school was rebuilt on the Oakland site. Six years later, in 1900, the novitiate in Martinez also sustained substantial damage in a fire.



A view of the area where Sacred Heart College stood before its destruction in the fire that followed the 1906 earthquake

In the great earthquake of 1906, which shook the whole Bay Area, Saint Mary's College and many of the grammar schools were spared, but Sacred Heart College in San Francisco was devastated by the fire that swept through the city. A contemporary account of the disaster reported that "Flames drew perilously near Sacred Heart College, but were successfully repelled. Next day, Thursday, the flames . . . crept slowly up Eddy Street and toward evening reached Larkin. The prominent College was the last of that awful day's tribute to the flames." The only things salvaged

from the rubble were photograph albums and a ledger of tuition accounts. The school continued in temporary buildings until 1914 when a new structure was completed at Ellis and Franklin Streets.

Fire again did severe damage to the campus of Saint Mary's College in Oakland in 1918, but through the staunch effort and determination of the College's president, Brother Gregory Mallon, funds were raised and the building was ready for use again the following semester.

In addition to these calamities, the Brothers grappled with financial difficulties that led to their withdrawal from a number of institutions. Because many parochial schools served neighborhoods with poor, immigrant populations, their economic base was fragile, and even the very low expense of housing the Brothers sometimes became too costly to carry. Schools that weren't completely shut down were slowly given over to the care



Saint Mary's College suffered a second fire in 1918.

of teaching orders of sisters. (Apparently, it was less expensive to maintain sisters at the schools, and pastors considered them to be more tractable.)

All of the Brothers' parish schools in Oakland eventually closed. St. Francis de Sales parish stopped classes in 1889 because of depleted parish finances. Two years later, Sacred Heart church was destroyed by fire, and the daunting cost of rebuilding pushed the burden of maintaining the boys' school beyond the parishioners' means. St. Anthony parish, which had a strong enrollment of about 200 students and a faculty of five Brothers during its last few years, eventually was unable to pay the monthly salary of 33 dollars; in 1914, the pastor, Father Sullivan, reluctantly told the Brothers they would have to go.



Rebuilding began immediately after fire destroyed a large part of the Novitiate in Martinez

It was a story that repeated itself in many places and eventually affected institutions outside of California. In Vancouver, for instance, the money crunch led to the closure of Christian Brothers Academy in 1911.

The departure from schools was not just a consequence of the lack of funds, but also of a distressing lack of Brothers to serve in them. In order to keep the larger schools staffed, struggling institutions such as Holy Cross in Santa Cruz, De La Salle Institute in Walla Walla (Washington) and St. Vincent's Asylum in San Rafael were closed.

The San Francisco District had always suffered from a shortage of vocations among Californians. Brother Justin had recognized the problem when he wrote in 1879 that it was "very difficult in a country like this—made up in the great part by adventurers—to engage young men to take up a really devoted life." Under his successor, Brother Bettelin, recruiters were sent to the East Coast to seek candidates. The novitiate register from the late 1800s shows the results: most of the novices in the San Francisco District came from Ireland, the eastern United States, and Canada, particularly Prince Edward Island.

By 1901 when the Visitor, Brother Theodorus, voiced concerns that there would not be enough men to fill the need for teachers, the cause was no longer just the lure of the material world. This time, the worrisome situation was aggravated by a struggle between the administration of the international Institute in Belgium and the entire United States Region over the teaching of Latin in the Christian Brothers' schools. It was a controversy that loomed over the future of the District of San Francisco, threatening its educational system, discouraging vocations, and undermining the American Brothers' leadership.



The Novitiate Register shows a large number of novices were not from California.

## The Latin Question

While the Brothers in the United States were experiencing a period of phenomenal growth in the latter part of the 19th century, a struggle was brewing with the Institute in Europe. Called the Latin Question, it had its roots in a dispensation granted by the Institute in the earliest days of the United States Province, but over time, it developed into a damaging quarrel that nearly paralyzed the Christian Brothers' mission in the United States.

When St. John Baptist de La Salle wrote the Rule (the set of directives for a religious community) for the new institute, he was explicit about prohibiting Brothers from teaching or studying Latin. The reasons for excluding Latin were sound. In 17th-century France, education was a prerogative of the wealthy and was largely carried out in Latin to prepare students for advanced studies in the university or for careers in the Church. For most of the poor whom De La Salle sought to serve, Latin had no useful purpose. He also feared that the Brothers themselves would drift away from the Institute's aim of serving the disadvantaged, possibly lured by the prestige of teaching the upper classes or called to a priestly vocation which required Latin.

