

Esopus as a Juniorate 1942 to 1969

As the Marist Brothers sought a site to relocate the Juniorate from Poughkeepsie to make room for Marian (now Marist) College, they explored several sites. One was the [Riordan School](#); click to read a report on this school by Brother Joseph J R Bélanger

looking for an author (or authors) to contribute first-hand knowledge ...perhaps a single essay, or else vignettes like those of Martin Curtin and Gil Levesque below.

from **Martin Curtin** (the grandson of Michael and Margaret Curtin, who lived in the gatehouse for many years. 4 February 2003. Marty visited his grandparents often). Enclosed is a picture of my grandfather, Michael Curtin, that my uncle sent us. It was taken in the living room at the gatehouse, at Esopus around 1969. With him is his grandson Tim. The pictures on the mantel are of his children: Bernard who became a Marist Brother; Viola who became a Sister of Charity, Sr. Miriam Therese; Michael, employee of American Airlines after his Air Force assignment; Claire (a reason my spelling of the county often gets messed up) who was a nurse; my father, Martin who worked for over 40 years for Pan American Airlines; and a son John who was a career serviceman and probably some of their kids. He brought some of them to my folks house when he moved in with them in the late 60's



The gatehouse was quite a house. With its high ceilings, large pantry, large rooms, rooms in basement previously used for coal storage, and an old wringer used to get the water out of hand-washed clothes. It was a house that amazed. For one used to a Levitt house on Long Island, the gatehouse was a mansion.

The gatehouse had four or five bedrooms upstairs with a bathroom and five or six rooms on the first floor. With an enormous basement, with several rooms there was ample place in the gatehouse to play hide and seek. The hallways were as large as small rooms. It had pushbutton electric switches, a manually lit gas stove, no washer or dryer. It was located within feet of Route 9W. At night you could image the trucks driving through the house. My grandfather maintained a garden off the back of the house. I think Br Felician must have provided him with the plants.

It was a grand house.

from **Joe Hagan**, of St George, Utah, a nephew of Brother John Patrick , rec'd
13 Nov 2003

I spent a number of summers at the "mansion" while visiting with my uncle and role-model, Bro. John Patrick (Edward Caffrey) in 1947-48-49. He passed-away in 1991 and is buried at Esopus - a place he called "Heaven-on-earth." Also, I am seeing names that trigger some great and emotional memories; Br. Linus William, Br. Edmund, Br. Peter Hilary. I also remember Br. Leo who amazed me with his physics lab on the second floor. Of course there was Rex the German Shepard mascot (I believe he belonged to Br. Linus).

I also remember one summer when we picked, cooked and bottled rhubarb from the farm in the kitchen in the English village. I seem to recall an arch that the road ran under between the buildings where the equipment was kept.

I remember Br. John waiting for me at the gate house as I arrived on a Greyhound bus from NYC. I learned to drive at Esopus - there was a Chevrolet panel truck ('41 model I think) that had the sides and roof removed thus making it a pickup. I can recall the gear shift handle not having a knob at the top of the handle - just threads. I also remember the boat house as well as the outboard motor-equipped row boat that was kept there. I have enjoyed these past few hours reading all the accounts of those who have fond memories of this "Heaven-on-earth."

from **Anne Sommer**, sister of Robert Hyndsman (Brother Denis Damian) on 17 Feb 2005:

Thanks to our son, Bob, we learned of your history of Esopus on the Internet. I really enjoyed reading the history and the pictures were great. My family has fond memories of skating on the pond at Esopus. Also, we are in possession of a dining table from the Payne (or Bingham) estate.

Perhaps you are not aware that my brother served at Esopus from 1957 to 1965 or 1966, when he left to go to Europe for his second novitiate. I believe his title was Director of the Juniorate and he served with Brother Stephen Urban and Gus Nolan. We had many great gatherings at our home in Greentree Park with Brother Stephen usually concluding the evening with his rendition of "Granada".

Ed. Note: Greentree Park is a section of Hyde Park, New York. Anne's husband, George Sommer was Professor of English at Marist College. He was the second full time lay person hired to teach there by Brother Paul Ambrose. Both George and Anne's brother Robert, were graduates of Mount St Michael.

email from **Ken Livingston**, who was a Junior at Marist Prep from 1943 through 1945:

I had intended to send two pictures to you as an attachment. Unfortunately, my software is not cooperating. Once I figure it out, I'll pass them on to you. One of the pictures is of my wife Evelyn and me, taken in Sorrento, Italy. We go there every year for about a month. Evelyn and I have been married for 52 years now and have five children, four grandchildren, and one great grandson.

