

**L**ET US REMEMBER ...

WE ARE IN THE HOLY PRESENCE OF GOD



LET US REMEMBER

A HISTORY OF  
CHRISTIAN BROTHERS HIGH SCHOOL  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

BILL ILIFF  
CLASS OF 1976

FIRST EDITION 2010

## BOOK REFERENCE

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Introduction

Chapter 1 - Early Days

Chapter 2 - A Question of Curriculum

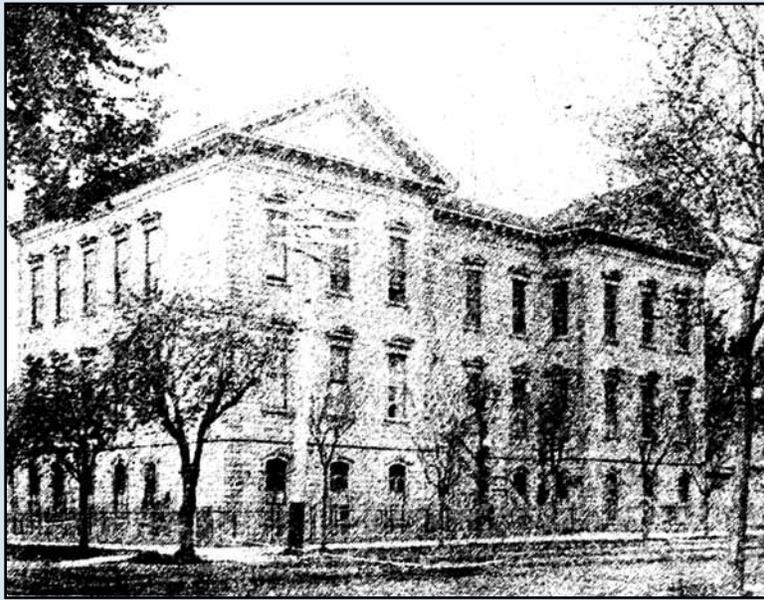
Chapter 3 - The Founder

Chapter 4 - From Old to New Again

Chapter 5 - Fight to Survive

Chapter 6 - The Times Are A'Changing

Chapter 7 - New Beginnings



*This book was written to honor all of the  
dedicated teachers and staff who have so warmly  
welcomed the students into their lives  
with wisdom and enthusiasm.*



## A QUESTION OF CURRICULUM

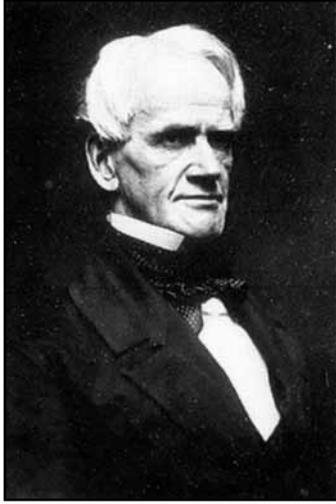
*...it does not propose making or sending forth expert scientists or graduating men capable at first blush of building a fort or directing a siege... A college in the proper sense of the word is a school in which all the faculties of a young man are harmoniously developed by a course of liberal instruction, and befits himself not only for the study of a learned profession but also duties of life. His memory is trained, his reason exercised, his judgment called forth, his imagination brought into play, his taste cultivated, the consciousness of his whole being expanded into one harmonious whole. It only lays a broad and sure foundation upon which afterward he builds up.*

*Br. Azarius Mullaney,*

*Noted 19th century writer/educator; from the article, What Is A College?*

We have explored what the school looked like at its inception and the teaching faculty. Another question remains as we look back. What about the curriculum? What subjects were taught to the students? Before answering that question, we would do well to first try to put American education into the context of the 1800's.

Until the 1830's, education was more of a private pursuit, something only available, for the most part, to families of means. Horace Mann (Massachusetts), an education reformer, led the call in 1837 for access to all American children to a public education. A system was set up, called the "Common School" movement, which referred to the belief that all children were entitled to the same content in education. This movement started in the northeast before spreading westward.