In America a century and a half later, two unique circumstances existed which made the issue of Latin a point of division: a shortage of priests and the ease with which class barriers could be crossed. The relatively open society of the United States provided everyone, even impoverished immigrants, the ability to rise above their economic class through education. More important was the fact that a background in the classical languages provided the key to advancement to professional careers in law, medicine, or journalism. These conditions created a significant difference between the American and the European experiences.

The first requests for a dispensation from the traditional prohibition against Latin were actually prompted by the American bishops. The United States had too few priests to minister to a Catholic population that swelled with each arriving boatload of immigrants. In response to requests from bishops, Brother Patrick, Visitor of the United States, added Latin classes to the curriculum at Christian Brothers College in St. Louis to increase the number of young men who would have the proper background to continue to the seminary. At the first possible opportunity, Brother Patrick sought approval for this deviation from the Rule. He presented his cause to the General Chapter of 1854 and received verbal permission from the Superior General, Brother Philippe, to continue the practice.

As new Brothers' schools were added in the United States, Latin was included in their curricula. By the turn of the century, there were at least 29 American schools and colleges with Latin courses. At the General Chapter of 1873, an official record was made



From its earliest days, Saint Mary's College offered classical languages.

of the Institute's approval for U.S. schools to teach Latin, but it contained two critical provisions: Latin was to be taught by "professors outside the congregation," and the permission for the United States was not to be considered a precedent for other districts.

From its very beginnings in 1868, the San Francisco District offered Latin studies. When the first Visitor, Brother Justin McMahon, assumed control of Saint Mary's College,

the Superior General in Belgium was well aware that the school carried classical language courses and that Archbishop Alemany expected those courses to continue. When the new Sacred Heart College was opened in 1875, Superior General Brother Irlande gave Brother Justin permission to teach Latin there; later the Sacramento Institute also offered Latin.

**SACRED HEART COLLEGE**  
EDDY AND LARKIN STREETS  
Conducted by *The Christian Brothers*

**COLLEGIATE DEPARTMENT**  
Literary and Scientific Courses.  
Modern Languages: Spanish, French, German.

**COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT**  
Arithmetic, Penmanship, Bookkeeping,  
Shorthand, Typewriting, Telegraphy.

**FULL GRAMMAR AND PREPARATORY COURSES**  
Syllabus Revised January 4, 1904

**An Evening Commercial School**  
Has recently been opened at the College for the  
accommodation of young men unable to attend  
day classes.

After the 1900 ban on teaching Latin, Brothers' schools offered only modern languages

Over the years, sporadic concerns surfaced about the Latin courses. The Jesuits, whose colleges were often in competition for students with the Christian Brothers' schools, complained to Rome that the Brothers were not adhering to their Rule. Since Jesuit regulations did not prohibit the teaching of classical languages, it was not surprising that they voiced a protest. But when the matter was examined by

local bishops, the decision was in favor of the Brothers to continue.

From 1866 to 1894, the Latin Question was put before successive General Chapters. Arguments raged over the details of the dispensation. Gradually, the lines were drawn. The French Brothers, whose numbers dominated in the Chapter meetings, believed that the practice of teaching Latin had been done without permission and was in contradiction to the Rule. The Americans, on the other hand, continued to point to dispensations and permissions granted by earlier General Chapters. As the argument grew increasingly acrimonious, the European position hardened.

Religious reasons for the quarrel were tinged by cultural perceptions on the part of the French and Europeans. As a result of its war with Spain and its expanding role in world affairs, the United States was regarded as an overbearing bully. Moreover, the American church itself was suspect in Europe. Europeans thought its individuality and independence ran counter to the ideas of obedience and regularity central to religious congregations. These perceptions no doubt influenced the French understanding of the Latin Question and muddled claims that the educational conditions in America demanded different practices. Both sides felt that they were in the right, the French Institute for keeping to the letter of De La Salle's prohibition against the teaching of Latin, the American Brothers for following the Founder's injunction to serve the poor through a practical education. Ultimately, the issue became one of adherence to the Rule versus

adaptation to change. Finally, the French position of strict adherence prevailed with the 1894 General Chapter commanding that "All the prescriptions of Chapter 28 of the Rule must be maintained in all establishments of the Institute."

To insure American compliance, two Brothers were sent to the US from the Institute in 1897, but these men were closed to any discussion or understanding and succeeded in alienating and angering their American *confreres*. Proposals to allow classics courses to be phased out gradually were squelched. The final blow was delivered by the General Chapter of 1899: all Christian Brothers' schools in the United States were to cease teaching Latin by the end of the spring semester of 1900. Moreover, the Brothers had to sign an oath promising to avoid the study and teaching of Latin.



Brother Justin McMahon (seated, center) was among the "Exiles" sent overseas after the ban on Latin was enforced.

