

# THE STORY OF CHRISTIAN BROTHERS SCHOOL, SACRAMENTO

by Ted McKnight,  
soph class of '66

Somewhere in Sacramento, a doorbell rang. A young woman entered, talked for a moment, and left with a small amount of money. The woman was Miss Maggie Cunningham; the year, 1876. Very capable and energetic, Miss Cunningham was making a house to house canvas, try-

ing to raise money so that the Christian Brothers might be able to start a new school in Sacramento. Her time and hard work were not spent in vain.

In the same year, St. Patrick's Institute was built on the corner of 12th and K Streets, and was dedicated July 16th by Archbishop Alemany of San Francisco. Seven Brothers arrived in Sacramento to take charge of the new school.

On the next day, two hundred boys registered. The modest tuition fees ranged from \$12.00 to \$40.00 for ten months. Students whose parents were too poor would not be asked to pay tuition. Boarding students were also accepted to help support the community.

Father Scanlan, the pastor, furnished the school's four classrooms with enough desks to

standards and managed to find room for most of their registrants. However, it is important to realize that while any sort of progress on the school itself was at a standstill for all this time. With the growth of Sacramento's population, business and commerce, the school's location, at the corner of 12th and K Streets, was right in the heart of Sacramento's growing business district.

Early in 1923, the property was sold for the sum of two hundred and ten thousand dollars, with the provision that the school be vacated no later than June 1st. The property was subsequently bought by the Weinstock-Lubin Company. This left the Brothers in a rather uninviting situation. Although plans had been made for the building of a new school, there was no possible way of having it completed for the beginning of the fall semester.

## • BROTHER VELLESIAN:

These nearly impossible conditions were met head-on by Brother Vellesian, director of the school. The school, as it stands today, with its large enrollment and high scholastic standards is a tribute to his prudence, energy and executive ability.

Pending the demolition of the old school, Brother Vellesian lost no time in finding a place where classes could be conducted until the new school was completed. The only available space in the city was a deserted public school building on 39th and J Streets (site of the present Sacred Heart Grammar School). The Brothers got permission to use the building and immediately moved all usable furniture from the former Christian Brothers' College, as it had been called since 1896, to temporary quarters on 39th and J Streets.

Another immediate problem arose from the demolition of the school. The Brothers and their thirty boarders lost a home, and had no place to stay. To meet this demand, Brother Vellesian rented a house and small cottage located on the corner of 21st and T Streets called "The Sequoia's." Since this was approximately two miles from the site of the temporary school, two buses had to be obtained to provide transportation for the Brothers and the resident students.

The school was conducted under these trying conditions for one year. During this year, school spirit blossomed, and the reputation of the Brothers as teachers grew stronger.

## • THEN IN 1924:

The new school went up in record time. The contract was let on February 4th, 1924; the cornerstone was laid on May 18th; classes were being conducted in the building by September 15th, and it was completed before November 23rd, on which day it was dedicated.

A loan of thirty-two thousand dollars was needed for the completion of the school. To obtain this loan, the school had to be incorporated with the State of California. The articles of incorporation were accepted by the state on November 5th, 1924. The school's corporate title was "Christian Brothers' School of Sacramento." There is an explanation for the changing of the school's name from Christian Brothers' College to Christian Brothers' School. Up until that time, there had been no restriction on the use of the term, college. But with the rapid growth of the

(Continued on Page 12)



The old Christian Brothers School at 12 and K Streets, Sacramento, where shopping centers, office buildings and department stores now stand.

