

New Century,

New Challenges

Fire, earthquake, “the Latin Question,” and the Great Depression all tested the Christian Brothers’ District of San Francisco as it sought to answer educational needs.

Writer: Andrea Miller, District Archivist

Images: District Archives, New York District, Saint Mary’s College

IN THEIR FIRST THREE DECADES ON THE WEST COAST, THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS HAD PLACED SAINT MARY’S COLLEGE ON A SOLID FOOTING, HAD EXPANDED THEIR EDUCATIONAL APOSTOLATE TO A DOZEN OTHER SCHOOLS, AND HAD OPENED A NOVITIATE IN WHICH TO TRAIN NEW BROTHERS. BUT THE LATE 1890S AND EARLY 1900S PROVED TO BE A TIME OF TRIALS THAT THREATENED THE YOUNG DISTRICT.

A string of physical disasters started in 1894, with a ruinous fire that gutted Saint Mary’s College in Oakland. For a year, the student body was moved back to the old Mission Road campus in San Francisco while the school in Oakland was rebuilt. In 1900, the novitiate in Martinez sustained substantial damage in a fire. And in the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906, though the East Bay grammar schools were spared and Saint Mary’s College escaped with minor damage, Sacred Heart College in the heart of the City was destroyed by the fire that followed the temblor.

An eyewitness account told how “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 school continued in makeshift buildings until 1914 when a new structure was completed on Ellis and Franklin Streets. Another fire damaged Saint Mary’s College in 1918, but through the determined efforts of president Brother Gregory Mallon, funds were raised and the building was ready for use again the following semester.

These calamities aggravated the financial difficulties of the District, which had only a modest income from a small production of sacramental wine at the novitiate in Martinez. The costs of employing Brothers in parochial schools in poor

immigrant neighborhoods were difficult to meet, for the District and for the parishes. In Oakland, for example, the Brothers had to withdraw from several schools. St. Francis de Sales closed its school in 1889 because of depleted parish finances. Two years later, the church at Sacred Heart parish was destroyed by fire, and the cost of rebuilding it pushed the burden of maintaining the boys' school beyond the parish's means. St. Anthony's, which had maintained a strong enrollment of about 200 students and a faculty of five Christian Brothers, could no longer pay the \$33 monthly salary needed to maintain the Brothers, and the pastor reluctantly told the Brothers they would have to go.

In addition to a lack of money there was a distressing lack of local vocations to the Christian Brothers' way of life. The Founding Visitor, Brother Justin, 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." The next Visitor, Brother Bettelin, sent recruiters to the East Coast to seek candidates, and the novitiate's registers show that most of the novices in the San Francisco District in the late 1800s came from far away: Ireland, the eastern United States, and eastern Canada. By the turn of the century, Brother Visitor Theodorus was worried that there would not be enough men to answer the demands for teachers. In order to keep the more established schools staffed, struggling institutions such as Holy Cross grammar school in Santa Cruz, St. Vincent's Asylum in San Rafael, and De La Salle Institute in Walla Walla, Washington, were closed.

Latin and Practical Education

These local difficulties transpired in the overarching shadow of a controversy that put the governing body of the international Institute at odds with the Brothers in America. Labeled "the



"The prominent College was the last of that awful day's tribute to the flames." This photo after the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 shows the part of the city where Sacred Heart College had stood.

Latin Question,” it had its roots in a dispensation granted in the earliest days of the Brothers’ apostolate in the United States, but it developed into a struggle that nearly paralyzed the Christian Brothers in America.

When 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 the poor whom De La Salle sought to serve, neither a university education nor an ecclesiastical career was in prospect, and for them 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, quite different circumstances existed. The relatively open society of the United States provided far more

opportunities for ordinary people, even immigrants, to rise above their economic class through education. Here, training in the classical languages could



Students learning chemistry at Sacred Heart College in 1905. The building was destroyed in the earthquake of 1906, but the school endures today as Sacred Heart Cathedral Prep.

be a practical aid to advancement into professional fields such as journalism, law, and medicine. There was also a shortage of priests, and the Catholic population grew with each arriving boatload of immigrants. The American bishops were eager to have Catholic educators provide the Latin training that boys would need in order to become priests.

Thus, it was in response to requests from bishops that Brother Patrick, Visitor of the United States, added Latin classes to the curriculum at Christian Brothers College in St. Louis. At the first opportunity, Brother Patrick sought approval for this deviation from the *Rule*. He presented his cause to the General Chapter of 1854 at the Motherhouse in Belgium, and received oral permission from Brother Philip, the Superior General, to continue the practice.

