ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

OF

NOTRE DAME de l’HERMITAGE,
St. Chamond, Loire, France
1824-2016

Br. Barry Lamb F.M.S.
Dear Reader

I’m imagining that you are reading this “Illustrated history” while actually being IN the Hermitage built by Father Champagnat, Brothers and tradesmen in 1824-1825. And that is why I have put together this narrative. I hope visitors may be interested in reading some of the numerous stories of the grand building and its many and varied residents over the last 190 years.

The multi-hued and multi-textured tapestry of stories has been stitched together from innumerable related histories, biographies, memoirs, letters, photos, drawings, paintings, Circulars, Bulletins, journal articles, account books, interviews, archives, booklets, lecture notes and more. I set myself the task of plucking the relevant bits from here, there and everywhere, and bringing them together between two covers.

I’d like you, dear reader, with my help, to see what’s held in different archives and to open books and journal articles for you on the relevant pages and also to select pertinent sites from the internet that you otherwise may be unaware of or not have the time to seek out.

The “Table of Contents” will allow dipping in to topics and periods of interest, while opening at random will display headings and illustrations that may spark interest in reading the accompanying text.

This history is not intended as a scholarly work, but rather a “popular” history for the “general reader.”

To those who may enjoy the many illustrations I’d like to say how very much I delighted in searching for them. And to those who may find some of the illustrations too fanciful or juvenile – I’d ask your indulgence.

In the limited time most pilgrims have to stay at the Hermitage I anticipate many may like to merely skim through the pages and headings. Even a superficial and hurried glance must surely, however, give some insight into the richness of lives zealously spent in work and prayer, administration and study. A vivid sense, too, might be gained of the enormous variety of the personalities and gifts of those who have lived and died within these very walls over almost two centuries.

And a peep at the final chapter – about YOU, dear reader, and the multitude of international Marists, Brothers and Lay from all over the world – will bring into focus how, from this special place, a Marial spirit of bringing Jesus to others is still alive and thriving nearly 200 years later.

What a delight to be in this building, Notre Dame de l’Hermitage, and catch the spirit of Marcellin Champagnat, the early Brothers, the later Brothers, the present Community of Welcome and enthusiastic fellow pilgrims. Thank you, Marcellin, for giving birth, through God’s grace, to this Marist family, still vitally alive today.

My special thanks go to those who have written in the distant past, particularly Brother Jean-Baptiste who put together the first thorough life of Father Champagnat in 1856. Also, indebtedness to Brother Avit for his extraordinary Annales de l’Institute covering the story from the earliest times till the 1880s. But particularly I am indebted to the many Brothers who entered the doings of the Hermitage in the Annals of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage, some entering something for each day of the year! Helpful, too, was Brother Sylvestre’s Memoire. And in recent times I’m grateful to Brother Stephen Farrell for his work of research, Achievement from the Depths. Paul Sester’s momentous two volume Letters of Marcellin Champagnat was of particular assistance. The enormously helpful recent (2017) landmark History of the Institute of Brothers Andre Lanfrey and Michael Green came just at the right time. And thanks, too, to those who have written articles in journals that I have been able to access. And then there is the work of scholars who have brought to light previously unknown facts and details and shown aspects of the history in a fresh way. Amongst these are Brothers Pierre Zind, Alexandre Balko, Owen Kavanagh, Frederick McMahon, Gabriel Michel, Alaine Delorme, Andre Lanfrey, Paul Sester, Michael Green, Ted Clisby and Eric Perrin.

Numerous others have been of assistance with making materials available or giving suggestions. Brother John McMahon was particularly helpful with his collection of materials on Champagnat and the origins of the Institute. Brother Colin Chalmers the Archivist at the General House has been especially helpful, particularly with facsimiles of Champagnat’s letters, but also with generously helping with many other questions and requests made of him. Also
Brothers Des Hornsby, Neville Solomon, Anthony Hunt, Tony Paterson, Brian Etherington, Desmond Murphy, Adrian Story, Lucius Bernheim, Jordan Redden, Hubert Williams, Antonio Sanchez Lozano, Alain Delorme, Jean Ronzoni, John Rocch, Alois Engel, Dennis Cooper, Joannes Fontanay, Heribert Pujolas Maset, as well as Gail Coates and Caroline Martin. Giorgio Diamanti from the Hermitage Community could not have been more helpful with supplying many hundreds of photos, including the taking of others I personally asked for, many of which appear in this history. And Br. Peter Howes and Grace Johnstone with patiently printing drafts. Brother Andre Lanfrey has been a most delightfully reliable, thorough and prompt help in any matter asked of him.

Carles Domenech, the archivist of the combined records of the Brothers in France, was of great assistance in making available the Annals of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage and spaces to read and photocopy at leisure, as well as directing me to other relevant sources. Happy memories of those days of research!

A work of major importance in the History of the English language is what has been for 150 years known as Roget’s Thesaurus. It was first printed in 1852 by Peter Mark Roget, and when I read his Preface to the First Edition I realised we were soul companions. His sentiments about the deficiencies, yet benefits, of his efforts in putting together his Thesaurus were so similar to those I feel in presenting the present Illustrated History to the reader, that I would like to quote his thoughts—writing in the charming phrasing of his time—and present them as my own:

“Notwithstanding all the pains I have bestowed on its execution, I am fully aware of its numerous deficiencies and imperfections, and of its falling far short of the degree of excellence that might be attained. But, in a Work of this nature, where perfection is placed at so great a distance, I have thought it best to limit my ambition to that moderate share of merit which it may claim in its present form; trusting to the indulgence of those for whom benefit is intended, and to the candour of critics, who, while they find it easy to detect faults, can at the same time duly appreciate difficulties.”

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Dedication to Brother Owen Kavanagh

Amongst many other gifts and accomplishments, Brother Owen Kavanagh from Australia was an indefatigable researcher and writer of articles on Father Champagnat and the origins of the Marist Brothers.

The present researcher of this illustrated history first met Brother Owen when attending the Marist Brothers School of Villa Maria at Hunters Hill, Sydney, while a student. He was my French and Business Principles teacher. When I went to the Juniorate in January 1952, he presented me with a Mass Book promising, in a written dedication: “The Brothers and Boys of Villa Maria pray that Francis may be blessed at the Juniorate at Lavalla.”

After periods of directing schools and a time as Provincial Bursar, Brother Owen spent many years in formation. In 1977 he was a founding member of the Resource Community at Notre Dame de l’Hermitage, the very house and community that is the subject of this history. He never lost his intense interest in details of the history of the Brothers, though his failing eyesight in his later years made this increasingly difficult.

His habit of calling his colleague Brothers “Frere” earned him the nickname, “Frere”, or “Frere Owen”. He was gentle in nature and frugal and simple in his lifestyle. He was never idle and enjoyed gardening as a pastime and hobby away from his desk. He was much admired, respected and loved.

His collection of Marist materials, once they were gathered and systematised after his death, ran to 10 boxes, and now are housed safely in the Archives of the Province of Australia in Sydney. They will always remain an invaluable resource for anyone researching Father Champagnat and aspects of the birth and growth of the Institute of the Marist Brothers.

The present researcher spent many pleasant hours going through these boxes of folders in the course of gathering materials for this history. Brother Owen died at Campbelltown near Sydney in 2006 at the age of 93.

The reader might like to imagine Brother Owen here and there in the Hermitage … in the chapel, in Father Champagnat’s room, in the former dining room, giving talks in the community room; and all the time, those who knew him would agree, being a latter-day Champagnat in so many ways.
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A note about sources

Two sources of archival material deserve special mention:

The “Annals” (Annales in French) of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage

In a circular to the Brothers in the 1830s, Father Champagnat urged (required) each community to keep a record of its life and activities in a sort of diary. And it was a delight to find that the community of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage kept this requirement extraordinarily faithfully for virtually its entire existence, right up to the time of writing [2017]. First of all these records were kept at the Hermitage itself, but when the “Mother House” moved to St. Genis-Laval, it is possible that the earlier records were kept there. And then with the moving of the Mother House back to the Hermitage during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, then back to St. Genis-Laval, then to Grugialasco in Italy after 1903, then back again, and finally to Rome – and surviving two world wars, it is a miracle that any records survived. But survive, they did!

In 2016 it was decided to bring all historical records of the communities of the whole of France into a purpose-equipped archive centre in the grounds of St. Genis-Laval. In the photo below, showing the grand chapel of St. Genis-Laval in the background, the building in the bottom right houses the Archives of the Marist Brothers in France. And that’s where the present researcher was presented, by the first Archivist at the new centre, Carles Domenech, with the nine boxes seen in the accompanying photo.

Most are handwritten in “exercise books” or “Diary” books, and in some extraordinary cases the annalist entered the activities of the Hermitage for every day of the year! Some of the handwriting is beautiful, neat and clear; at other times almost indecipherable. But it is there! A most extraordinary resource. (In modern times, of course, the annals are typed, or printed from the computer.)

Brother Owen Kavanagh’s gathered materials

Mention of Australian Brother Owen has been made in the Dedication earlier. During the time he spent studying and teaching about the origins of the Brothers at the Hermitage he collected and copied numerous items on all manner of topics. Nothing was considered too insignificant to him if it related to the life of Father Champagnat or the story of the early Brothers, their activities, personalities and customs.

After Brother Owen’s death in 2006 his materials were sorted, classified and arranged in ten boxes. They are now safely housed in the Archives of the Province of Australia in Mascot in Sydney.

Both these sources were absolutely invaluable in the preparation of this illustrated history.

Offer regarding translation

If any language group would like to translate this Illustrated History into another language, the present compiler would be delighted to offer the entire text and collection of photos and images for this purpose, completely free of charge. The original intention in putting together this history was that, if it were ever to be available for sale, the cost would be merely to “cover costs”. It would be hoped that anyone accepting this invitation to translate and copy this history would follow the same approach to the sale of copies. Contact with me (while I live) and access to the computer files can be gained by contacting the Administration Centre of the Australian Province.

Brother Barry Lamb, Melbourne, Australia, August, 2018.
Seeds of an idea
Brother John-Baptiste explains how Father Champagnat got the idea of building the Hermitage:

On his journeys to Saint-Chamond, Father Champagnat had often let his eyes rest on the valley where the Hermitage now stands. More than once, he had thought of it as a novitiate site, with its deep solitude, its perfect tranquillity and its great suitability for studies. “If God blesses us”, he reflected, “we could very well set up house there.” Yet, before finally opting for that position, he combed the surrounding district with two of the principal Brothers, to make sure that it was the best available. When he had had a good look at it all, it seemed the most suitable location offering for a religious house.

The valley of the Hermitage, divided and watered by the clear waters of the Gier, bounded on the east and west by an amphitheatre of mountains, covered almost to their peaks with verdure or with oak and fruit trees, is certainly a charming spot, especially in summer. But its restricted area, making it difficult to cater for a large Community there; the breezes and mists associated with the waters and decidedly ungenial to weak constitutions or to health enfeebled by the exertions of teaching; these would be factors that would later force the chief House of the Institute to be moved elsewhere.

Brother Avit tells of the choice of the site in these words: “However, the house at Lavalla was too small and too inconveniently placed for communication. In the frequent journeys he was obliged to make to Saint-Chamond for almost 8 years, he had been admiring an isolated valley, a sort of funnel with no outlet to the north surrounded by mountains or high hills on the banks of the river Gier. This locality called Gaux was very restricted in area, faced the southwest, was less sloping than the surrounding land, contained plenty of rocks, scrub and wood. ‘But it is secluded and perfectly suitable for my plans’, Fr Champagnat said to himself.”

The caption below the accompanying black and white sketch says “Les Gauds [the original name of the area] before the building of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage.” Brother Sylvester adds some further explanations regarding the choice of site for the Hermitage. In his Memoire he writes that Father Champagnat had been encouraged by Mons. De Pins, the local Archbishop, to expand from the cramped Lavalla into larger premises. He continues: “He did not want the building to be in the parish of Lavalla as it was too far away from appropriate communications. He was also conscious of the fact that he could be a nuisance to the curate who had replaced him.”
Origin of the name “Hermitage”

It is in a footnote to the 1989 edition of the 1856 *Life of Father Champagnat* that we learn a little of the origin of the name “Hermitage”:

However, further research has revealed much more about the intended meaning behind the term “Hermitage”. Brother Andre Lanfrey, the celebrated historian of the Institute, has looked into the background reading and experience of both Father Courville and Brother Jean-Marie Granjon. He refers particularly to Father Courville’s experience of the life of the Trappist Monks of Aiguebelle. He writes:

“The idea of ‘hermitage’ may perhaps have come from La Trappe, the monastery in Normandy reformed by Abbot de Rancé in the Seventeenth Century, and which still in the Nineteenth Century was regarded as the perfect expression of the monastic life strongly inspired by the Desert Fathers. For de Rancé in fact, La Trappe was the best possible adaptation of the primitive ideal of the solitary life. This hypothesis is all the more plausible in that in 1822 Brother Jean-Marie Granjon went to the Trappist monastery at Aiguebelle, as did Father Courville in 1826, where he formulated a theory of the Society of Mary very much inspired by the Trappist model.”

Another source of the origin of the desirability of finding a place like a remote desert is found in the writings of a saintly seventeenth century Spanish religious, Mary of Agreda, in her work *The Mystical City of Mary*. This was a book that Father Champagnat had in his library, and it is thought that all three, Fathers Courville, Colin and Champagnat, may have been influenced by her ideas. And one of them was the importance of getting away to a solitary place. And since “desert” was not an appropriate term for a green and wooded spot beside the Gier, the related term “Hermitage” gave somewhat the same sense.

And interestingly it was not always “Our Lady of the Hermitage”, as the following passage from Brother Lanfrey explains:

“Marcellin Champagnat and Jean-Claude Courville had placed their project under the title of “The Hermitage of Our Lady”, given, no doubt officially, at the time of the laying of the foundation stone in May 1824 and featuring in any case from July in the Prospectus. It was only after the dismissal of Father Courville in 1826 that this title was replaced during the period 1827 to 1829 by that of “Our Lady of the Hermitage”, which gradually replaced the traditional name of the area: “Les Gauds”. Even if they left no explanation for the choice of this somewhat strange name, there is little doubt that it symbolised the spiritual association they had formed in order to bring the Society of Mary into existence in that place. As the word ‘society’ was not a suitable designation for a house, they would have substituted ‘hermitage’, resulting finally in the formula “Hermitage of Mary” or “Hermitage of Our Lady”.

Research into the documents held in the Department of Loire undertaken by Eric Perrin and set out in *Marist Notebooks No.32* shows that a number of variations were found in numerous legal documents drawn up by Louis Finaz. They include simply “the Hermitage”, the Hermitage of Notre Dame”, “the Hermitage of the little brothers of Mary”, “the Hermitage of Mary”, “the hermitage of Gaux”.

However, whenever Father Champagnat wrote the name on his letters it was always “N D de l’Hermitage” or “Notre Dame de l’Hermitage as shown here:

[For the reader who in interested in following up further this choice of name “Hermitage”, the scholarly work of Brother Lanfrey in Volume 1 of his *History of the Institute* is recommended.]
Pivotal importance of Monsignor de Pins

Special mention must be made of the pivotal role of Monsignor de Pins in the establishment of the Hermitage. He was the Apostolic Administrator of Lyons. As you can see from the dates below the portrait taken from Br. John-Baptiste’s *Life of Father Champagnat* he held this position for almost the entire time Father Champagnat lived at the Hermitage. In a meeting with Father Champagnat in March 1824, he not only gave his blessing to the venture of founding a congregation of Brothers, but gave financial assistance as well. Emphasising Mons de Pins’ important role in the beginning of the Hermitage, Brother Stephen Farrell states:

“Marcellin’s meeting with de Pins in March 1824 would be the foundation upon which the fantastic expansion of the young curate’s congregation of Brothers would soon occur.”

Assistance of Father Jean Claude Courveille

Father Jean Claude Courveille plays an important role in the foundation of the overall Marist congregation, the foundation of the Hermitage and, as we will see in the following chapter, the cause of much distress. It was he who had the original idea of founding a religious congregation consecrated to Mary and it was he who had gathered the original group of seminarians, including Champagnat, to dedicate themselves to this cause in the seminal *Fouviere Pledge*. When Champagnat wanted to purchase the house at Lavalla he contacted Courveille who gave him half the purchase price. After priestly appointments over seven and a half years in three different places since ordination Courveille accepted an invitation in May 1824, to join Champagnat at Lavalla to assist with the nurturing of the young aspirants and to share the tasks of the sacraments. This assistance was invaluable during the time of the building of the Hermitage.

Legend of the re-appearing statue

The reader should be warned that what follows is presented here because it is mentioned in the *Annals* of Brother Avit. It sounds like a fanciful story, even suggesting Father Champagnat involved in some kind of theft! The reader can judge:

“The Diocesan Tribunal of Lyon conducted a survey regarding the apostolic process for the beatification of the Venerable Father Champagnat. This occasioned an octogenarian of Izieux to revive the memory. One day while walking along the path where the Hermitage gives access to the road to LaValla, the old man met the good Brother Tiberius, the gardener of the house, who himself was more than 70 years old; and as is quite natural between people of such an age, the conversation turned on the things of the past. "I know some wonderful things about the beginnings of your monastery, the octogenarian said to the Brother. When I was young, everyone in the area spoke about it. " And among other things, he began to tell the following: "Monsieur l’Abbé Champagnat was looking for a suitable place for the main house of his Institute and examined carefully the place where the Hermitage now stands. Suddenly he saw, at a fairly high place in a crevice of the rock, a small statue of Mary. As this place was difficult to access, he found a blacksmith who made shovels, who had his small workshop on the other side of the Gier and asked him to help him reach the statue. The good craftsman willingly complied with the request and the statue was taken from its niche and Father Champagnat took it to Lavalla. But a few days later, returning back the same way, what a surprise to see the statue back at the place where he had first found it. After asking around about, Father Champagnat concluded that Mary was telling him that it was there that he was to build the projected home.”

