



The first campus . . . Christian Brothers College, 12th and K streets, 1876-1923.

basically two: The desire by Catholics to provide a religious education for their children and general dissatisfaction with the quality of public instruction as it then existed. Accomplishing the task took a good five years.

Finally, with impetus from Father Patrick Scanlan and doorbell-ringing and arm-twisting by Miss Cunningham, the great day arrived--establishing the first local high school offering both academic and commercial classes. Officially known as St. Patrick's Institute after the patron saint of the Sacramento (then Grass Valley) Diocese but commonly referred to as the Sacramento Institute by the brothers who staffed it, the school officially

## Christian Brothers: C

BY STANLEY GILLIAM '41

One hundred twenty years! A long time, indeed, since an energetic young maiden lady named Maggie Cunningham saw her fund-raising efforts brought to fruition with the opening of what has, at various times, been known as St. Patrick's Institute, the Sacramento Institute, Christian Brothers College, Christian Brothers

School, Bishop Armstrong High School and finally--and hopefully last--Christian Brothers High School.

Despite those name changes--of which more later--and locations at four sites, there are two unbroken links spanning that century-plus: The continuous administration by the Brothers of the Christian Schools and a long line--thin at times, but uninterrupted--of graduates, now numbering in the thousands and all proud to be known as "Brothers Boys," joined since 1990 by "Brothers Girls."

The reasons behind the establishing of a school by the sons of St. John Baptist de La Salle, the Christian Brothers, in Sacramento were

dedicated July 16, 1876, by Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany, O.P., of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. The next day the brothers began enrolling students and by the following Monday--July 24--200 of them began their first classes. They wasted no time in those days.

What sort of place was it, this school which opened its doors in the nation's centennial year at 12th and K streets on the site of what in later years was Weinstock's department store, now filled with offices. The past never can be judged in terms of the present, and what appears spartan today was rather opulent in 1876.

There were all of four classrooms, with seats for 260 students (all but 10 would be filled within six months). The most basic division problem indicates the teacher-pupil ratio was such as to put to the acid test even the



Christian Brothers School, 21st Street and Broadway, 1924-1957.

renowned disciplinary talents of the seven brothers of the fledgling community. For each classroom there also was furnished, according to contemporary accounts, a teacher's desk and a revolving chair. With classes averaging over 60, the latter probably were kept in a perpetual spin.

Because Father Scanlan envisioned boarding students as a source of revenue, the three-story frame structure had a dormitory equipped for 20 boys, beds and bedding for the seven members of the community and kitchen and dining room facilities to accommodate 30.

All of this required the expenditure of \$24,000, a substantial sum for that day, and may have

to be exact--in the Assembly Chamber of the Capitol, just two blocks away, with Gov. William Irwin presiding.

During the next two decades the school--still known as the Sacramento Institute--thrived until, in 1896 and at the urging of Bishop Thomas Grace of Sacramento, it became the Christian Brothers College.

Nor was the term "college" loosely used, for in those days it was possible for a student to spend his years from the first grade through three years of college right there at 12th and K streets before--if he wished a degree--transferring to Saint Mary's College, then located in Oakland.

Sacramento.

Brother Clanan was succeeded by members of his institute whose names--Stephen, Bertram, Sabinian, Bonisio John, Genebern, Walter Erminold and Victor Ambrose--are now footnotes to history. But in 1900 there came on the scene Brother Vellesian, still remembered fondly by many, who returned in the early 1920s to preside over the construction of the "new" school at 21st and Y streets and who into the early 1940s was a beloved figure on what by then was known as the Broadway campus.

Meanwhile, in those early days of the century, space became a problem. The cost of an addition came in the form of \$5,000 from Mrs. Michael Bethel, a benefactress in the mold of Maggie Cunningham.

By this time the brothers must have considered themselves permanently established in the Capital City. Besides enlarging the school--it is noted by the well-remembered Brother U. Lewis in a history of the school through 1924--they owned, jointly with the Sisters of Mercy, a burial plot in St. Joseph's Cemetery.

## Century Plus of Service

accounted for the fact that when it came time to furnish other classroom amenities, there was just enough left for two globes, 24 blackboard erasers, and 24 pointers. Early accounts make no mention of chalk--or of blackboards, either, for that matter.

Extra fittings for the brothers, whose director was Brother Clanan, were furnished by the San Francisco District. That came to \$250, a hardly princely sum, and another \$950 was spent to equip three extra classrooms and cut down a little on those class sizes. From the very beginning the brothers themselves contributed significantly not only in personnel but in operational monies.

While the brothers and their first "boys" were not exactly lolling in luxury's ample lap, they did have their moments of glory. In just 10 months the school conferred its first diplomas--two,

Thus it was that the concept of the junior college came to reality in the Sacramento area in the hands of the brothers a good 20 years before Sacramento Junior College, as an adjunct of Sacramento High School, began offering post-secondary school courses.

And all the while, in a two-track system later to be emulated by the public schools, the Christian Brothers were pouring, through the commercial and banking departments, a steady stream of young men into the business life of



Bishop Armstrong, now Christian Brothers High School, Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., 1957.

## COVER STORY

The brothers' names now become more familiar to at least the older among the "old boys." The directors included Brothers Florinus Peier, the saintly V. Leo—"White Leo"—noted later both as engineer and poet; Ximenes George, a memorable administrator who was not above the manual labor needed for maintaining what by then was an aging structure, and V. Jasper, later provincial of the San Francisco District.