To add to the hard feelings generated by the controversy, leading American Brothers who had voiced strong opinions on the issue were "exiled," sent from the U.S. as a consequence of their perceived disobedience. Brother Justin, the former founding Visitor of the San Francisco District, was removed from office as Visitor of the New York District and sent to France. Other Brothers were posted to Belgium, Egypt and Ceylon. In all, 13 American Brothers were sent away. All of the Brothers obediently accepted the penalty.

From that point, the "rebellion" of the Brothers in the United States was halted. American Brothers took up the task of restructuring their programs toward scientific and vocational ends. At Saint Mary's College, the loss of classical courses forced the college to add other disciplines to attract students; soon it opened classes in pre-med, pre-law, architecture, civil engineering, and education. In Portland, Oregon, a commercial school called Christian Brothers Business College opened in 1908.

The Church hierarchy in the United States was not so willing to give up the fight, and for the next two decades, they petitioned the Institute and Rome for dispensations for the Brothers' schools. However, it was not until 1921 when Archbishop Hanna of San Francisco made a direct request to Pope Benedict XV to reconsider the ban on Latin at Sacred Heart College that change finally occurred in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. In 1923, with the encouragement of Pope Pius XI, the ban on Latin was lifted for the entire Institute.

The years of the interdict against Latin were a stultifying period in the American Brothers' history, negatively affecting both vocations and the ability to carry out the educational mission. Once it was freed from the demoralizing strain of the quarrel with the Institute, the entire United States Region experienced a period of rejuvenation. With a positive outlook, the San Francisco District entered a decade of expansion and success that recaptured the resolve and accomplishment it had displayed as an early pioneer community.

## After the Latin Ban

For the 21-year duration of the Latin ban that prohibited the teaching of classical languages in the Brothers' schools, the United States Region was stagnant. Few educational institutions opened, and vocations faltered. The lifting of the ban in 1921 coincided with the period of prosperity that the 1920s brought to America, during which the District of San Francisco entered a decade of vitality.

Christian Brothers High School moved to new buildings on Broadway and 21st Street outside Sacramento's city center in 1924. That same year in San Francisco, a high school was added to St. Peter's; the Brothers left the lower classes to the Sisters of Mercy and assumed the boys' education from 6th through 12th grades. Southern California saw the arrival of Christian Brothers in 1925, first as teachers in a parish middle school for boys, and then, a year later, at Cathedral High School in Los Angeles.

1926 brought lasting changes to the "Old Brickpile" in Oakland when the high school department physically separated from Saint Mary's College and was installed in the newly constructed De La Salle Hall on the Peralta Park Campus in Berkeley. (The old Palace of Saint Joseph's Academy continued in use as a residence for boarding students.) The college itself moved to a spacious and graciously designed campus in Moraga in 1928.

By 1930, the novitiate in Martinez was feeling hemmed in by the encroaching growth of the city, inducing Brother Gregory Mallon to purchase the old Theodore Gier Winery in Napa as a new site for the novitiate. In 1932, the move from Martinez to Mont La Salle was completed, a task complicated by the cumbersome winery equipment which had to be ferried across San Francisco Bay and carted to the new hillside property.

In the early part of the century, the Brothers made a substantial shift in their teaching focus from elementary teaching to high school and college instruction. The reasons for this have been debated but were certainly helped by the trend of parish elementary schools to replace Brothers with nuns. As a result of the shift, young Brothers were required to have greater professional preparation and more education themselves before they taught. The collegiate scholasticate was established in 1922 at Saint Mary's



The dedication of Christian Brothers High School's new Sacramento campus in 1924



At St. Peter's in San Francisco, Christian Brothers taught grades 6-12 and Sisters of Mercy taught the lower grades.





The first graduating class of Cathedral High in Los Angeles, 1928

College with the intention of providing them with at least some college education before they were put in charge of a class of students. While it would be many years before all young Brothers could earn a degree prior to their work as teachers, most now had a few years of collegiate study and completed their degrees at summer classes and at night, either at Saint Mary's or at UC Berkeley.

This period of prosperity came to an end with the stock market crash of 1929. As the economic depression settled over the country, the District began to feel the pinch of debts incurred by the moves to Moraga and Mont La Salle and had difficulty meeting payments on the bonds that had been issued for their construction. The situation came to a

head in 1936 when the San Francisco District was forced to declare bankruptcy. At Mont La Salle, Brother Visitor Jasper Fitzsimmons went through grueling negotiations to finally arrive at an acceptable payment system for his creditors. Saint Mary's College also found itself in desperate financial straits in July of 1937 when the institution was sold at auction on the steps of the county courthouse in Oakland. Two months later, San Francisco's Archbishop John J. Mitty purchased the college from its holders, allowing the Brothers to continue operation of the college while they repaid their debt. (The loan was paid off by June 1955.)