My parents were deaf mutes and when my Dad died suddenly at the age of 45 in 1942, I was sent to the Mount as a boarder for the eighth

grade. Br. Denis Colman was my teacher then and was instrumental in my going to Esopus in the Fall of 1943. While at the Mount, I recall the dorm prefect, a Br. Felix. That's about the only names I can recall from my Mount tenure. I do remember the priest that said daily Mass was French. I was an altar boy, along with a close friend of mine, a Donald Parker. Donald was the son of a well-known sports writer for the Daily Mirror, Dan Parker. You might remember him. I also remember two future All-American football players, "Zeke" O'Connor and Art Donovan, who were seniors when I was in the 8th grade. You might recall that Donovan, (whose dad was the referee in most of Joe Louis's fights), went on to fame with the Baltimore Colts and the NFL Hall of Fame.

While at Esopus I vividly recall the reading of "For Freedom and For Gaul" and "The Robe" during meals, after the Lives of the Saints. The snowball fights between the Gauls and the Romans are also a strong part of my memory. After rising in the morning, we ran from the English Village to the main house and daily Mass. Br. Joseph, the infirmarian sticks in my memory bank for two reasons. One, his remedy for diarrhea was always one hard boiled egg. Secondly, one day in French class, Dennis Murphy, as a lark, asked Br. Joseph "What does 'frappez la rue' mean" (We used to use that expression as a substitute for "hit the road"). After giving it some thought, Br. Joseph replied "Strike ze pavement?". Everyone in the class got a kick out of that, especially Dennis. The flag game was a great game for us. If memory serves me correctly, one Spillane, used to run with his tongue between his teeth. He fell one time and required several stitches on his tongue as a result. Jim Monahan was probably the best athlete at Esopus, followed closely by Dennis Murphy. I vividly recall hearing the news, via the grapevine, that Monahan had left the order. It always seemed to be a hush-hush piece of news at Esopus, and not to be discussed.

Some classmates from 1943-1944 and early 1944-1945 were Jim Vaughn, Bob Yahn (from Wheeling), and someone whose name I've forgotten, but whose nickname was "Pidgeon". Oh, another name was Pat Rooney,, same as the famed Irish soft shoe dancer. (A thought: would it be possible somehow for you to provide a list of my contemporaries?). Also, I went back through the newsletters from 2004 to 2002 and could find no mention of the passing of Br. Denis Colman. When did he pass away?

I must confess that Br. Linus William terrified me. When we were in chapel for prayers, he would sit in the back row and I think all of us must have felt his eyes on us. For some reason, I didn't get that upset when I had my monthly or quarterly talk with him. Br. John seemed to be the kindest of the Brothers there. He would make his rounds of the dorm after we had gotten into bed and he would offer a bit of encouragement to us as he walked by our beds.

I also remember picking apples on a nearby farm. The owner indoctrinated us as to the proper way to remove the apple from the tree and then we were on our own. I believe we were permitted to keep some of the apples for our use at the school.

The cook at St. Joseph's was also a very good baseball pitcher. He often showed me the correct grip for throwing a curve and a knuckler. As I recall, I don't think he relished his position as the cook though. (*Ed note: the cook was Brother Sigibert Leo Murray from Leominster MA. Brother*

*Linus William, headmaster, would not allow him to **pitch** to any juniors, but he often joined the team playing other infield positions.)*

The hill in front of the mansion was the ideal place to sleigh. It was a great ride down the hill, but unfortunately, at the very bottom, you had to go through saplings and if you didn't keep your head down you were punished.

Another recollection was that our class did not take geometry. Instead we got trigonometry. Supposedly, geometry had to be taken before trig, or so I remember. Other than Br. Joseph, I can't remember any of the other teachers.

Before I went to Esopus, I had never heard of "romeos". I learned that was the name for the slippers that we had to wear in the mansion. Also, I had never seen a bat until one became a squatter in the chapel. He was finally driven off somehow.

I'm sure that other memories will come to me sooner or later.

After leaving Esopus, I went to Rockaway Park to live with my grandmother. I attended Far Rockaway H.S., but after the discipline at Esopus, I became disenchanted with the laxity at FRHS and dropped out, joining the Navy at the age of 17. Thanks to the study habits I picked up at Esopus, and despite the lack of a high school diploma, I advanced to the rank of Lieutenant Commander and retired from the Navy in 1969 after 23 years of service. I went into banking in California for eight years and then joined a bank in Port Townsend, where I stayed for 13 years, retiring in 1991.