As new Brothers’ schools were added in the United States, Latin was included in many curricula, and at the



“Gentlemen, start your inkwells.” Class is in session at Christian Brothers Business College in Portland. The school ran from 1908 until 1922.

General Chapter of 1873 an official record was made of the Institute's approval for U.S. schools to teach Latin, but the permission contained two critical provisions: Latin was to be taught by "professors outside the congregation"; and this permission for the United States was not to be considered a precedent for other missions.

In the San Francisco District, Latin had been offered from its beginning in 1868.

When the first Visitor, Brother Justin McMahon, took responsibility for Saint Mary's College, the Superior General in Belgium was well aware that the school had 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 Irlide gave Brother Justin permission to teach Latin there; later the Sacramento Institute also offered Latin.

Over the years, sporadic concerns surfaced about the Latin courses offered by the Christian Brothers in the U.S. The Jesuits, whose colleges also offered classical language studies and were often in competition for students with the Christian Brothers' schools, complained to the Vatican that the Brothers were not adhering to their *Rule*. But

when American bishops, such as Archbishop Kenrick in Baltimore, were asked to look into such complaints, the decision was in favor of the Brothers to continue.



Some American Brothers were assigned to work outside the United States as discipline for their positions on "the Latin Question." In the center of this group of "exiles" is Brother Justin McMahon, first Visitor of the District of San Francisco.

The Struggle with the Motherhouse

Between 1866 and 1894, the Latin Question was put before successive General Chapters of the international Institute. Arguments raged over the details of the dispensation. Gradually, the lines were drawn, with the French Brothers,

whose numbers dominated in the Chapter meetings, believing that the Americans' teaching of Latin was being done without permission and was in contradiction to the *Rule*. The Americans continued to point to dispensations and permissions granted by earlier General Chapters.

The dispute was also colored by cultural perceptions. As a result of its war with Spain and its expanding role in world affairs, the United States was increasingly seen as an overbearing bully. Moreover, the American Catholic Church 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 sharpened the divisiveness of the Latin Question.

EXPERTS IN EDUCATION

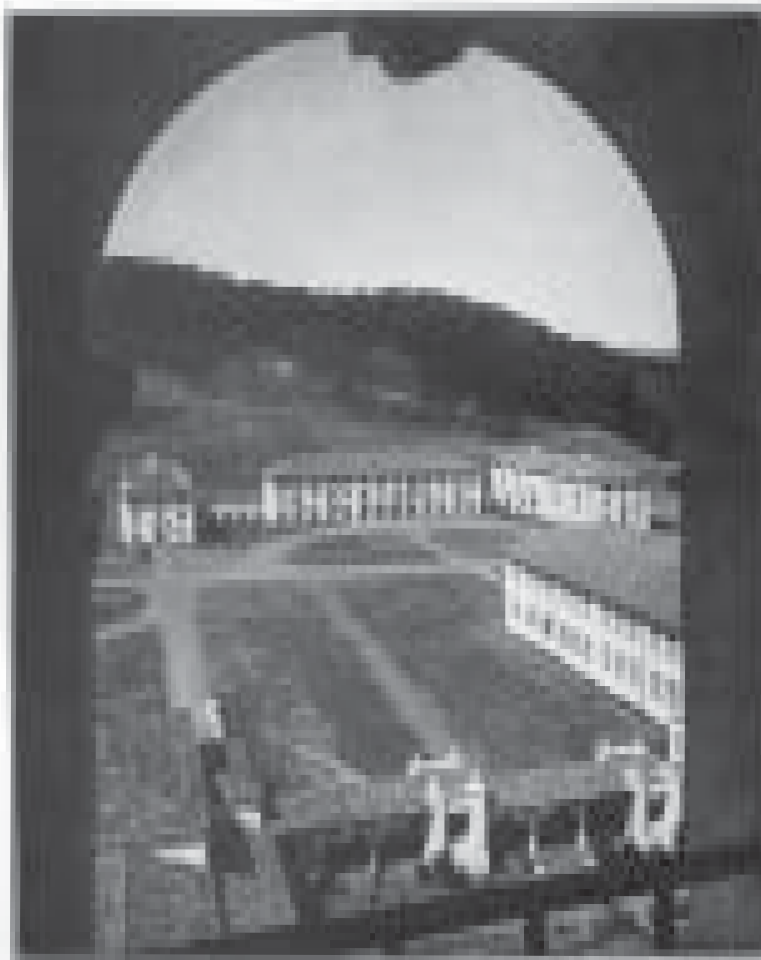
That is what the Brothers of the Christian Schools are—necessarily, because

Education is their one and exclusive concern.