In the case of Mont La Salle, Brother Jasper was finally able to pay off debts in 1944, thanks to the reliable income provided by an increasingly successful winery operation. By 1945, the Visitor had a new but rather pleasant dilemma: how best to use the profits produced by Christian Brothers' wines. Once again, the District had survived a time of trial and could look hopefully toward a promising period of growth in vocations and expansion of schools.



The new chapel and novitiate at Mont La Salle, 1932

## The Christian Brothers Winery

The beginning of the Christian Brothers winemaking enterprise was a happy combination of serendipity and providence that proved to be significant to the District of San Francisco.

By 1878, Brother Visitor Justin McMahon realized that the novitiate attached to Saint Joseph's Academy in Oakland did not provide the seclusion desirable for a center of religious formation. A brief search led him to a 70-acre property in the hills of Martinez. It was an ideal site, sufficiently removed from the city proper to offer privacy yet close enough to a railway line to provide access to Oakland and San Francisco. Additionally, the property included fields, orchards and a 12-acre vineyard. In January of 1879, Brother Justin purchased the estate from Mrs. Abigail Bush, and within a few months, the novitiate moved to its new location which was soon christened Villa de La Salle.



Christian Brothers winery began with a small vineyard in Martinez.

The winery's beginnings were modest. For the first few years, the grape harvest was sold, but it wasn't long before one of the frugal Brothers saw a use for the crop that might provide more income for the novitiate. By all accounts, Brother Victorick McDonald approached his first attempt at winemaking as an "experiment." Using a water trough meant for horses (a new one had been purchased at the local store) and a crudely hewn tree limb called a "mule's leg," he and Brother Cecilian O'Connor crushed a portion of the harvest, hoping to produce wine for the Brothers' table. The experiment must have been successful because records show that in 1886 the Brothers purchased a crusher, hand press, and storage tanks.

Brother Raphael Huber (manager of the winery from 1904 to 1935) recalled that "in 1891, we bought grapes from our neighbors Mr. Babatt and Mr. Frasher and commenced to sell wine for commercial purposes." Although records disagree about the exact date that the winery was founded, it has traditionally been assigned to 1882, the year that De La Salle Institute was incorporated as a legal entity.

Growth was gradual but steady. The Brothers' first commercial efforts involved selling wine to neighbors. When Archbishop Alemany learned of the winemaking venture, he encouraged the Brothers to produce sacramental wines; the Brothers readily complied.

In 1904, a large three-story building was constructed that offered several notable improvements over the renovated barn that had served for wine production. A conveyor system hauled the grapes to a third floor press for crushing, after which gravity carried the



Brother Victorick McDonald started the winemaking experiment.

juice down through canvas tubes to the second floor for fermenting, and finally to the lower floor for storage in barrels. No bottling was involved; the wine was sold in bulk, either in kegs or barrels.

When Prohibition (1920-1933) forced the closure of many wineries, the Martinez operation was allowed to continue selling its products for medicinal and sacramental purposes. Records for 1925 show that it produced over 80,000 barrels of wine.

By the 1920s, the rapidly growing city of Martinez was crowding the novitiate grounds, and it became clear that a new site was needed. Consequently, in 1928, Brother Visitor Gregory Mallon appointed Brother Victorinus Leo to look at properties. Among the several possibilities, the Theodore Gier winery in the hills above Napa appeared to be an ideal location. Situated a few miles outside the city, it offered solitude, a bountiful supply of water, 135 acres of vineyards, and an operating winery. The property was purchased in 1930, and the following year, construction began on a mission style complex called Mont La Salle.

In 1932, the Martinez property was sold, and the novitiate, the retirement home for the "ancients," and the winery were all moved to the not-yet-completed quarters above Napa. Brother Thomas Levi wrote of the event: "Recollections are quite vivid of our excitement as we boarded the red and blue bus from Saint Mary's College and were driven to the Martinez Ferry to be transported across the Carquinez Strait. As the boat moved from the Martinez Ferry slip, I looked back to our property in Martinez and saw the main building and the stately eucalyptus trees on Mount Hope. The thought of what was involved in this move was striking. . . . The memory of the scores of men who had lived in that Institute during its fifty-three years was awe inspiring." Longtime cellarmaster Brother Timothy Diener recalled that fees were waived for transporting the dismantled tanks and equipment on the ferry across the bay to waiting wagons that carted everything to Napa.

