

BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. MARY'S SCHOOL

By Dr. William Henry Scott

St. Mary's School, Sagada, was founded by American missionary Rev. Fr. John Staunton in 1904, which was then referred to as a mission school. By 1907, there were 17 pupils. The first school building of the Mission of St. Mary the Virgin in Sagada was completed in 1912. It was a two-and-a-half story building 36 x 90 ft with siding and roof of pine shingles.

Along side with the school was the girls dormitory where the girls spent four hours a day learning crocheting, lace-making and weaving, then called Girls School. The boys continued to live in the old Staunton house, but attended academic classes together with the girls. They were joined by day pupils coming from town.

When father Staunton began teaching typing, shorthand and mind training to Tomas Galgala in 1921, he started calling it the high school building. Two students actually completed the first year there - Galgala and Adela Maliaman. But after male students were moved in from the Girl's School, it came to be known as the Boys School. This is the building which was set afire by tracer bullets in an American strafing run during the Second World War.

It was under Fr. Robin that the four full years of high school were opened. The school's tradition of academic excellence was established. In 1929, seventh grade graduates were screened for entrance to high school. The principal said he didn't want to launch any "half-baked" graduates.

On 8 April 1930, the school was incorporated for the first time and, after a frustrating year of paper work, registered with the colonial government as Sagada School, Inc..

The high school became a subject of heated debate during the Church Convocation of 1930 in Manila: what was its purpose? Mission education had come a long way since Father Staunton's original dream: "to maintain at Sagada a school for boys and another for girls to produce a permanent impress on native life through the products which we turn back in the pueblos."

Four days later, Convocation recommended Eduardo Longid and Mark Suluen for admission as postulants for Holy Orders. Twenty five years later, priest in charge Lee L Rose, believed the purpose of the school was "to train workers among the Igorots themselves to

minister to their own people".

The first high school graduates received their diplomas from the hands of Father Rose in the Lyceum on 1 July 1932 - Eduardo Longid, Alfredo Pacyaya, Didaco Olat, and Benito Longdayan. Following graduation, Mr. Longid went to assist Fathers Barter and Wilner in Baguio, Mr. Pacyaya went to teach in Bagnen, Mr. Olat went to act as catechist for Father Gowen and Mr. Benito Longdayan remained in Sagada for theological study (but did not continue).

Eight more classes were graduated before the outbreak of Second World War in 1941, at which time Mr. Shaffer was principal. When Japanese invasion forces reached Bontoc in February 1942, the school's largest graduating class - 15 - received temporary diplomas, and classes were suspended for the duration of the War. By this time, there were a total of 88 graduates, 65 of which became priests, teachers or nurses or the wives of priests or teachers.

Strange to say, there was not St. Mary's School, during all this time. Like everything else in Father Staunton's mission, all the schools were referred to as SMV or simply the mission schools. Diplomas were issued in the name of Sagada High School. But the printed programs read Mission of St. Mary the Virgin High School. So, too high school athletes wore SHS on their uniforms but elementary pupils wore SMV.

When Mr. Hall A Siddal succeeded Mr. Diman as principal in 1936, the schools were registered as Sagada Mission High School Incorporated and Sagada Mission School, Incorporated. Not until after the Philippines became an independent republic was there a St. Mary's School.

When American missionaries returned to the Philippines after the Japanese surrender in 1945, Bishop Robert F. Wilner reopened 5th, 6th and 7th grade classes in the Lyceum, where he was succeeded as principal by Mr. Nicomedes Alipit the following year. Mr. Diman returned in 1948. He was Father Diman, having been ordained to the priesthood during the war, and he served both as principal and as priest in charge of the Mission St. Mary the Virgin. There, the classes of 1950 became the first graduates to receive diplomas bearing the name of St. Mary's School.

The next school opening, classes began in a newly constructed school building - a two story U shaped structure with one wing of three floors. Containing nine classrooms, a library office, laboratory,

and home economics department with kitchen and dining room. This was St. Mary's School until it was razed by arsonists on the night of 8 May 1975.

The school opening then continued under directives of the Bureau of Private Schools. This meant it no longer set its own curriculum or the salaries and academic qualifications of its faculty. Bureau inspectors arrived unannounced to check science and athletic equipment, measure classrooms, observe teachers' classroom performance and examine their lessons plans. And since the Department of Education had not reinstated the 7th grade after independence, this grade was quietly ignored until it was finally dropped in 1973.