Brother Avit goes on to say that a well-respected nun in the district, who had been young at the time, knew the story well and was surprised that the Brothers themselves did not know the story. The story is repeated in the Centenary *Monographie* (1925) under the heading “Un Fait Extraordinaire”. And add to that that, Brother Lanfrey mentions the story in his 2017 *History of the Institute*! And there is, too, Papal approval as can be seen in this footnote in the 1989 Centenary *Life of Joseph Benedict Marcellin Champagnat*: 
Purchase of land

Brother Stephen Farrell tells the story of the purchase of the original stretch of land for the site of the future Hermitage thus:

At first, certainly, Courveille was greatly to assist Champagnat. Marcellin had remembered how Courveille had helped him in the purchase of the first house at Lavalla. No sooner had Courveille arrived at Lavalla than Marcellin told him of his plans for buying land. Immediately, on 13th May, they both went to the office of Mr. Finaz at St. Chamond and there bought from Mr. Montellier an area of 206 ares of “woods, scrub, rocks, field” in the territory Chez Coulaud, Commune of St. Martin-en-Coailloux. The purchase price was 5,000 francs, payable in one year, interest at 5%. Marcellin and Courveille saw no difficulty with the payment since the archdiocese had given 8,000 francs for the land purchase and building project. However, as we shall see later, at the end of the “one year” period, only a portion of the purchase price could be paid for want of funds. Vicar-General Chollet, later this month of May, blessed the first stones of the future building.

The accompanying diagram and legend is taken from amongst the earliest documents in the Annals of the Hermitage and gives details of the various areas around the Hermitage site. Note that there is mention (No.18) of the house that Father Champagnat used during the construction of the Hermitage.

The diagram on the following page is likewise taken from the early pages of the Annals of the Hermitage. You’ll notice that it is titled “First constructions of the Hermitage in 1824” (centre, extreme right). And the building mentioned above as housing Father Champagnat during the construction of the Hermitage (No.18 above) is No.2 at the bottom of the full-page diagrams, but here is described as “The building where Father Champagnat lodged in 1824 with a dozen Brothers or Novices.”
CHAPTER 2  The Building of Notre Dame de L’Hermitage

The accompanying sketch claims to be the oldest sketch representing the period May-June 1924 showing the little “chapel in the woods” on the present Hermitage side of the river and the buildings Father Champagnat and the Brothers stayed in during the building of the Hermitage on the other side.

Arrangements during the building

Much can be learned from Brother John-Baptiste’s Life of Father Champagnat about the arrangements and daily schedule for the Brothers, Father Champagnat and the professional builders:

It is unfortunate that it is only in a footnote that the names of the professional builders are mentioned! Brother John-Baptiste’s footnote reads:

“The management of the work was in the hands of Mr. Roussier, head mason, Mr. Matricon Benoit, carpenter, and Mr Robert, plasterer.”

Maybe there could be a special plaque in the Hermitage acknowledging these workers!

Further research has turned up more names of tradesmen and they are recorded here with gratitude for their work which has endured for almost (2016) 200 years:

Labourers: Jean Poncet, Pierre Sayve, Simon Cote, Pierre Dorat (and many Brothers)
Plasterers: Antoine Robert and L’Auvergne. Painter: Mr. Ravery
Stonemasons: Etienne Roussier, Chavanne and Brother Pierre Souchon
Carpenters: Benoit Matronic, Philippe Arnaud, and Mr. Ruard for special work. Tiles, Glass, Plaster Suppliers: Tiblier, Bonnard, Gerin
Ironwork: Marcou Timber: Gerin, Matronic (Le Bessat) and several others.

There is an explanation, too, as to what work the Brothers did and what was done by Father Champagnat:

“Masons alone now did this work [of masonry], while the Brothers quarried and carried the stones, dug sand, mixed mortar and labored for the stone-layers.”

In another place we read that Father Champagnat was allowed to help with the actual masonry.

What was being undertaken

The Hermitage was to be a five-storey building to house one hundred and fifty people. And it was to include a chapel. Initially the land and the construction were to cost sixty thousand francs.

Another account by Brother Avit gives some further details: “After that purchase, they set to work. A shed was rented from M. Patouillard. The Brothers engaged in building slept there in bunks, one above the other. During the whole of summer, Fr Champagnat slept on a balcony and in the open air. As at Lavalla, all ate rye bread, cheese and vegetables given by the good people. They drank water from the Gier. Fr Champagnat himself woke the Brothers at 4.00am. They said prayers, made their meditation and heard Mass, then they worked the whole day. First of all, they built an oratory in brick covering 144 square metres at the spot where the arbour on the way to the cemetery now ends. A chest of drawers served as an altar. This place was well wooded. A bell hanging from an old oak tree beside the oratory announced the times for the daily exercises. That same bell still announces them in 1890 in the belfry of the house.”

Brother Sylvestre adds a little to the scene of the building operations: “... during all this time [of the building of the Hermitage] the rule was observed with the same care as in La Valla. At four o’clock Fr. Champagnat gave the signal for rising, silence was observed during work and every hour, to remind everyone of the presence of God, -- a favourite practice of Fr. Champagnat – they prayed with great recollection the Gloria Patri, Ave Maria and the invocation: ‘Jesus, Mary and Joseph have pity on us’”

Strenuous criticism and ridicule

From the very start there was sharp criticism and ridicule.
Passages from the *Life* make this very clear:

Human wisdom would see a strange imprudence in Marcellin’s undertaking to construct such a costly building, while he was entirely without funds. The land alone cost him more than twelve thousand francs. Naturally, then, when it became public knowledge that the community was moving and that a vast building was to be put up, there was a new storm of reproach, criticism, insult and abuse. This one perhaps surpassed even the outburst at the most turbulent time of the Institute. It was in no way abated by the Archbishop’s approval of the work, or by his high opinion of the Founder and good-will towards him. Nothing, in fact, could calm the agitated minds or silence the malicious tongues. His plan was regarded as sheer madness, and even his friends heaped blame on him and left no stone unturned to try to dissuade him. Alas! the world has no insight into the works of God, because they transcend its intelligence, clouded as it is by passion. The world treats these works as folly and their promoters, as madmen. “The world,” says St. Paul, “treats us as fools.” Such was the treatment meted out to Christ in the court of Herod; his servants should expect no better.

Supporters along with opposition

In spite of the trenchant opposition to Father Champagnat’s building plans, there were generous benefactors to support him. Particularly helpful, as noted earlier, was Archbishop Gaston de Pins of the Diocese of Lyons. His is one of the few portraits selected for inclusion in the 1856 *Life of Father Champagnat*.

The bookseller mentioned in the following extract from the *Life* is Mr. Rusand and the lender with whom he went surety was Mr. Marechal.
Goyo’s painting of the blessing of the foundation stones of the Hermitage by Vicar-General Cholleton recalls Father Champagnat’s way of entertaining visitors courteously with a meal to which they would be accustomed (because no such meal could be provided at the Hermitage). He would ask a generous neighbor, Mr. Bassons, if he might provide dinner for the important guests. And this is what they did on this occasion.

**Champagnat’s response to criticism of imprudence**

When taken to task with the apparent rashness of his enormous building project, Champagnat told of his trust in God. Brother Jean-Baptiste tells it this way:

> When he made a start at building the Hermitage, several people put it to him that it was imprudent to undertake such a construction without financial resources. “I agree,” the Father replied, “that it would be great imprudence and extreme rashness indeed, if we relied only on ourselves; but we rely on Providence which has never let us down and has done everything for us; it cannot abandon us since we are doing its work.” “But are you certain”, he was asked, “that God wills this work?” “How could anyone doubt it”, he queried, “after the blessing showered on us and the protection given us? If God did not wish this community, he would not send us so many subjects; he would not bless our schools; and he would not give us the means to survive, as he has done till now. Since he favours this Congregation, it is proof that he wills it; and, if he wills it, he will send us the resources to construct a suitable house.”

**Study as well as work!**

While one would think that the hard manual work would be sufficient for those labouring, we read that there was some study as well:

> Although overburdened with work, Father Champagnat always found time, both at night and on Sundays, to give the Brothers instruction and spiritual formation. During that summer, he thoroughly instructed them on the religious vocation, on the end of the Institute and on zeal for the christian education of children.

Brother Sylvestre goes a little further in explaining the religious instruction Father Champagnat gave during the construction of the Hermitage: “He knew how to find time during the evenings and especially on Sundays, explaining to them what they must do to prepare for their future mission. His advice, exhortations and instructions revolved around the practical steps to acquire the religious virtues, to correct their faults, to receive the sacraments worthily to attend the Holy Mass, to foster the charity which should exist among them, to practise fraternal correction which he called the daughter of charity, but mainly he directed his efforts towards instilling in them a solid devotion to the Blessed Virgin, his model, whose virtues they should constantly strive to imitate, among others her deep humility. He also attempted to cultivate in them a great zeal for the salvation of the children and he returned to this with great frequency.”

**Father Champagnat relieved of other duties**

About the feast of All Saints in 1824, Father Champagnat was released from his duties of curate at La Valla. Up till then, on Saturday evenings during the construction, he went up to La Valla to hear confessions and to say Mass on Sunday. Now that he was free from all commitment outside his project, he gave himself exclusively to the service and welfare of the Community.

**During the building, the first Prospectus, July,1824**

An absolutely basic document in the development and history of the Little Brothers of Mary was prepared and printed even while the construction of the Hermitage took up time virtually every day. The evolution of this 4-page document, refined through several drafts, is a story in itself, and can be studied in the formal histories of the Institute. Suffice it to say here that this document is the first to try to crystalise the aims and purpose of the new Institute. And so, a facsimile
PROSPECTUS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE LITTLE BROTHERS OF MARY

The education of the richer class is generally entrusted to the De La Salle Brothers. Everyone knows the good they do in the towns where they are established. But, in accordance with the rules of their Institute, they cannot go less than three together into the places that require them, and since the cost of establishing them is considerable, it follows that most of the parishes, especially those in country areas, cannot enjoy the benefits of this education accounted insufficient resources.

To overcome this problem there has been formed a congregation of teachers under the name of Little Brothers of Mary; at the moment a house for this institute is being built at the Hermitage of Our Lady near St. Chamond, Department of Loire.

Young men who desire to embrace this state of life will be received into the Congregation from the age of 15 to 30 years, provided that they can read, write fairly well and bear a certificate of good life and morals.

They will serve a novitate of two years. On coming to the House, they ought to have an outfit as follows: 1. the religious Habit, 2. a dozen shirts, 3. six trousers, 4. four pairs of shoes, 5. a dozen handkerchiefs, 6. 2 pairs of shoes. They will pay 400 francs for the two years.

Those who have an inheritance will bring it with them to the House which will guarantee a repayment in this regard if the Novice leaves the Institute; a fee will then be taken out to pay for the novitate.

The Little Brothers of Mary go into the Parishes that ask for them to the number of three, and even of two.

They ask: 1. 1,200 francs for three Brothers, and 800 for two. This sum will be paid each half year and in advance. (The parishes will be able to obtain from well-to-do parents some donations to cover part of the expenses involved in setting up the establishment).

2. A suitable house provided with the necessary furniture for Little Brothers-Teachers.

3. A garden and some other place for the recreation of the children.

They teach Catechism, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, the principles of French Grammar, Church Music and Sacred History.

They follow in their teaching the method of the De La Salle Brothers.

The Little Brothers of Mary count as much on the prayers of the faithful as on their generosity; they recommend themselves to the goodwill of the Parish Priests of the Diocese of Lyons and the other Dioceses, as well as to charitable persons.

Persons who desire fuller information on the Institute should apply to:

Father Courtois, P.S.G.L., and to Father Champagnat, P.D.R.T., residing for the present at Lavalle, district of St. Chamond (Loire).

Letters should be stamped before being sent.

Seen and permitted to be printed.

Lyons, 29th July 1824.

CHOLLETON. V.G.
Accidents, but no loss of life

It is worth pointing out that no Brother or other workman employed by Marcellin, was ever in an accident. This should be seen as a particular protection of God for the Community, especially as Father Champagnat spent his whole life building and always involved the Brothers in this kind of work. Quite often, serious accidents threatened the Community, but divine Providence, through Mary's intercession, always halted or averted the harmful effects. Let us take a few examples.

A workman, building at a great height on the side of the house next to the river, fell, and was headed for giant stones below, where he would have been dashed to pieces. On his way down, with the scaffolding materials, he was lucky enough to brush against a big tree and seize one of its branches, on which he hung till help came. He wasn't harmed, not even scratched. The protection of God is even more evident from the fact that the wood of the tree was brittle and the branch so weak that it couldn't normally support such a weight.

A young Brother, attending the masons on the third storey of the building, was walking on a rotten plank which gave way under him, causing him to fall. As he dropped, he called on Our Lady's help and remained hanging by one hand, his entire body below the scaffolding. His situation was so dangerous, that the first workman to come to his rescue didn't dare approach him or touch him. A second, more fearless and generous, rushed forward, grasped the Brother's hand and pulled him back. The only harm he suffered was an extreme fright.

Ten or so of the strongest Brothers were carrying up stones to the second storey. One of them, having reached the top of the ladder with an enormous chunk on his shoulders began to feel faint under the weight of the heavy burden. His strength failed and the stone fell capsizing the Brother following, who was knocked to the bottom of the ladder. A slight movement of the head on his part, even though he was unaware of any problem, meant that he was simply grazed instead of having his head shattered. Father Champagnat, a witness of the incident from up above the ladder, considered his death as a foregone conclusion and gave him absolution. Yet he was not harmed, only so frightened that he ran around in the field as though out of his mind. All the Brothers present shared his fright, as did Father Champagnat, who immediately had prayers of thanks said for the protection God had just shown the Brother. Next day, he again offered Mass for the same intention.
What the neighbours saw

These several extracts tell of what neighbours and visitors saw during the construction of the Hermitage:

“My father often used to go to the Hermitage to visit my brothers, who had become Marists, and he would stay a few days, working with the tradesmen. On returning home he would say, ‘The Hermitage is a paradise. There they pray and work, in silence and in mutual affection. And Fr. Champagnat is always the first in everything, the most edifying of all. He draws everyone to him by the love and veneration he inspires.’

“Work continues on the college at Couland Wood [the original name of the area]. They have finished the large building near the river, and they are making a chapel above the rock; they will enter it through their top-storey rooms. ... There is a lot of work going on there. It is said that the archbishop of Lyons is helping them, and several others.” (1824)

“Yesterday I attended Vespers at the Couland Wood so as to see what progress had been made, rather than from devotion. It is truly a scene of the Druids of ancient times. Some are in the Wood, the others in the field. ... The people of Layat [nearby] come out of their houses and sit down on the edge of their land with their books [to follow the prayers]. They are all at Vespers. Really now this ought to be put in the magazines. They have an organ like the singers of Paris.”

Building method with stone

The following notes were found amongst Brother Owen Kavanagh’s research papers:

“The method of building the walls, approximately 30 inches thick, consisted of laying down two outside rows of larger stones and filling the central space with smaller ones, the whole being set and levelled with mortar. Masons laid the stones, using trowel, hammer and right-angle brace, assuring the level and solidity; assistants used an iron ramrod to set smaller stones in the irregular cavity, filling all the interstices with mortar and levelling for the next layer. Iron cramps were used in places to strengthen corners and other points of stress.

“Dressed stone was bought to form the door and window openings. All were young men, 15-35 years of age; all worked in silence and with zest.

“Stone, sand and water were available on the building site. The nature of the stone on the site favoured this manner of building; most of it being hard schist.

“Besides the stone-masons, there was a master-carpenter and a master-plasterer; a few labourers were also employed in addition to the Brothers themselves.

“Some 20-25 Brothers worked with the builders and were available for such other work as preparing meals, washing clothes, starting the gardens, unloading and checking materials, erecting and moving scaffolding and ladders, carting and carrying generally – timbers for beams, joists and planks.”

First Brother to die

There is brief mention in the records that the first Brother to die in the Congregation of Marist Brothers was Brother Jean-Pierre Martinol and this was in March 1825. He died at Boulieu, and there not being a cemetery at the Hermitage at that stage, was buried elsewhere. Two other Brothers, Brother Pierre Robert died in the hospital in Lyons and Brother Placide (Farat) at Lavalla, also before 1827, before the cemetery at the Hermitage came into use.
Moving in, May 1825

“During the month of May 1825,” Brother Stephen Farrell writes, “the community at Lavalla took up their residence at the Hermitage. The community numbered 20 Brothers and 10 Postulants.”

The accompanying list to the left, headed 1824, is taken from Appendix J of Br. Stephen Farrell’s work, *Achievement from the Depths*, 1984. It is under the heading “Postulants at Lavalla”. An attached note tells that the list “…was made by Br. Owen Kavanagh after perusing old entry registers at Lavalla and from Br. Gabriel Michel’s article in the Bulletin on the Eight Postulants. It may be incomplete.”

The present compiler of this *Illustrated History* found the list to the right among Brother Owen’s papers, showing some differences. Whichever were postulants and which Brothers, the names make more vivid that real, live, young men were these early pioneers of the Little Brothers of Mary.

### First sketch of the Hermitage

While this sketch is said to be the first sketch, made by Father Bourdin, SM, who lived for a time at the Hermitage, an explanation below it, along with the other more professional sketch below, tells of possible inaccuracies in the representation. It is suggested that Father Bourdin may have done the sketch from memory at a later time, rather than standing in front of the recently completed Hermitage building.

While the rough sketch appears to show only 3 storeys, the reader should note that the “ground floor” is obscured by the rough stone wall in front of it. As can be seen by the other accompanying sketch, that wall was that of a building in front of the main building. Later diagrams show that this building housed, amongst other things, a hay loft.

