

Interviewee: Brother Richard Rancourt- Part II
Interviewer: John Ansley

March 14, 2002
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Brother Richard Rancourt Part II

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, New York

Transcribed by Erin Kelly

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

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Transcript - Brother Joseph Belanger

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Summary: In the following interview, Brother Richard Rancourt speaks about the early days of Marist College as a student and as a professor. After studying in the Juniorate at Esopus, Richard Rancourt continued his studies by becoming a Brother at the Novitiate at Marian College. After being a Brother in the Novitiate, Richard Rancourt joined the Scholasticate and began teaching after that. In the interview, Brother Richard Rancourt talks about his daily life as a student in the Novitiate as well as the changes that took place in the college as lay students began to come on the campus. The interview also focuses on Richard Rancourt's account of the physical grounds of Marist College in its earlier years before construction of several of Marist's current buildings. The interview ends with Brother Richard Rancourt's account of the transition of Marist's student population from mostly Brothers to the majority being lay students.

“BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW”

John Ansley: This is an interview conducted with Brother Richard Rancourt. We're in the Archives and Special Collections Reading Room in the Cannavino Library. The date is March 14, 2002 and the interviewer is John Ansley. In the last interview, you talked about the development of the college. Today, I'd like to focus a little bit more on some of the daily activities that you were involved with while you were a student Brother on campus. How old were you when you arrived here?

Richard Rancourt: Well, when I came here to the college, I guess it was Marist College or Marian College, as they used to call it.

JA: It was Marian College when you arrived?

RR: Yea. You have to realize that I had spent two years in Esopus studying in the Juniorate, which was a preparatory school to be a Brother.

JA: Okay.

RR: And I arrived there when I was about 15. I looked forward to studying in high school, and that was a customary way that we did things in those days in order to recruit the Brothers, the young people who would show their intense interest in living the life of a Brother. And a lot of people did that, we had about 60 students there, and in fact, it was what we were proud of, and then after we spent two years there, at the end of our third year of high school... It was more like three years there. They came in from grammar school. After our third year of high school and entering or senior year, we came over to Poughkeepsie.

JA: On this campus?

RR: Yes, on this campus. We had a Novitiate in the south part of the campus. The Novitiate is near the football field when you make that bend going into McCann going down the road.

JA: So it was down toward the football field, not on the North end of campus where St. Ann's Hermitage was?

RR: No, St. Ann's Hermitage... Well, not the Hermitage but the Novitiate house.

JA: Okay.

RR: The Novitiate house was in the south part. The whole property was called St. Ann's Hermitage.

JA: I see. I see.

RR: Okay, we didn't have one building that said St. Ann's Hermitage in those days. We had the Novitiate house, which was in the southern part just right on the other side of Leonidoff and then as I say, as you would go passing where the football field is, as you go down toward McCann, you make that right turn... Right there is where you have the Bee House and you have St. Mary's dormitory. There was a dormitory there, wooden building, nothing fantastic. And then right at that time, we had the Novitiate. Okay, we had the Novitiate House. That's the one you see burning down in one of these fires.

JA: Right.

RR: And when we came to the Novitiate, we spent two years there and the fourth year was spent... And the first year we came in... It was our fourth year of college, fourth year of high school rather. We got our degree at the end of the year and that was a big thing, getting our degree, working towards our Master's but all that meant was no big

graduation. It only meant that when we met one morning for just a general conference, he said “You fellows graduated. Here are your diplomas” and he passed them out.

JA: So no formal ceremony?

RR: No formal ceremony. No coffee, no tea, no ice cream, you know. [Laughter] It was just that you had graduated and good luck to you. [Laughter] God bless you, if you were to survive.

JA: How many student Brothers were in your class?

RR: Thirty.

JA: Thirty in that class, okay.

RR: Yea, we had thirty and we took the habit. We met in July. We got our holy habit and then in the first ceremony, we became Novices and the second year we stayed there at the Novitiate for a year of religious study and we could take one separate course. We took French or Spanish. So we were in the southern part of the property and as you walked maybe not about fifty yards, then we came to where we see Marian College and we saw the Greystone. We pass these things every day on our way to the North side of the property where the pool used to be and the Provincial House.

JA: Over by Lowell Thomas or where Lowell Thomas is now?

RR: Yea, near Lowell Thomas where we used to leave for Mass. I mentioned something about that before. So, we saw one another a lot all over but we were secluded because we were Novices and the Novices... These two years were a time for intensive religious development, you see and we studied the vows and we said a lot of prayers and we couldn't leave the property and all that kind of stuff. We did a lot of work on the property because we did our studies and it was pretty much confinement.

JA: Okay.