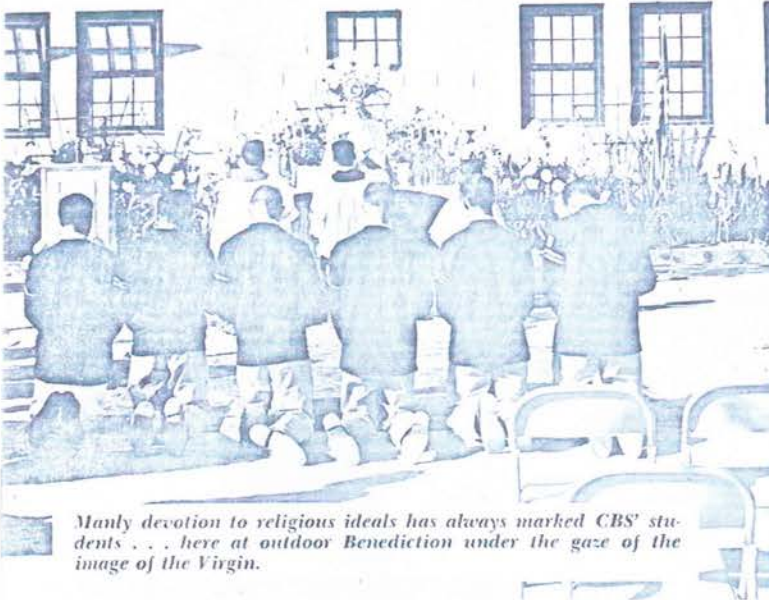
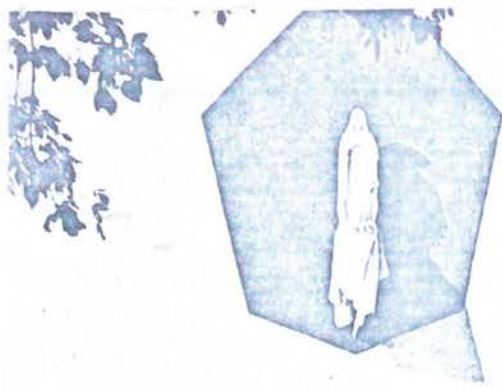
accommodate two hundred and sixty pupils. The dormitories were supplied with twenty beds, and the boarding department also received the necessary furnishings for their dining room, kitchen, and several parlors. The community house was well furnished for the seven Brothers who had assumed charge of the school.

It was under these conditions that the Brothers first began teaching in Sacramento. There were only seven of them, and their school was small, but their popularity grew rapidly in this city as it has wherever they have taught.

## • REPUTATION SPEAKS

As the reputation of the Brothers as teachers spread, there were more and more boys registering each semester. The capacity of the school was heavily taxed. It was obvious that something must be done about this problem, so Mrs. Michael Bethel, a long-time friend of the Brothers, always ready to help them in their needs, donated five thousand dollars for the addition of a new wing on the building. This was the last big improvement to be made on the old school.

For the next twenty years, the Christian Brothers maintained the school's high scholastic



Manly devotion to religious ideals has always marked CBS' students . . . here at outdoor Benediction under the gaze of the image of the Virgin.

## THE STORY OF C. B. S.

*Continued from Page 10*

large universities, it was decided that no school could bear the name of college unless it taught college courses. Some Junior College courses, however, had been given at "Christian Brothers' College" at the turn of the century.

Christian Brothers' School was a combination grade and high school, and was given the most appropriate name to express such a combination. Since the school was incorporated with the state, this title could not be changed, except through legal processes.

### • MERCHANTS CONTRIBUTE:

The businessmen and merchants of Sacramento, both Catholic and non-Catholic, projected a drive in June of 1924 to raise funds for the new school. In this single effort, they collected over nineteen thousand dollars.

At the time of its dedication in 1924, CBS was probably the most beautiful structure in Sacramento. It was actually two buildings, each two stories high, and each built of reinforced concrete. The buildings are situated around the corner at a 45 degree angle, and are joined by a circular arc which serves both as a hallway between the two buildings, and a facade for the entire structure. The building on Broadway contains classrooms, a library and other educational facilities, while the other wing, on 21st Street, contains the Brothers' residence, and accommodations for over 80 boarders. The entire building is predominately mission style architecture.

Sacramento's businessmen displayed their generosity again in 1926 by conducting a drive to furnish the school with a gymnasium. The drive was highly successful, and the combination gymnasium and auditorium was erected between the two wings of the school.

And so, with a new school and an ever increasing enrollment, the Brothers continued teaching in Sacramento, turning out some of the city's finest business and professional men. They also continued to instruct boys of both grade

school and high school until 1955. By that time, several parochial grammar schools had been built in the Sacramento area, so it was no longer necessary for the Brothers to maintain their elementary school facilities so the grammar school was dropped.