The other sketch (of unknown origin) clearly shows the five storeys.
Interior work completed during the Winter of 1825

This is how Brother Avit tells of the completion of the building: “When the building was roofed, several Brothers spent the winter at Lavalla. The others along with the Father and the workmen busied themselves with making floors, partitions, doors and the casement windows. The building, begun in May, was completed one year later. No one noted down anywhere what it cost, nor the gifts received, except for the 8000 francs given by Bishop de Pins. Br Jean Baptiste believed that it cost more than 60,000 francs (including the purchase of the land. This place has been called since then Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage (Our Lady of the Hermitage) to show that the Blessed Virgin became its Queen.”

Temporary chapel replaced

The earliest chapel within the house only lasted in use as a chapel for two months. Following that a more suitable chapel was built and furnished. This is how Brother Avit tells it: “The first chapel in this new home was situated in the east wing on the second floor in the section where later they made ribbons and then wove cloth and made sheets. It was 8 metres long and 5 wide. It had three windows facing the inner courtyard. It served as a chapel for only three months, that is to say, from the time of the arrival of the community at the Hermitage until the blessing on 13 August of the more suitable chapel, which was to replace it provisionally.”

On 13th August 1825, this chapel in the newly completed building was solemnly blessed by Fr. Dervieux, Parish Priest of St. Chamond, assisted by Priests Farge of Izieux and Bedoin of Lavalla. Father Dervieux waxed eloquent about the solemnity of the occasion:

“The Stations of the Cross, a gift of Monsignor de Pins, were erected in the chapel on 7th September 1827, by Father Champagnat. The present compiler of this history believes that the images of the Stations reproduced here are photos of these very Stations that Monsignor de Pins presented to Father Champagnat back in 1825. Stations of that shape appear in the earliest sketch and numerous photos of the chapel up till the 1940s. They were replaced initially in 1951 and stored in the attic, and were photographed there almost 70 years later.

Goyo’s thoughts on the building’s completion.
CHAPTER 3  1825 and 1826: very difficult years for Father Champagnat and those at the Hermitage

An introduction of foreboding

“There now commenced a most complex and unhappy period for those living at the Hermitage,” is the way Brother Stephen Farrell begins his account of sad doings during 1825 and 1826. One related to Father Jean Claude Courveille, one the departure of some key Brothers, the departure of his priest assistants and concerns regarding finances. Add to that a serious bout of ill health for Father Champagnat that worried the Brothers and his dearest friends. After reading this chapter you may have an understanding why Brother Stephen Farrell entitled his monumental life of Father Champagnat, “Achievement from the Depths”.

Brother Sylvestre put it this way: “After so many setbacks, sufferings and the work connected to l’Hermitage, Fr. Champagnat thought that at last he could enjoy some rest and take some time with his Brothers. But in this he was mistaken, as God had different ways of giving him his hundredfold as promised in the Gospel to privileged souls …”

The reader may wish to read a much fuller account of these matters in Br. Jean-Baptiste’s Life of J B M Champagnat and/or Achievement from the Depths by Brother Stephen Farrell. Also, most importantly is Volume 1 of the History of the Institute by Brother Andre Lanfrey. But what follows is a very truncated version in order to give the reader some insight into what must have been tearing away at the emotions of everyone living at the Hermitage during 1825 and 1826.

First community at the Hermitage

The first occupiers of the Hermitage were Father Champagnat, Father Courveille, 20 Brothers and 10 postulants, all of whom came down from Lavalla in May 1825.

Anxiety, upset and distress surrounding Father Corveille

The tragedy of this story is heightened by the fact that it was Father Jean Claude Courveille who had the original idea of founding a religious society dedicated to Mary. It was he who agreed to come to live at the Hermitage with Father Champagnat to assist him, and who had been so helpful in the purchase of the property on which the Hermitage was built. Part of the story is that Father Courveille believed that he was the superior of the Brothers and resented the love and affection that the Brothers had for Father Champagnat, and the way they saw Champagnat as their superior.

Wanting to be approved by the Brothers as their superior, Father Courveille organized a vote amongst them as to whom they would choose as superior between himself, Father Terraillon and Champagnat. The Brothers overwhelmingly voted for Father Champagnat, much to the upset and discomfort of Courveille.

A note about the saintly Father Dervieux

… from lecture notes of Brother Gabriel Michel:

“Father Dervieux was zealous, loved the poor, helped good works; he writes to his niece: “he has nothing to leave her.” Totally dedicated to charity. 1831 Prefect visits Father Dervieux: “not a royalist”; 1832 Sub-Prefect, a severe leftist, writes to the Prefect: ‘Father dervieux a man of the Gospel, of faith; different from Father Terraillon of St. Mary’s.’”
During 1825 Father Champagnat set himself the task to visit the Brothers in the various towns and hamlets where they had set up schools. As a result, Father Courveille was left in charge at the Hermitage. Reports are that his management of the Brothers was harsh and demanding. Goyo’s painting captures the gloomy atmosphere: Father Champagnat returned from these travels and visits distressed to learn of the unhappiness of the Brothers and the conduct of Father Courveille. And almost immediately he became very ill, so much so that it was believed that he should make a will … which he did. So ill was he that he accepted the invitation of Father Dervieux at St. Chamond to stay with him in order to better recuperate. This prolonged the opportunity of Father Courveille to mishandle the management and leadership of the Brothers back at the Hermitage.

Brother Sylvestre tells a little more about the time Fr. Champagnat was away visiting communities: “During the absence of Fr. Champagnat, which was quite long, M. Courveille did not give up and attempted by indirect methods to seize once again the title of Superior that he had lost. He wrote during this time bitter letters to some of the Brothers in various houses because they had not supported him, and he showed his annoyance to everyone in the Mother House. When Fr. Champagnat returned he took the opportunity to censure him for the way he directed the Brothers spiritually and temporarily. He removed him from the administration of the house and took charge himself of the moneybox whose contents often indicated that he was more qualified in emptying it than filling it. And who was blamed for this? Always Fr. Champagnat.”

Father Champagnat’s grave illness, 1825

Mention has been made earlier of Father Champagnat becoming gravely ill in early 1825. This led Father Courveille to write to all the Brothers telling them of the worrying state of Father Champagnat’s health and pleading for their prayers for his recovery. The original French of this letter is reproduced here as it is a flash of kindness and concern on Courveille’s part that should not go unnoticed:

Omnia ad M D G et M G D J H
De l’hermitage de notre Dame, le 3 janvier 1826.

Nos tres chers enfants en Jesus et Mere

C’est dans la douleur et l’amertume de notre coeur que nous vous escrivons pour vous ordonner de prier avec instance le Pere des misericordes et notre auguste Mere, la divine Marie, pour notre tres cher et bien aime fils Monsieur Champagnat, votre tres cher et venerable Pere Directeur, que est dangereusement malade.

Je vous en conjure, mes tres cher enfants, joingnez-vous a nous pour prier instamment le divin Jesus et la divine Marie notre Mere, de vous conserver un fils qui nous est sic her et a vous un pere qui ne doit pas moins vous etre cher. Priez Messieurs les cures d’avoir la bonte de prier pour lui et de le recommander aux prieres des fideles.

Recevez l’assurance de la tendresse paternelle avec laquelle j’ai l’honneur d’etre votre
Pere tout devoue et tout a vous

In Christo Jesus et Maria,f.d. et S.p.g.m

When Father Champagnat returned, somewhat recovered, to the Hermitage, his enthusiastic welcome by the Brothers upset Courveille so much that he made complaints about him to the Archbishop who felt obliged to go through the formality of having the complaints examined. This he arranged by sending Father Cattet to make an “apostolic visitation”. His report to the Archbishop was very critical. Naturally this had deepened the gulf between Father Champagnat and Father Courveille.

(The sketch is from an 1892 booklet)
The absolute final straw was, as told by Brother Stephen Farrell: “It was about this time that Courveille committed a homosexual act with one of the young postulants. … Naturally it was thought best for Courveille to leave the Hermitage, so he went to the Cistercian abbey of Aiguebelle, 120 km further south, [pictured] for a few weeks. For Marcellin, who had for so many years regarded Courveille as the logical superior of the general society of Marists, that is, of priests, brothers and sisters, the whole world must have seemed upside-down. He himself had been the recipient of so many favours from Courveille, and he had obviously welcomed Courveille’s living at the Hermitage in its early days.”

[If the reader would like to gain further insights into Courveille, Br. Stephen Farrell finishes this section of his treatment with a thoughtful summary on page115 and following.]

It is sad, in a way, that the only likeness of Jean Claude Courveille that we have is the accompanying photo of him in his latter days as a monk at the abbey. But we do, happily, have a signature, as reproduced earlier.

The heart-breaking loss of two valued and special Brothers

A particular sadness for Champagnat was the departure of Brother Jean-Marie in 1826. He was the very first boy/young man Marcellin had invited to begin his congregation of Brothers back in 1816. When asked he replied: “I will consider myself extremely fortunate to consecrate my strength, my health and even my life to the Christian instruction of children, if you believe me capable.” But with the passing of time he was visited by other thoughts and had left the Brothers for a couple of months in 1822 to try the life of the monks at La Trappe. But when he opted to return to the Hermitage Father Champagnat welcomed him back and offered him the directorship of a school which he continued in for only one year. Trying to accommodate him, Champagnat offered him a choice of appointments, which he refused. Brother Stephen Farrell helps us understand his strange attitudes in this explanation: “… his excessive spirituality was becoming his undoing. We noted earlier how he would want to deprive himself of much of his clothing and he would also deprive himself of so much food that he was literally ruining his health. Pursued by the idea of chimerical perfection he used to wear hair shirts, whip himself and would pray for hours out in the cold wintry conditions with arms outstretched. He now refused to accept any responsible position. Marcellin, who had a great affection to him, tried to get him to become more normal and, hence, more acceptable to his confreres. His efforts were to no avail and Jean-Marie, in this same month of October, had to be dismissed from the institute.”

The other sad loss at this time was Brother Jean Francois (Stephen Roumesy), “… another of Marcellin’s early recruits and a person who had been dear to his heart.” He had been a particularly successful teacher and well known for his charity to the poor. However, he was becoming very independent and was a nuisance to his confreres. Father Champagnat recalled him from his position in the school back to the Hermitage and put him in charge of buying and selling, a task he disliked. So, when an opportunity of leadership was offered by a priest planning to set up an orphanage came along, he took it. When he spoke to Champagnat about it, Champagnat urged him not to go. He did leave, however, without even a goodbye. Add to this … three other Brothers, including Brother Dominique, whom Marcellin had spent much energy in trying to help, went to join Father Courveille who, after spending a little time at the Trappist monastery, had left with the idea of founding a congregation of his own.

These matters would have been uppermost in the hearts of Champagnat and all the Brothers at the Hermitage over this period during 1825 and 1826.
The departure of Champagnat’s last remaining priest assistant

When things were going well, Courveille had been a helpful assistant to Champagnat at the Hermitage. With his departure that left only Father Etienne Terraillon who had joined him at the instigation of Monsignor Pins in late 1825. He, now, also deserts Champagnat. Br. Stephen Farrell reports this in these words: “Terraillon and Champagnat had never really got along together, nor did the Brothers (according to Br. Avit) get on well with Terraillon. Hence it is not surprising that Terraillon, who had also found himself over-loaded with duties after Courveille had left, took the first chance that came his way to withdraw from the Hermitage. Thus, at the end of October [1826] he used the pretext of having to preach a series of jubilee sermons to abandon the Hermitage, never to return.”

Financial worries

“A further worry on his [Father Champagnat’s] mind [in 1826] was the bad financial state of his congregation. As the year 1825 had progressed, the institute’s financial position went from bad to worse.”

The Archbishop’s Council in August 1826, required Father Champagnat to present a detailed account of the finances of the Hermitage. He did this with the following details, taken from Stephen Farrell’s account:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>12,000 (francs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mr. Maréchal de Lyonss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Parish Priest of Ampuis</td>
<td>12,000 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. P.P. of St. Peter’s St. Chamond</td>
<td>1,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Courbon du Lathal (of Le Bchat)</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. P.P. of Izieux</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The servant of Mr. Royer</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Audras de Lavalla</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Mr. Lagier—father &amp; son St. Ch.</td>
<td>1,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Fr. Journoux of St. Chamond</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Merchant of Rive-de-Gier</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Maréchal</td>
<td>623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Tinsmith</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Mr. Courbon Lyonnais</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Wood merchant</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Mr. Rusand (the Lyons bookseller)</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Guyot</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Despinace (tailor)</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Marie</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant of Guyot</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>38,850</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Here is the account of what is due to me or what can come in**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What I have at Lavalla</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 1500 francs which are due to us for the salary of one of our Brothers, due this summer</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The P.P. of Bouliu</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mayor of Bourg-Argetual</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The P.P. of Chavarnay</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mr. Colomb</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Mayor of St. Symphorien</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Charieu, due from Mayor</td>
<td>726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Father of Poinard, novice</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. P.P. of St. Symphorien d’Ozon</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Noviciate fees, Br. Pierre</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Martinol of Burdignes</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Furet of St. Pol Chalencon</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Br. Hilarion, balance of fee for which I have Promissory Note</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Br. Ambrose, balance of fees</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Br. Dominique, balance of fees</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. A total of 600 francs which I hold in Promissory Notes</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** | **12,271**
A cry from the heart springing from these trials

We can learn something of the anguish of Father Champagnat where he spills out his cares before one of the Vicars General, Father Barou, in May of 1827:

Letter to Father Barou, V.G.,

I will tell you very frankly that I am always pleased to see you.

I am writing to you with a great deal of confidence to inform you of my problems and explain my situation very simply. I am alone here, as you know, which leads me to think a great deal about persons who might be attracted to this work and who would help it along. The public, which nearly always talks without knowing the facts, blames me, first of all, for the departure of Fr. Courveille and Fr. Terraillon. All these events upset me, it is true, but they do not surprise me, because I expected hard trials and I expect even more of them. May the holy name of God be blessed. I still firmly believe that God wants this work; but alas, perhaps he wants other men to found it. The terribly sad affair of the one who appeared to be its leader is one of the most terrible efforts to which hell ever gave birth, to overthrow a work which it saw would do it harm.

In a few words, here is my situation: you will do whatever you think is good for the greater glory of God. I imagine that by the end of August we will be more than eighty, seeing the large number of persons who are asking to enter and the large number we already have. By All Saints we will have sixteen establishments which it will be imperative to visit at least every two or three months, to see if everything is on a firm footing; if any of our brothers has made any dangerous acquaintances, in order to terminate them from the outset; if the Rule is observed; if the children are making progress, especially in piety, and to consult with the parish priests and the mayors for the payment of what they owe us; in a word, to see that our brothers do not lose in any way the spirit of their vocation.

I will not tell you about the accounts that have to be kept, the letters to be written, arrangements to be made, debts to be paid or collected, the temporal and spiritual maintenance of the house. We presently have nearly two thousand children in our schools. That, it seems to me, ought to deserve some consideration.

Everyone agrees that it is of the utmost importance to train young people well. It is therefore very important that those who work at this excellent undertaking be themselves well trained and that they not be left to themselves once they are sent out.

While waiting for a suitable helper, one who loves this work, who asks only for room, board and clothing, I recommend myself to your good prayers, for I see more than ever the truth of the prophecy: Nisi Dominus aedificaverit.... Father Séon would be suitable from many points of view. He would not only not ask for anything, but he has told me that he would even give us his patrimony of 20,000 francs.

(Brother Colin Chalmers, archivist, General House, Rome, 2017, believes this letter of Father Champagnat was never sent!)
Brother Stanislaus, a constant rock of fidelity and encouragement throughout
At the time of Brother Stanislaus’ death in November 1853, Brother Francois paid him the following tribute in a Circular he wrote to all the Brothers telling of Br. Stanislaus’ death and the wonderful companion they had lost. Notice his special signalling out of his “courage, constancy and firmness” at the time of the great troubles of 1825:

While Br. Sylvestre gives the same credit to Br. Stanislaus, he includes others in helping the fledging Institute through these dark times. He writes: “I will end this chapter by saying that Monsignor d’Amasie, Archbishop of Lyon, Fr. Gardette, superior of the Major Seminary and out excellent Brother Stanislaus had all made a major contribution to the settling of the institute while Fr. Bochard, undoubtedly with the best intentions in the world, the parish priest of La Valla and Fr. Courveille, probably deceived by the devil, were on the brink of destroying it. Our gratitude goes out to the first three and God will judge the other three.”

A note about Brother Sylvestre who is often quoted
Brother Sylvestre was born Jean Felix Tamet in 1819 and approached Father Champagnat to become a Brother when he was just a young boy of only 12! Being so young and having a lively manner he was quite mischievous in his early months and years, sometimes behaving childishly. But Father Champagnat saw great goodness in him and guided and encouraged him as he matured.

After profession he was entrusted with a number of small schools and from time to time assisted in the training of the Brothers, both at the Hermitage and at a neighbouring establishment for initial and teacher formation, La Grange Payre, not far from the Hermitage.

He retired from the classroom in 1887, the year that he died. And it was in that year that there was a movement to present the “cause” of Father Champagnat to Rome to begin the process of “canonisation” -- the formal naming of him, by the Church, as a saint.

Part of the process was to gather recollections of people who knew Father Champagnat, and such memoirs were called for. Brother Sylvestre accepted this invitation and filled twelve notebooks with his recollections. They have been put together in a book, and it is from this book that the various quotations are taken.
Introduction of vows

It was at this time that Father Champagnat decided it was prudent to require the Brothers to take vows binding them to their attachment to the Institute. Br. Sylvestre explains it this way:

"The departure of the two Brothers already mentioned, added to the temptations of Brother Louis, made Fr. Champagnat join the Brothers to their holy state by means of their religious vows. This was done to keep them in their vocation in spite of the difficulties, sorrows and hardships that could discourage them and force them to return to the world. Already from the beginning they had consecrated themselves by means of lay promises, but not vows, to teach the catechism to the country children, including other elementary knowledge such as reading, arithmetic etc. They also promised to obey their superiors, to practise chastity and own nothing personally. As can be seen, these were the three basic vows of religion, but realising that a simple promise was not sufficient to guarantee their perseverance in the Institute and wishing to follow the advice of Monsignor [de Pins] who had encouraged him to allow the Brothers to make the simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, he finally decided to take this step which really constitutes the religious state."