Their founder, St. John Baptist de la Salle, organized them for that sole purpose.

They conduct schools and colleges all over the world.

Their work speaks for itself.



STUDENTS GRADE
— ONE YEAR
— IN LESS THAN SEVEN
— MONTHS

THEY ATTEND
— COLLEGE
— IN LESS THAN 10
— MONTHS

PHOTOGRAPH BY BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

BROTHERS' FOUNDATIONS IN CALIFORNIA:

- Saint Mary's College, Placerville, Santa County
- Saint Mary's College High School, Berkeley
- De la Salle Institute, Miami
- Christian Brothers' High School, Sacramento
- Sacred Heart College High School, San Francisco
- Saint Peter's Boys' School, San Francisco
- Cathedral High School, Los Angeles

THE "BROTHERS' BOY" IS A FAITHFUL MAN

This ad appeared in the San Francisco Monitor in 1955. The view is from the bell tower of the Chapel.

Both sides felt that they were in the right, the French-dominated Motherhouse for keeping to the letter of De La Salle's prohibition, the American Brothers for following the Founder's injunction to give the poor a practical education.

The final pronouncement was made 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 1900. Moreover, the Brothers had to sign an oath promising to avoid the study and teaching of Latin. And that was not all. Leading American Brothers who had voiced strong opinions on the issue were assigned to communities outside the U.S. Brother Justin, the founding Visitor of the San Francisco District and now Visitor of the New York District, was called to France, and a dozen other American Brothers were "exiled" to Belgium, Egypt, and Ceylon. All of the Brothers obediently accepted the penalty, and the Brothers in the United States took up the task of restructuring their programs toward scientific and vocational ends.

The Years of the Latin Ban

The Latin Ban had a demoralizing effect on the American Districts, and seems to have been a crucial factor in the American Brothers' very slow growth during the first two decades of the new century. There were relatively few new vocations and there were substantial numbers of departing Brothers. Nonetheless, this period was not without progress for the community life of the Brothers in the San Francisco District. Under Brother Visitor Theodorus Marcoux (1900-1910), a scholasticate (teacher-training college) for young Brothers was



Scholar-athletes from the high school department of Saint Peter's in San Francisco display their championship trophies and pennants for baseball (1925, above) and handball (1939, below). The Christian Brothers taught at St. Peter's from 1886 to 1955.

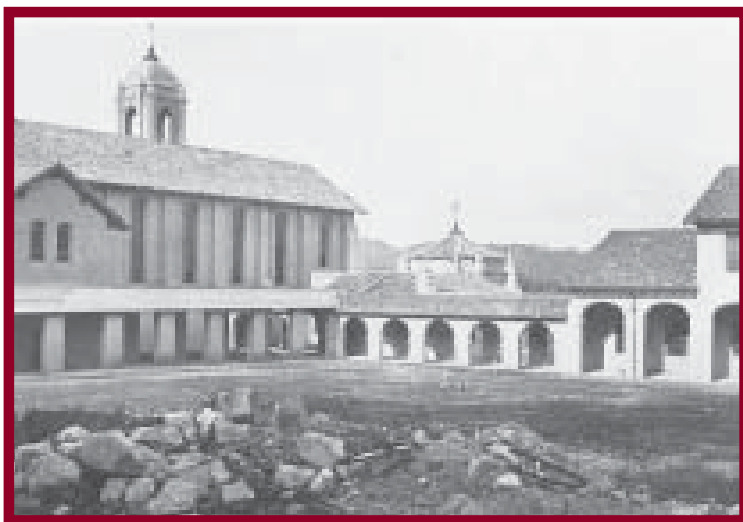


opened at St. Vincent's in San Rafael. Brother Xenophen Kelly, the Visitor from 1910 to 1916, instituted annual educational conventions that not only increased the interchange of pedagogical

experiences but also expanded the Brothers' interaction with one another. In 1919, during the visitorship of Brother Calixtus Curran, the District purchased the camp at Russian River to provide a spot for the Brothers' rest and relaxation.