RR: One could say it was a religious boot training. [Laughter] Right, and it was discipline and they said “If you can go through the Novitiate, you can go through anything,” you know? And I think I mentioned last time I was here was people used to tell me or some of my superiors would say the Novitiate were the happiest days of their lives. Well, I just couldn’t believe it [Laughter] because I said if those were the happiest days of your life, what do you have to look forward to? [Laughter] So they can carry that to the ending but I certainly don’t regard the Novitiate as the happiest days of my life. Even though they would say that it was a time of spiritual development and union and getting be meaning with God, spend a lifetime for all of that. You know, work at that but the Novitiate was that kind of orientation and it was very, very religious development. I’ll just put it that way. That was what we see... We weren’t really like tainted with academic work there, in the Novitiate and we kept an examination of conscience. We had little books and how many [erasers we got and how many of this and that] and all that kind of stuff. It was really a nice foundation when you think of it. When I think of developing character formation, it was really wonderful. You know, I don’t do it anymore like... Was I unkindly and all that, but I probably should. I might be more unkind than I used to be [Laughter] but I think of it in terms of character development but not being too introspective that you’re going to get upset about it with anxiety, then full of anguish. You just have to say you know, there’s those people who build that physical component and now we have a physical fitness center. And I can tell my students in Ethics that we have to build our virtues, [Laughter] you know. They really do that and then they don’t believe me of course but I say that this is all part of the course but then

Interviewee: Brother Richard Rancourt- Part II
Interviewer: John Ansley

March 14, 2002
MHP

they train you. And then we went to Marian College, okay. And after taking our taking the vows a year later, some guys went in cooking. Some fellows, the young Brothers, some were now cooking for the various houses, in the Juniorate, for example in Esopus. We needed cooks so when we finished our Novitiate, we could get thirty guys there. They say “Well, Brother A and Brother B have been assigned to Esopus to cook. Brother C and Brother D will go to St. Ann’s Hermitage on the property to cook for the Scholastics. And Brother E and F will go and work at the Novitiate.” Because then we had that some will be tailors and all that. So we were parceled out. The chosen few who are those whoever might be considered to be chosen in those days, would go to college.

JA: Okay.

RR: And to study and it was that the smartest ones went to the college because that was the way it worked. It’s just that in terms of what kind of talent you had and if they thought you’d be a good cook, you know, they thought you’d do good with that and they needed you because with only one year, you can always pick up the studies. So we came to Marist College, there were twenty of us at the time and we would both be here for three years and three summers for you to finish your degree.

JA: Is that considered the Scholasticate?

RR: Scholasticate, yea.

JA: Okay.

RR: Marian College. Paul Ambrose was the... At that time, Paul Ambrose was the dean of the college. He was not the President. The Provincial was the President. It was later on that they switched that. Paul Ambrose was the dean of the college and he welcomed us with open arms in the new class of Brothers coming in and we had about maybe sixty

Interviewee: Brother Richard Rancourt- Part II
Interviewer: John Ansley

March 14, 2002
MHP

in the Scholasticate at that time, first year, second year, third year. You used to think first, second, and third year but [Laughter] what happened to you in that fourth year... You wouldn't have any fourth year. They just merged that fourth year all together in one third, one third this and one third that. And when I came over here, I was seventeen... Eighteen years old, eighteen. Just going on eighteen and then being here, we had a regular academic program, took Chemistry and Mathematics and the beginning of Philosophy and Logic. We had English. We had Public Speaking and our regular five courses plus our religious life, saying our prayers, getting up early in the morning, doing our little morning employments. We all had little things we had to do like... Some people were assigned to work in the refectory I think six weeks at a time. Usually, sometimes it was two weeks but two weeks would be too many changes so every fourth week, we'd get a new assignment. So we'd rotate these things. And what I mentioned last time too, they also had "keys". "Key" is a special, special assignments that we were supposed to become masters at. And some people became electricians. Others became electrocuted becoming electricians. [Laughter] I should use some stories there. Some people worked at the barn. Some people worked at the garden. Some people were like sports directors. We had somebody who was a "key" for other guys in the sports would be for ourselves, our football games that we had. And we played football games out in the field here where... Which is right in front of Champagnat, that whole thing. That was our football field. It wasn't very fancy. In fact, a lot of rocks out and stuff like that and when we played football, it was touch football. We didn't tackle because it was too dangerous. It was dangerous as it was playing on that field, you know. So we had our soft ball sports and we had a guy who had that as a "key," organizing that. And myself,

the “key” that I had as I think I mentioned was the fixing of the typewriters and I didn’t know too much about them actually and I told you how we didn’t have any teachers teaching us how to type. We just sit up there, we let them work and we began to do this and because I played the piano I picked it up pretty fast.

JA: Right.

RR: And they all picked it up but I think Paul Ambrose, you’d see him typing, he only typed with two fingers.

JA: Yea. [Laughter]

RR: Typing away at it but he does it fast enough. But we did that and I did the typing for about maybe two years. I used to fix the typewriters, I would clean them. I learned a little bit about them. I must say I never liked the job so much. I just wasn’t interested in [Laughter] pushing a typewriter but I did it was good enough and it taught me something and I was glad to be able to do it. Maybe it tested my obedience, you know, stuff like that. Thereto, I also used to be Assistant Organist with the Brother who was in charge of the singing and the choir. He taught me how to play the organ. I knew back in the Juniorate but he encouraged more and more and more.

JA: This is Brother Ziggy, you said?

RR: No, that was Brother Adrian August.

JA: Okay, that’s right.

RR: Brother Adrian August was the fellow. He died here when I first came back to teach and he... The building was named after him, the Adrian building. He was a great musician and so he taught me. He encouraged me to develop my musical talents.

JA: Okay because I just thought that was one of your nicknames.

