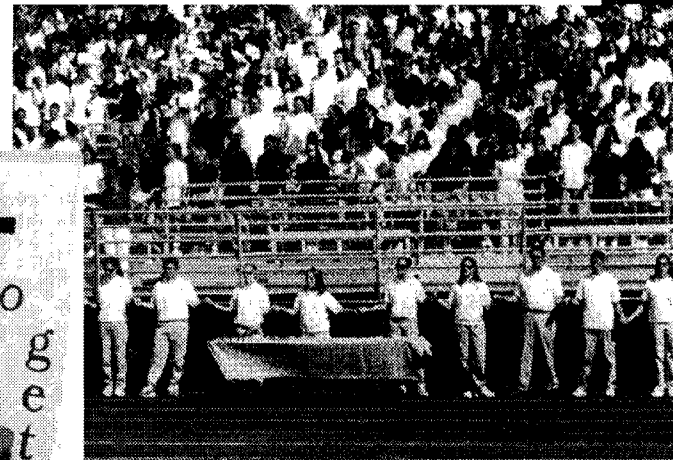
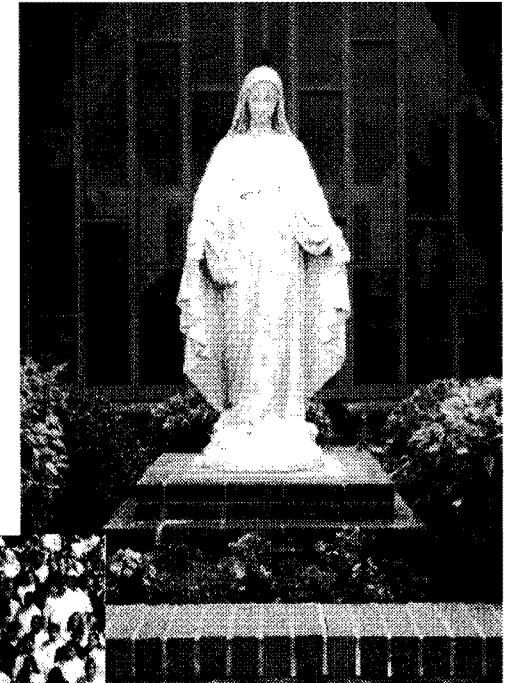
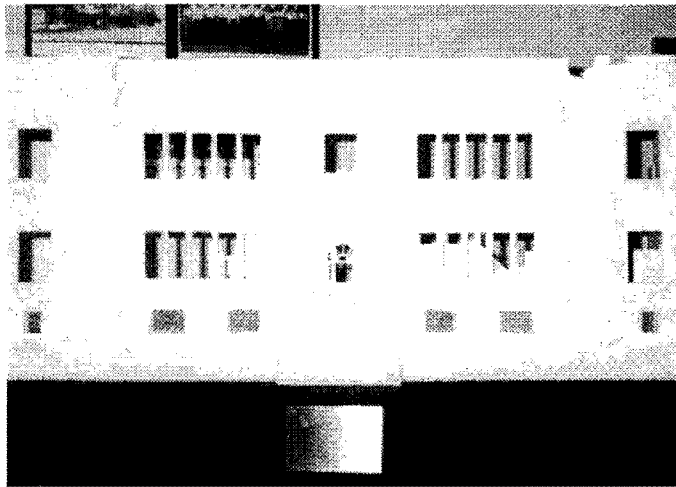


St. Mary's High School

2004 Century Business Honoree



San Joaquin Historian

Fall/Winter 2004

The San Joaquin Historian

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The Society, a non-profit corporation, meets annually and on other special occasions. The Board of Trustees meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month.

The Society operates the **San Joaquin County Historical Museum** at Micke Grove Regional Park under an agreement with the County of San Joaquin. The Society maintains its offices at the Museum.

Well researched and documented manuscripts relating to the history of San Joaquin County or the Delta will always be considered. The editor reserves the right to shorten material based on local interest and space considerations. Inquiry should be made through the Museum office

**San Joaquin County
Historical Society & Museum**

**Michael W. Bennett
Society & Museum Director**

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This Issue...