Positive developments also occurred in the schools. Initially, the Brothers had been concerned that their institutions might lose their charters, since many were granted on the basis of a classical language curriculum, and they feared a drop in enrollments as students moved to other colleges that would offer them Latin and Greek courses. These worries were unfounded. While there were some losses, Brothers' schools continued to grow. Saint Mary's College, in fact, saw its offerings expand as the loss of classical studies forced the college to add other courses to attract students; soon it opened classes in pre-med, pre-law, architecture, civil engineering, and education. In Portland, Oregon, Christian Brothers Business College opened in 1908. Saint Joseph's Academy moved from Oakland to Peralta Park in 1903, and in the next decade, both Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento and Sacred Heart College added classroom space to accommodate growing enrollments.

With the new century, the Brothers began a



Mont La Salle is shown here under construction. In 1952 the novitiate, the winery, and the retirement community were all moved here to the hills above Napa.

shift in their teaching focus, moving away from elementary schools to focus on high school and college instruction. As a result, young Brothers required greater professional preparation and education themselves before they taught. The collegiate scholasticate was established in 1922 with the intention of providing them with at least some college education before they were unleashed on students. While it was many years before all young Brothers could complete a degree prior to their work as teachers, most had a few years completed and worked on their degrees at summer classes and at night, either at Saint Mary's or at UC Berkeley.

A Pall Is Lifted

Though the American Brothers had submitted to the ban on Latin, the bishops of the United States were not so willing to give up the fight, and for the next 20 years, they petitioned the Institute and Rome for dispensations for the Brothers' schools. The breakthrough finally came in 1921, when Archbishop Hanna of San Francisco made a direct request to Pope Benedict XV to allow Latin to be taught at Sacred Heart College. The Pope agreed, and further clarified that this dispensation would apply not only to Sacred Heart, but to all of the Brothers' American colleges. After 21 years, the ban on Latin was finally rescinded.

As if a pall had been lifted, a burst of activity followed the decree, and the Brothers were able to capitalize on the period of prosperity that the 1920s had brought to America. Christian Brothers High School moved to a new building on Broadway and 21st Streets 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 Oakland, the now crowded “Brickpile” campus of Saint Mary’s College ended its service. In 1926 Saint Mary’s College High School was installed on its Peralta Park campus in Berkeley, and Saint Mary’s College moved in 1928 to a spacious new campus in Moraga. The Martinez property housing the novitiate and small winery had become hemmed in by the expanding town, and in 1930 Brother Visitor Gregory Mallon purchased the old Theodore Gier Winery in Napa and began construction on the site for a new novitiate and a larger winemaking operation.

This period of prosperity and growth ground to a halt after 1929, when the stock market crashed and the nation entered its worst economic



Brother Jasper Fitzsimmons, FSC, Visitor of the District from 1935 to 1944, helped to guide the District’s recovery from the Great Depression

depression. The District, like so many other institutions, began to find it difficult to repay the money it had borrowed for construction and expansion. In 1936 the District was forced to declare bankruptcy. Saint Mary’s College faced foreclosure, and in July 1937 the college 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 and returned title to the Brothers, allowing the Brothers to continue operation as they repaid the Archdiocese. In the case of the novitiate at Mont La Salle, Brother Visitor Jasper Fitzsimmons went through grueling negotiations to finally arrive at an acceptable payment system for the creditors. Not until 1943 were the debts finally paid off – and that was accomplished with the aid of a new stream of income from the sale of wine. The little winemaking “experiment” that the Brothers had run since the early days at Martinez grew into a substantial business without which the District might have folded in those dark years.

A New and Pleasant Dilemma

Christian Brothers’ wines had begun modestly enough. The Martinez property included 12 acres planted to grapes, and Brother Victorick

Future of Saint Mary’s Assured As College Is Sold to Archbishop of San Francisco

**Archbishop Mitty Will Purchase to Operate
School According to Terms
of Agreement Signed Yesterday**

Archbishop Mitty of San Francisco yesterday announced that he had purchased Saint Mary’s College from its holders and returned title to the Brothers, allowing the Brothers to continue operation as they repaid the Archdiocese.



Mitty College

The purchase of the college by Archbishop Mitty was announced yesterday in a statement issued from the archbishop's office. The statement said that the purchase was made under the terms of an agreement signed yesterday between the archbishop and the Christian Brothers. The agreement provided that the archbishop would purchase the college from its holders and return title to the Brothers, allowing them to continue operation as they repaid the Archdiocese. The statement also mentioned that the purchase was made for a price of \$1,000,000.