RR: Yes, it is.

JA: Yea. [Laughter] So I was just a little confused there.

RR: [Laughter] But that's only when it was still in my file. So, then we all used to have employments to do at the college. Some were working with chickens, some were with the pigs, some were with the barns and with, you know, cleaning the stairwells and cleaning the chapel. We had to do property work here.

JA: So you had very full days?

RR: Very full days, yea. We got up at 5:30 every morning and when I think about it I say, "Every morning, 5:30" and then we'd be up in the chapel about ten to six and then we'd go... Then there's our Mass and we say our prayers, standing up meditation, for a half hour. Kind of tough in those days, you know? And then from there, we'd all go to holy Mass for another half hour and then by the time we got to breakfast in the morning, it would be about a quarter past seven and after breakfast everything would be assignments. We only talked in the Scholasticate when I was there. We just spoke at the noon meal and the evening meal. In the Novitiate we didn't speak at all... At all, except on big feast days. There was silence all the time. So that was a big thing coming to the Scholasticate because now we were growing up, you know. I don't want to say they trusted us but we felt liberated. [Laughter] I don't want to be irreligious or trash the Novitiate. I liked the Novitiate but I... I have to use these terms, it was very, very silly, very confining and I think... Just think about the fact that we only had... We couldn't talk at meals. It was always reading. Also, taking a shower too. I mean, I hate to bring this up but in the Novitiate, there were so many of us that we all took our showers once a week, and then we had it. In this Novitiate, way up on the top floor of our dormitory, it

was tough getting water up there and the water was always cold water and we had a big trough, you know the horses would lap out of?

JA: Sure. [Laughter]

RR: And then we had this big pipe going along the length of that trough and in each particular section you have a faucet. So I remember you could be washing, you could be brushing your teeth... As you're brushing your teeth looking down at the trough, somebody next to you would be washing his feet and we didn't think anything of it.

Those people who shaved, they had a special base and they would have a special faucet over there [Laughter] for the magically hot water and a lot of us could use that. So if early in the morning when you get up on a winter morning and you have to splash your face with cold water and nothing woke you up, that certainly did, you know. [Laughter]

But when we came to the Scholasticate, then there was hot water. It had better accommodations and it was the last stage of our religious formation because once we finished the Scholasticate and had that academic training, they would go out and be assigned to teach. So I stayed here age of eighteen to twenty years old and then I went out teaching.

JA: During that time, it sounds like the Brothers were still tending gardens and raising some livestock on the grounds for their own food. Did you ever sell any of this to the outside community?

RR: No, I don't remember selling any of it to the outside community. Actually, all the food that we bought, we probably would have given some over to Esopus in the Juniorate over there if we had any extra but it was really of our own maintenance here at the college because you have to remember we had three different houses to provide food for.

Interviewee: Brother Richard Rancourt- Part II
Interviewer: John Ansley

March 14, 2002
MHP

We had the old Brothers with the infirmary, which was in the pool area about where Dyson is north and we had a big infirmary there and that's where the Scholastics lived also, in there for a couple years. In the years to come, you know, Marian College was where Greystone is, you see.

JA: Right.

RR: So we always had to walk over the North side to the Dyson building. We get used to walking along that road and we had a lot of old Brothers there and we had an old Brothers Provincial house. We had maybe twenty Brothers on the staff there and then we had the Scholasticate. We had sixty fellows with a staff of fifteen Brothers also and the Novitiate was maybe sixty others. So you had all this food and that was a way that we'd think to save money. The only thing that we did do when I was a Scholastic and a little later on in that was Paul Ambrose took to this idea. He was always into money schemes I guess. He was very a forward-looking fellow of... We had the chickens. Then he would sell the eggs to the schools, all the schools and I think that was one of the first times that we got money from the outside to help our little venues and finances here but it was a way that we would pick up money and at the same time the Brothers had to buy eggs outside from Mount St. Michael in the Bronx out in Queens. Paul Ambrose said "Well, would you mind if we supplied you with our eggs?" and of course he probably gave him a cheaper rate. So they said sure. It was a way to help one another. There was a lot of that in those days, you know, because we were one big province and well-connected with a big network and concerned about one another.

JA: And you were involved with the egg one, the "egg run" right?

RR: Yes but that was when I became a teacher here.

JA: So that was years later?

RR: That was about six years later.

JA: Okay.

RR: So the eggs were going for a long, long time. But what I used to do with the... When I came here, since they knew I was going down to Fordham to take courses... I was teaching in my first year. This was in 1959. This was my first full-time teaching here. They knew I was going down for courses and Brother Kieran Thomas was the Master of Scholastics. Brother Paul Ambrose had been named Assistant General and now Linus Foy was also like the President of the college but they got the idea that instead of sending two young Brothers down on the "egg run", since I was taking courses at Fordham on a Saturday morning...

JA: Working on your Doctorate.