The move was completed in the midst of the financial predicaments of the Depression. The District flirted with bankruptcy as its heavily mortgaged properties faced auction and sale. It was in these most troublesome years that the winery began to flourish, thanks principally to the leadership of three men. The appointment of Brother John Hoffman in 1934 as winery manager began the winery's transformation from a modest producer to a seriously profitable establishment. In 1935, Brother Timothy Diener was designated as chief chemist and cellarmaster, and his increasing expertise brought the wines to a new level of quality. In 1937, the winery began a long relationship with Alfred Fromm, whose assistance with national distribution helped to make the Christian Brothers label widely recognized and well respected.

Shipment No.	Serial No.
MANUFACTURER and CONTAINER	LA SALLE FERROVY, INC. MARTINEZ, CALIF.
Product No. California A-200	
Kind of Liquid	Wine
Date Manufactured	1925
Quantity	Wine Culture
Container	To LA SALLE FERROVY, INC.
Product No. Federal A-48	

Early sales were made as La Salle Products.



Brother John Hoffman, first president of the winery

juice down through canvas tubes to the second floor for fermenting, and finally to the lower floor for storage in barrels. No bottling was involved; the wine was sold in bulk, either in kegs or barrels.

When Prohibition (1920-1933) forced the closure of many wineries, the Martinez operation was allowed to continue selling its products for medicinal and sacramental purposes. Records for 1925 show that it produced over 80,000 barrels of wine.

By the 1920s, the rapidly growing city of Martinez was crowding the novitiate grounds, and it became clear that a new site was needed. Consequently, in 1928, Brother Visitor Gregory Mallon appointed Brother Victorinus Leo to look at properties. Among the several possibilities, the Theodore Gier winery in the hills above

Napa appeared to be an ideal location. Situated a few miles outside the city, it offered solitude, a bountiful supply of water, 135 acres of vineyards, and an operating winery. The property was purchased in 1930, and the following year, construction began on a mission style complex called Mont La Salle.

In 1932, the Martinez property was sold, and the novitiate, the retirement home for the "ancients," and the winery were all moved to the not-yet-completed quarters above Napa. Brother Thomas Levi wrote of the event: "Recollections are quite vivid of our excitement as we boarded the red and blue bus from Saint Mary's College and were driven to the Martinez Ferry to be transported across the Carquinez Strait. As the boat moved from the Martinez Ferry slip, I looked back to our property in Martinez and saw the main building and the stately eucalyptus trees on Mount Hope. The thought of what was involved in this move was striking. . . . The memory of the scores of men who had lived in that Institute during its fifty-three years was awe inspiring." Longtime cellar master Brother Timothy Diener recalled that fees were waived for transporting the dismantled tanks and equipment on the ferry across the bay to waiting wagons that carted everything to Napa.

The move was completed in the midst of the financial predicaments of the Depression. The District flirted with bankruptcy as its heavily mortgaged properties faced auction and sale. It was in these most troublesome years that the winery began to flourish thanks principally to the leadership of three men. The appointment of Brother John Hoffman in 1934 as winery manager began the winery's transformation from a modest producer to a seriously profitable establishment. In 1935, Brother Timothy Diener was designated as chief chemist and cellar master, and his increasing expertise brought the wines to a new level of quality. In 1937, the winery began a long relationship with Alfred Fromm, whose assistance with national distribution helped to make the Christian Brothers label widely recognized and well respected.

Statement No.	Sold No.
MANUFACTURE and CONDITION	LA SALLE WINERY, Inc. MARTINEZ, CALIF.
Form No. California A-100	
State of License	California
Date Manufactured	7/22/27
Quantity	Wine Gallons    Alcohol Content (%)
Contract	LA SALLE WINERY, Inc.    To LA SALLE WINERY, Inc.
Form No. Special A-80	

Early sales were made as La Salle Products.



Brother John Hoffman, first president of the winery

As sales grew, vineyards were expanded to include acreage on the Napa Valley floor and near Fresno at the town of Reedley, where the Brothers established the distillery for their world famous brandies. In 1950, the Brothers purchased Greystone Cellars in St. Helena as a site for aging wines and for the production of sparkling wines. In 1957, the winery was incorporated as a separate entity, Mont La Salle Vineyards, and royalties from its products continued to support its educational mission, as well as the formation and retirement of Brothers.

The last quarter of the twentieth century brought many changes to the wine industry that led to the decision to sell the business to Heublein, Inc., in 1989. For the first time in more than a century, the lives of the Brothers of the San Francisco District were no longer tied to the rhythms of harvest, crush, and bottling that had for so long supported their many schools and apostolates. Cellarmaster emeritus Brother Timothy, reflected upon the change: "The sale of our wine and brandy business freed us from many distractions and allowed us Brothers to concentrate exclusively on our three-century role of teaching. It gave new life and funds for the growth of our primary mission of education."



