

Esopus as a College/Scholasticate 19?? to 19??

looking for an author (or authors) to contribute first-hand knowledge ...

From Bill Maher 5 March 2003: A little anecdote for Richard Foy...I don't know if you were with four of us who were selected to carry bricks to the top of the scaffold above the stage while the gym was being built in Esopus in 1951...four of us who were slight and small were given buckets with four bricks to walk across the scaffolding to give to the mason who was working ...Bro. Francis in his most serious of faces and voice (none of us knew who this man was at the time) said, "...it would be better for you to jump down onto the slate below than to tell me you chipped one of the bricks that have already been set!"...it was bad enough being up at that height but then to have to be told that really set us on edge...it wasn't until years later having the opportunity to live with him in Poughkeepsie that I was personally able to know the caring and soft side of Bro. Francis Xavier.

Response from Rich Foy: I don't remember the brick toters, but I do remember that that scaffold was *very high*. When I had to mount it, I grabbed firm hold of the 4x 4 uprights. I also remember Brother Joseph Belanger and Brother Jogues balancing planks on their shoulders and then walking along thin planks joining post to post. I got dizzy just looking at them.

To understand how Esopus functioned as a scholasticate or college, it will be necessary to backtrack and study the evolution of how aspirants became Marist Brothers.

When the Brothers came to Canada and the United States from France, they concentrated on teaching in the elementary schools, with a natural bent towards servicing the French Canadian groups in Canada and which had migrated south to New England to work in the mills and factories. It was natural to recruit from among the students the Brothers taught, which meant recruitment was from eighth graders in their schools, supplemented by circuit-riding recruiters who visited schools in New England. Thus two secondary schools were established for the training of aspirants: one in Tyngsboro Massachusetts was for students whose native tongue was French; the other, in Poughkeepsie NY was for students whose native tongue was English. The boys would spend three years at these schools, then transfer to the Novitiate in Poughkeepsie where they would finish high school (named St. Anne's Hermitage). They they would spend a year as Novices

devoted to religious studies. Next they would transfer to the Scholasticate in Poughkeepsie, called Marist Training School for the first two years of college. After leaving Poughkeepsie, the Brother would be assigned to teach, usually in elementary schools, but also to complete his bachelor's degree at Fordham University School of Education.

The pattern of early recruitment was not limited to Brothers. The system was patterned on the model for the priesthood. In the New York Archdiocese, Cathedral Preparatory was a secondary school for those who were thinking about the priesthood. They would continue to Cathedral College, (located at Dunwoodie) and move into the seminary itself. Cathedral Prep was a commuter school since most of the students lived in or near the city, but a residence was opened for candidates from the further reaches of the diocese.

Oddly enough, groups of sisters did not recruit candidates until completion of secondary school. The young women entered the two year novitiate directly, and college courses began only after profession as Sisters.

The decade of the 1940s saw changes at both ends of the Brothers' pattern. The last first year class at Marist Preparatory in Esopus was accepted in September 1944, and following classes were delayed until after freshman year. Most candidates came after sophomore or junior year in high school. At the same time, Brother Paul Ambrose Fontaine was asked to lead the scholasticate from a two year junior college to a full liberal arts bachelor's granting college.

In the early 1960s, the Juniorates were merged and moved to Cold Spring NY. They accepted only juniors and seniors, and these candidates completed their secondary school education at Cold Spring, now called Marist Preparatory. Two Novitiates were established, one in Esopus, the other in Tyngsboro Massachusetts, reflecting the division of the USA Brothers group into two provinces. The division was along territorial lines, not language. The Postulant or first year at the Novitiate, offered freshman college courses. Thus, Esopus and Tyngsboro were classified as extensions of Marist College. Candidates with some college courses were directed to Esopus, and were able to take upper level courses on the Poughkeepsie campus.

After the separation of the USA Brothers into two provinces, the candidates associated with the Esopus province did not move to Poughkeepsie, but lived on the Esopus property, but they commuted to Poughkeepsie for their coursework.

By the end of the 1960s the recruitment process had evolved further. Both provinces established Contact Programs which kept contact with young men who had expressed an interest in joining the brothers as they attended and graduated from other colleges. The Postulant Year was then devoted to teaching or other community activities.

As of 2003, the Provinces required a candidate to have taught or performed other apostolic works for two years before acceptance into the program. So the Esopus property is no longer an extension of Marist College.

References: personal recollection of Richard Foy

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