RR: Working on my Doctorate that I should take the "egg run" down. So they would pack up the little Volkswagen we had with cotton and eggs labeled Cardinal Hayes, [Laughter] Mount St. Michael, Molloy, St. Helena's and then I had to go down after I finished my teaching. I was dashing to that Volkswagen to get it going and traveled all the way down to my first stop at St. Helena's in the Bronx and then I threw the eggs and everybody was happy to see me, [Laughter] you know? I stayed about fifteen, twenty minutes and off I'd go to Molloy and then I'd take Long Island Expressway and go off to Cardinal Hayes' in New York City and St. Agnes and I would take the old crates and put them in and I would wear my Roman collar, you know black suit, you know. [Laughter] I wanted to look business-like. And then I'd go to Mount St. Michael and park the Volkswagen there and I studied at night. The next day I'd take the Volkswagen to

Interviewee: Brother Richard Rancourt- Part II
Interviewer: John Ansley

March 14, 2002
MHP

Fordham in the Bronx and I'd take two courses in Philosophy and I'd drive back. So I did that for one year, what they called the "egg run." I thought that was my claim to fame. [Laughter] Actually, why I say that was Brother Leo Sylvius. You see, we all have maybe different appreciations of titles and all of this. Brother Leo Sylvius was a dean of the college probably two years before I went there to teach, okay. And he had the "egg run." [Laughter] He was the dean of the college. Remember it was just a young college and we had young Brothers so we all pitched in and there wasn't anything beneath you, your dignity as it were.

JA: Right.

RR: And Brother Leo Sylvius later on left the college and became principal of a high school, eventually became Provincial of the New Jersey Providence. He became Provincial of the New Jersey Providence so I used to keep kidding everybody while I was the... I had the "egg run." I said I think one day I'll be Provincial. [Laughter] I have another joke like that one day.

JA: That wasn't always natural. [Laughter]

RR: It wasn't natural. It was just something to do. I had the "egg run" and with many Brothers that was the big thing to talk about, fun days. All the things that we used to do were just amazing, you know. The things that we would do to save money.

JA: Yea.

RR: We'd earn money.

JA: I'm going to back up a little bit to when you're still in the...

RR: I never got that money. I never saw that money. I only delivered the eggs.

[Laughter]

Interviewee: Brother Richard Rancourt- Part II
Interviewer: John Ansley

March 14, 2002
MHP

JA: You just delivered the eggs, okay. [Laughter] When you're still in the Scholasticate, was there a lot of or any interaction with the outside community or was it really...?

RR: No, not in those days. The only... The only interaction we had and I say this as... We had Dr. Schroeder, John Schroeder. He came to teach full-time. Paul Ambrose had hired him full-time, the first lay teacher at the college and he was a Quaker.

JA: Oh, really?

RR: That was something new.

JA: That's interesting.

RR: With all Catholics here and Dr. Schroeder had taught in Arlington High School. He had a Doctorate. They liked that. So he did teach here on a part-time basis before I got here in 1948 or '49, I came to the college. '49 from the Novitiate, okay, my first year here and that was the first year that Dr. Schroeder was a full-time teacher. So there they think he was different because he was a lay man and all the other teachers were Brothers, you know, and we didn't have any outside activity. Probably the nuns over at St. Francis Hospital used to invite us over there like for the Queen of the May, crowning of the Queen of the May.

JA: Oh.

RR: And that was they had a nursing school over there so sometimes Brother Paul Ambrose... We had a choir here. We did that too. We did a lot of singing and when the nuns have, like Christmas time, when they have their party or are there for their staff members, the Brothers will go over to sing. We've sung at four parties, five parties.

JA: Wow. That's real nice.

RR: And as a young Brother, I went over there. I was part of the choir. When I came to teach here in the college, I was also director of the choir.

JA: Oh, really? I didn't know that.

RR: Yea, the director of the choir because Brother Adrian had died then. That's another thing that... Well, just to back up on that part. What happened was one weekend when I went down to take courses at Fordham, I found out Brother Adrian died of a heart attack. So I came back on Monday and then word that I would inherit the director of the singing with all the young Brothers.

JA: Wow.

RR: This was 1960 and I said oh... That was something extra now I had to do. So, I didn't mind it but I don't think... The young Brothers didn't like singing too much you see. They had a lot of things in those days. First of all, they were saying that this is now a major college. I know that that got to be a factor. You know, "If this is a college, why do we have to go to singing practice? Why do we have to sing for a bunch of services?" But sometimes we'd go over to the... We talked about going over to interact with outsiders. That would be the extent of our interaction I think.

JA: Okay.

RR: But also one time go up to visit IBM plant. We also sometimes... I'd take the special people and I and they were affiliated with the college in some way, I'd make a group of Brothers of this sing at their Mass, things like that. But as far as playing like baseball on outside teams or anything of that nature, no. It was pretty much confined. Once we were here, we were here in those days. We didn't get outside the property too too often.

JA: Okay. When you graduated from the Scholasticate, how many students were in your class?

RR: Well, it should have been about maybe twenty-five.

JA: Okay.

RR: Okay, but see now, when you ask me that question, you have to remember that I went out teaching after my second year here.

JA: And usually it should be three years in the Scholasticate.

RR: It should be three. So my class, I supposed to graduate in '52. I came here in '49, three years '52. I'm not teaching in '51 so it took me 1953 and I finished what they call the "extension school" in New York City so that might have been about... And I did come up to get my degree. I said I have to do something so I came up and I think another fellow drove up to get my degree. But there wasn't a ceremony, it was a little ceremony that we had. We didn't have anything for those and it was wonderful that they had even in these days... Was something else, little banquet and then they gave us our degrees then I went back teaching again and drove down to the city. [Laughter] So maybe all together it might have been maybe twenty-five, twenty people.