Horace Mann

McGuffey Readers, written by William McGuffey, a Miami (Ohio) University professor, were first published in 1836 for students and had their emphasis on vocabulary building and Protestant, Anglo-Saxon morality. The readers were, by far, the most widely circulated textbooks of the day and throughout much of the 1800's. Over time, especially the post-Civil War period, the McGuffey readers were revised in an attempt to be grade level appropriate with less moral and spiritual content in the textbooks.

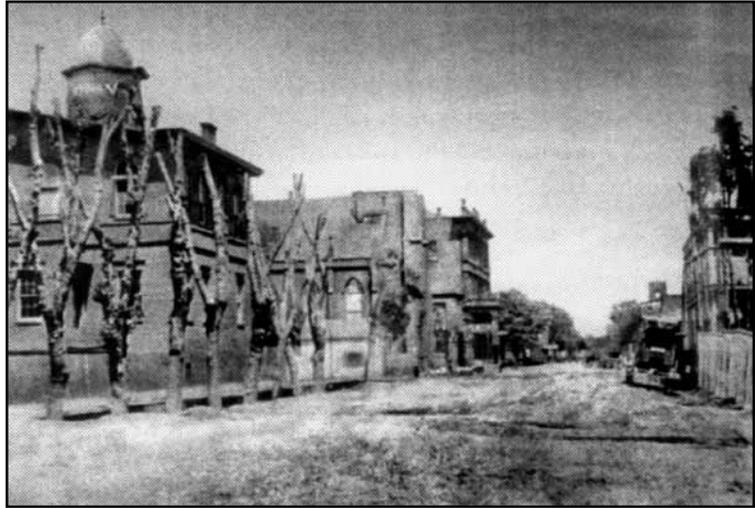
As for California and, specifically Sacramento, it should be noted that the public at large had little appreciation of the value of education. It was a very low governmental budget priority, being woefully underfunded. And, as a public society, we had precious little knowledge in how to properly or effectively educate our students. To some extent, this may have been a result of our beginnings as a state. California had many newcomers, often either directly or indirectly due to the Gold Rush. In many ways, California was a "backwater" land with legions of uneducated people who had flocked to the west in pursuit of their fortune. Also, there was a predominance of adults, older people. Children were neither populous nor their welfare considered very important. Education in a school setting was just not a priority.

*There was a wall against learning. A man wanted his children to read, to figure, and that was enough. More might make them dissatisfied and flighty. And there were plenty examples to prove that learning made a boy leave the farm to live in the city- to consider himself better than his father.*

*John Steinbeck, East of Eden*

It was compulsory to start the day in Sacramento public schools (typically one room schoolhouses with a wide range of ages) with the reading of Bible passages and recitation of the Lord's Prayer beginning in 1855. The Bible was also seen as a ready textbook for the students beyond its use as a devotional. Mandatory pupil participation in the Bible readings was eliminated in 1871, though the readings were expected to be continued either by the principal or teacher each day. Over time, it became increasingly paradoxical for Catholics as their community understandably sought religious teaching for their children but objected to the prevailing Protestant devotions in the schools.

Nationally, responding to a more East Coast sentiment but also strongly endorsed by President Ulysses Grant, the Blaine Amendment (named after United States Speaker of the House James Blaine) was proposed as an amendment to the United States Constitution in 1874. As written, it would forbid any direct governmental monies to any educational institutions that had religious affiliations. The amendment did pass the House with a two-thirds majority but not the



*Sacramento City grammar school, baptist church, and Masonic Hall, 1860's*

Senate as it was seen as a states' rights question. However, most states, including California, passed laws that met the general spirit and requirements of the "Blaine" amendment. It should be noted, however, that there appeared to be little local sentiment or animosity toward a Catholic education and its place in Sacramento.

About the same time (1873), the Roman Church hierarchy announced that it expected families to send their children, whenever possible, to schools where they could be educated in the Catholic faith.

Also, in 1871, Henry Bolander, a non-Catholic, announced, while running for election as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction that his position on private schools (parochial or otherwise) was that the state of California should not interfere in the administration of those schools. It was also, at this point, that there was a push for a law to compel families to see that children aged 8 to 14 receive a suitable education, heretofore voluntary as of yet. By 1874, it became state law to have parents or guardians send their children to public school for at least two-thirds of the school year. As late as 1900, only 31 of the 45 states in the union required children to attend school. Further, it was not until 1918 that all states had laws in place requiring its children to complete at least an elementary education.

