

Pioneers to California

Excerpted from *Spreading the Fire* by Sister Joanne Wittenburg, SND '58

1924 Ferdinand R. Bain builds his 100-acre estate with a red brick Colonial-style home on Overland Avenue and names it Rancho La Lomita, or "Little Hill Ranch."

1939 Paramount Pictures purchases the distressed Rancho La Lomita to build its Paramount City studio, only to sell it in 1941 to the Overland Housing Company, which subdivided the land to build homes.

1944 Reverend Mother Mary Vera Ness, provincial superior of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Cleveland, identifies the last 2.5 acres surrounding the original Bains' home - the only large parcel still intact from the original estate - as the site for a future elementary school.

"This school, with the home on the property, we can use then for the present for our yearly retreats and for the summer homecoming. The property is too small for building our novitiate, etc."



1946 Although elementary classes were scheduled to begin on February 1, construction and rain delay the opening to April 1. When the tile floor had still not been laid at the end of March, Sister Mary William Gara, SND, the first principal, writes to Mother Mary Vera:

"There wasn't the slightest chance of taking 33 little ones into a building...[that was] damp and cold - no flooring - and still NOTRE DAME would open on April 1. We simply had to open...There was only one thing to do and that was to open school in the Convent."

1946 On September 10, Notre Dame Academy, the first school owned by the Sisters of Notre Dame on the west coast, begins a full year of classes for grades one through six in the completed building and with an additional five Sisters on the faculty.



1948 With an incomplete annex for the first eighth graders in September, the Sisters rearrange the elementary classrooms to accommodate the middle school students for the month. Construction finishes by October 4, just in time to welcome the school's first class of kindergartners along with the junior high students.

1948 After tabling plans for a high school due to financial constraints, during her annual visit in the fall, Mother Mary Agnes Bosche, SND, remarks that when the first eighth grade students graduate from the elementary school in June 1949, the girls must be able to enter Notre Dame Academy High School. Sister Mary Madelyn Ryan, SND, recalls:

"We all lost our breath. In one chorus we all asked, 'Who is going to do the building?' The answer came very definitely with Mother Mary Agnes' usual smile, 'You people are. Just get busy thinking.' That meant more building. Where to get the money? That was up to us."



1960 By the end of the 1950s, Notre Dame Academy reaches its capacity enrollment with a curriculum that includes a full four-year college preparatory program along with classes in home economics and business.

1968 Notre Dame Academy phases out home economics and business tracks to become a strictly college preparatory high school for girls.



1992 The front of the auditorium is extended to accommodate a dance studio, weight room, art room and computer lab in a two-story addition.

1995 The Richard Riordan Foundation funds the elementary school's first state-of-the-art computer classroom.

1920-1930

1940

1950

1960

1990

2000s

1945 Mother Mary Vera, SND, makes her annual visit from Cleveland in the fall and describes her first glimpse of Notre Dame Convent:

"It would be very difficult to describe our emotions when, for the first time, our Cleveland car turned in the driveway of OUR OWN HOME on the WEST COAST. We had left 'home' behind, only to find it again at our destination. And what a HOME it is!"

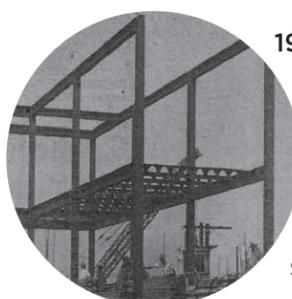
1945 The Sisters of Notre Dame take title of the land at the end of May, and in less than four weeks, welcomed the Sisters for "Homecoming Day." Since the convent could not accommodate all of the Sisters at the same time, they took turns vacationing at

"Overland." After all of the Sisters had made a retreat, Sister Mary Loyole Gabal, SND, Sister Mary Celestine Raetz, SND, and Sister Mary Gladys King, SND, remained at Overland to oversee the construction of the new elementary building and to prepare for the opening of school.



1946 On Sunday, September 29, Auxiliary Bishop-Elect Timothy Manning presides at the dedication of the school. His remarks are both a hope and a prophecy as he likens the dedication of a new school to a christening:

"Heaven itself has seen fit to participate in that christening by sending the little shower of rain, just enough to sprinkle the new building... the new school bears the name of Notre Dame, and is placed under the patronage of Our Blessed Mother. No project under her patronage can fail."



1947 Construction begins on the two-story annex when the first class of seventh graders filled the main building to capacity. The building would provide two classrooms for the junior high students on the main floor and additional living space for the Sisters on the second.



1949 On May 13 - 15, the Sisters host a three-day fundraiser culminating in a ham dinner. Having organized successful benefit dinners in Cleveland, they hoped for similar success in California.

Mother Mary Agnes, SND, received the following report:

"The Ham What Am' carried its power of advertisement so well that we served approximately twelve hundred people... [and] netted a gratifying \$12,000 - a good beginning for our greater Notre Dame in California."

1949 Although financial issues delay construction, the Sisters are determined to begin classes in September as Mother Mary Agnes wished. They transform the elementary library into a high school classroom to welcome 28 young women as the first freshman class.

1950 The Sisters break ground on the high school building in March and complete construction the following year.

1954 Two wings containing a chapel, science lab, and auditorium/gym are added. The spacious new chapel is especially meaningful for the Sisters, as the Chapel of Our Lady, Mother of Grace is the first large enough to accommodate all of the Sisters assigned to California. Sister Mary William Gara, SND, remarks:

"They now had a place where they could all gather for the Eucharistic Sacrifice and for community celebrations...Thoughts of gratitude to the good God for helping us through this long-desired hope...were secretly offered to the good God."



2011 The former annex is transformed into the "Villa," dedicated to providing modern educational spaces for middle school students. The school implements a one-to-one iPad program and welcomes its first transitional kindergarten class.

2015 The convent building, Bain's original Colonial-style home, is renovated over the summer to accommodate the growing space demands of the elementary, middle, and high schools and is renamed Rosa Mystica Hall.

2018 Generous donations from Shea Family Charities, the Ahmanson, Parsons, and Brandlin foundations, Henry Jordan, and the NDA Board of Directors fund a major facelift of the main high school building and create a new Student Learning Commons.

2023 Notre Dame Academy announces the opening of its all-girl Catholic middle school, the first of its kind in West Los Angeles, and prepares to welcome its first classes of sixth graders in the fall of 2024.