JA: Okay.

RR: But they all were kind of scattered. We didn't have any big ceremony. You know, first graduating class, only four people and that was five years before we got there. So maybe the parents would come up and then they'd do something a little bit special.

JA: But that's interesting to hear though what a difference there is between the graduation ceremony now. It's a much more elaborate ceremony and you know, it sounds like you received your degree and went back to work. [Laughter]

RR: Yea, that's right. That's right. You could be done as I mentioned though and then, you know, in this doing some kind of work to get your degree. We didn't make any big fuss about it too much, you know. But it was an accomplishment, for that.

JA: Sure, yes. When you were on campus, going to the Scholasticate, you mentioned a few buildings that are no longer on campus like St. Mary's dormitory. Were there any other buildings that you remember that were torn down or even new construction during that time?

RR: There was... Yes, there was another building that I remember. I don't remember the building too well but they had these prefab buildings from World War II they used to buy and put up and the Quad set-up. I believe and I don't remember seeing it too well but somewhere near the Adrian building where that was established there was Quad set-up that might have been like an improvised dormitory for a while.

JA: Okay.

RR: But I don't remember that too long. At those points, it does come down pretty fast you know, because this prefab you put together, you take it down. The only other building that I could think of... There was a barn in the middle of the old garage that we had but that's all demolished now. You know, that would've been where the old townhouses are now and the new townhouses are on the north side of the property but not as far as Gartland Commons, not as far as that. And then they had St. Mary's and then we had the Bee House. The Bee House was right next to it. Those are all the places that I can remember because the major houses were the Provincial House and then the Marian building, okay, around here then the Novitiate House that they called St. Ann's Novitiate. But there was no other big structures that I can remember. We had St. Peter's naturally,

and then we had the Gatehouse. You know, at St. Peter's, I lived there too. The Brothers used to live there. There was an extension on the back of that.

JA: I remember seeing a photograph of that.

RR: Yea, a big extension the Brothers built and that was just a three story extension. It had [metals in at the top] and then there was a front part of it too that went out to the road to the... When you're used to the beginnings of St. Peters, if you look at St. Peter's now, then you look at the stone, you might be able to detect the new stone that was put in to mask the old one. But they had a little extension there too and it was tasteful actually.

[Laughter] It was just shingles, you know, good shingles. It was just a space, extra space. It was convenient. It was comfortable. It served its purpose and all of that.

Brothers and I, when I came back here to teach I remember living in there and then they tore it down and that's more and more what I saw than anything else.

JA: And more recently there's been quite a few changes on campus just a year or two before, a couple years before I arrived here. They tore down the original Fontaine building.

RR: Yea.

JA: Which was attached to the chapel, right?

RR: Right.

JA: And now of course we're sitting in the Cannavino Library...

RR: Was that...?

JA: Where old Fontaine used to stand and on the North part of campus there's quite a bit of new construction including the Lowell Thomas building and Dyson and Fontaine.

What was there before those buildings were put up? You talked about this a little bit but is that where the gardens were?

RR: No, we didn't have any gardens up that way.

JA: Okay.

RR: We had, for example, in front of St. Peter's along the roadway as you go where the chapel is... One time we had a little kiosk where the chapel was because as you take that road up going to the chapel...

JA: Right.

RR: You know, from the Waterworks Road, they called it the Waterworks Road. As you take that road down and move up to the chapel in a little lane, consider that like the old-fashioned road and that's what would lead you right to the Marian building.

JA: Okay.

RR: And in front of the chapel, they have a little kiosk there. It was cute, you know. You were able to sit down and a place to relax. That was the other thing that we had but as you come back and you go up to Waterworks Road again and you take that right to the chapel, right there then we'd have a greenhouse. In the greenhouse we had flowers and Brother Abelus, the farmer, would take care of that. Brother Abelus was an old fellow. I guess he was at the age of ninety-three and he was the fellow who... The gardener but I remember we had a lot of gardens around our Novitiate. Maybe he was in charge of that garden too. So I tell you he had rhubarb patches and he had strawberry patches and we had apples all along the place, you know. And then coming near the... Maybe right in front of the chapel in front of the... I'm not so sure about this. We had some other gardens right in front of St. Peter's, had a kind of garden there. But what I'm trying to

think of and you know, you could be right, there could've been gardens in that part too that I forgot about. But I know we used to a lot of gardening, you know, turnips, beets, all that stuff, cucumbers, they had to be somewhere. [Laughter] So I know there were a lot of them near the greenhouse and we had a lot on the Waterworks Road so we do have... And then we have cows too and the cows would come and go on the fields and the pastures near Leonidoff Field.

JA: Oh, okay.

RR: Yea, and they would go on that. I don't remember the gardens being over there.

JA: And were the cows for meat or for milk or for both?

RR: The cows... Mostly for milk and I guess they killed a few in a day, you know but I never attended that, that excitement, you know. Even in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts where we had our Novitiate, we'd kill cows.