While there was personal worry and sadness about the matters mentioned in the previous chapter, there was life and the establishment of routines at the Hermitage as community living became established.

Lighthearted jokes, tricks and amusing incidents

Lest the reader come to think, given the very detailed timetable of duties and the gloom associated with the sorrows of particularly late 1825 and 1826, some insights into the lighter side of life at the Hermitage will be given here.

Goyo has brought to life with his illustrations a couple of incidents involving Brother Sylvester.

Br. Sylvestre’s mischievous haircut!

"Young Br Sylvestre (Tamet) had taken the religious habit on 15 August 1831, at the age of 12½. Very fickle, he was guilty of many thoughtless actions, which brought him many reprimands. He didn’t crack under them. A child, a brother of Br. Gregory, had made his First Communion and took the habit the same day, at the age of 9, that same year and had received the name of Br Basile. One day he asked Br. Sylvester to cut his hair. He agreed to do so. Father was absent and would be away for a fortnight, people said. The new barber had told himself that Basile’s hair would have time to grow before the Father’s return, so he had given the young Brother a pretty tonsure. But the Father returned the following day and presided at the Chapter of Faults. Br Basile, wearing a calotte stepped forward to declare his faults. Having told him to take it off, the Father saw the tonsure and wanted to know who was responsible for it. Br Basile at first mumbled something but finally mentioned Br. Sylvestre’s name. The latter confessed he was guilty of numerous thoughtless actions, including the tonsure prank. When the time for fraternal admonition came, the older Brothers mentioned a litany of his faults. ‘What penance does he deserve?’ ‘To correct himself,’ said a senior Brother, ‘make him take off his soutane and leave it off for some time.’ ‘Go and take off your soutane,’ said the good Father, ‘and come back.’ On his return, Br. Sylvestre felt sheepish. ‘Yours is a
serious case,’ Fr Champagnat said to him; ‘the Archbishop must be the judge of it.’ This announcement made the culprit tremble. For a few days he was very serious, at the end of which time the Vicar General came to the Hermitage and called the Brothers together. By order of Fr. Champagnat, Br Sylvestre had to confess his fault humbly. ‘You did that through flightiness,’ said the Vicar General. He then embraced him and told him to put on his soutane again.”

Two other incidents, commemorated in the accompanying illustrations of Goyo, further tell of Br. Sylvestre’s antics. In one he was to look after a couple of goats, and to control them he tied them together. However, he got entangled in the rope and Sylvestre and the goats all fell in a heap together. In another incident the young Sylvestre thought he would surprise a companion in front of him going up the stairs by jumping on his back and urging him to carry him up the stairs. Only at the top did he realise it was, actually, Father Champagnat!

Recreations of the time

We learn of these pranks and adventures from Brother Sylvester himself who, as mentioned earlier, wrote a substantial memoir of the time of the Brothers up to the death of Father Champagnat in 1840.

He mentions that Father Champagnat “... did not want the Brothers’ recreations to resemble those of the people of the outside world. As a result he did not approve noisy recreations, immoderate laughter, childish behaviour, physical contact or any great restlessness. ... He liked to see the Brothers strolling in threes or fours together but rarely twos ... But what he really liked and was visibly pleased to see were the Brothers playing innocent games, especially the game of boulle.”

And at one point it is recorded that a certain Br. Alexis about whom it was said that if there were no bowls in Paradise, he would not remain there!

At another time he mentions that if confined to indoors “when we could not play boulle or barre etc. we played dominos or similar games. Usually Fr. Champagnat played backgammon with the chaplains.”

And guides to Fr. Champagnat’s room are keen to show a “hidden” chess or checkers board on the inside of the door to the prie-dieu (pictured)!

Story of the statue “La Bonne Mere”

All the Brothers living at the Hermitage, or visiting, would have been very familiar with the statue commonly known to the Brothers as “La Bonne Mere.” It is believed that Father Champagnat originally had it at Lavalla and maybe it is the statue of Mary at the “Chapel in the Woods” during the construction of the Hermitage, 1824-5. From then on it resided in Father Champagnat’s bedroom.

Research has shown that it is based on much earlier statues, particularly one, “Virgin of Valmont” in Rouen, which dates back to the fifteenth century. Over the years various images in the same style were created with the child Jesus in some cases shown as sucking his thumb and in others, his index finger.

Interestingly research shows that the Brothers at the Hermitage, between 1833 and 1840 had moulds made of the image and they produced copies of the statue for use by the Brothers and for sale!

There is a charming anecdote recorded in the Life of Brother Bonaventure that, “...one day, Father Champagnat found him at work helping an artisan who was making plaster statues of the Blessed Virgin, and he said to him: ‘Is it not true, Brother Bonaventure, that as the mould is such so will be the statue? Well remember you are the mould of the Brothers of the whole Congregation, in fact.'”
Structured day
From rising at 4 O’Clock in the morning (5 O’Clock in Winter) till Bedtime at 8.30pm, each hour or quarter of an hour had its allotted task.

Many of the young men accepted to be Postulants had very little education and possibly few “social graces”. What they lacked in these departments they made up for in zeal and affection for Father Champagnat. But there was much to learn.

The reader may be astonished to glance through the detailed schedule of activities gleaned from notebooks of the time. And even if the document from which these times and tasks were taken were a draft document, it is reasonable to assume that the daily programme would have resembled what is given in the box under the heading, “Rules for the Mother House of the Brothers of Mary.” One researcher gives the probable date as between 1827 and 1837. But irrespective of the exact date it is indicative of the sort of routine followed at this time.

Rules for the Mother House of the Brothers of Mary
[These notes are taken from handwritten notebooks and are GREATLY abbreviated to give an idea of the daily programme.]

They will rise at four o’clock from 1 March till the end of September inclusively. At five o’clock from 1 October till the end of February

When the rising signal has been given they will make the sign of the cross and say: “My God, I adore you, I thank you and I give myself entirely to you. Lord Jesus, when shall I be all yours and completely at one with your heart?”

When dressing we shall think about our subject of meditation.

As soon as we are dressed everything is put in order around our bed and we go to the chapel to adore the Blessed Sacrament.

[At twenty past four the bell will ring five times and we shall immediately proceed to the oratory.

The subject for meditation will have been prepared the evening before.]

At ten minutes to five, explanation of how to do the meditation, or repetition of the meditation

At 5 o’clock Mass [There follow detailed guidelines for attending Mass]

At 6 o’clock you will write neatly, each on following the model given to him …

You will learn Bible History, at 7.20 you will recite it.

The meal [at o’clock] Remember the meals of Jesus and Mary. Think of the fact that there are many poor people who have nothing to eat. … You will go to the dining-room in twos and in silence. … Each one will sit at table in a modest attitude, throwing nothing to the ground and allowing himself to be served only what he can eat.

8.15 You will do arithmetic
8.30 reading
9 o’clock Manual work. Each one will be sure to go promptly to his allotted task, accepting it from God after his sin. That work must be accepted for what it is, a painful and humiliating experience showing that we are sinners.

11 The particular examen
At midday, dinner. After grace you go to the chapel in twos, with head uncovered reciting the Miserere Mei.

Recreation. [There are various “rules” concerning recreation, of which the following is part] During recreation we should be cheerful, frank and cordial as far as possible, laying aside all attitudes of mournfulness and melancholy. Do not join company for the sheer pleasure of it with any Brother because you prefer him. Avoid shouting and loud laughter such as smack of worldly persons. Above all, avoid like the plague all kinds of coldness, petty aversions, scandalmongering, mockery that hurts, in a word anything that might wound, be it ever so little, that charity and good manners befitting a religious society.

Manual work at one o’clock
At 3 o’clock French Grammar
At 3.30 you must pay attention to the reading of the Bible in order to learn its history
At 4 o’clock you learn the method of meditation or another prayer you have been assigned, by heart.

4.15 dictation
4.45 singing class
5.45 Chapter of faults. Each one should be careful to accuse himself sincerely and humbly and with a real desire to correct his faults.

6.05 Spiritual reading
625 Rosary and Office Office must be recited unhurriedly, devoutly and distinctly. When saying the rosary you will think about how many great people have said it: kings, great saints like St Francis de Sales.

7.30 Supper
8 o’clock Recreation
8.30 Bedtime
Further reading of these draft rules provides a clear insight into the spirit that was being inducted into the new recruits:

“In order to be well disposed for making our meditation we must always remain in the presence of God, mortify our passions and our senses in order that our spirit may always be ready to unite itself with God…”

…”From Communion to the end [of Mass] thank the Divine Majesty for his incarnation, his life, his death, his passion, for the love he shows for us in the holy sacrifice, begging him to be always favourable to the Society, to your parents, your friends and to the whole Church…”

…”During your prayer [The Office] preserve an attitude of great internal and external modesty without allowing your mind to wander nor your body to adopt any movement or posture lacking in modesty.”

…”You must listen to the grace before meals with great modesty, sighing after that eternal meal at which God himself will be our food. There must be silence throughout the meal, modesty, temperance in eating, tasting God in the savour of the dish and the gall of the Passion in those which may be badly seasoned and not at all to your taste, practise some little mortification, listen attentively to the reading and then thank God with respect and attention, consecrating to God the strength you have regained through the food.”

Newcomers immediately introduced to Humility

It is interesting to note the enormous emphasis Father Champagnat placed on humility on those who asked to join his Brothers. The following is taken from Brother Jean-Baptiste’s Life:

The first lesson he gave them on arrival at the novitiate, was a lesson in humility, encouraging them to work particularly at acquiring that virtue, the foundation of all the others. The first book that he put into their hands was The Golden Book or Treatise on Humility. Each was required to read it and meditate on it carefully in order to imbibe deeply the sentiments and the virtue with which that book aims to imbue the heart and mind of the reader.

Note the description of the virtue of humility as “the foundation of all the others.” In the colloquial Australian English of the early 21st century, that is “a big call”!

Brother Jean-Baptiste adds that Father Champagnat’s “… spiritual reading was drawn from “The Golden Book” (Le Livre d’Or) or from “The Contempt of Oneself”. These two works were favourites of his and he read them and meditated on them throughout his life.”

And regarding the novices and young Brothers he says of Father Champagnat: “Pride was the first vice which he aimed to eradicate from novices and young Brothers; he saw it as the greatest enemy of humility and as the antithesis of the spirit of the Institute.”

He abhorred anything that smacked of hauteur or flaunting knowledge or imagined superiority. He continually humbled those in whom he noticed vanity or self-complacency, and he would sometimes allocate humble tasks to those he thought were giving themselves airs.

This book, Le LIVRE D’OR, at a time when Brothers did not have personal goods, was one that all Brothers were entitled to possess, even being mentioned in the first Rule in 1837, Ch. 10, on Holidays, art.5 (see box). Earlier, in summoning the Brothers to the retreat of 1835, Father Champagnat urges each Brother to bring his copy of Livre d’Or to the retreat. In this way, this book became part of the furniture of the Hermitage in the early decades, and its teaching of self-blightment, part of the fabric of community life at the Hermitage and that of the early society.
Hermitage like a little town
Very soon a wide variety of trades and activities developed at the Hermitage. Brother Stephen Farrell writes: “Actually this Mother-House was soon to become a complex of many activities. In the documents we find mention of farming, silk-weaving, clothmaking, ribbon-making, clothes-tailoring, a shoe-making shop, a forge, a carpenter’s shop and, of course, there was always a building squad at work. What’s more, the establishment also had its own mill and bakery.”

Nail making
Legendry in the history of the early Brothers is the making of nails in order to scrape together some revenue to be able to subsist on. Preserved in the “basement” or “cellar” at Lavalla (2013) are tools used in this making of nails, particularly an anvil. One of Father Champagnat’s great benefactors was a metal manufacturer in St. Chamond, Antoine Etienne Thiolliere, and it is presumed that he assisted in the provision of the metal to make the nails and then gathered them for sale or purchased them himself. In the Summer time young boys would be expected to work on the farms that they lived on rather than going to school. So, there was no school during those months. It was during this time that various industries were undertaken to make some money.

The accompanying article, *The Craft of Nail Making* is by Brother Alexandre Balko, who did an enormous amount of research into the early years of the Brothers.
Financing all the activities

The accounts show numerous businesses, tradesmen and suppliers being regularly paid. Where did this money come from?

When a young man presented himself to join the Brothers it was expected he would pay a certain amount. Lists of the income from that source are extant. Some things that the Brothers made in the different tiny industries were sold and this became another source of income. And generous benefactors also contributed.

Then in 1829 some government money was made available. Br. Sylvestre writes: “Then [1829] seeing the prosperity of the schools in the latter [Department of the Loire] the General Council of the Department assigned to Fr. Champagnat without his asking the annual sum of 1500 francs to support the Novitiate of l’Hermitage.”

In 1831 the Mayor of St. Chamond replied to a request from the new Director of the Academy of Lyons asking details about the Hermitage and its conformity to new laws. One answer is relevant to this matter of income: “By the provision of fees by the novices, by the produce of a vegetable garden which these men cultivate themselves, and all is helped by the frugal life which they lead, hardly ever eating meat, and finally by the work of several Brothers who spend some hours each day in the making of linen and cloth.”

Brother Avit writes about 1826: “To procure resources for the Mother House, Fr Champagnat took in some boarders. He also set up a ribbon workroom in the apartment where the temporary chapel had been located the year before. There he kept busy the Brothers and the postulants who could not do anything else.”

Account books reveal day-to-day expenses

Daily life can be visualized while perusing the account books of the time. In 1827, for example, total expenses were 20,000 francs. Substantial amounts were for building materials; also, the making of the new soutanes that were introduced that year; purchase of coal, pigs, plaster, butter, olive oil, grain soap & candles, pens and paper; and for payment of carpenters, tinsmith, laundresses, hatter and bootmaker. There was the purchase of a hot-water boiler and some “dressed stone”. Various travel expenses are accounted for. There is record of Father Champagnat compensating Brothers arriving at the Hermitage for any expenses incurred in travelling there.
Who was Philippe Arnaud? And his place in the story

Philippe Arnaud is mentioned in the above segment on expenses at the Hermitage in 1828, as being a nephew of Father Champagnat, and coming to the Hermitage as a carpenter. The portraits shown here are of Philippe and his wife Jeanne, in later life. He dwelt at the Hermitage for a period, and his room is shown in an extant diagram, and along with his wife a son and two daughters are shown to be at the Hermitage at the census of 1840. The Patouillard family owned and operated the mill buildings on the opposite side of the Gier. They were the Brothers’ closest neighbours. It was an advantage to Father Champagnat and the Brothers to acquire this property, and Philippe’s romantic association with the daughter may have facilitated this beneficial acquisition. Br. Sylvestre in his Memoire states, that, “He [Philippe] stayed many years at the Hermitage, working under the direction of Fr. Champagnat, who confided in him about many important matters.”

Retreat of 1826

A retreat preached by Father Champagnat in the recently completed Hermitage during 1826 gives a most interesting insight into attitudes of devotion and the spirituality of the time being inculcated into the Brothers. The reader is alerted to the fact that details of the retreat that have come down to us are from the notes and memories of Brother Francois only. The following will give just a glimpse into this particular Retreat and the reaction of one of the principal retreatants. Brother Francois records:

“1. It is impossible that hearts, even the purest and the most religious, do not contract a little of the contagious dust of the world (St. Leo the Great). It is therefore a necessity to renew oneself interiorly at certain periods in order to make up for, by a redoubling of fervour, the losses which the soul is ceaselessly faced with.

“2. To stir myself to make my retreat better I must consider:
   a. The graces I have received from God;
   b. What he expects of me by way of gratitude;

“3. Since I receive so many benefits, I must render gratitude.”

There is much more recorded by the young Brother Francois of this retreat, but this will suffice as a reminder that a very serious retreat was carefully followed during 1825, the final year of the building of the Hermitage.

New cemetery and first burial, 1827; deaths at early age

Early in 1827 Father Champagnat had been granted permission by the Archbishop of Lyons to begin a cemetery for the burial of the Brothers at the Hermitage, and later that year the first Brother, Brother Come (Pierre Sabot), was buried in the Hermitage cemetery. Father Bourdin, who was staying at the Hermitage at the time, spoke some words at the graveside, drawing parallels with the natural surroundings: the loneliness of...
the cemetery area that inspires serious thought, the river that marks the passing of time and the rock that by its immobility represents eternity.

Br. Stephen Farrell provides us with a most interesting statistic: “One tends to shudder today when it is learnt that the average age of the first 49 Brothers when they died in the Institute was 21 years. However, in France in 1830 life-expectancy was but 30 to 35 years ...”

Another figure of interest is that by 1834, 14 Brothers and Postulants had already been buried.

Enthusiastic young priest arrives to help, 1827, and attracts two others

This enthusiastic young priest is Etienne Seon (pictured right). While he was a Deacon, still in training for the priesthood, he had visited the Hermitage while “on probation” at the College at St. Chamond. He liked what he saw and Father Champagnat liked him. Furthermore, Champagnat asked the Vicar General of the diocese for him, and this was granted. However, when he arrived there was a small misunderstanding and he left to try to join the hoped-for Society of Marist Priests being planned by Father Colin. When this did not work out as planned, Seon returned to the Hermitage where he was to become a staunch supporter and helper of Champagnat. Brother Jean-Baptiste pays him this tribute: “Father Seon, a pious and devoted priest, full of zeal and a man of total integrity, fitted in very easily with the spirit of Father Champagnat. He was always perfectly one with him and assisted him greatly in the formation of the Brothers and in the administration of the temporal affairs of the Society.” Not only that, but during 1826 and 1829 he was “to gain two additional young chaplains, Fathers Jean Bourdin (pictured right) and Jean Baptiste Pompallier” (pictured left). So now, from being alone in early 1825, Champagnat has one excellent, enthusiastic, assistant after May 1825, and by the end of 1829 has three!