**Brother Timothy Dicner,  
cellarmaster from 1935 to 1987**



## History of the Novitiate

Brother Jasper Fitzsimmons, an early historian of the San Francisco District, begins his *History of De La Salle Institute* this way: "When the first colony of Brothers was sent from the East to take charge of Saint Mary's College, then situated on Mission Road, San Francisco, one of the first cares of the energetic superior, Brother Justin, was to provide for the extension of the work of the Brothers on the Coast. For this purpose, the work of recruitment was early commenced and was remarkably successful."

In fact, a temporary novitiate was begun on the grounds of Saint Mary's in San Francisco within a few weeks of the Brothers' arrival. Just one year later, two novices received the habit. Brother Agapian Joseph Phelan, who had been a gardener on the Saint Mary's Campus, was the first District novice to "persevere" and remained with the Brothers until his death in 1913.

The crowded quarters on the college campus were not conducive to formation training, so Brother Justin arranged for the novitiate to be moved to Oakland, where he had purchased the

Ross Brown property at 5th and Jackson Streets. Its several acres ensured solitude for the young men in training and provided space enough for a grammar school to be opened there. Called St. Joseph's Academy, it provided novice Brothers a place in which to begin their teaching careers.



Villa de La Salle in Martinez

ate relocated to a 70-acre property just outside the city of Martinez. The original building on the property contained ten rooms and was barely adequate to house the novices and their teachers, but it served until 1882 when a new three-story frame building was erected and named Villa de La Salle. This housed a chapel, a retirement home for the Ancients, dormitories, dining rooms, and classrooms. Brother Permian Moeller, one of the original eight pioneer Brothers and first Director of Novices, was responsible for planting the gardens around the main building. Because the property



Juniors pose on the steps of Villa De La Salle in Martinez in 1908.

also included a dairy, orchards, and a vineyard, the Novitiate was self-sufficient, both raising food for the table and selling produce for income.

In 1888, a juniorate (a residence high school for boys aged 14 to 16 who were interested in becoming Brothers) opened on the grounds in a small building designed to accommodate 15 boys. A junior's day was structured by prayer, school, outdoor work, study, and recreation. Those who found the life compatible received the habit and continued to the senior novitiate as postulants, living in the same community as the novices, but having a separate program. (The postulancy for young men who came directly from the juniorate lasted for three months, while those who entered from other high schools spent six months as postulants.) Postulancy was followed by the novitiate year, a time for intensive spiritual development and for study of the Rule of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.



A work party of Juniors at Martinez in 1930.



Study was an important part of the juniorate's daily schedule.

When the novitiate year was completed, the young men made their first profession of vows. Because many students in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had entered the novitiate before finishing their high school studies, some novices often spent additional time either completing their diplomas or preparing for teaching. Various records refer to the senior novitiate as a "normal" school, that is, a training institution for teachers. Its importance was noted in a 1910 newspaper article: "What West Point is to the Army and Annapolis Academy is to the Navy, the Normal Institute is to the Christian Brothers of California."

For several years after World War I, vocations fell dramatically, causing Brother Jasper to note that "Owing to the strenuousness of the times, the stress of the war and various other causes, a considerably lower percentage has remained faithful than in former times." So few applied to the novitiate that it was closed from 1921 to 1922, and the one or two candidates went to Glencoe, Missouri, to complete the year's training. By 1925, however, the numbers at Martinez were larger, with eleven novices registered.



Mont La Salle, 1935. Young men received the habit prior to the start of their novitiate year.

When the Brothers had first moved to Martinez in 1879, the town had a population of about 1,500, but by 1924 that number had grown to 6,000. In 1930, the search for a more secluded new location ended with the purchase of the Theodore Gier property in Napa, which the Brothers renamed Mont La Salle. Two years later, the three communities—Juniorate, Novitiate, and Ancients—moved to Mont La Salle.

During the first 20 years at Mont La Salle, novitiate groups averaged between eight and eleven candidates. By the 1950s, groups swelled to such size that additions had to be made to the Novitiate wing. However, following the changes of Vatican II in the late 1960s, numbers began to decrease, leading to the closure of the Junior Novitiate in 1969. The novitiate itself continued, but its programs went through many changes reflective of the times. Brother Bertram Coleman recalled that "In the last part



of the 1960s and 1970s, there were a series of experimental programs. A pre-novice (another title for postulant) was admitted to Saint Mary's College for a year before entering the novitiate. There were other programs that had the young men begin a novitiate, receive the religious habit and religious name, and then return to St. Mary's College to continue studies. They would later complete their novitiate year."

By 2000, due to the small numbers of novices throughout the United States, Mont La Salle became the Regional Novitiate for all the districts of the United States and Toronto Region.

