



St. Vincent's School – 167 Years of Care for Boys

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Though barely visible to the thousands of motorists that pass by the school on a daily basis, the St. Vincent School for Boys, north of San Rafael, has been serving children in need since 1855. Originally an orphanage, the school was built on land that had been donated to the Catholic Church by Timothy Murphy. Timothy, or Don Timoteo, was an Irish immigrant and early Marin pioneer who had been granted over 21,000 acres of land in central Marin. In January of 1853, Murphy lay dying of a burst appendix when he bequeathed 317 acres to Bishop Alemany of the Catholic Church if the church would build a school within two years. Just before the two years had elapsed, the St. Vincent Seminary opened and by the end of 1855 there were 28 orphans living at the site and another forty attending school from farms nearby. The seminary was under the direction of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul who had made the perilous journey west to California from Emmitsburg, Maryland the year before.

By the late 1870s the orphanage cared for over 300 boys, ages 6-14, and had changed its name to St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum for Boys. Management passed to the Christian Brothers and within a few years the campus had been enlarged and was caring for over 500 orphans. In the late 1880s, under the direction of the Rev. W.D. McKinnon, Dominican Sisters were brought in to help with teaching and the curriculum expanded to include farming practices and many trade skills. As the boys were only able to stay at St. Vincent's until they were fourteen, McKinnon wanted them to have the skills necessary to support themselves when they were placed on a farm or in a home. 4000 fruit trees were planted on the property, cattle, pigs and chickens were raised and through their education and labor the boys supplied much of their own food as well as the clothes and shoes they wore.

The photograph above was taken around 1910 and newspaper articles from the era reveal an institution that was fully integrated into the Marin community. Annual commencement and confirmation services were attended by thousands who were entertained by the boys

in musical, sports and acting programs. The school was supported by numerous events each year through benefits at opera and play performances, vaudeville shows and dinner-dances. The popular St. Vincent Boys' Marching Band performed for many years throughout the county at fairs, carnivals, baseball games and city celebrations and, as one columnist wrote, "was the cynosure of all eyes." (I had to look that up too!)

Today, according to their [website](#), the St. Vincent School for Boys is managed by Catholic Charities and is, "dedicated exclusively to therapeutic and compassionate care of traumatized boys. St. Vincent's is a 52-bed licensed Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program annually serving up to 60 boys ages 7-18... in a home-like, safe and peaceful setting."

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