In 2001, Dr. James Shebl, on the occasion of the 125th Anniversary of St. Mary's High School prepared a published history of the Catholic educational institutions in Stockton, California, that were precursors of St. Mary's High School of today. Dr. Shebl captured the history of the various facilities and the activities of students and school leaders from the days of St. Agnes Academy on the south bank of Mormon Slough to the current facilities at 5648 North El Dorado Street in Stockton.

This issue of the San Joaquin Historian is drawn from that history and is sensitively edited for presentation here on the occasion of the 2004 Century Business Dinner whereby the San Joaquin County Historical Society & Museum honors St. Mary's High School for 128 years of providing educational excellence and spiritual guidance to thousands of students many of which have become leaders of today and the creators of the continuing history of Stockton, California and the Nation in business, arts and professions.

On the Cover...

- Sculpture, St. Agnes Academy by Joseph Jacobs
2001, 125th Anniversary
- Statue of Mary in front of School Chapel
- 125th Anniversary Student Banners
- Anniversary Mass in St. Mary's School Stadium
August 28, 2001

Special Note: As of January 2004, the *San Joaquin Historian* will be published on a semi-annual basis- Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter.

Fall/Winter 2004

St. Mary's High School of Stockton

A Dream Come True

That is what Valley Catholics called it, “a dream come true” – the opportunity for their children to have a Catholic education in Stockton, California. When the generous and determined founder of Stockton, Capt. Charles M. Weber and his wife Helen Murphy Weber, connected with the saintly and visionary priest, William Bernard O'Connor, the outcome was certain. Children from this bustling, international port city would have the privilege of attending school in a nurturing, academic, value-centered environment. Theirs would be a course to prepare them for the business of life.

The Webers strongly believed that every child should have an education, public or private. They supported that belief in word and deed. Charles and Helen contributed, at every turn, to virtually all that would make Stockton a fine city, a community of successful and cultured residents.

The forward-thinking Joseph Sadoc Alemany, Archbishop of San Francisco, assigned Father O'Connor to Stockton in 1872 by design. They both preached by example. Archbishop Alemany trusted that Father O'Connor would help the people of California's Great Central Valley build a faith community commensurate with their needs. He knew this unassuming priest would kindle a fire in the hearts of all whom he touched.

The work did not take long. From the first, Father O'Connor rode countless miles to minister to the farmers and ranchers and those in the secluded communities in the Sierra foothills and along the San Joaquin River watershed. He helped them build their

houses of worship and later, their schools. He understood the value of education. He knew the importance of the values upon which Catholic education is built. His passion was the dissemination of those values. The well being of generations depended upon him.

This work required a person of vision, a person not inclined to place self before others. Old Stocktonians used to tell of Father O'Connor's friends who once gave him money for a mattress; he had given his to “someone more needy.” He gave their gift to the poor. His frustrated friends bought him a mattress and with humor and good will “threatened” him if he did not use it and start taking care of himself. They knew he had a great work to do. They wanted him well.

With assistance from his friend and mentor superior, Archbishop Alemany, Father O'Connor asked the Dominican Sisters, then of Benicia, to come to Stockton to teach. [Archbishop Alemany brought the teaching order of Dominicans from France to California for this very purpose. “Make a little sacrifice to assist in completing the new convent in Stockton,” wrote Archbishop Alemany to Mother Mary Joseph Dillon in 1875.] Archbishop Alemany also suggested the Sisters, Mother Mary Joseph and two additional, come to Stockton to collect “subscriptions” from the people. As it turned out, this was a very demanding request. The Archbishop was asking the Sisters to leave the peace, beauty, and certainty of their Mother House, and a temperate climate for Stockton-considered by some to be at the edge of the known world!

As pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption, the only Catholic Church within a day's journey for most area Catholics, Father O'Connor had a considerable audience.



