

# 1869 and 1870: St. Joseph College does well in Brownsville

This week's column continues the story of the early days of St. Joseph College, which, beginning in 1868, was operated by the Christian Brothers Catholic order. An event in April 1869 called an "examination" was held, reviewing the work of the college. The event took place "in the large hall of the second floor of the college, where a stage had been set up, tastefully decorated with the American flag. A numerous and intelligent audience, including neighbors from Matamoros, were interested and attentive spectators." The lengthy program, with performances by the students, ended with a closing address by Brother Noah, who headed the school.

The next day, a statement was issued, signed by 12 prominent citizens, stating they had examined the work of St. Joseph College, found it was of the very highest order, and recommended this institution to the public.

In June 1869, The Daily Ranchero newspaper reported that the college was offering many advantages for the moral, physical and intellectual development of students. The student body was made up of both boarding students and day scholars.

The newspaper had this to say about the college buildings: "The college buildings leave nothing to be desired. The main building of brick, 100 feet long, 45 feet wide, and three stories high, provides classrooms and a dormitory, which, for convenience and comfort, are unsurpassed.

"The adjoining building, erected in the last few months, contains a dining room and music room, and is particularly suited for the purpose for which it was built.

"When entirely finished, the principal building will cover a front of over 250 feet, and in point of taste and desirability, will equal to anything of a similar class in any part of the country.

"The grounds attached to the college, and used for purposes of recreation, cover an entire block, situated in the most agreeable and salubrious part of the city."

During July 1869, a report in The Daily Ranchero stated that the brothers had intended to continue the scholastic year until the end of September, but the heat of the past few weeks had "considerably cooled their zeal" and it had been decided to terminate the semester early.

On Feb. 2, 1870, the community celebrated the first anniversary of St. Joseph College, an event which also noted the progress of the community itself. It was noted that 30 years earlier the community of Brownsville did not exist, but that by 1870 it had gradually progressed to a point where "public spirit has erected churches and convents, a courthouse and market and elegant private dwellings."

It was further noted that boys needed to be educated, and that the ladies of the community had toiled to organize a bazaar to fund the school, which was now free of debt.

The local newspaper, The Daily Ranchero, concluded the report of the first anniversary with these words: "Let this institution be used for true purposes and just principles, and its future will be a blessed volume in the annals of our town. It will tell of generations of noble men who have been educated within its walls, and it will have performed a noble mission, being the nursery of a mental life that cannot die."

The Christian Brothers, a large Catholic order, at that time had six brothers at St. Joseph, and were accomplishing in Brownsville what they had accomplished in other areas. It was noted that in one year they gained the confidence of the public, and that some 80 scholars were now in attendance.

This story will be continued next week.

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