

School marks 150 years of Catholic education

Mass, celebration draw hundreds to historic church on Mission Hill

By CATHY KELLY

ckelly@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — Hundreds of worshippers crowded into Holy Cross Church on Sunday to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Holy Cross School. Revelers heard and told stories of a school founded in a much different time and one that has served as an educational foundation and community for generations of local families.

"It's important from a history point of view and a faith point of view," said the Rev. Joe Occhiuto, pastor of Holy Cross Church. "The parish is over 200 years old, and 150 years ago the school was established with great sacrifice. And the sacrifice continues and the school continues to turn out fine examples of citizenship and faith."

Bishop Richard Garcia gave an account of the school's long history during Mass, recounting its establishment by the Daughters of Charity in the 1862-63 school year.

Seven members of the order journeyed to California from Maryland in 1852, at the request of then-Bishop of Monterey Joseph Alemany, according to the order's website.

During a harrowing trip at a time when railroads did not yet cross the country, the nuns came by steamer from New York, crossing the Isthmus of Panama atop mules. Sisters Ignatia Green and Honorine Goodman died of cholera and were buried in Panama City.

The others established an orphanage as well as a boarding and parish day school in what was then a rural area without paved roads or other amenities. The school was first housed in an adobe and then a wooden building. The

current school was built in 1958.

Several people told stories about their experience at the school during a reception after Mass, as they milled about displays of black-and-white photographs and newspaper articles and thumbed through yearbooks dating back to the 1940s.

Margie Sisk of Santa Cruz, whose three daughters attended Holy Cross School, said her parents met at Holy Cross High School and that she and her seven siblings all went to Holy Cross School. (The high school closed in 1970, though the building still stands. The school now serves about 200 children in preschool through eighth grade.)

Sisk said the school was largely comprised of the children of Italian immigrants in those days. When her blond mother and her sisters started there, her father had graduated and was attending St. Mary's College. But when his brother told him about the new girls, he drove his car onto the school field to attract their attention, Sisk said.

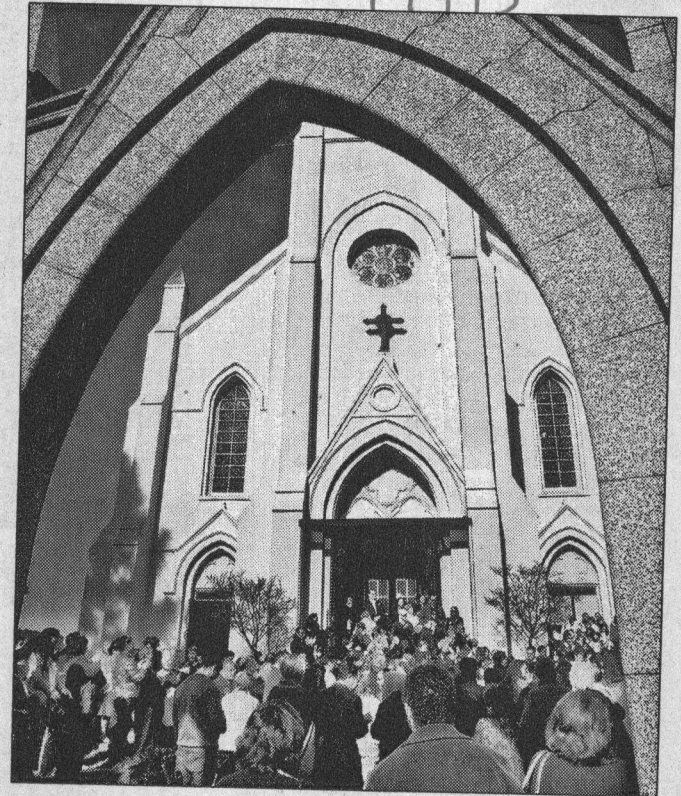
Her father, Ted Whiting Jr., founded Whiting Foods at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk.

Sisk said the school has a lot of meaning to her personally as well. It is small enough to allow students to practice leadership and be involved in just about everything, Sisk said.

"I have so much gratitude for my experience here," she said. "For me, it's about tradition and the spirituality. I like saluting the flag and praying and calling Christmas Christmas."

"And we got a great parochial education. It saved some of my brothers."

Sunday's anniversary celebration



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Hundreds of families, parishioners, alumni and supporters fill the courtyard in front of Holy Cross Church as a plaque commemorating the 150th anniversary of Holy Cross School is dedicated on Sunday.

ation also included a ceremony after Mass in which a time capsule was buried. With several students helping, and others singing in the church choir afterward, the capsule was placed underneath a new kiosk.

The kiosk was built by the school as a symbol of appreciation for the parish's support, Principal Michael Hopper said.

Each class at the school chose items to go inside the capsule, as did Garcia, Occhiuto, the diocese's Superintendent of Schools Kathleen Radecke, and others.

Gabriel Padilla, whose sons Felipe and Eddy attend Holy Cross School, said the anniversary celebration was exciting.

"My kids have been looking forward to it," he said. "I think it's good to know

where we came from; it helps to know where to go in the future."

Two sisters with the Daughters of Charity attended the celebration — Sister Margaret Ann Gainey of Los Altos Hills and Estela Morales of San Francisco.

Their early sisters in the Daughters of Charity acquired a new convent in 1943, in a large home at Mission and Sylvan streets along Mission Plaza, according to historical accounts on display. That same year, the Adrian Dominican Sisters took over. One historical account said the Daughters of Charity had decided to focus on the order's work in hospitals.

Follow Sentinel reporter Cathy Kelly on Twitter at [Twitter.com/cathykelly9](https://twitter.com/cathykelly9)