**In 2000, Mont La Salle became the novitiate for the entire United States and Toronto Region.**



## Vatican II and the New Millenium

With the end of World War II, the United States enjoyed a brief lull before political and social events led to the upheavals that were so distinctive of the latter part of the 20th century. Vocations were on the rise in the District of San Francisco, perhaps in response to the Cold War focus against Communism, and the winery was providing reliable income. It was in this optimistic climate that the San Francisco District looked again toward expanding its educational institutions.

Southern California was the initial focus of growth. At the request of the Monterey-Fresno Diocese, the Brothers began teaching at the newly constructed San Joaquin Memorial High School in Fresno in 1945. Two years later, they responded to a call from another new school in Bakersfield. Like the Fresno school, Garces Memorial High in Bakersfield was co-instructional: Both boys and girls attended the same institution, but there were essentially two campuses, each with its own administration, classrooms, and faculties. Only a few buildings—a gymnasium, library, and cafeteria—were shared. Boys were taught by the Brothers (who were not permitted to teach girls until the mid-60s), and the girls were taught by nuns. The difficulties caused by this split situation, com-

pounded by the fact that the schools were owned by the Diocese, prompted the Brothers to resolve that future schools would be under their ownership and administration.



St. Peter's High School students collecting food for the needy in war-torn Europe



Brother Celestine Cormier, FSC, with auto shop students at Cathedral High School in 1949

During this period, the San Francisco District experimented with vocational education programs in the high schools. Realizing that not all of their students planned to or were able to continue their education in college, the Visitor, Brother Alfred Brousseau, supported the introduction of curricula that included commercial and manual arts training. The concept did, in fact, keep with the Lasallian admonition to provide a practical education. Courses such as woodshop, metal work, and auto repair were offered at Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento, San Joaquin Memorial in Fresno, and Sacred Heart in San Francisco. By far the most extensive program was offered at Cathedral High School in Los Angeles, where a technical

annex was erected to handle the requisite machinery and specialized classroom space. Although the vocational programs always included standard academic requirements, they did not meet with the success that had been hoped for, and by the early 1950s manual arts courses were phased out.

When the District opened La Salle High School in Pasadena in 1956, the school was clearly advertised as a college preparatory institution. It had opened in the great push by Cardinal McIntyre of Los Angeles to provide Catholic secondary schools to the burgeoning area, but the school was owned and operated by the District of San Francisco, not by the archdiocese.

In 1958 an elementary school was opened in Reedley. Close to the brandy-making facility at Mt. Tivy, Saint La Salle School was the dream of Brother John Hoffman, head winery administrator, who wanted to tie the commercial aspect of the Brothers' operation more closely with the Institute's Lasallian principles. Students paid no tuition, a benefit that existed until 1976.



St. La Salle school in Reedley was a tuition-free elementary school.

In Northern California, Christian Brothers School in Sacramento had outgrown its buildings. Consequently, when the diocese of Sacramento built Bishop Robert J. Armstrong High School in 1956, the Brothers agreed to move the 11th and 12th grades to the new co-instructional facility, leaving the old campus on 21st and Broadway Streets to the middle grades. Once again, the Brothers found that a shared facility was difficult to administer. The situation was resolved in 1964 when, with the opening of two all-girls' high schools, Bishop Armstrong became the Brothers' school. It was renamed Christian Brothers High School in 1968.



La Salle High in Pasadena opened in 1956 as a college preparatory school.

Growth in the suburbs of the San Francisco Bay Area also raised demand for Catholic secondary schools. In response, the Brothers opened De La Salle High School in Concord in 1965, and the following year, Justin High School in Napa. Both were boys' schools, although each had a Catholic girls high school located next door. Eventually, Justin High School merged with Siena High School, operated by the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, to become Justin-Siena High School.

In Oregon, where the Brothers had last operated a school in 1920, they were called to staff a proposed co-educational high school. Because he assured them administrative oversight, the Bishop convinced the Brothers to assume responsibility for the enterprise, and La Salle High School in Milwaukie opened its doors in 1966.

The period's expansion into schools occurred against the transforming backdrop of the Second Vatican Council. Convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962 to update

the Church in the light of modern challenges, it was intended as a breath of fresh air. In fact, its cumulative effects had the power of a strong gust of wind that shook the structure of all Catholic institutions.