Grand welcome for key patron and supporter, Monsignor Gaston de Pins, 1827

As mentioned earlier, Msgr. De Pins was central to Champagnat being able to build the Hermitage in the first place, both by his encouragement and financial assistance. And so, to honour him on his first visit to the Hermitage, Father Champagnat and his new assistant priest, Etienne Seon, erected a pavilion in the courtyard decorated with greenery. After words of greeting they proceeded to the chapel for a prayer and thence to bless the whole house beginning with the dormitory of Our Lady. In extremely formal words, the bishop gave the following blessing: “Here in this year of 1827, on the thirteenth of June, we, Jean-Paul Gaston de Pins, Archbishop of Amasia, Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Lyon, at three in the evening, accompanied by Messrs. Barou, Vicar-General, Montany, promoter, and Fathers Farge, pastor of Izieux, Préher, parish priest of Tarentaise, Father Seon and Father Champagnat, do bless the house of the Hermitage.” And following a custom, also mentioned earlier, because the poverty of the Hermitage meant the inability to fittingly entertain such an important visitor, His Lordship and those accompanying him were taken to dinner at the residence of Father Dervieux, the Parish priest of St. Chamond.

Approx. ten potential recruits scared away by the poverty and poor food, 1827

Readers may enjoy an incident told by Br. Sylvestre which tells something of the modest living conditions at the Hermitage in its early days: “Fr. Rouchon, the parish priest [of Valenboite] was a worthy and venerable priest who at the same time as Fr. Champagnat tried to found a similar congregation. When he encountered a shortage of candidates, and his numbers were going down rather than up he decided to join Fr. Champagnat. So, he came to La Valla [does he mean the Hermitage?] with the whole of his community made up I believe of ten members with the intention of making this merger. But when Fr. Rouchon’s Brothers saw the poverty of the house and the food provided for the followers of Fr. Champagnat that contrasted so much with their bourgeois way of life and studied manners, and having looked around, they left without any explanation.”

An insight into the poverty of the early days

Brother Jean-Baptiste tells of the poverty of the Brothers in the early days: “Accommodation, furniture and clothing of the Brothers were the same standard as their food. Their household linen was of the coarsest kind. All the Brothers slept on straw and there weren’t any mattresses even for the sick. The Brothers did all their travel on foot, no matter how long and painful the journey. For more than twenty years, no Brother used a trunk to transport his personal belongings; a rough cloth bag served the purpose. There
were no umbrellas, and, in fact, the Brothers did without everything that could possibly be dispensed with.” He goes on to tell the attitude of the Brothers: “The wonderful thing is that the Brothers revelled in this poverty; they loved it and practised it generously in a spirit of virtue; they rejected any slightest alleviation ...” And Father Champagnat required all Brothers to learn how to cook, “and how to run a house with care. This was required by a spirit of poverty and in order to be self-sufficient ...” They were also to sew and mend their own clothes; and in this Father Champagnat led by example.

Some more building, 1827 – the Infirmary
Father Champagnat was always greatly concerned for the welfare of sick Brothers and was very keen that a suitable infirmary be built. Some of the records tell of a building of 1827 for this purpose. In Brother Jean-Baptiste’s Annals, we are told, Father Champagnat had it built “purposely for the accommodation of the sick.” He added: “The venerated Father, Brother Pierre and others erected a building consisting of ground floor and first floor in the yard on the south side of the house. It ran from the corner of the house, parallel to the river, and then ran back at right angles between the yard and the garden, near the path leading to the cemetery.”

Br. Avit wrote: “It was not a sumptuous building. They put the bakery there and that is where the bread for the community was made. Several Brothers took their turn in doing the baking. They had never learned the trade but the bread was quite as good as that eaten at Lavalla. The water of the Gier was as excellent for making bread as for drinking. This building also contained the cowshed and stores of various kinds. Shortly afterwards they put the place for carding the wool there.”

While Brother Pierre was the chief mason and builder, he was assisted often by Brother Pierre-Joseph. Brother Avit explains that while “Brother Pierre was always the master-mason, as was also Brother Joseph-Pierre who could work in iron as well as stone.”

Father Champagnat singled out the two of them for special well-wishing in two separate letters he wrote from Paris in 1838. And interestingly, both of them died in the same year, 1868.”

We learn in Br. Jean-Baptiste’s Life that “... dissatisfied with that infirmary [the first built] because it was too close to the river, so he [Fr. Champagnat] built a second, roomier and more suitable.” In another place it’s recorded. “The Larger infirmary was built on the second floor of the main house, above the workshop ... it thus faced the inner courtyard. From there the sick had easy access to (a) the chapel of 1825-36 which was on that floor, and (b) to the outside courtyard, the rocky yard which is still used today [date unknown].” Br. Jean-Baptiste continues: “He set up a dispensary in it, containing all the medicines needed by the sick. He placed one of the senior Brothers in charge and saw that he got the lessons needed to equip him to fulfil his task perfectly. Several other devoted and very kind Brothers were given him as assistants, to serve the sick under his direction.”

Marcellin asked for a report every day on the progress of the sick Brothers, and he visited them regularly to see how they were being, to assure himself that they had everything required and were comfortable, and to encourage them in bearing with their illnesses.

“Government Aid”, 1825, 1826, 1828
The expression “Government Aid” in the history of Australian education, including that of the Marist Brothers’ schools, refers to government money being contributed to the education of children in non-government schools. It was only in the 1960s in Australia, after a long campaign for “aid”, that such government contributions to private schools were achieved. It is interesting, therefore, to find in the records some sort of financial assistance coming from the General Council of Loire to the early schools set up by Father Champagnat, and/or to the training of the teachers. The following is extracted from typed articles found in the research papers of Brother Owen Kavanagh: “What money was allocated,” the paper asks, “to the Little Brothers of Mary by the General Council of Loire in the 1828 budget? The absence of documents precludes an answer; most likely it was the same as for 1825 and 1826.” The article goes on to quote a letter Father Champagnat addressed to the Prefect of Montbrison on 11th April 1829, in relation to this:

The interest you show in our establishment induces me to offer you a simple, sincere summary of our present position. Our establishments which now number 16 are progressing satisfactorily. The Mother-house where we are contains about 50, both Novices and Brothers, and is doing equally well. However the needs are still great here. We still pay each year 1,000 francs in interest; nevertheless we paid something off our old debts last year when you kindly gave us a helping hand, but the previous year we were short of money. I fear for this year, because apart from the fact that we have very many sick, we have a great many people on our hands.

We have undertaken, as I have had the honour to inform you, to make braids so as to employ the Brothers usefully when the classes are not functioning. But for nearly two months now we have not had any orders for work. At present several of...
our Brothers are returning to the Mother-house because in the towns where they are placed, the children are employed at work in the fields.”

Change in the Brothers’ costume, 1827

The original costume of the Brothers was principally designed by Father Courveille and their short soutane was sky blue, leading to the Brothers being called for a while, the “blue Brothers”. The accompanying sketch is found in black and white in the biography of Father Champagnat by Br. Jean-Baptiste. The original colour sketch is in the archives.

During 1827 Father Champagnat arranged changes, to make it more “religious” as follows: Their former long trousers were replaced by knee-breeches, the blue cassock by a black one fastened to the ankle with a coat of the same color. The tall hat (a “top hat”) was replaced by the three-cornered hat, more common amongst clergy and religious of the time. The rabat was adopted, and also the cord. For professed Brothers, on the day of their profession they were presented with a metal cross set in ebony. The rabat was only given to the novices on the completion of the novitiate.

Brother Avit explains that Father Champagnat encouraged various prayerful reflections while putting on the different items of costume. Putting on their cross every morning and seeing it on their chest was to indicate to the Brothers that they are dead to the world and they should not stop following the crucified God. The cord with which they were girded must not cease to remind them that their will should always be consistent with that of God which is manifested by the Rule and their superiors and that they must obey. The sight of the whiteness of the rabat was to remind them of the purity of intention with which they must conduct all their actions.

[The artist’s illustrations give some idea of the blue frock-coat before 1827 and the soutane, cloak and hat after 1827.]
Here is another detailed description of changes in the Brothers’ costume (for those interested):

Footwear

There are several references to the Brothers’ footwear in the records: “From 1817, Fr. Champagnat had used the cobblers of Lavalla to make all the Brothers’ footwear. For some years two people called Diosson and Roux did their cobbling at the Brothers’ house. Later the latter took the habit in 1834, taking the name of Br Pâcome and Fr. Champagnat put him in charge of the cobbling department. He was not skilful and there was nothing chic about the Brothers’ footwear. Poorly tanned leather, still adorned with most of its hairs, was the usual raw material.” And in 1833 another entry: “Fr. Chanut, a Marist priest, wrote to Fr. Champagnat to introduce to him one of his nephews, aged 14, who was not able to pay for his Novitiate, but was to turn out to be a good subject. He also informed the Founder that Br. Théodore’s father (Payasson) would soon arrive at the Hermitage with all his tools to make clogs with leather uppers and ordinary clogs.” Wooden shoes were the common form of footwear in the district around the Hermitage, as we read from an observer from 1835, A. Hugo, who wrote: “The ordinary footwear of both sexes is wooden shoes; leather shoes are worn only on Sundays, and then only by the well-to-do peasants” (From A. Hugo: La France pittoresque, Vol.II, Paris, 1836)

Supply of clothing

Entries in the Annals of the Institute for 1840 include the following: “Since the material used for making soutanes, cloaks and stockings was made at the Hermitage, it was rather coarse, but it lasted a long time. The soutane had to last for two years, the cloak and the hat five years, and each Brother received two pairs of stockings to last a year. At that time no one asked for clothing before the appointed time, nor did anyone have a trunk or a bag with a lock. Nor were the shoes in any way dainty. You could often see bits of hair on the uppers where the leather had been badly tanned.”
Champagnat’s respect and esteem for the religious costume

Marcellin was noticed to pick up a discarded bit of chord or an old hat left lying around and to dispose of them properly. He tried to instill in the Brothers that their religious costume was sacred and should be treated as such. “Your clothes,” he reminded the Brothers, “are blessed and they are the livery of Mary, so you must respect them and take the greatest care of them.” Brother Jean-Baptiste records that Champagnat “... asked for the cross and soutane to be kissed before they were put on in the morning.” This was a custom continued in some places well into the twentieth century.

Champagnat’s use of costume as a “discipline” or temporary “penance”

It’s recorded that Father Champagnat would ask a Brother who had committed some misdemeanour that he not wear his rabat, or maybe not wear his soutane for a short period of time. The slight humiliation associated with standing out in this way was to be a little “penance” for the transgression.

The strange matter of the stockings and spelling of the consonants, 1827

The reader (or may not) find interest in the following story that is taken here, verbatim, from Brother Avit’s telling of it:

“The question about stockings was not under consideration at that time. The Brothers continued to wear knitted ones. At the period we have come to, Fr. Champagnat modified the soutane. Hooks and eyes as far as the waist replaced the buttons and then it was sewn down to the bottom. The Founder felt that the wearing of the knitted stockings had three inconveniences: 1° uniformity was almost impossible; 2° they tended to lead to vanity and luxury - some Brothers had already bought silk ones; 3° they occasioned too frequent contacts with women. To get rid of these inconveniences which might become serious, the Founder wanted to introduce cloth stockings. Nevertheless, he handled the situation carefully. They were first required to be worn only when the wearer was going to receive Holy Communion."

“Father Champagnat saw difficulties for the children in the old spelling of the consonants - difficulties that retarded their progress. The new spelling appeared preferable to him and he suggested its use to the Brothers. Almost all of those accustomed to the old method rebelled against this. Fr. Champagnat urged them to try it for a year during which time he would consult a lot of competent men. At the end of the year most of the Brothers had tried the new spelling only half-heartedly and were still not in favour of it. Fr. Champagnat pointed out to them its advantages and wanted it to be adopted.”

“This decision displeased some of the Brothers. They were much more unhappy about the cloth stockings. Some dissident members worked up the others. ’These stockings,’ they said, ’are dearer than the others and less in accordance with poverty. People outside are laughing at them.’ Some found them too warm, others too cold. Very patiently the Founder showed them that these reasons were frivolous, that cloth stockings lasted twice as long as the others and were consequently cheaper. He himself had worn them during his long journeys and had found them quite good. ’The only reason you have in wanting to wear knitted stockings is that they are more worldly,’ he said. ’It is for that reason that, after consulting wise persons, I have decided to ban them.’ All the Brothers accepted this decision except three agitators who had lost the spirit of their state. These latter got together, moved quietly, and won over to their cause a certain number of Brothers and one of the chaplains. Proud of their success and learning that the Vicars General were going to visit the Hermitage, they drew up a petition, had it signed by their supporters and surreptitiously by many others who did not even know its contents.

“Some good Brothers grieved at what was taking place, made common cause and went to find the Founder who was consoled by their fidelity. One of them afterwards met one of those who had signed, reproached him for his conduct and persuaded him to see the Founder. The latter required him to ask pardon of the assembled community. This act of humility, turned into ridicule by the rebels, won back the majority of Brothers who had followed the ringleaders at first. To put an end to the spirit of revolt, the Founder called together those Brothers who had opposed the rebels. He asked them to prepare an altar secretly in the chapel, light it up brightly and place a statue of the Queen of the house on it. This was punctually carried out. When they went to the chapel as usual at 8.30pm for the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, all the Brothers were astonished when they saw this new altar lit up like this. Fr Champagnat was in front of the Blessed Sacrament. One of the Brothers who had opposed the revolt knelt and spoke to him thus: ‘Reverend Father, deeply grieved at what is taking place in
the house and ever wishing to walk in the way of obedience and perfect submission, we cast ourselves at your feet to express to you our grief at the scandal which has just taken place among us and to show that we are disposed to follow your will at all times in perfect docility. So, kneeling before Jesus Christ and in the presence of Mary our Mother, we ask you for the cloth stockings and the soutane with the hooks and eyes and sewn up to the waist, promising to wear them all our life. We also promise to follow in our teaching the regulations which you have laid down for us, particularly that of using the new pronunciation of the consonants. Finally, in the points mentioned above and in everything else we will have no other will but yours.’

“After that, Fr Champagnat, pointing to the altar of the Blessed Virgin, called out loudly: ‘Let those who wish to be good religious and true children of Mary, come over beside their blessed Mother.’ All hurried there except the two leaders of the revolt. Father asked them if they wished to join the others. They coldly replied in the negative. They were dismissed the next day."

(For many years the statue of “La Bonne Mere”, a favourite of Father Champagnat, and what’s believed to be the original held in the chapel in the General House in Rome (2017), had a sign painted on the base (reproduced here) declaring that it was before this statue that the matter of the stockings was so dramatically put to the Brothers. However, this sign no longer appears at the base of the statue and seems to have been painted over! The text reads: “C’est devant cette statue que la question des bas de drape a ete tranchee dans la Chapelle de l’Hermitage en 1829” – “It’s in front of this statue that the matter of the stockings was settled in the Hermitage Chapel in 1829”. The photo by Marconi of this statue, reproduced in the 1989 Bicentenary Edition of the Life of Champagnat, shows this inscription on the base.)

More on recreations

From the Annals we read: “The Founder insisted on the Brothers taking their recreation either talking among themselves or playing different games. The usual ones were the ‘Prisoners’ base’ or ‘boules’. From the year 1830 these games usually took place on the large recreation ground that had just been formed. Out of reverence no games were played on the important feast days ... they merely walked and talked.”

(The accompanying photo shows Second Novices from Australia in 1982 enjoying a game of boulle in the Hermitage grounds. As the French have an expression: “Plus ca change ...”)

The game of “Prisoner’s Base” or “Barre”

The Encyclopedia Britianica entry is thus: Prisoner’s base, also called base, bars, or prison bars, children’s game in which players of one team seek to tag and imprison players of the other team who venture out of their home territory, or base. Under the name of barres, this game is mentioned in 14th-century French writings and may have been one of the most popular games in medieval Europe. The game continues to be played, although less frequently in the 21st century than in previous centuries.

Also on the net a teacher describes the game in detail: The class was divided in half and a line of chalk was placed down the middle between the two teams. About 20-30 feet in back of each team a large square (prison) was drawn on the ground using chalk. Each team picked one person to be the prisoner of the other team (usually someone who could run fast). Then each team would try to free their prisoner by sending a team member to the prison through the opposing team to bring him/her back without getting captured by a member of the opposing team. If the person attempting to rescue their own prisoner made it to the prison through the opposing team without being caught, he/she was safe while in the prison and could pick their own time to run with the prisoner back to their own side of the line. If the team member was caught by the opposing team, they also became a prisoner needing rescue. So each team was busy both trying to rescue their own prisoners and protect the prisoner(s) from the opposite side from getting rescued. At the end of recess, the team with the most prisoners won.
The following description of the game of “boules” is given in a footnote to the English translation of Br. Sylvestre’s Memoire:

81 The French game of boules, or pétanque, has long been popular in France, especially in the south. Close to the Italian bocce and similar in concept to British lawn bowls, it is typically played with metallic balls on a dirt surface beneath plane trees. The local boulodrome is a social focal point in the suburbs and villages of southern France to this day, especially among middle-aged and older men. The object of the game is for a player to throw a ball — usually with somewhat of an arched back-spin — so that it lands closer to the small object ball (cochonnet) than those of his opponent, or strikes and drives the object ball toward the player’s other balls and away from his opponents.

Brothers of great “regularity”

In Religious Life in years gone by a key virtue was “regularity”, meaning the keeping of the Rule conscientiously in every detail, attendance at prayers, keeping silence when required, etc. Brother Avit, at the time of the death of a Brother, would often recall a little of his work and manner. Here are some entries from 1837:

“Br Marcellin [Moreau, made his profession in 1831] was a second “John the Silent” and very modest although he had a very good knowledge of botany. Later he was bell-ringer for 30 years after the death of Br Jean Joseph. Like him he always had the bell-rope in his hand when the hour was about to strike. On the very day of his death he rang the rising bell.