Finally, it should be noted that a California public school education did not mean an education free of expense to the student's families. The cost of textbooks was borne by the families and, in some cases, school tuition or other fees were charged, as well.

It was becoming an increasingly wider belief that post-literacy schooling of the masses at the elementary and high school level would greatly enhance the economic production of society. The “high school” movement in the United States, while somewhat slow to get started, began to greatly diverge on its educational pathway from our European counterparts. Except for the wealthier families, European secondary education did not exist throughout the late 1800’s to the turn of the century. Technical training schools were the regular educational route taken instead by European students following elementary school.

Locally, there were many good reasons for Sacramentans to be dissatisfied with the quality of a common or public school education in the 1870’s: 1) the teachers were often newly minted high school graduates, scarcely older than their pupils, 2) the teachers’ qualifying examination was inconsistent, at best, in its content, and 3) “teaching” at that time was not necessarily instruction but often rote memorization done by the student at home and then recited in class to an unprepared teacher. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Henry Bolander, himself acknowledged in his 1873 biennial report that the state needed to do a better job of identifying potential and properly prepared teachers to send into the classroom.

The first established public “high school” in Sacramento first received students in August of 1856. The twenty-one pupils in the first class met in an “old building on M Street” (between 8th and 9th Streets). The high school continued to operate in at least four different locations over the next twenty years until the first true high school building project was completed under the auspices of the Board of Education in 1876. This was to be Sacramento High School.

According to Sacramento schools historian Richard C. Rogers, a description of the period is as follows:

*Equipment was almost non-existent. There were no laboratories, no maps, and no pictures. Essentially, it was a room or two, teachers, books, and pupils. By 1870, there was serious discussion concerning the need for a separate high school building. On August 31, 1876, the (high) school moved into its spacious new quarters at 9th and M. When (later, in the 1890’s) requests were made to consider the possibility of building yet another high school (due to overcrowding), the taxpayers did not respond positively. After all, had they not just built one twenty years ago! Gradually, citizens began to realize that a school, under the existing conditions, was hardly a school at all. In 1905, some twelve years after the original agitation for a new high school was voiced, bonds for its construction were introduced. Unfortunately, the bond issue was defeated. However, one year later, they were submitted again and the public approved.*

Please be clear on this matter. The intent, here, is in no way to besmirch the efforts of the Sacramento Board of Education of the day. It is simply to illustrate the general local public sentiment regarding the relatively low value placed on education during the first fifty plus years in Sacramento. It was within this environment that the local Catholic community was motivated to organize and get behind a new school project. And, it should be noted that Father Scanlan of St.



*Sacramento High School, 9th & M Streets, 1876*

Rose and his school building committee was able to convince not only his parishioners to donate to what would be a new high school but many in Sacramento not affiliated with the Church at all. They understood, early on, the value of educating their children and were very willing to make that short-term sacrifice for a public gain of a younger generation that would be better prepared and more capable to navigate an increasingly complex society.

The opening of the new school by the Christian Brothers (1876) in essence took some 200 children off the burden of the Sacramento Public School system. That is a significant number in that the population of the entire city at that time was only approximately 20,000.

As to the curriculum at St. Patrick's Institute in 1876, it was described as "carrying all of the major fields of human knowledge." In other words, it was a rigorous, well-rounded education, grounded in the basic subjects but with ample exposure to music and drama. By all accounts, the students were challenged daily with a solid core of subjects.

The school, now re-named Sacramento Institute (as of 1879), also established a banking department in 1884 with the funding being provided by the Bishop's office. This development occurred somewhat out of the necessity of creating a good business education for the students while still emphasizing a solid core curriculum. Many other American Christian Brothers institutions had, in fact, moved to a complete business course load, becoming de facto business schools. In the period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was a trend throughout the country our local school did not follow. They quietly held firmly to a well-rounded education for its students.

*Brother Justin McMahon*

*The founding San Francisco Visitor-Director, Brother Justin had already made a name for himself prior to his passage to California as one of the eight original Brothers to respond to the call of Archbishop Alemany in 1868.*

*Known as one who could navigate the often difficult gulf between religious and political issues, Justin used all of his public relations acumen to further Catholic educational interests.*

*After managing St. Mary's College to stability and helping to establish new area feeder schools, Brother Justin returned to New York. He is also credited with establishing the first Catholic chapel on the West Point (Army) campus.*

In the late 1880's, The Sacramento Institute was somewhat unwittingly pulled into the "common school" controversy and forced to alter its curriculum in response to a larger debate as to who should be able to teach certain subjects, especially Latin and Greek, to the students.