JA: Oh, really.

RR: And it was like you sort of hit them with a sledgehammer [Laughter] and all that kind of business. But maybe the Novitiate would probably... The Novitiate would look after the gardens. We had a lot of gardens there and we did a lot of work in the gardens, weeding and all that. Even as you go out towards the South gate now, as you look over to the left, we have the football practice field there. All that was all gardens. It was all strawberry patches. We did a lot of that.

JA: And you mentioned bee hives too.

RR: We had bee hives right along the same thing, right around the Novitiate. As you go towards the Leonidoff Field...

JA: Right.

RR: I'd say from Greystone to Leonidoff Field, as you go over there and make the curve to go out of the property, it's hard to place the property.

JA: Yea.

RR: And right over there on the hill were a lot of our... Maybe six or seven or eight beehives.

JA: Oh, okay.

RR: And we'd make our own honey. The bees would make it for us and that would bring you to the, what we call the Bee House. We'd take the honey all out and we did a lot of canning over there and the canning wasn't really just for the Novitiate. I think it was also for the Scholasticate. We would share the best we could and Brother Adolph Armand, one of my teachers, was in charge of that whole production the cannery. So we'd pack things up. So we were pretty much self-sufficient. Meanwhile, the old French Brothers who had all this training back in France and brought these traits over with them and encouraged us to do the very same thing, you know, so we were self-sufficient.

JA: Were you involved with the construction of Donnelly Hall or the chapel?

RR: No, I wasn't really because the chapel was built either 1953 or 1954, maybe something around in the era and also Donnelly Hall. Those were the days when... I tell you a Brother would come up from the schools, a lot of young Brothers would come up, eighty around there. Not all young Brothers, older Brothers too and they would be... They would help out starting to build Donnelly. That's how they built the chapel, okay. They did a lot by that and Nilus... Brother Nilus who was teaching up in Central Catholic in Lawrence, Massachusetts was brought to Poughkeepsie by Brother Paul Ambrose to see what kind of vision that Paul had and Paul Ambrose wanted the new chapel and got

permission for it and so he asked Brother Nilus who had just built Central Catholic gym, Brother Nilus, with the help of Brothers said this chain of buildings is something that we cultivated and the Brothers, they worked up... The old Brothers worked up in Central Catholic so Nilus had his crew all ready for him that he had trained and some of those Brothers would come back in the summer. Brother Edward Michael would come back, was it Edward Michael? And he would be the manager, the director and all of the young Brothers would come up and then he'd assign them jobs to do. So they built the chapel and then they got to build the Donnelly Hall. And a lot of people in my group, my own class, they worked for the summer and they often wondered how I never worked.

[Laughter] And one time I said I couldn't work because I had to go up to the Novitiate. I had to go up to Tyngsboro to teach music just after teaching my first year. To teach music because the director of music up there had to go to New York to study for courses over the summer and so they asked me to go up and teach the Novices music and to be a prefect up there. And some of my talents were used up there as a musician, not in digging up ditches...

JA: Right. [Laughter]

RR: For Donnelly Hall. And then when I came up... I came back to teach at Marist. Eventually if you're not on full-time in Marian College in those days... I used to ask Brother Nilus. I said "I'll go over to help you clean up" but Donnelly really was pretty much finished, okay. I said "You have to teach me a trade. You're not just going to have me just rake the grounds," [Laughter] you know. So I never got into the building. I used to admire the people who worked there. They worked hard and they built the whole summer, six months, six weeks rather, eight weeks. Finished school in late June, they get

on the bus, there'd be a bus there for them and off they go to the "Project." They called it a "Project" and they would work hard. They would shower at night but they were dirty when they came back.

JA: Yea. [Laughter]

RR: You know. And it was just... And it wasn't that they had comfortable bedrooms either. They were just beds put in various rooms, five, six, or eight beds. They didn't have the comforts of home. There were a lot of personal sacrifices they made and they would bring their little, you know, the least with them, whatever they needed. They had to go down I guess... And then on the weekends to pick it up, pick up some other stuff at the school, they would do it. But basically, once they were here they were here and they worked hard. The other thing sometimes that I did was since I was a musician once again, that when they had the little get-togethers to celebrate... We had to keep the workers happy [Laughter] and so they'd have some nice parties and they would ask me to come over to play the accordion or play the piano and I used to go over. They used to sing a lot. So I sort of thank god for my talents. [Laughter] It saved me from a lot of hard work that I probably would've had to do. [Laughter] But I never really got involved in this stuff and I think that some other people didn't get involved either, you know. They were made for it. Although other people who were less talented than I was and all that stuff, they had to work on the "Project." I consider myself fortunate. Nobody reminds me of that. People don't seem to be envious of the fact that I didn't work through and those who were jealous, you know [Laughter]...

JA: Would you tell me a little about the old pool?

RR: The old pool?

JA: Yea.

RR: Well, what I remember about the old pool was that... It was pretty huge actually and when I came to the Novitiate, we had to go down there and in the summer we were allowed to swim once a day or maybe twice a week. I don't remember but once again you see, I had to think about these Puritanical rules that we had. When we swam in the pool, the Novices, even the Scholastics speaking of Donnelly, they always had to wear a top shirt, you see which was alright I guess in those days and the pool was... We took care of it and we washed it out. You know, it was a major task to do that, drain it and all that business and then in the wintertime we'd freeze it and then we used it for hockey, playing hockey.