Reverend W.B. O'Connor

He challenged the people to build their first permanent school and they responded. [In 1863, two lay teachers opened a one-room school called St. Mary's.] Of course, two Dominican Sisters going house-to-house by buggy across the countryside – in the horrid heat of summer and miserable wet of winter and the dreadful Tule fog – asking for assistance, helped the project along considerably. Only one year after the Sisters agreed to “make a little sacrifice,” the first of several buildings planned went up on the land donated by the Webers.

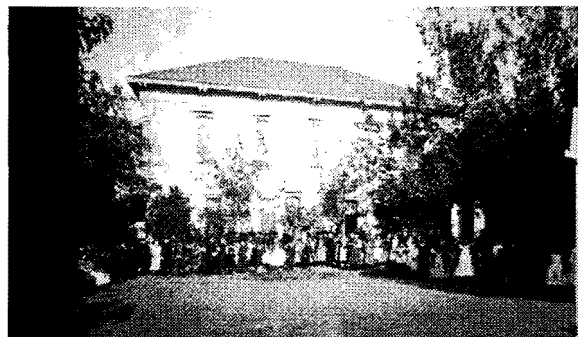
The first vision of Catholic higher education and meeting its challenges became themes in the evolution of the phenomenon that was to become St. Mary's High School. They are themes of the same magnitude today; the stakes are as high.

The Catholic community dug deep to provide funds ranging from \$5 to \$200, and gifts of building supplies and materials. The Sisters of St. Vincent's Convent in Vallejo gifted \$330. Father O'Connor contributed \$200 from his own pocket.

St. Agnes Academy, 1876-1914

On March 17, 1876, Archbishop Alemany dedicated St. Agnes Academy. The Stockton Evening Mail proclaimed the four-

story wooden structure, on the south bank of Mormon Slough (between San Joaquin and California Streets) to be “one of Stockton's finest buildings.” It cost \$22,000.



St. Agnes Academy

One of the first natural gas wells in Stockton provided heat and light to the facility. Overflow water from a well filled a bathhouse that the students found to be a wonderful retreat from their studies-and a godsend in the sweltering summer. Adjacent to the convent was a small, clear water lake, which complemented the gardens.

The upper story housed student boarders – rather meager but sincere attempt to supplement the Sisters' income – and a “cloister” for the Sisters.

Weber, a horticulturist by passion, selected, purchased and planted the trees and shrubs that distinguished the facility. It was a park, a haven for its faculty and students. Beautiful Palm trees framed the bank of the slough; it was more than an illusion.

The Academy became a community unto itself. Its residents were family. And they behaved accordingly. Sister Magdalene tended the orange trees, and students were not allowed to pick the fruit from these trees. This was a rule. Students could, however, eat the oranges that had fallen to the ground. Sister Agatha Tierney, clearly a student favorite, would occasionally go upstairs, open a window and shake one of the trees with a broom, knocking the fruit to the ground! A little secret shared by all.

When classes began in August, seven Sisters were teaching ninety-five pupils, grades one through twelve. They taught, of course, the expected school subjects, but the curriculum was enriched with instruction in vocal and instrumental music, drawing, painting, French, “plain and fancy” sewing, and cooking.

Father O’Connor kept involved. He visited classes on Thursday afternoons, often offering a subject on which students were to write an essay for his critique. “It was almost like waiting for Gabriel’s trumpet,” wrote one student.

The boys took classes to the eighth grade at St. Mary’s School until 1880, when a department for boys – called Weber Hall – was added to St. Agnes. This department relocated in 1884 when the Brothers of Mary from Dayton, Ohio, took charge. [June 1884 First High School Graduation. St. Agnes Academy. Girls only.] The Brothers immediately offered a commercial course through the tenth grade. St. Mary’s was now called St. Mary’s College.

In the late Eighties, Stockton led the nation in grain production. Its milling companies contracted across the world. There were new schools and much growth and development. Students with a Catholic education became essential players in the economy. The commercial course was proving its worth.



Students at St. Agnes 1914-1917

Life at St. Agnes proved to be a real learning experience. Day Books (found in the basement of St. Agnes on San Joaquin and

Park Streets) record the routine and the adventure.