One Frank Pixley, editor of *The Argonaut*, an influential San Francisco periodical of the day, often wrote critically of the Catholic Church for allowing its American religious, particularly the Christian Brothers, to teach, as they were "unfit" to do so. It was really nothing more than outright prejudice and ignorance, but it must be taken in the context of the day. In some quarters, Catholic schools were not well received, seen as a direct threat to the somewhat nascent public school system (the "common schools").

Locally, the Sacramento Institute, staffed, of course, by the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, was drawn into the question as to appropriate curriculum for the school. The Brothers presented a diverse liberal arts education including the classical languages. The American Church hierarchy, led by Archbishop Francis Patrick Kendrick of Baltimore, had reviewed the educational emphasis of the Brothers and stated, "Let the Brothers alone, they are doing a good work."

However, with the spotlight of controversy brought on, in part, by the lay press, the French Christian Brothers became involved in the debate as to what the educational emphasis should be. Despite the support of the American Church, the French Brothers were not pleased with the direction that their American brethren were taking. It was their belief that the Brothers should stick to their historical mission of educating students, especially the poor, with practical subjects. Again, recall the general European educational system at the time was one of technical and other similar course emphasis. American education was heading in a very different direction and the Brothers, especially including the Sacramento based (who were effectively at the forefront of the movement) were respectfully diverging from their 17th century

French roots to best meet the local students' needs. San Francisco District Archivist Andrea Miller explained the dilemma in her 2008 history of *The De La Salle Christian Brothers on the West Coast*:

*While the Brothers in the United States were experiencing a period of phenomenal growth in the latter part of the 19th century, a struggle was brewing with the Institute in Europe. Called the Latin Question, it had roots in a dispensation granted by the Institute in the earliest days of the United States Province, but over time, it developed into a damaging quarrel that nearly paralyzed the Christian Brothers mission in the United States.*

*When St. 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 careers in the Church. For most of the poor whom de La Salle sought to serve, 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, two unique circumstances existed which made the issue of Latin a point of division: a shortage of priests and the ease with which class barriers could be crossed. The relatively open society of the United States provided everyone, even impoverished immigrants, the ability to rise above their economic class through education. More important was the fact that a background in the classical languages provided the key to advancement to professional careers in law, medicine, or journalism. These conditions created a significant difference between the American and European experiences.*

The French Brothers held much more sway, however, with the European Church hierarchy and forced a significant change to bring the American Brothers back in line with their wishes.

**“The General Chapter of 1894, dominated by French conservative delegates, voted to reaffirm the traditional ban against Latin and Greek and compel the Brothers in the United States to close the classical departments of their schools. The American hierarchy was appalled by the disastrous effects which the ban on the classics would have on the Catholic School System of this country and appealed to Rome.”**

The West Coast District voted overwhelmingly to return the classics in the school curriculum. The Vatican, sympathetic to the more influential French position, rejected the American appeal and upheld the ban on teaching of the classical languages in 1899. The American Brothers were obligated to sign a loyalty oath not to teach the subjects. It was an edict that remained in effect until finally being reversed by the Pope in 1921. By necessity, Christian Brothers College (so named in 1896), developed a commercial education department, to complement its still effective core curriculum of solid subjects sans the classics. As previously noted, many American Christian Brothers schools had become business schools, a trend our Christian Brothers College did not follow.

Despite losing the classics, the Sacramento Institute became Christian Brothers College in 1896. The name was more representative of the education the students were receiving in the context of what was occurring in the California school system at the time. The students were often taking college level courses there in Sacramento before transferring to St. Mary’s College, which was often the case, or some other equivalent college. Usually, a year after their transfer, the student received a bachelors degree. Hence, being a “college “ really was not a stretch in the sense that Christian Brothers College was filling the responsibility of a junior (or community) college, a concept that was some twenty years distant in the future. Indeed, Christian Brothers was a “college preparatory” school a century before the term became in vogue. Talk about being ahead of its time!

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