“Br Bonaventure became an excellent Master of Novices. He instructed them as much by his example as by his words. After relinquishing this task he carried out the lowest housework with perfect humility.”

Father Champagnat was a great champion of “regularity”. He expressed himself on the subject in this way: “To be exact in the observance of the Rule, is to do God’s will continually; it is to take giant strides along the path of perfection; it is to procure for oneself all the consolations of religious life; it is, as far as possible, to ensure one’s salvation.”

Customs of “penance”, encouraging humility

“Chapter of Faults” was a formal ceremony at which the whole community gathered, and one-by-one Brothers would come forward and kneel in the middle, sometimes kiss the ground, and then accuse themselves of some fault.

“Kneeling out” was a “penance” sometimes imposed for some failing or transgression, for example breaking a plate. The transgressor would be obliged to kneel in the dining room at mealtime holding the broken plate. After a little time, he was allowed to resume his seat and take the meal.

Interestingly these two practices were still in vogue in the Novitiates in Australia up to the 1950s and 1960s.

Ground plan of Hermitage buildings, 1827

The accompanying painting may help give some idea of the living arrangements of the young men in these early days.
Assistant Chaplains 1820s
It is a little hard to keep track of the assistant Chaplains who joined Father Champagnat at the Hermitage in the early years as they came and went. The following will attempt to give some acknowledgement to those who assisted Champagnat in conducting the Hermitage, administering the sacraments and, presumably, in various teaching and formation roles. The following extracts are from Br. Jean-Baptiste’s Life. Father Seon has been mentioned earlier; but remarks about Father Bourdin are also worth remembering: “[Father Bourdin] was only a deacon when he arrived at the Hermitage [in 1826] and had to surmount considerable difficult obstacles in order to persevere. On ordination, he was offered several distinguished posts; these, he generously declined, preferring the poor, humble and hidden life of the Brothers at the Hermitage to all the temporal gains promised him elsewhere.” As time went by, “[Father Seon was appointed Superior of the community of Vallenboite. Fathers Bourdin and Chanut went to Belley as humanities’ teachers and were replaced at the Hermitage by Fathers Servant and Forest. These in turn were succeeded by Fathers Matricon and Besson, both of whom did so much for the Brothers.”
Father Claude Besson was for ten years a chaplain at the Hermitage. A most fulsome tribute to him is found in Vol.2 of Br. Paul Sester’s Letters of Marcellin Champagnat: “All the Brothers who loved him and were attached to him were unanimous in praising him. He was a simple, upright, unaffected man without malice or bitterness. He lived quietly, was calm and obliging and totally dedicated to his duty. He paid no attention to what was happening in the world, accepted all privation, and was devoted to the Brothers to whom he dedicated his whole heart, all his time, and all his prayers. He lived like one of them and shared their joys and their sorrows with admirable sincerity.”
Brother Sylvestre back this up in the following way: “These two [Fathers Matricon and Besson] stayed with Father Champagnat until his death, lending him excellent support. I knew them, and I can assure you that they were true sons of Fr. Champagnat through their humility, simplicity and family spirit, a spirit that Fr. Champagnat inspired in them and that has become the distinguishing feature of the Society of Marist Fathers and of the Little Brothers of Mary.”

An extraordinarily generous benefactor over 36 years, Antoine Etienne Thiolliere
Antoine Etienne Thiolliere must go down in the early history of the Marist Brothers as one of the most generous benefactors, firstly to Father Champagnat, and continuing after Champagnat’s death to Brother Francois and Brother Louis-Marie. His fortune was made in the metal manufacturing trade in and around St. Chamond. It’s believed that Champagnat first came to know him at the time of the building of the Hermitage or even earlier at Lavalla in connection with the Brothers making nails. Br. Paul Sester, in his notes in Vol.2 of Father Champagnat’s letters says this:

It is very difficult to calculate the value of his gifts since they were of different kinds, and no record of them was kept before 1837. According to the account book, he made three contributions of 1000 fr. in 1837, and then 3000 fr. a year from 1839 to 1841. According to Bro. Avit, he gave a gift of 9000 fr. during the construction of the new chapel at the Hermitage in 1836 (AA, notebook 6, p. 542) and covered a debt of 22,000 fr. in 1840 (ibid., notebook 3, p. 231). According to the testimony of Bro. Stanislas, his gifts to Fr. Champagnat totaled over 100,000 fr.

At the time of his death in 1876, Brother Louis-Marie wrote in a circular to the Brothers: “In him the Little Brothers of Mary have lost one of their benefactors, he who more than anyone else shared by his gifts and his prayers in the trials of Fr. Champagnat, our Founder, and for thirty-six years, those of his two successors. His abundant alms constantly came to our aid and helped us overcome our most trying needs.” Even when the central administration moved from the Hermitage to St. Genis-Laval, M. Thiolliere continued his generous assistance.

Custom of visits to the Blessed Sacrament
Any visitor to the Hermitage in the time of Father Champagnat and the years following would have noticed the Postulants, Novices and Brothers visiting the chapel for very short periods at all times during the day. Such short visits were and still are called “visits to the Blessed Sacrament”. The idea was to call in to speak briefly in prayer to Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. “You should never,” he told the Brothers, “leave a house where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, without going to ask Christ for his blessing; and when you return home or go into a parish, your first visit should be to Jesus Christ.” This applied all the more so at the Hermitage where the Blessed Sacrament was always reserved. The custom was established that before going for a walk, or leaving the Hermitage for a time, a “visit” would be made; and also, on returning.
Part of the folklore of the Hermitage is the dramatic story of the speedy expulsion of a postulant in its very early years. He had committed an offence of a sexual nature, something that was particularly abhorrent to Father Champagnat, and about which he wanted to give a very clear signal. Something similar had happened at Lavalla earlier. This is how Brother Jean-Baptiste tells the incident:

Interestingly, many years later, this action that could have the appearance of being unreasonably severe, was cited against Father Champagnat’s suitability for declaration by the church of him as a saint. The argument was similar to that of what for many years had been “The Devil’s Advocate” – someone who tried to bring discredit on a candidate for canonisation.
Early schools
The accompanying map shows the schools of the early years of the Institute. The reader must imagine Brothers coming and going from these towns/hamlets.
Keeping of accounts

The attached page shows Father Courveille’s handwriting in keeping accounts in the early years. Also reproduced is a facsimile of Father Champagnat’s entry of accounts. At one stage Father Courveille demanded he take over the finances!

The reader may enjoy a remark by a Marist priest, onetime Provincial and Novice Master, Father Maitrepierre S.M., on Father Champagnat’s easy acceptance of all types of candidates who presented themselves. He is quoted as saying: “In the beginning he accepted with great ease the blind, the lame, the deaf, those disfigured in appearance, learned and ignorant, polite and impolite, and with these he founded establishments. He said: ‘I use for my needs whatever I have at hand; when I need a superior, a director or a teacher, if I don’t find one with two eyes, I use a blind man; when I don’t find one who walks straight, I put in a lame one and I say: ‘If the Blessed Virgin wants that work to go ahead, she certainly must take a hand in it, for she sees quite well that otherwise it certainly cannot prosper.’”

Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Traditional in monasteries for centuries was the recitation of the “Divine Office”, seven sections of which were recited at various hours during the monastic day. An adaptation of this custom to “active” religious orders was the recitation of the “Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary”. Father Champagnat adopted this practice for the Brothers. The Office consists mainly of the Psalms of David from the Old Testament with short introductory prayers, hymns and occasional prayers related to the Seasons of the year: Pentecost, Easter etc. However, to the surprise and interest of the twenty-first century reader, the custom in the nineteenth century was to recite the Office in Latin. Virtually all the young men joining Champagnat had no knowledge of Latin; some, moreover, could neither read nor write. Naturally there were objections to the Brothers reciting prayers in a language they did not understand. Brother Jean-Baptiste tells of Father Champagnat’s response to these objections (see box). So, visitors to the Hermitage would have heard, at various times of the day, the Brothers reciting the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Latin. This practice continued around the world for more than 140 years and the present compiler of this History recalls reciting it in Latin (without understanding it) in the late 1950s and into the 1960s. The Second Vatican Council of the mid 1960s

Several persons disapproved of his imposing on the Brothers the Office of the Blessed Virgin. They gave as reasons for objecting: 1) Since teaching was very demanding and the Brothers had to speak a lot in class, the recitation of that Office would weaken their chests and ruin their health. 2) Because the Brothers did not understand Latin, that prayer could not be of much use to them.

“I am convinced”, countered Marcellin, “that the Office of the Blessed Virgin, far from being an aggravation of their laborious task, is a consolation and a relief for the Brothers. They can chant it in a very moderate tone of voice, and while strolling; they have the satisfaction of being united to so many other religious Congregations and so many of the pious faithful who pay this tribute of praise to Mary. As to the objection that they don’t understand Latin, I agree that they don’t, but God does, and their prayer is no less pleasing to him, provided the interior spirit and a genuine heart inspire it.”
brought about changes when it introduced the conduct of Mass in local languages. (Though the pages reproduced here are from a printing in 1923, the arrangement of prayers etc. would have been virtually unchanged from its introduction in the nineteenth century.)
Case study of Father Champagnat’s patience and kindness
The fascinating history of young JOHN CHOLLETON, his short life and death

John Cholleton’s, father was an itinerant tradesman living and working from a caravan near Clermond-Ferrand when young John was born. Having shared the vagrancy life for some 13 years the boy was sent adrift to fend for himself. Finding it hard to endure the awful conditions of factory life, he wandered about in need till he sought relief from his cousin the Vicar-General Cholleton who provided for him, and noting his qualities placed him in the minor seminary of Verrières. Naturally John found this sedentary and disciplined life little to his liking; he did not settle down and several times ran away.

It was in October 1826 that this boy, now 13-and-a-half, bright, handsome, possessing a good memory and clearly of some promise, was returned to Fr. Cholleton. What to do with him, he pondered? Ah ha! Father Cholleton knew the only person who might succeed with his wayward cousin, so he asked Father Champagnat if he would take him in at the Hermitage.

Though Father Champagnat was enduring the trials of the recent loss of three well-loved Brothers, he agreed to take the boy in out of gratitude to the Vicar General who had always been a very staunch supporter. Indeed, he went in to St. Chamond to meet the train bringing him in from Lyons. He noticed immediately how very worn young John’s shoes were so he immediately took him to a bootmaker and had them repaired as well as purchasing another pair for him.

While some aspects of life at the Hermitage pleased him, he was not entirely happy and was inclined to leave. Father Champagnat reasoned with him, restrained and encouraged him. His levity and mischief-making shocked some of the Brothers in the Hermitage community, but his skill in games made him a favourite with the other postulants.

He had bought with him his soutane from his time at the minor seminary of Verrières, and one day when Father Champagnat was away he put it on and paraded around like a young priest! “Abbe, the young Abbe” his companions cried. When Father Champagnat heard about this incident he frankly and patiently advised him on his behaviour. He took steps to curb his silliness with acts of self-sacrifice, of piety and acts of charity.

Beginning to read serious books from the Brothers’ library, and settling down somewhat, though remaining his characteristic bright and vivacious self, John declared that he would like to become a Brother like his Hermitage companions. In spite of misgivings he was first of all allowed to attend frequent Communion and he showed a natural inclination to help others and developed, also, an obvious prayerfulness.

As a mark of encouragement and a sign of progress, in June 1827 Father Champagnat chose John specially to present the formal address of welcome on the solemn occasion of the visit of Archbishop de Pins of Lyons, the great supporter of Father Champagnat and the Brothers. And then at the retreat in October he was judged worthy of receiving the religious habit, taking his Baptismal name, John, as his Religious name. As time passed he showed himself to have great zeal for the religious ceremonies, for serving Mass, for practising humility and for trying to live in the presence of God. He showed himself able in studies and was appointed Prefect of boarders, and later Infirmarian’s aide where the doctor declared: “He is a treasure for the sick.”

However, his own health was not good, and he suffered painful swelling of the knees and joints. He was appointed to Lavalla where he astonished the parish priest by his zeal and his ability in teaching catechism. But his infirmity began to get the better of him and he asked if he could return to the Hermitage to do some work there. He worked for some time in the cloth workrooms where his kindness made him popular with everyone.

His illness was fatal, and after suffering patiently for some time he died in Father Champagnat’s arms at the end of June 1829 at the age of only 17.
While the two paintings reproduced on this page are of riots etc. in 1830 in Paris, the third is closer to home, being of riots in Lyons the following year. The caption for the third painting is: Depiction of the fighting in the streets of Lyon in front of Saint-Nizier church during the 1831 revolt. They help bring to mind the violence and instability of the time.

As mentioned above, this painting to the left recalls the scene of the disturbances in Lyons, the nearest city to the Hermitage. The background to the uprising of 1830 and change of government is something that the reader might like to consult on the internet. Suffice it to say here that the “new” government was suspicious of religious and clerics who traditionally had been, in French history, supportive of the conservative monarchy. Br. Sylvestre tells of the anxiety of the Brothers at the Hermitage “…when they saw crosses being demolished, the ministers of God being insulted and their establishments facing closure.” He goes on, “Indeed, some of them, tired of hearing the obscenities screamed at them by enemies of the soutane asked Fr. Champagnat to buy them suits which they could wear when necessary. Far from consenting to this he made them realise that this change of clothing would no more save them than would a spider’s web …” So little was Fr. Champagnat concerned about these threats that he arranged a ceremony for the new taking of the habit which took place on August 15th, the feast of the Assumption. One Sunday neighbours came to tell Fr. Champagnat to be careful as in the afternoon a group of workers was coming to l’Hermitage to demolish the cross on the steeple. While this did not eventuate, the Hermitage became a matter of rumour and suspicion, and before long the authorities came knocking.

This leads to the famous story of Father Champagnat and the axe. The accompanying paintings by Goyo and J.B.Conti bring the scene vividly to mind. Officers of the revolutionary force arrived at the Hermitage with the accusation that it was hiding anti-
government personnel and demanded to search every room. It was said that the Hermitage was harbouring a “marquis” with a view to raising a counter-revolution. There was talk, too, that the Hermitage was filled with arms and that the Brothers had military drill each evening. It was, indeed, the “Crown Prosecutor” who led the inspection at the head of a company of troops. When they came to a room that was locked and given the explanation that the one of the chaplains who occupied that room was away they said it didn’t matter. But Father Champagnat insisted that they see inside that room so that there would be no lingering suspicion that one room had not been searched. He sent for an axe and broke down the door so there would be absolute certainty that there was nothing to find.

When the inspectors were satisfied there was nothing hidden, Father Champagnat invited them to stay for some refreshments – which they did – and they left promising not to disturb him again. While some of the Brothers and clerical advisers were very nervous about appearing in public in their religious habits etc., and while there was advice that the Brothers should vacate the Hermitage, Father Champagnat remained calm throughout, as can be seen from his letters reproduced in the boxes.

In reversal of the severe and threatening initial approach of the Crown Prosecutor mentioned above, the Report that he subsequently published following his search and examination of the Hermitage was enormously encouraging. Br. Stephen Farrell’s summary runs thus: “The publication of the Crown Prosecutor’s Report on the Hermitage must have inspired many who read it. For instance, the Crown Prosecutor had not only discounted all false reports that had been circulating concerning the Hermitage, but he included in his article lengthy sections of very high praise for Marcellin’s establishment and the work being done there by its inhabitants.” [The illustration is from an 1892 booklet]
Subsequent life and death of the Attorney, M. Jean Valentin-Smith

Br. Owen Kavanagh’s research tells of the subsequent history of this Attorney who was responsible for the dramatic “raid” on the Hermitage in 1830: “[M. Smith’s] various promotions show clearly in what esteem he was held by his contemporaries for his deep sincerity: in 1837 he was councillor of the Court of Appeals in Reim, in 1850 in Lyons and in 1864 in Paris. Between his retirement in 1866 and his death in 1891 he wrote an impressive number of works; one biographer mentions 33 of them. On the day of his death he got up and worked as usual, but he dictated instead of writing for his hand had begun to shake. Several days before he had prepared himself for death in a Christian manner. Finding that he could no longer speak, he let himself be carried to his bed where he died, his eyes turned towards the crucifix hanging near his bed.”

Newspaper article, 1st September 1831

The favourable newspaper article referred to from 1830 has never been found. However, as can be seen in the accompanying box, there was an article written in the Catholic newspaper, “L’ami de la Religion” in late 1831. The present compiler of this history attempted to find a facsimile of the actual article but, while very many issues of this newspaper are posted on the net, he was not able to find the one Br. Gabriel Michel was able to find. Note that following the translation of the text are notes commenting on various aspects of the contents of the article.
“Salve Regina” introduced, 1830

It was at this time, August 1830, that Champagnat began the custom of the Brothers beginning and ending the day with the singing of the Salve Regina. “He mentioned that this would normally be sung and would be sure to obtain for them Mary’s strong protection for no good mother forsakes the pleas of her children.”

(Br. S. Farrell with illustration by Goyo)
Champagnat’s stress on, and example of, trust in God, 1830

1830, for many Brothers, was a year punctuated with periods of great anxiety. All throughout, Marcellin stressed to the Brothers the importance of “trust in God.” Brother Jean-Baptiste devotes a chapter of his Life to examples of his living out of this virtue. And he signals out the year 1830. “In the year 1830,” he writes, “he [Champagnat] devoted several exhortations to the Brothers to stimulating the practice of this virtue. In one of these he exclaimed: ‘It is God who permits all events and who turns them to his glory and to the good of the elect; if we trust him, no harm will befall us; no one in the world can hurt us or cause a single hair of our head to fall. If God does not permit it.’”

Further political instability, 1831, 1834

When the reader realizes that the events described in the following passages taken from the net were not very far from the Hermitage, it would be easy to understand the anxiety caused by these uprisings. The number of dead and injured is emphasized to draw attention to the magnitude of the disturbances.