On January 26, 1890, student boarders and the Sisters awoke to city bells ringing and whistles blowing. It was about four o’clock in the morning. The cacophony was a warning. Flooding, which had been imminent for days, was now a reality. The basement of St. Agnes was filling rapidly; to make matters worse, the sewer was backing up as well. Soon the water was at five feet.

Moveable articles were quickly relocated. Others were abandoned in place or left to float dangerously about. At First light, Father O’Connor made his way to the Academy. He celebrated Mass with students and Sisters huddled in hopeful prayer. Long tables, laden with a kaleidoscope of cargo floated below, battling barrels of sugar, boxes, tins, and such. The piano floated grudgingly, the story goes, its weight denying buoyancy until the last.

In the brilliant morning sun, the city showed its watery cloak glistening teasingly. The flood had done its damage.

Then they discovered the worst possible thing had happened. Sister Winifed Denehy had lost her chickens! All of them. The mystery was: had they flown the coup or had they fallen before the flood? A mystery unsolved to this day.

Recovery began immediately; all formality was set aside. Meals were primitive and sleeping arrangements were unparalleled. It took several days to restore some semblance of order. Sister Mary Liguori memorialized the occasion, “aside from the damage and inconveniences following such a surprise the flood of ’90 was a novel and most unique enjoyment.”

As Stockton grew, so too did the demands of commerce. Two railways, the Santa Fe and the Copperopolis, passed through the convent grounds on a right-of-way. Then

came the streetcar line-virtually through the front garden. Shortly after Father O'Connor died in December 1911, the new pastor of St. Mary's, Father William E. McGough, determined St. Agnes Academy must move away. Away from the intrusion and the flooding, north to where the city was fast moving.

The Sisters commuted from the convent by streetcar until 1921 when a beautiful brick building adjacent to the high school opened as their new home. It had a chapel, reception rooms, refectory and atrium, kitchen and storeroom and guest dining rooms on the first floor. On the second floor were bedrooms, community rooms and a small library. On the third floor, there were more bedrooms, a sleeping porch – which was very popular in the summers - a laundry and sewing room. The basement was used for storage and refuge on hot days.



Dominican Convent garden at San Joaquin and Park. circa 1960's

St. Agnes High School, 1914-1931

Father McGough selected as a site for the new school facility, the corner of San Joaquin and Park Street. By September 1914, students began classes in what the Evening Mail described as being a very modern building, designed by the pastor himself. The building was faced with brick. The lower floor held the elementary school, an auditorium with a stage and a small cafeteria. The second floor held classrooms, a commercial room, a good-sized library, study hall, and science laboratory. As well, the Sisters had a plan for continued improvements. The evaluators from the University of



From left to right:
Sr. M. Ambrose Garvin, O.P.
Sr. M. Reginald Garvin, O.P.
and seated Sr. M Rose Lamasney, O.P.

California were very impressed and fully accredited the school. Four Sisters taught the high school students, four taught grammar school and there was a music teacher, as the music department had developed to a point of distinction.

“Like Father O'Connor, Msgr. McGough was the guiding hand. Continually, he visited classrooms, conducted assemblies, administered tests, assigned essays and supervised the writing of the same. He also selected and directed drama productions and taught logic,” recalls Sister M. Colette Standart, O.P.

“St Agnes College,” as it was then called, was a grammar and a high school for girls. In 1918, boys were admitted to St. Agnes for the high school courses.

1918 and 1919 were difficult years, not only for the school but also for the community, indeed for the nation. The Sisters had to close St. Agnes for the month of October in the face of a most terrible influenza coursing the nation. In Stockton it took its toll. Faculty and students wore masks when in class and in the community.

At the time, many faculty and students were volunteering for the American Red Cross. Soldiers just home from “The Great War” of 1915-1918 needed help resettling in the community; their lives had been fragmented by the horror of battle. Stocktonians answered the call and St. Agnes' students were there to help. The flu made their work all the more difficult. In 1919 it returned and again the Sisters dismissed classes for a time. Hospitals over-filled. Patients found themselves in the hallways, on gurneys. It

was a learning time for the students of St. Agnes and, by all reports, they took full advantage of it.

