

# Do You Remember?



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## St. Michael's School 1913—2013

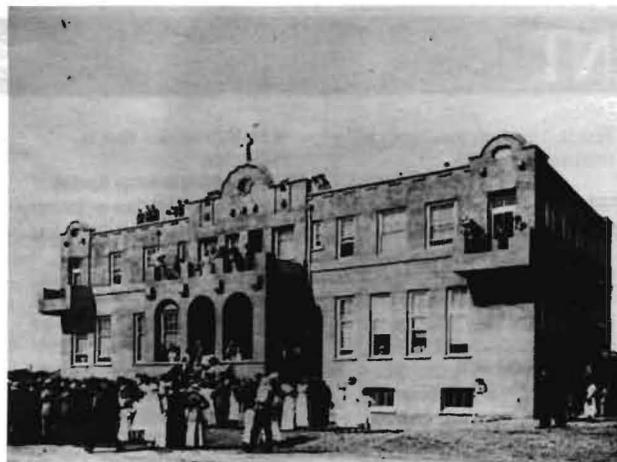
Father Patrick Power was born in Carrick-on-Sur, County Tipperary, Ireland, on March 17, 1842. He completed his education at Carlow College and took his holy orders there. In 1872 the newly ordained priest came to California. After several other posts, he came to St. Michael's Parish in 1879. He helped the Catholic community build its first church in 1882 and its larger Gothic-style church in 1891. These were both at the intersection of First and Old First Streets.

However, he always said that he was most proud of his work for the youth of the church and being responsible for the erection of St. Michael's School in 1913. As he lay dying of pneumonia and heart problems in 1915, he asked to be lifted up so that he could look in the direction of the school and said, "Thank God, I got that finished."

As early as April 1910, Father Power put down a deposit on part of the McLeod Tract and in-

vited architects from San Francisco to look over the site on Maple Street. The Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, at his invitation, agreed to staff the school. By February 1912 Father Power announced that St. Michael's Church had raised \$10,000 to start the building project in March. He held a special parish meeting on the first Sunday of Lent in 1912 to emphasize the importance of the new school. "All my work and yours will be in vain unless a Catholic school is established to take care of the rising generation and to train them to follow in the footsteps of their forefathers." The congregation needed another \$20,000 to pay for the land and the school building. They came up with \$10,000 more, and a "good friend" added another \$10,000. After Father Power's death, the "friend" was identified as Father Power himself.

After a celebratory dedication of the new building before a large crowd on September 21, 1913, classes began the next day in re-



**The photo was taken in September 1913 during the dedication of St. Michael's Academy. The building was torn down in 2004.** (Photo courtesy of Livermore Heritage Guild)

ligion, academic subjects, and music under Sister M. Laurentia, principal, Sister Ambrose Garvin, Sister Dominica Hartnett, and Sister Bertrand O'Connor. The school opened with thirty students in grades one through seven. The eighth grade was added the following year. On June 8, 1915 the first class of eleven students graduated. Kindergarten was added in 1988. The building consisted of classrooms on the first floor, and the sisters' quarters on the second floor. In the beginning, several upstairs rooms were set aside for girls who boarded during the week. A full basement held the furnace and laundry room.

A number of the people that I interviewed about

their experiences at St. Michael's School recalled the playground and recess. There was only one piece of playground equipment—a pole with rings. Students would hold onto the rings, and others would push them so that they would fly around the pole in circles. Then one year a girl fell from her ring and broke her leg. The school took away the equipment. Peggy (Kelly) Frydendal graduated from St. Michael's in 1943. She remembered that the playground was divided in half—boys had to stay on one side and girls on the other. Jack Volponi said that there were ground squirrel diggings in the yard, and he and some friends would spend time

trying to catch a squirrel. I said, "Did you ever catch one?" "Of course," replied Jack. I asked, "What did you do with the squirrels?" Jack: "I don't remember!" Carl Holdener brought cardboard milk bottle tops, and a number of boys played a game with them against a wall. Jack smiled, "Life was pretty simple in those days."

I am not sure that school uniforms were required from the very beginning—the old photo of the first graduating class does not show the students in uniforms. The uniforms have varied throughout the years. Carla Viale Lewis brought some old class photos. In her day the girls wore gathered navy blue skirts and white blouses. Peggy recalled that originally the blouses had a type of sailor collar. One day two girls in uniform stopped at a local gas station on the way to school and went in the restroom to have a smoke. The station owner called the school principal. She confronted the girls as soon as they arrived at school. This makes me think of those days when Livermore was still a small town. The girls at St. Michael's are not allowed to use makeup. Carla was especially upset by this rule. She consoled herself by using Vaseline on her eyelashes.

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The Kelly home was only a half block from the school. Occasionally, the sisters would remember something that they needed in the evening. One of them would call the Kellys and ask them to go to Viale's Market down the block, buy the item and bring it to them. Peggy said she or her brother would usually run the errand.

In 2004 the original school building was torn down and replaced by a modern one on the east side of the same block. The school address now is 345 Church Street. I interviewed Sister Emmanuel Cardinale recently; she worked at St. Michael's School for 30 years as principal and teacher. In 1956 the first lay teacher came to the school. Now, with the retirement of Sister Emmanuel in 2011, lay teachers have totally replaced the sisters. Sister Emmanuel still sees the importance of parochial education: "Young people today live in a world of many distractions. An educational program that fosters the development of strong Christian values benefits the individual student as well as the global society of the future." The school centennial celebration will be on April 27, and you are all invited.

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