“On November 21st 1831, several hundred weavers toured the then independent commune of Croix-Rousse. They forced the few weavers still at work to close their workshops, harassing the National Guard. Soon after they erected barricades and marched to Lyon with the anarchistic black flag.

“On November 22nd in Lyon, the workers captured the fortified police barracks at Bon-Pasteur, pillaging the arsenal and stealing weapons in the process. Several units of the military guard and the national guard were attacked. The infantry attempted to stop them but was forced to retreat under a hail of tiles and bullets. The national guard, most of which was recruited from amongst the canuts, changed sides, joining the insurgents.

“After a bloody battle which caused about 600 casualties (100 dead, 263 injured on the military side, 69 dead, 140 injured on the civilian side), the insurgents captured the town. During the night of November 22nd to November 23rd, General Roguet, commander of the 7th division and mayor Victor Prunelle fled the town.

“The insurgents occupied the town hall. At this point, the leaders of the workers were unsure as to the further course of action, having started the strike with the sole intention of making sure the fixed rate on silken goods was being applied correctly. A few republicans in the group insisted on using the momentum to form a governmental committee. The committee did not make any definite decisions, due to a lack of agenda. Not helping the committee’s effectiveness was the canuts’ refusal to have their insurrection used for political purposes.”

The uprising was brought to an end when Marshal Soult (pictures left) brought a force of 20,000 troops on December 3rd 1831 to restore order. (The other painting is of Louis-Phillipe, “King of the French” at the time.)

In February 1834 there was another revolt in Lyons which was firmly suppressed:

“The army occupied the town and bridges. Soon after, gunfire began, with troops firing on an unarmed crowd. Barricades were erected quickly throughout the town to hinder the army’s progress. The disorganised workers stormed the Bon-Pasteur barracks, the same as during the first revolt, and again plundered the arsenal. The workers barricaded the different districts of the city, including Croix-Rousse (pictured), effectively creating fortified camps. What would be known later as the Sanglante semaine (bloody week) had begun.”

How bloody the uprising and its suppression was can be seen in the following account of casualties and harsh punishments:

“April 15th was the end of the Sanglante semaine in Lyon, the second canut rebellion having been suppressed. Conservative estimates of the number of casualties were between 100 and 200, while more liberal estimates were more than 600. 10,000 captured insurgents were tried in a “gigantic trial” in Paris during April 1835 and were condemned to deportation or strict prison sentences. The July Monarchy suspected the intrigues of other groups, such as legitimists or Bonapartists, at work, which accounted for the harsh repression of the revolt.”
CHAPTER 6  The 1830s following the Revolution of 1830

The accompanying picture, is taken from the Life of J B M Champagnat, published in 1856. The reader is invited to imagine the happenings told in these pages being acted out in that setting. And if the reader is actually IN the very building while reading these lines, it is hoped that the events and people will be vividly present as their story is read.

Description of Father Champagnat in 1831
The reader may appreciate a detailed description young Jean-Félix Tamet (Brother Sylvestre) paints of Father Champagnat when he arrived, aged 12 and three months in 1831, at the Hermitage: “I can still see myself arriving with a postulant from my part of the country and the Brother who accompanied us to Fr. Champagnat’s modest little room and I remember the impression he made on me with his height and majesty, his air of goodness and seriousness at the same time. His face commanded respect, his cheeks sunken, his lips a little prominent which made him appear to be smiling, his eyes both piercing and searching, his voice strong and sonorous, his speech markedly articulate, without being terse or tedious, everything in proportion. In short, he presented by his whole aspect one of these models of sanctity, which are to be seen in the portraits of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Francis of Assisi, the Cure d’Ars etc.”

Brother Jean-Baptiste in his Life of Champagnat (1856), describes him in the following way, adding impressions of his manner:

And the accompanying “Signalement” lists his personal characteristics at the age of 47 as found in his passport of 1836.
Another chaplain to assist Champagnat, December 1830
In December 1830, Father Jacques Fontbonne becomes an additional chaplain to Champagnat, relieving him of certain tasks.

Further insights into Father Champagnat’s manner, and his management of the young men joining as Postulants
The reader might like to imagine being a young fellow trying to fit in with life at the Hermitage in the early 1830s. To assist in this imagining, let us read further from the memories of young Brother Sylvestre and how Fr. Champagnat coped with his childish and impulsive behaviours: “In an effort to curb my restlessness, Fr. Champagnat allotted me many different tasks, in the kitchen, in the forge, in the bakery, in the lamp store etc., but everywhere I caused more trouble and was unable to stay for more than a few days in one employment before the patient Fr. Champagnat was forced to move me again. An example for this was when I worked in the lamp store. Fr. Champagnat came to see how I was coping and wanting to demonstrate my ability I managed to drop a pitcher of oil at his feet staining his soutane. I certainly deserved a penance, as it was obviously a lack of care on my part. But he contented himself by telling me to pay attention to what I was doing and even in spite of that he left me working there. However, he had to move me some days afterwards in an effort to give me a fixed post in the weaver's shop under the supervision of an old Brother who was kind, pleasant and patient, while being circumspect, serious and of outstanding piety.”

And once a young fellow had been accepted, Father Champagnat was anxious to know if he was experiencing any difficulties. Brother Jean-Baptiste explains: “One of the most pious Brothers in the house [Brother Stanislaus] was given the task of keeping an eye on the new arrivals and of telling the Founder who was having trouble settling in, and who might even be having doubts about his vocation. As soon as such a one was brought to his notice, the Founder sent for him or found an opportunity of being alone with him. This might be by taking him as companion on a journey, by an outing with him or by inviting his help in some manual work. In any case, he never lost touch with him until he had reinforced his determination to persevere in his holy state.”

Several writers have remarked on what an attractive and engaging personality Father Champagnat must have had since so many young men wished to join him and suffer the privations and not readily leave. Had the Hermitage not been a happy place with a warmly welcoming leader, interest in remaining would surely have been short-lived!

New laws put demands on the education standard of teachers, 1830, 1831 and 1833
Laws were passed in 1830 neutralising the influence of the clergy in education and then in April 1831 a law was passed that, in effect, all teaching Brothers would have to have the “Brevet” (the university approved teaching qualification), and then in mid-1831 another law making military service compulsory for unauthorized teachers. This put great demands on the training of Brothers for teaching, and this teacher preparation was conducted at the Novitiate at the Hermitage. It also meant that the teacher-trainees would need to spend more time at their studies, and this, in turn, put strains on accommodation at the Hermitage.
The accommodation problem was alleviated by the acquisition, through a very generous bequest, of La Grange-Payre (pictured), not far from the Hermitage. The younger aspirants were sent there to complete their school studies where they joined a boarding school that had been set up there.

(Note the image of a “Brevet” reproduced here. It was this precious piece of paper that became so important!)
The Scholasticate, 1830s onwards
But the studies needed to be strengthened, and this led to the eventual establishment of a special Teacher-Training wing of the Hermitage, to be known as the SCHOLASTICATE, a name for a house of studies.
Regarding the examinations for the brevet up to 1833 we learn, in an article in the Bulletin de l’Institute of 1959 that “… the examinations for the Brevet de capacite, at least for the 3rd stage, were nothing very terrible; reading, writing and arithmetic did not present any insurmountable obstacles; we know that Br. Laurence passed his brevet “by correspondence”; he had as the only test a long addition sum, in which he succeeded brilliantly.”
“Schoolwork was no burden; the sessions lasted only 90 minutes in the morning, and the same in the afternoon. The list of subjects taught was short enough: religion, writing, grammar, arithmetic and simultaneous method; this scheme continued 4 years. In Autumn 1831, the arrival at the Herrmitage of Alexis Labrosse brought the studies to a new level; special courses in maths and applied Geography were given by the God-sent postulant, and were followed with great interest and profit by Br. Francois himself – he had just been appointed Secretary and Councillor of the Founder.”
This “God-sent postulant” became Brother Louis-Marie, who eventually went on to become the second Superior General of the Institute.
(In time a new building would be constructed for this purpose, and it, over time, became what is now (2016) known as “Le Rocher”.)

The Guizot Law of 1833 and its effects on the Hermitage and its Novitiate/Scholasticate
Another law, known as the “Guizot Law” came into effect in 1833. (Author: Francois Guizot, pictured)
“A new effort was demanded of the novitiate in 1833 to raise the studies to the standard of the new University requirements. The liberation of the Guizot Law was more apparent than real; it was to become the first threat of strangulation for the religious teaching Congregations. As time went on, the programs for the brevet were loaded with all kinds of knowledge, more or less necessary in the Primary, but which provided the examining commissioners, who were Voltarians, with numerous excuses to eliminate the Brothers. Thus, to quote an example, there was a decree from the Royal Council, 29th March 1836, obliging the candidate to present for the program in “Theory of Music”, which was considered by De Lammenais as ‘truly frightening’.

An unexpected addition of 6 or 7 “new” Brothers
It was about this time (the event is taken from Br. Sylvestre’s Memoire, and he is not specific about the year) that a group of six or seven young “Brothers” arrived to join the Novitiate. Unlike the story of the ten or so who came with their “founder” in 1827 and left hurriedly after experiencing the poverty and poor food, this group stayed. Br. Sylvestre’s story runs thus: “Fr. Douillet, the venerable ecclesiastical superior of the minor seminary in Cote-St.-Andre and a model of regularity like Fr. Gardette had tried to found a Congregation with the same aims as Fr. Champagnat. He had already gathered a number of youths to give classes in the village school. Believing himself to be unworthy of such work, and also being harassed by the government, he offered his little community to Fr. Champagnat who went to Cote-St.-Andre to see if there was enough scope for a foundation. He recognised the will of God in this and accepted Fr. Douillet’s offer. A few days later he arrived with his little group of six or seven. I can still picture those young men entering the courtyard of l’Hermitage and Fr. Champagnat welcoming them with such warmth that they immediately felt at home.”
1833-1835 Numerous requests for Brothers
The following reference has been found, related, doubtlessly, to the new laws:
“1833-1835 Numerous deputations from towns arrive at the Hermitage to ask for Brothers in preference to lay-teachers.”

New attempts to obtain authorisation for the Institute
This is a heading Br. Sylvestre chose for Chapter XII of his *Memoire*. Two paragraphs are reproduced here to explain:

As can be seen, the Congregation was growing, the Novitiate was being filled with good aspirants and therefore exemption from military service was becoming more pressing. A new law in 1833 only exempted from service teachers with a brevet that was not easily obtained. Fr. Champagnat resolved to renew his efforts to gain legal recognition of the Congregation by the government. So, having reviewed the statutes and made them consistent with the new law, he asked a deputy who was sympathetic to the Institute to present them to the minister and at the same time requested prayers for the success of this important matter. But, although the University Council approved the request made by Fr. Champagnat, the king refused to sanction it, out of spite.

What could be done? He raised his eyes to the holy mountains and help arrived in the following way. Fr. Champagnat totally by chance made the acquaintance of M. Mazelier, founder of a community whose aims were similar to his own, the education of youth. Situated in St-Paul-Trois-Chateaux (Drôme), the Dauphin had approved it and as a result M. Mazelier was able to exempt his Brothers and his novices from the recruiting laws. The Brothers, having obtained the certificate of exemption, could remain or not in the Congregation, as they were not bound by any special vow. Since the two founders, having only good and the glory of God in mind, understood each other and came to an agreement. Fr. Champagnat would send to St-Paul-Trois-Chateaux the Brothers affected by the law until they gained their diploma and then they would return to l’Hermitage where they would be given a post. In this way the Congregation could continue as though it had been authorised.

Separate residence for old men, an “Old Folks’ Home”, 1833
It appears that Champagnat had an “Old Folks’ Building” constructed during 1833 as a sort of hospice or retirement dwelling for elderly and poor men. In the register of those admitted to the house, he notes: “Today, Saturday, 1st December 1832, a happy and blessed day, we contributed to a good work performed by Miss Fournas, by receiving two incurably ill persons.” A generous benefactress, Mademoiselle Marie Fournas, had made Champagnat two gifts, one of 1,000 francs and another for 3,000 francs in the first half of May 1833 “for a charitable cause and for food.” Various notes and corroborating documents indicate that this money went into the construction of a separate building in the growing Hermitage complex to accommodate some poor and elderly men.

A letter from Father Champagnat referring to this is the following from 1833:

"Mademoiselle

Here we are again in this beautiful season. It is time to prepare a place to continue the good work you have begun, to which we will gladly devote ourselves. Our good will is limited only by our lack of resources and space. Since our house is becoming more crowded, we need a separate location for this good work, which means an outlay of seven or eight thousand francs; otherwise we will be obliged to give up this good work in which we want to become involved, but without interfering with our main purpose.

I await your reply.

We are pleased with little Luc.

"Champagnat"
From various pieces of evidence it is believed that a separate building was erected for this purpose. A sketch with the name Thomas Grauthon as artist has been found, but little is known about it. It is reproduced here, very pale as it is, for the interest of the reader. The bright glow in the photo of the model also gives the location.

Many years later a Brother gave this recollection: “In 1834, when I entered religious life, I remember four old infirm residents. A Brother, whose name I cannot remember, was in charge of them, in a house which we called the infirmary. The house was beside the main building and a few metres from it. The Brother instructed the old men in the mysteries of religion and encouraged them to pray to God.”

Br. Avit in an entry for 1833 mentions:
“Later, Fr Champagnat received a mentally retarded person named Corrompt, a small, lame person and old Chazelle, a cobbler. The latter received the habit, taking the name of Br Spiridon.” And then later, in an entry for 1838, we read: “Jean Marnas, [who died in 1838] aged 80 years, who had been received into the Hermitage out of charity.”

And then in 1839 we read: “Among the deceased that year who were buried in our cemetery, we must include M. Perret, aged 71, and Marie Chevalier, his wife, aged 68. They were the parents of Brother Liguori. They were natives of Saint-Pierre-de-Bressieux. They had retired here to be near their son, to be helped in their old age and to help prepare themselves better for death.”

And Brother Alexandre Balko, from his research writes:
“There are many references in our books to this house for the aged, including a letter from Father Colin asking Father Champagnat for a place for his older brother. Father Seon also inquires if there is a place for his old father who is living in a room in Lyons. Father’s own brother, Jean-Pierre, and some of his children may have lived there for some time before they died.”

Br. Sylvestre also mentions several “sick old men”. “He ... supported through charity and at the house’s expense four or five sick old men whom he treated with truly paternal kindness wishing the Brothers to work with them in the same way. I remember being reprimanded [by Fr. Champagnat] and punished for allowing myself, without any malice, to play some jokes on them. The house took care of them until they died. And there was one who was insane. He stayed with the Brothers for more than forty years although his ailments were very disgusting.”

We learn from Brother Jean-Baptiste, also, something of these men: “Some of these men were afflicted with quite repulsive sicknesses; others, in addition to bodily sickness, had moral weaknesses, which made it extremely painful and difficult to serve them.” He continues: “But charity, which is patient and bears all things, never giving up, was undaunted in the
Founder, by such wretchedness. Needless to say, he did not stop at assuring their physical needs and soothing their bodily sufferings; his zeal concentrated especially on their reception of the sacraments, on teaching them to pray and to sanctify their sufferings by resignation to God’s will and union with the sufferings of Christ. Following his advice, these old men planned their time, dividing it between prayer and occupations commensurate with their strength and health. Attendance at Holy Mass, spiritual reading, the rosary, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament were part of each day.”

(This dramatic portrait of Father Champagnat with the large blue cloak standing on a rocky mountain top is by Australian artist Virgil LoSchiavo and was commissioned for the 1955 Beatification. The artist read the life of Father Champagnat and was so impressed by his care of the old fellows he took in to the Hermitage that he included a representative old man into the painting. And note, too, he is shown saying the rosary … in keeping with the information found in Br. Jean-Baptiste’s Life.)

“What’s for dinner?”
A tiny insight into meals of the 1830s is given by Brother Avit:
“The Brothers’ food began to improve. Of course, partridges and warblers did not figure on the menu, but the quality of bread was better and adequate for all. A little meat was served at dinner. Although it cost only 25 to 30 cents a pound, a crow could have gulped down in one go the portion each one got. The good water of the Gier was given a reddish tinge with a little wine. This drink would not have stained the tablecloth had there been one. The other dishes consisted of potatoes, carrots, cabbage cooked in the soup, then lifted with a skimming ladle, salted and put onto serving plates.”

Secretariate established, 1834
“This year, for the first time, Marcellin had found it necessary to set up a Secretariate at the Hermitage, and it was only from this year onwards that most letters, dossiers, etc. were maintained there.” Up till that time Champagnat had personally attended to all correspondence and knew the arrangements he had made with different Mayors etc. concerning schools, but little was recorded and kept in any sort of order. Once the Secretariate was established all copies of letters were kept and agreements filed. It’s thought a good deal of material from 1829 to 1834 has been lost. We find the following brief message in the Annals of the Institute: “Br Babulas was the first secretary of the Institute with that title. After some years he was found dead one morning in his office.” He died in 1853.

Champagnat writes to the King, Louis-Phillipe, early 1834

Sire,

I was born in the district of St-Genest-Malfaux, in the department of the Loire, and I learned to read and write only after making tremendous efforts, for lack of capable teachers. From that time on I understood the urgent necessity of having an institution which could, with less expense, provide for rural children the same good education which the Brothers of the Christian Schools provide for the poor in the cities.

Ordained to the priesthood in 1816 I was assigned to a rural parish as curate; what I saw there with my own eyes made me feel even more strongly the importance of putting into execution without delay the project I had been thinking about for a long time.

I therefore began to train a few teachers. I gave them the name of Little Brothers of Mary, being very convinced that that name would of itself attract a large number of subjects. Rapid success, in just a few years, justified my belief and exceeded my expectations. In 1824, under the protection of His Lordship the
administrator of the diocese of Lyons, aided by that prelate and by the good people of the area, I built near the city of St-Chamond a very large house, where I could set up the normal school of the new society.

Seventy-two subjects of this house are already working in a good number of towns, without counting about forty very dedicated novices who are preparing to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors.