Again, thanks for steering me to your wonderful website. Reading many of your comments about the brothers brought a lump to my throat and my days at St. Joseph's will always be treasured.

from **Ken Deshaies**, Melbourne Florida via email 18 Feb 2005

I thoroughly enjoyed your efforts regarding the Marist Brothers site. It was a trip back in time--for me it was in the 1953-1954 time period, which seems so long ago. I also appreciated the wonderful photos of different aspects of the Esopus property. I can recall when I was a student there, that I took long walks throughout the property, from the north end where the creek entered the Hudson (there was an array of summer cabins (private) there, to north of the coal bunker, where there was a steep washed-away cliff, and at the bottom one could find many fossils. There was also a slate quarry above the pumping facility, and the quarry (small) was usually filled with tadpoles in the summer. I also recall the strong tide (usually outgoing) in the Hudson when we swam there. I also remember Sunset Lake...nice photos also.

I did also manage to get over to Slabsides, and as I remember, there was a small pond near there with high rocks on one side.

Thanks again for your fine efforts, especially the great photos and the historical section. I regret that I couldn't appreciate the historical value of this wonderful area when I was there

I will monitor your website for future updates...thanks again.

from **GIL (Gilbert Louis) LEVESQUE** ('51): I thank God and His Blessed Mother for all the wonderful events that have helped shape me through my association with the Marist Brothers. I will never be able to thank adequately all those I have come in contact with through my years in "the order" and to tell them how much good I derived from them. Never would I have met and lived with such a genuinely happy, friendly and sincere group of people, whose main purpose is to "do good quietly!" I thank God and the Marists for the training and skills I obtained, allowing me later to pursue a successful career in education in the Port Washington Public Schools, first as math teacher and then as computer director.

Last year at the reunion of the groups of '50 and '51 several of us did a lot of reminiscing as in Esopus we walked from the Mansion to the English Village side of the property and then on to the Cemetery, where so many of the Brothers we knew and lived with in community rest in peace. Thoughts still come flooding into my mind. How quickly the happy years have flown. Here are a few memories of Esopus ...

Brother Regis, the Director, floating on his back in the Hudson
Brother Stephen Urban singing the evening "Salve Regina" before our retiring
Brother Edmund with his pince-nez glasses, Gregorian lessons, and
"punctilius"
Brother Placid playing the piano so beautifully with his very large hands
Brother Patrick, in charge of maintenance, always so friendly and happy
Gazing at that fabulous panoramic view of the Hudson from the front of the
Mansion
Walking the field praying the rosary ... robins chirping, smell of new mown
grass, homesick
Diving off the dock into the waves and oil slicks of the Hudson, nearly
drowning, never again!
Cleaning the rock lined gutters with fingers and hoes in the spring, gathering
leaves in the fall
Scrubbing the Mansion marble stairway with steel wool, getting souvenir
shards in fingers
Looking for the "secret passage" supposedly in the wood paneled library

And, of course, Tyngsboro comes to mind ...

Brother Louis Omer on the handball court flipping us about with his bulk
Brother John Berchmans, one of the best Brothers I ever met, putting up the
Quonset hut
Brother Anthony in his wood shop cutting oak logs into boards with tractor
hooked to buzz saw
Wilfrid, the farmer, pointing down with his big thumb, predicting hell for us
Brother Henry Charles scaring everyone he encountered
Brother Simeon, a truly holy man, with index card stories to illustrate his
religion lessons
Dom Cavallaro looking for lost handball with "Tony, Tony something's lost and

gotta be found"
Stomping silage in the silo with molasses all around
Running from study hall to chase escaped cows from the cornfield
Prostrating during chapter of faults and confronting small "silverfish" bugs on
the floor
Trying to memorize the gospels and reciting them piecemeal with the aid of
many hints
Picking evergreens from the woods to make miles and miles of Christmas
garlands
Decorating that beautiful chapel fashioned by Brother Aloysius
Ice skating after Christmas Midnight Mass with swishing noises of ice skates
midst the silence
Walking in deep snow to the quarry and back
Laudetur Jesus Christus. Et Maria Mater Ejus. Amen.

References: MaristsAll newsletter, issue # 65, December 2001

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