Jack Tone attended St. Agnes in the late Twenties. He remembers liking his “studies and the Sisters very much...even though



St. Agnes Cauldron student newspaper circa 1930

some of them were tough. But they had to be,” he hastens to add. After a year and a half, the family moved to a ranch in the country. He had to transfer to Linden High. “I wanted to continue at St. Agnes but my father said I would have to walk to school; there was no practical way for anyone to take me. I liked the school a lot. I missed playing baseball and basketball, too.”

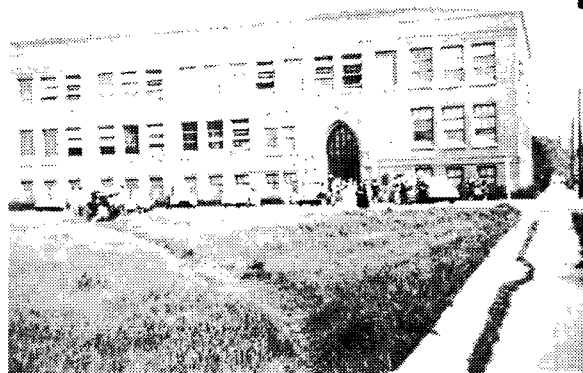
St. Mary’s High School, 1927-1956

In 1927, the Brothers, with the considerable financial help of parishioners, built a new St. Mary’s Boys’ School on Lincoln and Magnolia Streets. The city was moving north. St. Agnes became a girls’ school once again. The Sisters actually were disappointed to see the boys leave St. Agnes. While they “demand more attention in class than girls and exact greater energy from a teacher, they add liveliness and interest to a discussion and as a rule are more friendly,” wrote one Sister in the Day Book.

In these days curricular choices were limited. “There was no choice,” says Sr. Colette Standart, O.P., then a student. “Students could either take the academic course or the commercial course.

Accreditation was very important; we were examined and evaluated by a professor from the University of California, Berkeley, once a year. Our graduates were quite successful and our teachers were well prepared and professional. We were always accredited but it meant a great deal of work for us.”

“The Sisters ran the school. There were no lay teachers. I had about 30 fellow students. We all got along very well. Many of us had been in grammar school together.”



St. Mary’s High School at Lincoln and Magnolia 1930’s

With the Great Depression, it was exceedingly difficult to support two high schools, even with financial support from the Archbishop of San Francisco. In 1930, Father McGough proposed the consolidation of the two high schools as being essential to the survival of even one.

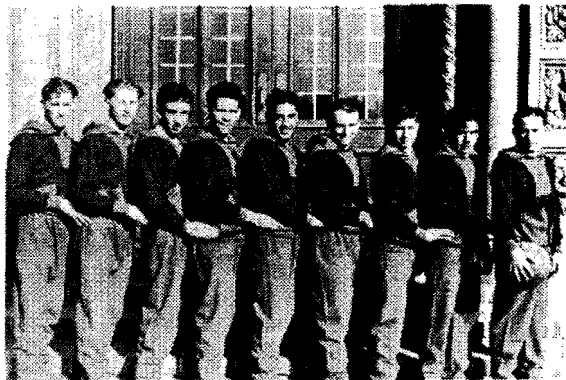
The Brothers, who declined to teach high school girls as a matter of policy, left in 1931. The Dominican Sisters taught at the recombined school -St. Mary’s High School- in the new facility on Lincoln Street.



Graduating Class 1941

In the Sisters’ Day Book, Sister Mary Justin, O.P., wrote of parents expressing concern

about the consolidation. Parents feared their boys might not be encouraged in sports. As if in response, in 1931 St. Mary's basketball team won the championship in the Catholic High School League of Northern California. The next year the varsity team defeated all the Catholic High Schools they played on the West Coast.



St. Mary's High School Basketball Team 1929-1930

Several years later, they were back. In the semifinals for the championship of all the Catholic High Schools in the United States, they lost in the final ten minutes. With no substitutes, "the players failed from exhaustion, not from lack of spirit or skill," reported the *Chicago Tribune* Sports, and championships became traditional at St. Mary's High School.