The Saint Mary’s College Collegian reported in 1937 on how Archbishop Mitty of San Francisco rescued the College from bankruptcy.

In Oakland, the now crowded “Brickpile” campus of Saint Mary’s College ended its service. In 1926 Saint Mary’s College High School was installed on its Peralta Park campus in Berkeley, and Saint Mary’s College moved in 1928 to a spacious new campus in Moraga. The Martinez property housing the novitiate and small winery had become hemmed in by the expanding town, and in 1930 Brother Visitor Gregory Mallon purchased the old Theodore Gier Winery in Napa and began construction on the site for a new novitiate and a larger winemaking operation.

This period of prosperity and growth ground to a halt after 1929, when the stock market crashed and the nation entered its worst economic



Brother Jasper Fitzsimmons, FSC, Visitor of the District from 1935 to 1944, helped to guide the District’s recovery from the Great Depression

depression. The District, like so many other institutions, began to find it difficult to repay the money it had borrowed for construction and expansion. In 1936 the District was forced to declare bankruptcy. Saint Mary’s College faced foreclosure, and in July 1937 the college 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 and returned title to the Brothers, allowing the Brothers to continue operation as they repaid the Archdiocese. In the case of the novitiate at Mont La Salle, Brother Visitor Jasper Fitzsimmons went through grueling negotiations to finally arrive at an acceptable payment system for the creditors. Not until 1943 were the debts finally paid off – and that was accomplished with the aid of a new stream of income from the sale of wine. The little winemaking “experiment” that the Brothers had run since the early days at Martinez grew into a substantial business without which the District might have folded in those dark years.

A New and Pleasant Dilemma

Christian Brothers’ wines had begun modestly enough. The Martinez property included 12 acres planted to grapes, and Brother Victorick

Future of Saint Mary’s Assured As College Is Sold to Archbishop of San Francisco

**Archbishop Mitty Will Purchase to Operate
School According to Terms
of Agreement Signed Yesterday**

Archbishop Mitty of San Francisco yesterday announced that he had purchased the Saint Mary’s College campus in Oakland for \$1,000,000, according to a statement given to the press by the archbishop.

The purchase of the property, which includes the college building and the novitiate at Mont La Salle, was announced yesterday.



Mitty College

The purchase of the property, which includes the college building and the novitiate at Mont La Salle, was announced yesterday.

The purchase of the property, which includes the college building and the novitiate at Mont La Salle, was announced yesterday.

The purchase of the property, which includes the college building and the novitiate at Mont La Salle, was announced yesterday.

The Saint Mary’s College Collegian reported in 1937 on how Archbishop Mitty of San Francisco rescued the College from bankruptcy.

This advertisement for sacramental wines dates from about 1953.

PURE ALTAR WINES

*our specialty for over
SIXTY YEARS*



All proceeds from the sale of our Altar Wines go in the support of our Junior and Senior Brothers and Scholasticate whose members of our order study to become Religious Ministers.

All our wines are made, packed and sealed under the strict supervision of the Brothers and sold only in the original containers.