JA: Oh, wow.

RR: Yea, so it was a great thing to have on the property and some people sometimes would come in and use it but we didn't encourage that because we didn't want to have any accidents where people come in and maybe someone gets drowned and all that. So it wasn't... It was for the exclusive use of the Brothers.

JA: Okay.

RR: And then also before that it was like a lake form what I hear and then we had an old Brother Legontianus, who was the Provincial, but he was a little bit... Very, very up-to-date on mechanics and electronics or the new things happening in physics and in those days when you had these... Remote cars you could direct with from another place... You know automatics...

JA: With a remote?

RR: Like loaded to something.

JA: Was there a remote control?

RR: Remote control. That's what I wanted. The boat... He made the boat and it had a remote control, one of the first ones. And one of the big thrills was from what I hear from people telling me this story, that this Brother Legontianus would go down to the pool and put the boat in the pool and then have it go off and then he would control it with a remote control and it was really an event of the day, you know. It was something that they haven't seen. It was something new and everybody would clap and applause and they were all just happy. [Laughter] It was an achievement. And it was like... And Nilus, Nilus knew this fellow, Legontianus and Nilus built up those same kind of talents. See, Nilus was a self-made man and he was the fellow who, see, built and looked after the place. He had a Murphy bed and he was always... He would hammer away while we were at prayer. A lot of the guys were always into something so...

JA: That's interesting.

RR: Brother Nilus got a lot of that training from Leo Legontianus in the physics. Also, Legontianus was my teacher in physics when I was in high school. So the pool was just that. And then of course, then they drained it all, then they covered it all up and now on top of the pool was where Dyson currently is. No Lowell Thomas.

JA: Lowell Thomas.

RR: The Lowell Thomas building. It's a funny thing when I go over there and I try to visualize this whole experience because when I was... Let's say 1920, when we crossed over let's say from St. Peter's to walk to the pool, we'd walk across that Waterworks Road and then we would come down and then make a little turn and then pool was right there and right across from the pool going North was the Provincial House. It seemed to

me to be far away at that time maybe because I was younger and my perception of distance was all different. Nowadays, when I walk down there, before I know it, I'm right at Lowell Thomas. I stand back a bit and I try to visualize all this. Probably the only picture that I got one time was when they had a picture in the Poughkeepsie Journal about the publishing house that was across the street from us. And when I saw it all, I said "Oh, now I have a pretty fair idea where the pool was with relationship to Lowell Thomas" and all of that. And I know it fits right on top of that but I'm not exactly sure in terms of the whole thing.

JA: Right, yea.

RR: I don't think anybody ever checked dimensions. I do know when we built Lowell Thomas and had our classrooms in the basement that they had some trouble with the old pool back many years ago. [Laughter] I know a little bit of that. I don't know the whole story but they remedied all that and now I teach some of my classes down there. So I really haven't forsaken the whole pool entirely, [Laughter] coming back to haunt me.

JA: That's right.

RR: But sometimes it's not so bad, I say "Well, we're all underwater." Some of my students actually, early in the morning. [Laughter]

JA: But yea, I can appreciate that. [Laughter] I want to jump ahead a little bit to 1966 when there's the introduction of female students on campus and I guess there'd already been the introduction of lay students on campus. Was that a dramatic change?

RR: Oh, yea. That was a very, very, very dramatic change. There's no doubt about that. You know, when the... Well, there was authorization, obligation and I suppose in some of our houses, if we go back, in some of our houses, we would have women cooks. But

you know, that was I think a lot of the age of the real separation of males and females when I put it that way. And so we never I think encountered having females in our various houses and I'm really, I'm sure that there were exceptions but when we began here at the college, even getting a female secretary... Brother Paul Ambrose hired Miss Travis or something like that or Linus hired Miss Travis. That was really kind of an exception because we didn't think we had a lot of young women on campus in those days and there was no sense... They wanted to call off their vocations and there was no sense... You want to say like bringing in females who are going to distract them from their religious life and then take them away from us, you know, [Laughter] you have a lot of strange things happen. So that was one of the thoughts and it was a male college and then when it was brought up to take in females that thought from what I remember wasn't taken too happily by maybe the major superiors. They didn't really care for too much, you know, didn't really like... It was like new ground, a new frontier, a new movement.

JA: Right.

RR: And they were always looking at "We always had all boy schools." The Brothers never taught girls. I know in our teaching, we never taught girls. But then they began to change with co-ed schools in the fifties and move into all of that. Even at Lawrence we had the Brothers teaching the boys and the lay men insisted teaching the girls and that was still supposed to be co-ed but they were separate buildings. [Laughter] Okay, and then they began to merge and then you had the Brothers doing this, doing that so it was something that just came sort of progressively, you know, slowly and I guess Brother Linus was the one, Linus Foy, who thought that it would be good to move in that direction to invite women and girls to come to the college here. We always had women

on campus, I mean we had our dining rooms and dining halls. Well, we naturally had women working there, you know, but we never really had women as students until about 1966 and that was... I think they introduced them only in the evening school at first...

