

Spring 1927

We were off on a grand ride in our old truck that had been turned into a bus. One of the older French Brothers, a mechanic as well as a driver, took us on our journey that went through the beautiful spots of New England. We were so enthralled with the beauty of the countryside that we never minded our dilapidated vehicle, always mindful of the fact that it was also taking us up the ladder of our religious commitment one rung higher. We would now officially be in the Marist High School, even if we had already passed several of the basic high school courses.

This was an essential move in our adventure, which was already filled with unforgettable memories; it was finally New York Here We Come, that majestic treasure we had heard so much about. For us young squirts it was a momentous adventure from a small town to a big city, and not just any city but the city of New York. At least, that is what we thought as we headed for Poughkeepsie, which was another one of those old cities with an Indian name we did not yet know how to spell. We were young and crazy and ready for any adventure.

On that ride from Tyngsboro to Poughkeepsie, we stopped in the countryside at a place called Pittsfield, to stretch our legs, relieve the bladders, and take a lunch. It was a restful place and just before the bus left, the good Brother who was our driver reminded us that if ever any of us needed to stop for emergencies along the way, all he had to do was to ask for a stop at the next Pittsfield. We continued heading west towards that other city on a river, called Poughkeepsie. While our new home was on the Hudson River, Tyngsboro had been on the Merrimack. The Hudson River, a place where we could swim in the summer and skate in the winter-or so we thought.

I will never forget our arrival in Poughkeepsie where we stopped at the beautiful five-story historical mansion known as the McPherson estate, which had a circular veranda all around the front and sides of the huge building. For us it was quite impressive. After living in a red brick school building, this was more like a home. But since we had just arrived from a long trip and we had been too excited to ask for a stop in Pittsfield, our wise driver told us to come around the side of the building below the veranda section and stop at the shining room. This was the euphemistic name for the equivalent of Pittsfield. The fact was that in the school here we were to wear special shoes for inside the house and work shoes for when we went to work or play. The shinning room was where we changed shoes. There was a box shelf for each one of us with our name lettered on the outside, and that is also where we kept the material for shining our shoes.

Across the room opposite the shoeshine boxes was a battery of toilets. We were in for a surprise, for they were not like the toilets in our dormitory in Tyngsboro. The facilities consisted of a block of stalls, and each stall had only a half door for privacy. If one looked towards the stalls he could see the crumpled pants of those seated there and on some others he could see the head and shoulders of those just standing for relief. The little swinging doors only hid the main course. And this was our entry to the Poughkeepsie mansion! We decided at once that no matter if this is a mansion, we still preferred the system of Tyngsboro, or even of Pittsfield for that sort of ceremony.

We were divided into groups to be assigned sleeping quarters, classrooms, and activities. The place was a huge farm with barns and workshops, farming vehicles, and places for horses, cows, pigs, chickens, rabbits, and also flocks of pigeons. The estate was self-sufficient, ready to provide for all our needs. Our playing field had been slowly and painstakingly produced by hard work of picks and shovels, and even some blasting of the famous shale rock, which can be found all over the campus. We worked and worked until a new playing field was ready for use. One could readily realize that the slogan and motto of Prayer and Work was a solid way of life that came from the Marist Founder and was instilled in his disciples.

Besides the farm buildings and grazing fields, there were three baseball fields. One was the third camp, which was way down a steep hill on the property where a giant waterwheel, operated by a natural stream of fresh water, pumped water up the hill to our residence. Third camp was my baseball field, and we often used the cowâ€™s contributions as our bases. Everything we had then is now the north campus in the McPherson estate, which the

Brothers bought in 1904. The Bech estate was purchased in 1908 and ran from the then Waterworks Road to the huge cemetery at the south campus where the McCann Recreation Center is presently located.

We did our own baking, had our own infirmary, and the doctors came to visit the elderly Brothers and even performed minor operations in the well-equipped infirmary. The chapel was more than adequate, with a first-class organ to provide life to our ceremonies. The infirmary was on the second floor, but there were glass walls along one end, and the sick Brothers could follow Mass without coming downstairs. The chapel and infirmary served the entire property. The north end of the property was the Provincial administration, which housed the retired, old, and sick Brothers, along with the residence for the Juniorate, where we were completing our high school studies. At the south end of the property (the Bech estate) was our Marist cemetery with the facilities needed for the operation of the Novitiate.

Each Marist Brother in training spent two years in the Postulancy and the Novitiate proper. Postulates could be young men, such as we who graduated from Tyngsboro, or someone older who took the vocation later in life. Behind the Novitiate was a Bee House with some forty beehives. At the center of the present main entrance to the college, which was then known as Waterworks Road, where the City of Poughkeepsie had and still has its water purification plant, was the Scholasticate. The property ran from Waterworks Road, where we had a vegetable garden at the right-hand side of the present chapel, to the road. There was a greenhouse there also, and we have always had a greenhouse on this property as long as I can remember. It is French custom and very useful to provide seeds and flowers needed for the garden and chapel.

At the very center near the present Greystone building was a three-story wooden building with a tailor shop on the top floor. The Scholasticate study hall was on the second level, and the main entrance on the ground level. Below was the laundry with industrial machines needed to do all our cleaning. The Scholasticate property went as far as the grotto, which is still part of the Marist campus, and it was used for our outdoor Stations of the Cross for both the Novitiate and the Scholasticate.

Our years on this property started with the Juniorate for high school courses, then it continued at the Novitiate, where the McCann Center is presently, for study of Marist rules. At the end of our Novitiate we were granted the Marist religious habit and made our first vows. Then we proceeded to the Scholasticate, where Greystone is still the key building and the newly initiated Brothers worked at the courses needed to earn a teaching degree. It was remarkable how these three groups functioned as one family. Everyone on campus was interested in the personal growth of each religious of this great Marist family.

The Juniorate introduced us to the family spirit of the Marist Brotherhood and helped us to complete our high school. The Novitiate was intensive study of the rules and the vows that we would be taking to follow with intensive spiritual life our true dedication. The Scholasticate allowed us to start our college degree during the two years there, and we were expected to complete that college degree while we were also teaching in one of our Marist communities. That is why the Scholasticate was then called a Marist Normal Training School as it had been finally approved in 1929.