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Chaminade Has Gone From Here Today; Gone Tomorrow?

Editor's Note: This article appears in conjunction with efforts by SCOPE and the Santa Cruz Historical Society to foster interest in local homes and buildings of historical or unusual value.

By Margaret Koch
Sentinel Staff Writer

Whether it was for housewives or high school boys, Lee J. Esty took pride in the buildings he designed.

Esty always declared that when it came to designing homes, he aimed to please the womenfolk. "After all, they are the ones who spend the most time there," he was fond of saying.

But the late Santa Cruz architect was perhaps proudest of a school building he designed, according to his wife who today is Mrs. Mae Esty Morgan of 769 North Branciforte avenue.

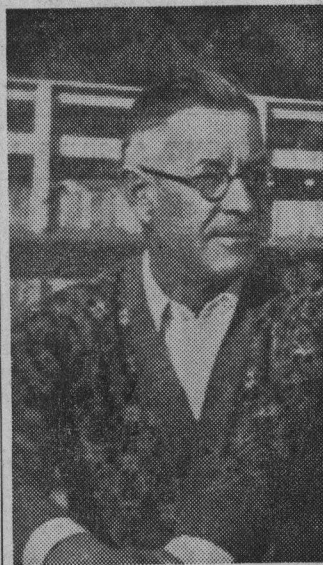
The school stands high on a hill near the east edge of De Laveaga Park, unnoticed by most casual passersby below. Of Spanish style architecture, it was built in 1930 and came into existence as Chaminade, a Catholic high school for boys.

Esty kept offices in the Alta building on Pacific avenue and it was there he was approached by priests of the Society of Mary. The great U.S. depression was in full swing. No one was building much of anything in 1930.

But the Marianist priests wanted a building they could point to with pride. It was to be named for the founder of their order, the Very Rev. William Joseph Chaminade, a French priest.

By March of that year, Esty had completed plans for the main school building. It was to cost \$10,000 and was to be completed before September 1. It included a chapel, dormitory, classrooms, study and recreation hall.

Other buildings, roads, a gymnasium, a well and large reservoir were to bring the total investment to about \$100,000. The Marianists had their site;



Lee J. Esty
Architect

they had bought the former ranch home of Judge Curtis Lindley.

Esty's plans were approved, construction began, and a dedicatory program and barbecue were held September 14. Chaminade opened that month with 50 students.

This was an important milestone in Catholic education in Santa Cruz County, due mainly to the efforts of the Rev. P. J. McGrath. Father McGrath was pastor of Holy Cross Church and it was he who first brought the Brothers of Mary to teach in Santa Cruz. They arrived in 1928 to teach at Holy Cross School.

For almost 10 years Chaminade was operated as a Catholic boys' school. It offered grades seven and eight plus high school. Then, in 1940, due to

Britain once considered the 34-square-mile island of Ascension, in the South Atlantic, as a man-of-war with a naval officer as governor. Today several nations have communications facilities on the isle. It plays a vital role in the United States space program as a missile tracking station on the Eastern Test Range.

changing patterns in education and world unrest, Chaminade closed its doors as a boys' school.

In June, 1941, the educational plant was leased to Mrs. Mary Blake Burke who operated it as a school for exceptional children.

Eight years later the Brothers of Mary were back. They opened Chaminade as a Marianist seminary. A dedication ceremony in October, 1949, drew more than 300 visitors and guests. And in August, 1953, eight novices took their vows there — the first profession of Marianist vows in California.

There today, young men are being trained for the teaching priesthood.

The handsome Spanish-style building, so right in its setting, stands back on the hill just off Paul Sweet road. It overlooks Doyle Gulch and Monterey Bay. Appropriately enough, it also looks out over the trail blazed by Gaspar de Portola, Spanish explorer and first European to set foot in Santa Cruz County.

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