JA: Right.

RR: To try out. And I remember teaching some of them. I remember then having seen women in my class, you know. And it was just... I never get excited about it. It wasn't, I guess it was a new experience but they were just there as students and I just taught my subjects and corrected their papers but I think just the idea of their coming on campus was something entirely novel and it just was a way of breaking the ice. And then naturally, we would introduce a few more coming on and enroll more and then they built up a loophole and followed on their own.

JA: Did you feel that there's any friction between the lay students and the brothers when the first lay students started coming on campus?

RR: Well, yes. I think about that. There were a lot of what I call growing pains. And now also too, I look at my own feelings about it, we have this place here, this college for the Marist Brothers. Now of course, we knew we were going take in lay students and that was fine. You know, we were going to expand and maybe develop along the lines of Iona and Manhattan College, maybe Fordham. And at first, it was good. We thought we were doing a service to the community and it was good for us, that feeling that was branching out. It was opening our gates, tearing down our walls, you know so that we could let the people come in and share in our heritage and we share in theirs in some way or other. But some of the basic problems would come up when you take a lot of these lay students, let's say the male lay students and then I would begin to house them on the

college. I mean, we had to move the dormitories. So the first dormitories, you know, were in Donnelly Hall and so some of those old classrooms were made into temporary dorm rooms and Brother Daniel Kirk was the first prefect in those years. And so that was a start. Okay, and also some of them lived in the hotels outside. We put the rooms in the hotels but once the lay men came on the property, then we had to provide rooms for them to enjoy one another, entertain themselves. So then they offered to... Then we'd have Adrian Hall for, as I mentioned one time, was used mainly for the Brothers, young Brothers and their parents coming on Sundays and to eat there and to have a place where they could relax and enjoy each other's company. Well then, naturally, we had the lay students. We had to provide a room for the lay students too so that they too have to give it time for the Donnelly and from that Adrian Hall in the share of it and the physical comforts of a decent place to relax in, enjoy one another. Well naturally, if that's going to depend on the time that the young Brothers can have that place and they say "No, we're being squeezed out" and all that kind of stuff. So there was maybe that little bit of friction that was developing. Even normal I think growing pains is how I look upon these things. You have to remember also, that the young Brothers too did their training and worked on Saturday and working on Saturday meant they had to clean the streets and they had to clean the roads and they had to do lawns and they had to work on the garden. They had to paint and all that kind of stuff. Well that was always alright but now, when you have a lay student on the lawn and I remember some of the young Brothers would tell me this, you know, because I was one of the directors like in those days. I was a fellow who would take them for interviews, the young Brothers and they would say that they don't like working on Saturday, you know, because they weren't working around

here when the young Brothers studied for academics. Of course they had their own complaints too, you know, in their own vision of what things should be like and “Why do we have to clean the streets, clean the roads here at the college campus?” and as I’m doing something like that and they will say “I’m cleaning something, a lay student will come by and say ‘hey, you missed that piece of paper over there. Pick that up.’”

[Laughter] And that would cause a little bit of trouble. I guess the emotional response and the anger would come up when we played basketball. [Laughter] Now then you see, young Brothers had a routine. They played together for three years and they used to play a lot of pick-up games and we had our own little leagues, you know, and this is all we had. This is how we had to do it when we were training. And the lay students were just starting, I think they didn’t have a lot of good players and when we played them in basketball, I say we as in Brothers, I never played. When the young Brothers, the student Brothers would play the lay students, the student Brothers would win [Laughter] and that was an achievement until we got more lay students and then they stopped those games because there wasn’t any competition because now Marist College was building up its own major basketball team, you know.

JA: Right.

RR: So the friction was there in a lot of different respects, you know. Naturally, when we had the dormitories, the lay students go off the property. The lay students had access to, like even eating between meals. We were encouraged, told not to eat between meals. This was all sacrifice you see... You remember that. Not just during Lent. It was just that we don’t eat between meals. We have our three meals a day and to do otherwise would be sort of a show, a lack of discipline and tone. So you could take these young

Interviewee: Brother Richard Rancourt- Part II
Interviewer: John Ansley

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MHP

Brothers now, they say oh, they see Coke around the place, they see this, they see that, they see people smoking. Young Brothers weren't supposed to smoke. Well, that all opened up a bag of new tricks for them, you see. A can of worms that they would say. And so you just had all those kinds of things that you just couldn't control. So you had to maybe like, not so much yield, but say let's move into this new dimension as gradually as we possibly can and of course all that kind of little friction... It subsided in its own type of way and then as changes came about in the 1960's when the young Brothers began to move off the property and we began to have other housing combinations for the young Brothers like in the Gregory House and the Benoit House. Then the young Brothers had more freedom. We felt maybe if they felt more relaxed... But that was the time of the great upheaval in the whole Christian church and in religious life. So you could see that they were just meshing as it were and wondering where we were going to all end up. And now of course, we don't have any young Brothers anymore at the college. We used to have a lot of them. We might have a few somewhere along the line. So that all fizzled out in its own particular way. But they were tough in the early days I think because there was also like people losing territory and losing things but that's all part of the sacrifices you make, you know.

“END OF INTERVIEW”