Produced and Bottled by

Mont La Salle Vineyards

owned and operated by

THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

P. O. BOX 430

NAPA, CALIFORNIA

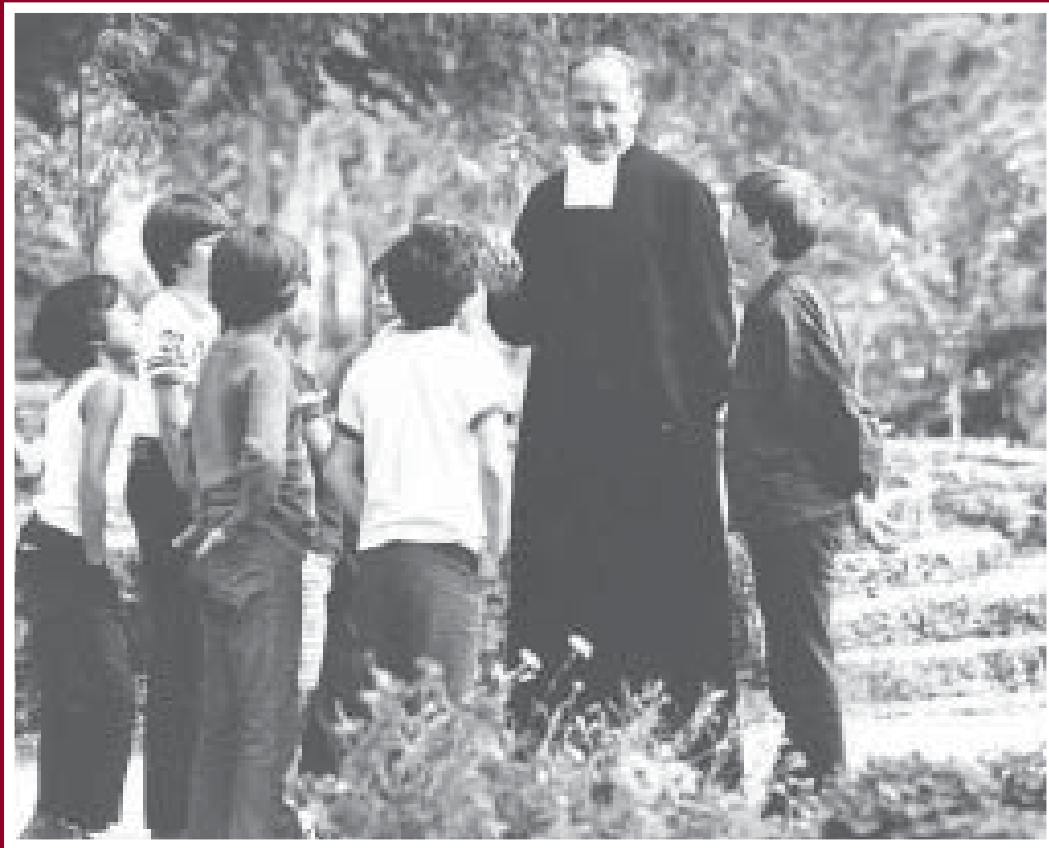
PHONE: NAPA 4-0119

McDonald's trial press of grapes in a water trough there in 1880 gradually led to the Brothers making more wine than their own needs required. First, they sold it to neighbors, and later they expanded into sales of sacramental wine. Prohibition was instituted in 1919 and lasted until 1933, but the novitiate winery had established enough of a customer base for its sacramental and medicinal wines to weather this period when so many other wineries closed.

The move from Martinez to Mont LaSalle, completed in 1932, was providential, made all the more attractive because of the acres of vineyards and the small winery that already existed there. As District debts mounted and creditors began hounding the Brothers for payment, the winery was the single reliable source of income. Under the direction of Brother John Hoffman and with the growing craftsmanship of Brother Timothy Diener as cellarmaster, it steadily improved the quality and volume of its wines, and a relationship with Fromm & Sichel proved key in establishing distribution and publicity structures for the Brothers' wines and spirits. So profitable was the operation that by 1943, Brother Jasper had paid off the last of the bondholders and was facing a new and rather pleasant dilemma: what to do with the income brought in by Christian Brothers wines.

The first few decades of the 20th century had certainly tested the resilience of the District of San Francisco. But by 1950 the District was full of renewed vitality, full of hope, growing in numbers of vocations, and looking forward to building more schools and increasing the scope of its work. What no one could foresee was the transformations that the Second Vatican Council would usher in, and the entirely new challenges that the District would face as both the Catholic Church and the *Rule* of the Christian Brothers changed in the 1960s.

Next issue: Changes in the Church and the world bring new challenges and new opportunities. ■



"SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO BROTHER VICTORICK STARTED A SMALL ENTERPRISE TO HELP HIS INSTITUTE TO CARRY OUT ITS PRIMARY WORK. TODAY MANY MAY VIEW THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS WINERY AS A LARGE BUSINESS, ONE WHICH HAS RECEIVED NOTABLE RECOGNITION IN ITS FIELD. YET ANY OF THE BROTHERS INVOLVED IN THE WINERY WILL TELL YOU THAT IT IS ONLY A SMALL PART OF A GREAT PICTURE. THESE BROTHERS, WHO AT ONE TIME JOINED A RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF HELPING AND EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE, HAVE BEEN APPOINTED TO THE CHALLENGE OF BECOMING THE BEST WINEMAKERS AND BUSINESSMEN POSSIBLE SO THAT THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF THE WINERY THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS MIGHT CONTINUE THEIR WORK IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION."

- from a 1966 "History of the Christian Brothers Wineries," in the District archives.

Brother Timothy Diener, FSC, cellarmaster of Christian Brothers winery, with friends at Mont La Salle, circa 1970