In those days, the Dominicans, now of San Rafael, had an inspiring tradition. These wonderful women tended the sick and the poor, established centers of culture and scholarship. With wisdom and foresight, they prepared themselves and their charges to fulfill their destinies.

In the mid-thirties the enrollment was very small. "We were graduating an average of thirty to forty students each year. The faculty was still made up of Sisters and eventually a few laywomen. Without a gym, the volunteer coaches only went into action outside of school hours," recalls Sr. Colette.

Hired by Sister Colette, Camie Lagorio was the first Catholic lay teacher at St. Mary's.

She taught the "commercial" courses—business English, accounting, the like.

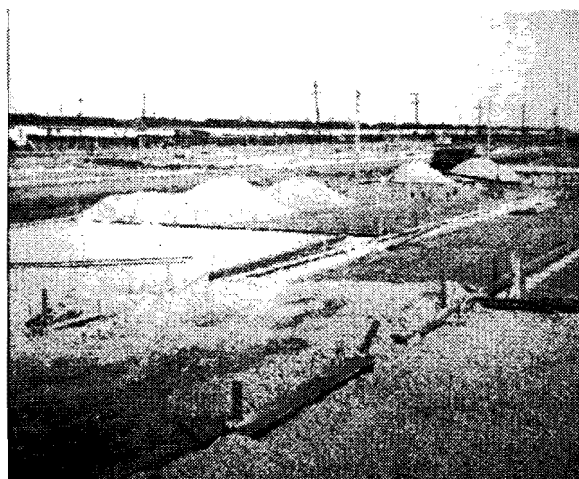
"Although the administration determined the course design, teachers could influence the curriculum and certainly the classroom was theirs. In those days, classroom discipline was the teachers' responsibility.

"Skirts, blouses or sweaters, bobby socks and white Spaulding oxfords were the norm for the girls. The boys wore slacks or cords with shirts or sweaters. The heart and soul of St. Mary's was the faculty. What they taught us will remain with us forever."
Rose Leonardini, Class of '48

St. Mary's High School, 1956-

By 1955, the Catholic Community raised enough money to build a larger high school on twenty-five acres in north Stockton. Again, this is where the city was expanding, and the facility at Lincoln and Magnolia could no longer accommodate the growing numbers of students from the Catholic elementary feeder schools. The property was too small to have room for another building. Enrollment had grown to 408 and there was a waiting list. The need for new facilities was apparent.

The new campus on El Dorado Street, which opened in 1956 with an enrollment of 518 students, included four wings of classrooms, a library, cafeteria, and three athletic fields. Four Franciscan Priests, ten Dominican

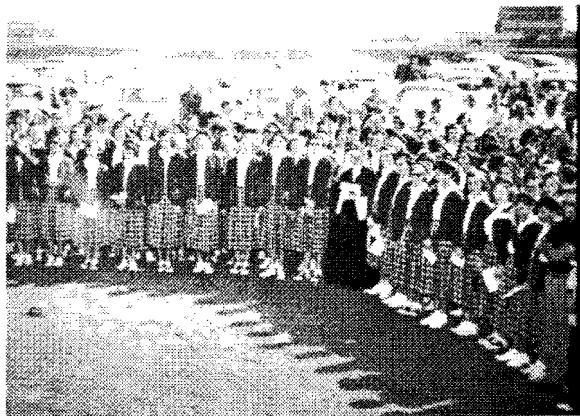


Construction of the new El Dorado Street School circa 1956

Sisters, and seven lay teachers offered an academic and a commercial curriculum.

The announcement accompanying the opening of the new high school affirmed "the keystone of its philosophy to be a respect for the dignity and value of each individual."

Father Xavier Harris, O.F.M., the first principal at this new site, declared "Opportunity" and "support" essential to St. Mary's "high spirit." Sister M. Colette Standart, O.P., served as the school's vice principal.