The history of those years is minimal as to detail, perhaps because, as Brother Lewis noted with a rare touch of asperity, "Brothers Florinus, Leo and Jasper kept poor records." Maybe, by way of excuse, they were just too busy trying to keep board nailed to board in a crumbling edifice, which was three times threatened with destruction by fire in 1919 and 1920 while under the administration of Brother U. Vivian.

It must have been felt by his superiors that Brother Vivian had endured enough—or perhaps that he was jinxed—because after that near-disastrous year he gave way to a former director, Brother George, who presided over the disintegrating structure until December 1921, when, upon the return of Brother Vellesian, a new era was about to dawn.

The downtown school was falling apart and the value of the property—still owned by the diocese—was such that its sale—for \$210,000—imperative. Imperative or not, it put Brother Vellesian, his faculty and student body in a position that was, at best, somewhat awkward.

The property had to be vacated by June 1, 1923, and it would have taken a series of miracles to erect a new school in time for the start of classes in August.

Brother Vellesian, a practical man, and a not particularly demanding one, preferred to depend on his own resources rather than

to tax Divine Providence. The result was a move to the only available place in the city—a site, actually, almost out of the city, the abandoned East Sacramento Public School building at 39th and J streets, where Sacred Heart Church now stands.

That solved only part of the problem, however, because there remained the rather vital matter of living quarters for the faculty and some 30 boarders. These facilities were found in an old residence and adjoining cottage at 20th and T streets. Two buses conveyed teachers and boarding students to school each morning, home for lunch, back to school and home again during a year which must have seemed endless.

Meanwhile, even though it took seven months to iron out the details, construction of the new

facility and the dedication on that date drew a large crowd including, most fittingly, a maiden lady, no longer young, whose memory went back to another dedication 48 years before. Her name? Maggie Cunningham, of course.

The energetic Miss Maggie Cunningham had come to the fore as principal fund raiser for the new school. It was through her efforts that most of the monies necessary were raised from the community, the bulk of it from non-Catholic sources. Soon after, Miss Cunningham was granted Letters of Affiliation by the Superior General of the Brothers, making her an affiliate member of the Institute and the first woman so honored on the West Coast.

The curriculum having been reduced some years before to eliminate college-level courses, it



Front view of Christian Brothers School on 21st Street and Broadway (formerly Y Street).

school advanced at breakneck pace: The contract was let on Feb. 4, 1924; ground was broken Feb. 11, the cornerstone was laid May 18 and students were in their classrooms and brothers and boarders in their living quarters on Sept. 15. It would seem that Brother Vellesian did have his miracle, of sorts.

By Nov. 23 the finishing touches were put on the \$225,000

again was time for a name change, and on November 5, 1924, it became officially the Christian Brothers School.

A classroom wing built to accommodate 500 students extended along the Y Street (now Broadway) side of the campus; brothers' and boarders' quarters were on 21st Street; an arcade, later providing entrance to a gymnasium, connected the two.

feeding the hungry for about 20 years at the Sacramento Food Bank. They have a program on Sundays where they give out nearly 2,300 bag lunches for the poor (no small task). Keep up the great work, Joe. ... Another one of the CB athletes was given a write-up in *The Sacramento Bee*.

**Guillermo Jara '92**, who plays for the Los Angeles Galaxy is 22 years old and the first soccer player from Sacramento to play in the big leagues. US National Coach Steve Sampson said he was one of the finest players on the ball in the country. He is still young and has not had a lot of international experience but will be one of the players of the future in American soccer. Jara was coached at CB by an old friend of mine, **Mike Carroll**, one of the best soccer coaches in the area. From CB, he went on to University of San Diego whose team made it to the NCAA finals in 1992. He ended his collegiate career by setting a school record of 51 goals and 48 assists. ... **John McNamara '50** has put on his uniform again. John

was just appointed interim manager of the California Angels. He has also managed the Oakland A's, San Diego Padres, Boston Red Sox and Cleveland Indians. Boy, what a distinguished career!

Got a great letter from **Cathy Doyle-Johnston** who gave me an update on the Johnston family. **Richie Johnston '59** has been running East Sacramento Hardware for the past 13 years; it is a great favorite with East Sac people. **Johnny Johnston '60** just commemorated his 30th wedding anniversary and brother **Timmy Johnston '68** continuing to run the successful Brothers Electrical and Plumbing Supply. Johnny's son, **Todd Johnston '86**, was recently appointed vice president of Western Sign, Inc. in Diamond Springs. **Mark Johnston '88** recently left Brothers' company to become a self-employed contractor. And, by the way, **Casey Johnston** comes from an old involved in uncle Char the Sacramento Sol

**Charles Doyle** was the hat boy. Thanks, Cathy, for the update.

And now let's see what's doing with the LaSalle Club. Varsity baseball coach **Joe Gill** recently announced that baseballer **Omar Ruiz '96** is the first recipient of the Vincent F. Stanich Perpetual Trophy. The trophy was named to honor the late **Vince Stanich**, who was chairman of the LaSalle Club Hall of Fame Committee for 44 years. The award is given to the most inspirational varsity baseball player. Congrats, Omar. ... This year, **Jim Flynn '30** and **John Giannoni** were honored at the annual LaSalle Club Coaches Night Banquet and Athletic Director **Mike Clemons '63** gave a short report on the various athletic activities at the school and promised they would honor all the coaches in the Sacramento County area. That is going to be a lollapalooza of a banquet!

Well, gang, this is it for now, I keep those letters and phone calls coming because we really want to know what's going on out there.

AD TALK IN  
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HISTORY-ALSO



Ed Conway  
Garrett Kirkland  
Mark Johnston



Kevin Campbell  
Timothy Johnston  
John Johnston