### • NEW SCHOOL SETUP:

After 1957, Christian Brothers' School was serving only freshmen and sophomores. This was due to the construction of Bishop Robert J. Armstrong High School, a co-instructional school for juniors and seniors. The girls came from St. Francis and St. Joseph's High Schools. The Brothers also began teaching at Bishop Armstrong.

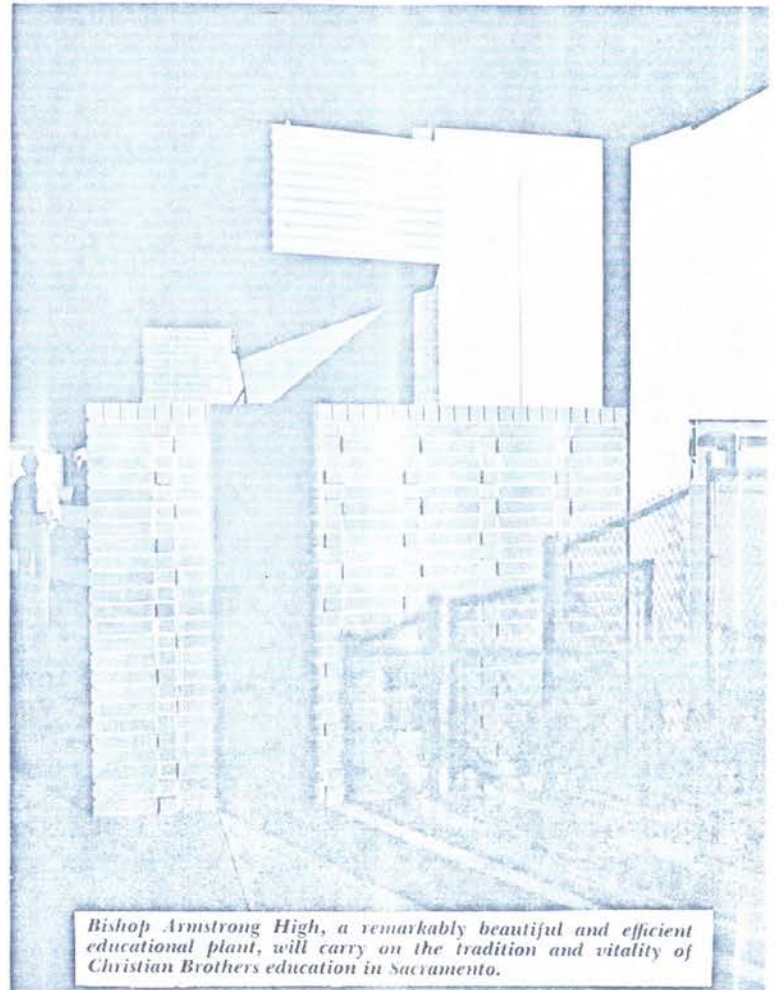
In January of 1964 the diocesan-wide expansion program was announced. Bishop Alden J. Bell declared that the drive was for the expansion and renovation of school facilities. As part of the plan, a new Saint Francis Girls High would be built at 59th and M Streets to absorb the enrollment of the present St. Francis High, and also the girls of Bishop Armstrong. Bishop Armstrong would become a high school for boys, taking the present enrollment of Christian Brothers. Christian Brothers would be torn down. And eventually another girls high will be built on the corner now occupied by CBS.

The present school has served the Sacramento Diocese for over 40 years. This landmark in the city will soon be no more. After the last student has left in June, wrecking cranes will move in and, bit by bit, level CBS to the ground.

### • PERSONAL THOUGHTS

For Catholic Education this is a step forward; but to many of the students of the school, to the Brothers who live and teach there, and to the alumni, some of whom helped raise money that paid for the school, there is a loss. What loss? It's true the Brothers are not being lost: their tradition and standards live on at Bishop Armstrong.

Perhaps it is just the loss of an old building filled with memories. But that doesn't really matter. The fact is that this summer, the lot where Christian Brothers' School stood for some forty years will just look like an extensive addition to the cemetery directly behind it. And in a way, it will be.



Bishop Armstrong High, a remarkably beautiful and efficient educational plant, will carry on the tradition and vitality of Christian Brothers education in Sacramento.