Groundbreaking, Sr. Monica Gillispie and students. 1956

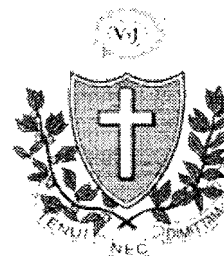
By graduation day, 1961, a gymnasium/auditorium, a student chapel, a friary and a convent had been built. In that year, the Fathers' and Mothers' Clubs

merged to concentrate their support in a more effective manner.

Catholic Campaigner for the El Dorado St. Campus. 1956 "I found St. Mary's to be a place where you can get a great education if you want it. The people there care. There is discipline; there are rules. There are challenges, but the people there really care about you." George Clark, '62.

In 1963, one year after the Diocese of Stockton came into being, Msgr. James DeGroot, a Diocesan priest, accepted responsibility as Treasurer of St. Mary's. This coordination with the diocese relieved the principal of the high school – Father Emery Tang, O.F.M., – of one great responsibility, while formalizing the school's relationship with the newly established Diocese of Stockton (1962).

In 1968, the Franciscans left St. Mary's. They were short of priests and found it necessary to lessen their commitments. Bishop Guilfoyle appointed Msgr. James DeGroot Interim Principal of the High School. The extraordinary culture of the school was not to be disrupted with the change.



Seal of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

VALLEY INTER-PARISH

Catholic Campaigner

for the NEW St. Mary's High School

BUILDING AND BENEFITTING TOGETHER

CAMPAIGN FRIDAY ONLY 12 DAYS AWAY

YOUR LOYALTY NIGHT "FAIR SHARE" SCALE IS OUR INTER-PARISH BASIS OF GIVING

Special in This Issue

The Diocese of Oakland had approached the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales from Toledo, Ohio, to come to Alameda to consolidate St. Joseph and Notre Dame High Schools. This was in 1968. Father John Foley, O.S.F.S., was negotiating the arrangement when Monsignor James Cain, then Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Stockton, became aware of the proposition. The timing was fortuitous. Msgr. Cain was seeking a Religious Order to administer the school. He offered the Oblates a persuasive argument, the diversity of St. Mary's High

School and their history of value-centered education.

The Oblates agreed to come to St. Mary's, bringing their own style of teaching and a strong sense of tradition.

Studies have always been first at St. Mary's High School. Students behind in their studies are expected to bring up their grades before participating in extracurricular activities.

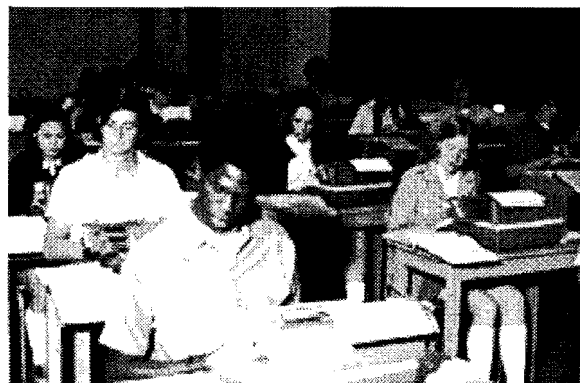
When Father Thomas O'Neill, O.S.F.S., became the first of the Oblate principals in 1970, he assured all listeners that the faculty would do all they could to make the students stay at St. Mary's "profitable educationally, athletically, socially and above all religiously." He made it clear that St. Mary's would be an educational experience for all who would make the commitment. This philosophy became tradition. By the time Father John Fallon, O.S.F.S., completed his tenure as principal in 1989, academic excellence had become the keystone of St. Mary's High School.

Enrollment steadily increased. What was the draw? Certainly, it was the commitment of the teachers. It was the outstanding record of the graduates. At St. Mary's High School, the student learned and appreciated respect for the dignity and value of each individual. This precept of Christianity permeated the academic and the religious courses of study. It manifested in teaching, advising, monitoring and coaching.



Student Choir circa 1970's

With the Seventies, there came about a renewed emphasis on staff in-service. Faculty attended workshops on individualized instruction and innovative methodology. Innovation generated team teaching projects and instruction using resource centers and learning packets.