For the Christian Brothers, the spirit of Vatican II was implemented, first locally, by the 1963 Directors' Workshop and later, Institute-wide, at the 39th General Chapter in 1966. The far-reaching changes brought by these meetings touched every aspect of the Brothers' spiritual and personal lives. Reforms altered the schedules and forms of community prayers, replacing Latin with English in many devotions. Individuals were granted more privacy and freedom, from time spent in study, to the dropping of a restriction against teaching girls, to allowing smoking without special permissions. Brothers received the option of using either a baptismal name or a religious name. Their vow of poverty was eased to allow them to carry money. And for the first time, district leaders and council members were elected rather than appointed. (In 1968, Brother Bertram Coleman became the first elected Visitor of the San Francisco District.) It became a time of experimentation in many aspects of religious life, even inspiring an evaluation of their traditional robe and rabat.



Vatican II inspired the Religious Garb Experiment in the San Francisco District.

While many of the reforms were welcomed, they had an unexpected effect: vocations dropped dramatically, and many Brothers chose to leave the Institute. The number of Brothers in this District fell from <sup>over 260</sup> 250 in 1965 to 211 in 1969. This was a phenomenon common to virtually all Catholic religious congregations, but for the Brothers in the San Francisco District, it had grave implications since they had recently committed themselves to the running of three new schools.

The situation proved to be an opportunity as well as a challenge. Greater numbers of lay teachers became involved in District schools, enabling the Brothers to maintain existing institutions even as they renewed their commitment to the poor and disadvantaged. The District sponsored projects such as Vaugirard in San Francisco and Centro La Salle in Tijuana, Mexico. Brothers went to serve as teachers and administrators at Bethlehem University and in Africa. For several years, they assumed responsibility for St. Joseph Grammar School in Sunnyside, Washington. In Los Angeles, the District supported Instituto Miguel Hidalgo to assist Hispanic families.



Students receive tutorial help at the LEO Center in Oakland.

Today, the work continues in other apostolates such as the Lasallian Educational Opportunities (LEO) Center in Oakland, which offers tutorial programs for grammar and high school students; La Salle Vietnam House in San Jose, serving the needs of Vietnamese immigrant families; Bahay-Pag-asa (House of Hope), a program for poor, court-adjudicated youth in the Philippines; Latino

Adult Institute in Napa, providing language education and parenting support for Hispanic families; and Christian Brothers Ranch, an animal husbandry program for at-risk youth in the Napa area.



La Salle High School in Yakima, Washington, opened in 1998.

In addition to these non-traditional apostolates, four new schools have been founded since 1998, utilizing both traditional sponsorship and innovative means of collaboration and partnership. La Salle High School of Yakima opened in Union Gap, Washington, in 1998 following a traditional path. However, De Marillac Academy in San Francisco was founded in 2001 in co-sponsorship with the Daughters of Charity. Modeled on the San Miguel plan, it is the only private school in the city's impoverished Tenderloin District and offers the area's low-income children access to Catholic education that focuses on academic readiness for high school and college. Eight years after its opening, its first enrollees are now in college.



Students at San Miguel High School in Tucson combine academic and corporate internship experience.

Both De La Salle North Catholic High School in Portland, Oregon, which opened in 2001, and San Miguel High School in Tucson, Arizona, founded in 2004, belong to the Cristo Rey Network which follows a corporate internship model. By blending business and work responsibilities into the students' schedules, the corporate internship model allows students to earn tuition while providing them with practical experience, work skills, and community connections.

accessibility to families of low income and to increase the financial aid available to such families.

At the same time, the District's longer-established schools have committed themselves to increasing their

The District also continues to develop formation programs that introduce lay partners to the tradition of Lasallian education, helping them to become familiar with the educational mission and the charism of the Founder, Saint John Baptist De La Salle. These efforts have resulted in a growth of Lasallian spirit, values, and traditions in all of the District's schools and ministries that have benefited from the contributions of lay

partners who serve as teachers, administrators, trustees, and supporters. Beginning in July 2002, the District instituted a District Assembly on Mission to be held every four years, recognizing the crucial collaborative role that lay people play and acknowledging them as Lasallian partners with voice and a vote in the direction of the District's efforts.



**In July 2006, Brothers and Lasallian Partners joined together at the Second District Assembly on Mission .**

Like the pioneer Brothers who preceded them on the West Coast, the De La Salle Christian Brothers and their Lasallian partners continue to meet challenges with imagination, resolve, and commitment. Together, they work to ensure that the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle will endure in the District of San Francisco.

This history, as well as complete information on the District of San Francisco, can be found on the District web site at [www.delasalle.org](http://www.delasalle.org) .

In addition to the manuscripts cited in the text and other documents in the San Francisco District Archives, the following sources were used to compile this history:

*The Christian Brothers in the United States 1848-1948* by Brother Angelus Gabriel, FSC  
*The Christian Brothers in the United States 1900-1925* by Brother Clair Battersby, FSC  
*Called to the Pacific* by Brother Ronald Isetti, FSC



Faint, illegible text or markings at the bottom of the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side or a very light stamp.