Mr. J. Randall Norton, an experienced educator who had been headmaster of St. John's University Middle School in Shanghai for many years became principal in 1952. He filled the school and several municipal buildings with furniture and equipment made in industrial arts classes, leveled and fenced schools, school playgrounds, and cooperated with the public schools through the Sagada Teachers Association.

Mr. Norton's most famous project was the construction of a dam in Latang and a small rowboat which, when the first rains took the dam out, was left high dry. This inspired a popular Igorot song written in the Boys Dormitory - "Nan Ark Norton". But his most lasting contribution to the school and the community was the founding of the Sagada Postboy, a mimeographed student organ which was published weekly without interruption until the declaration of Martial Law in 1972.

When Mr. Norton retired in 1954, he turned the school over to Mr. Alfredo Pacyaya as acting principal until he himself left for graduate studies abroad in February 1955, whereupon Father Diman resumed the principalship.

In 1957, Father Diman was relieved by Mr. William R Hughes who had just come from the Church's Cuttington College in Liberia. Mr. Hughes was a highly professional educator with teaching experience at every level of school from kindergarten to university. He was actively concerned about faculty development, and it was the school's loss that he only stayed for two years.

Mr. William Henry Scott was appointed principal in 1959, after five years on the faculty and in charge of the Boys Dormitory. (As it happened, Mr. Scott's first teaching experience had been under Mr.

Norton in Shanghai where he was discharged from the US Navy in 1946.) He introduced journalism, surveying and library science into the industrial arts curriculum, designed the school coat-of-arms with an Igorot motto "Adi tako bokodan di gawis", and phased out grades 5 and 6 because of the quality of elementary graduates from the Sagada Central School. In 1951, he resigned to become staff missionary, devoting half of his time to research, writing and lecturing his fellow missionaries.

The Rev. Archie Stapleton arrived in 1959, became school chaplain after his ordination to the priesthood and succeeded Mr. Scott as principal in 1961, an office he held longer than any of his predecessors. He brought with him a reputation as youth worker and guidance counselor and during his administration, St. Mary's achieved its highest academic standard.

In 1962, the school placed ninth in national examinations administered to 1,500 public and private schools, an achievement the principal attributed to four factors: the excellence of the faculty, the entrance requirement of the 7th grade, the presence of large open stack-library, and the quality of 6th grade graduates entering from the Sagada public schools.

Stapleton Hall had actually been intended as part of a junior college and the first year of that institution was opened in 1965. Mr. Scott returned to join the faculty in 1967 with a doctorate in Philippine History. The first four graduates were awarded certificates as Associates in Arts in 1969. That year, Mrs. Dorothy Kiley became principal of St. Mary's School. The Junior College proved unable to compete with colleges in Baguio and Manila, and was closed in 1971 for lack of students.

During the summer vacation of 1975, the school burned to the ground with the complete loss of all property except for office records and part of the library's Filipiniana collection. Classes were resumed in the Girls Dormitory and Stapleton Hall. In these emergency conditions, St. Mary's largest class graduated 117 members in 1977. Grants from the Diocese of Northern Philippines and the United Thank Offering of the Episcopal Church Women finally permitted the construction of four hollow block classrooms.

By 1983, the Don Enrique Yuchengco Memorial Hall was completed and dedicated as the new St. Mary's School. The school was donated by Manila businessman Alfonso Yuchengco in memory of his father. It is a splendid three-story building constructed entirely on non-inflammable materials around three sides of an open court.

In addition to ten classrooms, a library, laboratory, office, toilets, and space for home economics and carpentry, the new plant provides luxuries the school never enjoyed before - an auditorium, teachers lounge, typing room, museum and canteen.

Since the Episcopal Church became administratively and financially autonomous in 1990, the school faced extremely difficult financial constraints. As part of its financial upkeep from student's tuition fees, the school gets subsidy from the government plus a sizeable amount from the ICCO, a Netherlands-based support agency; and pledges from the alumni. The opening of Bomabanga National High School in 1995, located in the same vicinity made the financial status worsen. From an average of at least 300 students a year, enrollment decreased to some 200 students.

By March 2000, St. Mary's school graduated some 35 students. If motivated by a sense of affection and concern for their alma mater and stewardship of the talents developed while they were students, they could also have an impact on the life of St. Mary's School.

- End -