Students in Class circa 1972

Despite higher tuition, closure of a feeder school and a nationwide decline in Catholic School attendance, enrollment at St. Mary's High School jumped from 715 to 760 in September 1972. Joan Wainwright, the diocese's education coordinator at the time, reported to the *Stockton Record*, "Our efforts at quality education are beginning to be felt. Parents are beginning to realize that their children can do as well with us."

In the spring of 1972, the Board of Regents was dissolved to be succeeded by an Advisory Board made up of faculty, student, parent and non-parent representatives. Subsequently, a foundation was formed for the specific purpose of developing resources to support the growing school. Over time, the Foundation assumed the advisory capacity as well.

By the late Seventies, students were in the computer center writing programs for the administration!

Administration and staff began a series of reviews that led to changes. The Religion program was revised, the Counseling department was reorganized; the curriculum

was bolstered; greater articulation with feeder schools was initiated.

“Spirituality is the best thing about St. Mary’s. This foundation helps you find out who you are and what you are. We each had a community service project. I taught the newly arrived to Stockton children from Southeast Asia. I am hoping my children have the same experience as I did in high school.” Tory Verber-Salazar, ’84.

St. Mary’s Graduates accept their civic responsibilities: former San Joaquin County Supervisor Douglas Wilhoitt, ’71, Stockton Mayor Gary Podesto, ’59, Stockton Police Chief Edward Chavez, ’61, for example. And they serve the greater good. Sister Patricia Simpson, O.P., ’56, is Prioress General of the Dominican Order of San Rafael, to name another of the many who attend to the needs of humankind.

Opportunities abound in clubs, athletics, publications, student government, service organizations and academics.

The idea, of course, is to educate the student in the Catholic values needed to transform society. Faculty challenge students to analyze the global reality as well as their own lifestyles. Students come to understand how they, as one person, can create humanity in justice and peace. The Christian Service Program, began in the early 70’s, has provided a vehicle for community outreach.

Father Fallon served as principal of St. Mary’s from 1978 to 1989. His was the longest religious principalship. Peter Morelli, ’69, became Principal in 1989. The accreditation of 1989 pointed out the increasingly complex role of school administration.

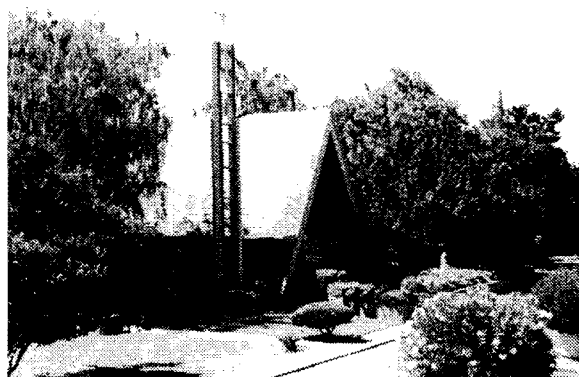
The situation seemed to call for a restructuring of roles and responsibilities. The restructuring resulted in the adoption of the president/principal model which was becoming increasingly common in Catholic

schools at this time. In the new model Father Fallon became president and Peter Morelli became the principal.

“It made sense to appoint Peter Morelli our first lay principal,” says Father Fallon. “He knows the school-he was a student here and the Dean of Boys for five years. Peter has the best interest of the community at heart, not just of St. Mary’s. He is well known and respected. And, very importantly, he has embraced Salesian spirituality. His appointment was a natural.”

Four generations of Stocktonians have graduated from St. Mary’s to serve in the areas of government, business, education, industry, medicine, and agriculture, as well as in various areas of social and protective services.

In the year 2002, St. Mary’s welcomed the first family to have five generations attending St. Mary’s. It all began 129 years ago. It has been a dream come true.



St. Mary’s Chapel Today

Acknowledgments and Appreciation

Individuals

Ali Biagi, ’93

Paula Biscaia

Father John Fallon, O.S.F.S.

Sister Marie Molini, O.P.

Kathy Salady, ’59

Publications

St. Mary’s 125th Commemorative book, A Dream Come True, written by Jim Shebl

This issue of the San Joaquin Historian was prepared in honor of:

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Stockton California

Presented at the Century Business Dinner

October 2, 2004

by

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