

Mont La Salle



Since 1932, Mont La Salle has operated in various capacities from spiritual to educational. Mont La Salle now serves as the administrative headquarters of the San Francisco New Orleans District, one of three United States Districts of the De La Salle Christian Brothers. Sharing its rich tradition and historic grounds, Mont La Salle opens its conference center to public groups as well as continuing its service to the Brothers and schools.

History of Mont La Salle

The property now occupied by Mont La Salle was first settled in 1864 when a successful gold miner named Herman Hudemann constructed a home and planted lush gardens in this area. He named his acreage Spout Farm for the many natural springs that provided water for the property. Eighteen years later, in 1882, financial misfortunes forced Hudemann to sell his property. It is said that he was so despondent upon losing his beloved gardens, he left in the middle of the night to avoid looking at what he had lost.

The next owner, Rudolf Jordan Jr., planted acres of grapes in hopes of establishing a vineyard. Inspired by the many water lilies, or Egyptian Lotuses, that grew in the small artificial lake on the property, he renamed the farm Lotus Vineyard and used the flower on the labels of wines he bottled. His hopes for a thriving operation never materialized and he, too, was forced to sell the property in 1900 to a successful wine merchant named Theodore Gier. Adding to the existing grape planting, Gier established a profitable winery called Sequoia Vineyards. The original stone building he constructed as a cellar still stands at the neighboring Hess Winery.



Wine cellar built by Gier in 1903 (now the Hess Collection Winery).



Entrance to Sequoia Resort

during his 30 year proprietorship, Gier also operated a spa on the property called Sequoia Resort, complete with hotel, cottages, dance pavilion, a "swimming tank," and five natural springs whose waters provided therapeutic baths in the Spring House. The vacation retreat and winery remained a popular destination until the late 1920s when the restrictions of Prohibition prevented Gier from marketing his wines and eventually led him to put the land up for sale.



Mont La Salle near completion in 1932

The property came to the attention of the Christian Brothers who were looking for a site to relocate their juniorate and novitiate (residential programs for the religious formation of new Brothers), as well as the winery that at the time was located in Martinez. Finding the solitude, spaciousness and established winery ideal for their needs, they purchased it in 1930. They immediately commissioned architect H. A. Minton to design a mission-style complex, and in May of 1932, they moved their Martinez establishment, which also included a retirement home and cemetery, to the hillside above Napa. The site was christened Mont La Salle after Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the French priest who had founded their religious order in France in 1680.

The winery that the Brothers moved from Martinez had been in operation since the early 1880s. It began as a venture in thrift—the Brothers did not wish to waste any of the grapes grown on their small 12-acre vineyard—and eventually produced enough wine for sale to neighbors. Later, the Brothers branched out to produce sacramental wines, a decision which allowed them to maintain their winery during Prohibition. When they moved to Mont La Salle in 1932, they continued to operate the winery.



Growing in success, it was incorporated under the name Mont La Salle Vineyards in 1957, although the most recognized products were marketed under the Christian Brothers label. Profits from winemaking supported their many schools, the formation program for new Brothers, and the care of aging Brothers. During this time, Brother Timothy Diener gained renown as one of the great winemakers of the Napa Valley; his tenure as cellarmaster spanned more than 45 years.



Brother Timothy Diener,
longtime cellarmaster



In 1969, the juniorate, a high school for boys interested in becoming Brothers, was closed, and Saint Mary's Residence School for boys, which the Brothers had operated in Berkeley for many years, moved to Mont La Salle. It continued here as a grammar and boarding school until its closure in 1986.

By 1989, the wine industry had changed dramatically and led to the Christian Brothers' decision to leave the trade. That year, Mont La Salle Vineyards was sold to Heublein, Inc., ending more than a century of winemaking by the venerable order.

However, De La Salle Institute (the incorporated entity for the Christian Brothers) retained ownership of the structures and land at Mont La Salle, leasing the vineyards and winery building to the Hess Collection Winery.



De La Salle Christian Brothers

Mont La Salle Today

De La Salle Institute: These offices house the operational headquarters and the Lasallian ministries of the San Francisco New Orleans District.

The Christian Brothers Retreat and Conference Center: Catering to groups from both within and outside the District, the Retreat and



Conference Center provides indoor and outdoor spaces for meetings and gatherings, overnight accommodations, as well as meals and dining. Our beautiful chapel offers space for prayer and concerts. The site is also available for marriage ceremonies, receptions, and other special events.



The San Francisco New Orleans District Archives: Records of over 150 years of the Brothers' work in the South and Southwest and on the West Coast are stored here.



The Brothers' Communities: Two communities of Brothers make Mont La Salle their home: the Provincialate Community of Brothers involved in administration and the Holy Family Community of retired Brothers.

The Cemetery: Nestled in the forest hillside, the cemetery is the final resting place of deceased Brothers.



Who are the Brothers of the Christian Schools?

The Brothers of the Christian Schools, also known as the De La Salle Christian Brothers, are a religious order of the Roman Catholic Church. They are the largest congregation of Brothers dedicated solely to education, particularly of the poor. The initials FSC, which are commonly found after Brothers' names, stand for their Latin name, *Fratres Scholarum Christianarum*. Founded in France in 1680 by St. John Baptist de La Salle to educate the poor, the order and its lay colleagues teach in over 80 countries. The term "Lasallian" is used to describe the educational works and philosophy that continue the mission of St. La Salle.

The San Francisco New Orleans District has schools in California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana.

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