In order to grow and prosper, this newborn institution, whose statutes are enclosed, needs nothing more than the required authorization. The zeal which Your Majesty has shown for education encourages me to make this humble request of you. Shall I be fortunate enough, Sire, to obtain it? I dare to flatter myself that I shall. The many requests I receive from all sides from different mayors (especially since the law of 28th June 1833), the approval of the local authorities, of the Prefect of the Loire and a number of honorable Deputies, who kindly assured me of their protection, show me far too clearly that my establishment is in harmony with the spirit of the government, and the needs and resources of the rural towns, for me to doubt for an instant that my request will be honored.

I am therefore filled, Sire, with the pleasant hope that this undertaking, begun solely in the best interests of my fellow citizens, will be approved by Your Majesty, who is always ready to encourage what is useful. The Brothers of Mary, having received their legal existence from your royal goodness, will owe you their eternal gratitude, and will join me in saying forever that we are, Sire, Your Majesty's most humble, most obedient, and most faithful subjects.

Br. Avit has these comments regarding the follow-up to this letter:

“This petition to the bourgeois king therefore was only partially successful and we shall see that the frequent approaches, the painful journeys and tiring efforts of our saintly Founder failed before the bad will of the Voltairean government which was then in power in France.”
More building in 1830

“Despite the harsh winter of 1830, Fr Champagnat, Philip, his nephew and several Brothers uprooted trees, overturned rocks and built the large terrace as well as the road that leads to them on the west slope of the east hill. They began to organise the infirmary to some extent, but the necessary living quarters and the dispensary were as yet missing.” In another place we read that it was then that the “Avenue des Plantes” was planted (see photo from the 1925 Monographie) and it was said, in 1973, “Most of them are still standing and doing quite well.”

The Novitiate and the enormous importance of the “Master of Novices”

It might not be an exaggeration to say that the wellbeing of a religious congregation at any particular time depends on the personal gifts of the “Novice Master”. This is a term used for centuries throughout the church for the one chosen and appointed to “form” the religious in the spirit of the particular congregation. He is said to be in charge of “formation”. Such a one must personally embody the special virtues that are characteristic of the congregation, and be a figure deserving of imitation in kindness, zeal, piety, hard work, constancy etc. The reader will readily see that the qualities of a Master of Novices are little short of those of a saint.

And following the practice of centuries, Father Champagnat strove, above all, to find the most suitable Brother to take on this special role of formation.

His very first choice was Brother Jean-Marie Granjon, but after three years found it necessary to appoint Brother Louis Audras who remained Novice Master for 10 years, although he was called away at times. Father Champagnat is quoted as saying of Brother Louis: “Brother Louis truly has the spirit of his state. The religious spirit invigorates and characterises everything he does. His virtue is truly the virtue of a Little Brother of Mary.”

Then shortly after the troubles of 1830-31 Father Champagnat chose Brother Bonaventure Pascal to take on this vital role of Novice Master.

The reader may enjoy learning a little of this Brother who holds a special place in the history of the Hermitage. He was one of the special six who signed Father Champagnat’s Spiritual Testament in May 1840.

Anthony Pascal had left school and had taken up employment as the servant of a rich man in the town of Ampuis when he decided to approach Father Champagnat with a view to becoming a Brother. Father Champagnat appears to have teased him to test him somewhat with his questions, rather like Jesus did with the woman who asked a favour. First of all, he suggested that he was a bit old and used to having his own way and would find it difficult to accustom himself to regular observance and submission to obedience. Anthony’s reply was: “Father you may do with me what you like; for I am a servant by profession and have obeyed all my life.” Then Father Champagnat tested him with suggestions that the uprising occurring at the very time he was applying to join the Hermitage may land him in jail. “Who knows,” Father Champagnat said, “if the soldiers will return and take us all to prison? I think it would have been wiser for you to stay at home.” Anthony Pascal’s reply to this was: “Father, I never cease thanking God for bringing me here; these events only confirm me in my vocation. In fact, this very morning I resolved to ask you the favour of receiving the religious habit.”

The year after he was described as “the model of the novitiate”, the now Brother Bonaventure, was sent to Sorbiers to Brother Cassien who was a critical and demanding Brother that nearly everyone found impossible to live with. When Father Champagnat asked him how he found Brother Bonaventure he replied: “Father, he is a model for us all; he is fit to do more than teach the small class.” Father Champagnat replied, “I was thinking of making him Master of Novices.”

Brother Bonaventure fulfilled this very important role of formation of the young men joining the Brothers for nearly 20 years and must be considered one of the very foundational members of the Little Brothers of Mary.
The importance of Brother Bonaventure as Novice Master and beyond

Having age and experience behind him before he joined the Brothers, Brother Bonaventure could wisely advise those who felt tempted to leave. Highly esteeming his religious vocation, he made an annual novena, commencing on 27th June, in thanksgiving to God for his fortuitous vocation. He often examined his spirit of devotedness to the Institute:

“I often say to myself, ‘If you do not esteem your vocation properly, another will take your place.’”

The Brothers formed during this important period, 1832-1850, were very numerous as the Institute was in full development. From 1840 to 1860 Brother François (Superior General) opened annually an average of 16 schools. Fortunately, Brother Bonaventure was the right man to form the young members in the spirit of the Institute. Though he excelled in all virtues, his devotedness to the Institute was outstanding: “He was a father and mother to the Novices, sharing their work, games and all their troubles.”

After fulfilling this responsible office of Novice Master for some 16 years, Brother Bonaventure took charge of the manual work at the Hermitage, and then at St. Genis-Laval when the Mother House was transferred there in August 1858. He accepted this appointment joyfully as he thought it more in keeping with his knowledge and talents! Called upon to do all kinds of work, he was ever ready, cheerful and devoted. “Kept busy night and day, he used the recreation times to visit the cellars, barns and stores.” During the years at St. Genis he rose each day at 3.30am to have the cows milked and the animals fed, so as to be in time for morning prayers.

From Brother Alain Dolomme’s research into the life of Brother Bonaventure he was able to write: “He was not seen to lose his temper or treat anyone harshly, act brusquely or appear bad tempered – never! His good heart and his sure judgement gave him common sense, perfect tact and admirable disposition in giving his opinions, making reproaches without hurting feelings, dealing with weakness and making punishments proportional to the degree of virtue of those whom he corrected.”

How the time was filled during the holidays, 1830s

“From the time the community went down to the Hermitage, the holidays had lasted and still lasted two months, as previously. Fr Champagnat used them to improve the knowledge of the Brothers, to enable them to cope with the demands of primary teaching, to develop the best means for maintaining good discipline in their classes. Above all he made use of the holidays to train the Brothers in the virtues of their state and to study with them the Rules which he was to give to his congregation. To initiate them into the art of primary teaching, he got the more capable Brothers to give the others lessons, and he himself did likewise. He obliged the Brothers to show him the ten pages of writing they had to do during the year. Even the teachers of the senior classes had to show two pages of writing done by each of their pupils - one written at the beginning of the year, the other at the end of it in order that he could see what progress had been made. He set up commissions, he himself being on them, before which each Brother or postulant had to face an examination. This was drawn up and written by the Founder.

“I have before my eyes, for the year 1828, a record containing the results of this examination. It is drawn up and written completely in the hand of the saintly Founder. It is divided into 9 columns at the head of which is written: ‘Names of candidates, piety, catechism, character, submission, regularity, science, arithmetic, writing.’ Nineteen letters of the alphabet serve to indicate the merits of each one whose name is written in these columns. If this record comes down to our successors, they may find that this notation is too elastic. They will try to do better. Seven postulants and fifty-six Brothers have their names in this record book. That was the whole personnel.”

Champagnat writes to the Queen, May 1835

J.M.St.J. Great Queen,

The purpose of this letter is to beg Your Majesty to please urge His Majesty Louis-Philippe to approve by ordinance the authorization which his council was willing to grant to the society of the Marist Brothers, by approving their statutes, as contained in the General Manual of Primary Instruction, Nº6, for the month of April 1834.

Fear of the above-mentioned brothers will be affected by the dawning of 1835. We have no other way to exempt them.

Your great devotion to Mary, the royal devotedness of your ancestors to the Mother of God, the beginning of this month consecrated to honoring her, all fill me with great confidence. All our brothers will join me during this month for the success of this matter and for the prosperity of your household.

Our statutes are enclosed, if His Majesty wishes to read them, with a brief introductory note giving the main reasons
for which I founded this society of teaching brothers.

Ordained a priest in 1816, I was assigned to a town in the district of St-Chamond (Loire). What I saw with my own eyes in that new post, with reference to the education of young people, reminded me of the difficulties I had experienced myself at their age, for lack of teachers. I therefore quickly carried out the project I already had in mind to establish an association of teaching brothers for the rural towns, very many of which, for lack of financial resources, cannot afford the Brothers of the Christian Schools. I gave the members of this new society the name of Mary, since I was convinced that this name would of itself bring us a good number of subjects. Rapid success, despite our lack of material resources, both justified my belief and surpassed my expectations.

In 1824, with the help of Bishop de Pins and some good people of the area, I built a house for the novitiate. At present, there are one hundred and forty subjects in the society, of whom eighty are working as teachers in a good number of towns. We receive many requests to open new establishments as soon as we have subjects trained. By authorizing us, the government will facilitate our growth remarkably; religion and society will both profit greatly thereby.

Please excuse the self-assurance which leads me to Your Majesty's feet, and accept the expression of the sentiments of deep respect and total dedication with which I will always be, Great Queen, your most humble, most obedient and most faithful subject.

Champagnat received a reply dated 4th September 1825, from Francois Guizot, Minister of Public Instruction, explaining that the Queen had forwarded the letter to him as the one responsible. Regarding the authorization asked for, his letter stated: “As for the request itself, to authorize your house as an association, it has not appeared possible to me to grant it at the present time. Please accept, etc....”

Yet more building, 1835

“Arrangements had been made with M. Motiron-Montpellier for possession of the rock face, which formed the boundary of the enclosed courtyard to the north. The rock was cut back, and construction work was recommenced. As in the past, Fr Champagnat, with several Brothers, took part in the work. The west wing was lengthened by about 6 metres, such that it joined the definitive chapel, the foundations of which were laid on the above-mentioned rock, which had been levelled. The east wing was raised to give three floors on which to locate the novitiate, the infirmary and a dormitory. This wing did not, as yet join the chapel as it was separated from it by the still uncut rock.
The building and decoration of the new chapel, 1836

We learn a lot about the chapel from Brother Avit who entered the following in his Annales, where he quotes from Brother Francois. The following gives extracts from the description:

“This chapel, begun in 1835, was 20 meters long, 10 wide and 11 high. Mr. Ravery, the painter from Saint-Chamond, painted twelve Corinthian columns decorated with frescoes, a plaster cornice projecting above, embellishing them. Between the columns are painted fresco medallions with some invocations of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, represented in symbolic forms. In the middle of the sanctuary, behind the altar is a large painting of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary painted on canvas by the same artist. Above the altar is a crucifix fresco with two Angel worshipers. At the same level, on the side of the epistle [the right hand side], is the statue of the Blessed Virgin, the same one that was in the old chapel, and on the side of the gospel [believed to be the one pictured with the heart], that of St Joseph in gilded wood.

Below, on each side of the altar, on the epistle side is a statue of Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague and the side of the gospel, that of Saint Francis Xavier. [St. Francis Xavier is the one holding the crucifix.]

The part that makes up the nave, as well as that for the congregation, is decorated with 15 Ionic columns. Between each column is a picture of the way of the Cross. On each side and at the back of the chapel, above the cornice, there appears a curved garland of roses.

The nave is lit from each side by two arched windows and the sanctuary is so only by one from one side; the other is a painted window.

The ceiling of the chapel is in plaster and the shaped vault is supported by large wooden hangers. Above the altar, the Holy Spirit is painted as a dove on a blue background, surrounded by a large circle of glory. Three lamps, arranged in a triangle, decorate the sanctuary. The middle burns day and night, the other two are lit for great solemnities.

In the middle of the nave is the large chandelier hanging from the old chapel. There follows a detailed description of the tabernacle. But the reader can either visit the chapel to see it themselves or look carefully at the photo.

There are two confessionals opposite each other in the nave of the chapel: one the old chapel and the more ornate one that Father Champagnat made."

“This chapel, so minutely described by Brother Francois, was blessed by Mgr. Pompallier after retirement as we have already said. His Lordship then pontifically officiated and gave the sacrament of confirmation to 15 novices and postulants. With Father Champagnat and the Reverend Chaplains, the priests of St. Peter of Izieux, Saint-Martin-en-Coallieux and Lavalla were present at the ceremony. Soon after, Mr. Gourdius, pastor of Saint-Polycarpe in Lyon, offered an attractive Way of the Cross."

[The tabernacle has been kept from that time, and the one in the Chapel at the present day (2016) is the very one described here. It is said to have been from the Cathedral of Saint-Maurice in Vienne and purchased at the time of the Revolution by a woman who subsequently gave it to Father Champagnat. The confessional, as photographed here, is the very one Father Champagnat used in the 1836 chapel. The identification label seen above the central panel is reproduced here.]
Father Champagnat’s attitude to chapel furniture, vestments, decorations etc.

Brother Jean-Baptiste explains Marcellin’s attitude to matters related to the chapel and the sacred liturgy: “Although Marcellin had a predelection for poverty and carefully established its reign in the community, ... he wanted the chapel and everything connected with divine worship, to be an exception; he wanted vestments and sacred vessels to be not only clean but even rich, as far as the resources of the community would allow.”

And a tiny insight into social customs of the time was a prohibition of spitting in the chapel! (The photo of the chalice to the top right is of Father Champagnat’s personal chalice; the monstrance on the left is said to be Father Champagnat’s own – though held in Australia -- and the other photos are from the Hermitage archives of historical objects, photographed in 2017 and from the display cases.)

The first two photos below are of chasubles worn by Father Champagnat when celebrating Mass. The “back” of the chasubles are shown. This is what the congregation would have seen while attending Mass, as the priest was facing the altar and away from the congregation. The reader will notice the same embrace by Father Champagnat of rich ornamentation for vestments as he applied to sacred vessels. The third chasuable is from a later time. The image of Mary on the third example has been blown up to show detail, the sort of decoration Father Champagnat approved of and encouraged. Different designs and different colours were for special seasons and feast days.

The small patches or stitching are sewn into the vestments. The JBMC on the purple patch is, of course, for Joseph Benedict Marcellin Champagnat. The red patch tells of being given (DON) by Mme. Gabrielle Balas, a great benefactor of the Brothers, along with other members of the Balas family. They were particularly generous at the time of the building and furnishing of the new chapel completed in 1877.

Champagnat’s short trip to Paris, August 1836, seeking authorisation

Brother Sylvestre has a brief entry telling of this unsuccessful trip: “As at this time [1836] the government showed itself to be less unfavourable to the teaching congregations, Fr. Champagnat judged it to be an appropriate time to renew the efforts made between 1820 and 1834. With this in mind on 19th August 1836, having
prayed for this intention, he returned to the capital. But unfortunately, on his arrival he discovered that M. Sauzet, who was now Minister of Public Education and on whom he was counting, no longer had the power as the Ministry had just been changed. And so, he had to return to l’Hermitage.”

Reproduced here is Father Champagnat’s passport. There were various requirements for French citizens of the time to carry passports for travel within France. The handwritten document to the left is one of several testimonials that Father Champagnat took with him to be able to present to those who were to assess the worthiness of the Institute to gain civil recognition. The typewritten sheet gives an English translation of some of those testimonials.
Long discussions/consultations/meetings drafting the Rule, 1836; distribution, 1837

Earlier we read that all the Brothers were supplied with a hand-copied “Rule” to look over and give feedback. Father Champagnat was very keen that all his Brothers be consulted. An opportunity for such consultations occurred during the holidays. The present compiler of this history believes that the accompanying cover page and handwritten page could be one of those copies distributed to the houses for the Brothers to look over. (The more neatly written page is in Father Champagnat’s own hand. It could have been part of the manuscript sent to the printer.)

It was during 1836 that a small committee of senior Brothers set to work on a final draft. Brother Jean-Baptiste explains: “He assembled, for this purpose, a number of the most experienced Brothers, and for more than six months he devoted several hours a day to this important work. Each article was examined and discussed separately; and some of them occupied several sittings …”

The final copy was sent to the printer in December 1836, and was ready for giving to each Brother early in 1837.

It was all contained in the 58 pages of a slim volume and small in size. It contained eleven titles with the following headings:

Chapter I – Extract from the Statutes of the Society: 1º Aim of the Brothers – 2º Conditions for being received into the Society – 3º Conditions for establishing a house.
Chapter II – Timetable and order of the day – Special rules for the beginners’ class.
Chapter III – Government of the Brothers in the establishments: - 1º Brother Director – 2º Brother first Director – 3º Brother Visitor.
Chapter IV – Means for maintaining piety and regularity: 1º Confession and Communion – 2º Monthly retreat – 3º Other practices.
Chapter V – How the Brothers should behave in their different relationships – 1º Among themselves – 2º With ecclesiastics and civil authorities – 3º With the parents of pupils – 4º With the children.
Chapter VI – Special classes.
Chapter VII – Letters
Chapter VIII – Going outside, travelling
Chapter IX – Care of temporal goods
Chapter X – Holidays
Chapter XI – Funerals of members of the Society at the Mother House.

These chapters were preceded by an instruction on the esteem we should have for the Rules. This instruction was reproduced word for word in the 1852 edition. That edition greatly developed the Rules, but the fundamental principles and the main points remained the same.
Another visit from Monsignor de Pins

“The road from Saint-Chamond to Lavalla was made in 1837. The solitude of the Hermitage was not helped by it. A fairly good pathway leads from that road to the house.

During the summer, Mgr. de Pins honoured us one evening with his second visit. His carriage stopped at le Creux and His Grace arrived at the house by the road and pathway mentioned above. The good Father and Fr. Matricon, who had gone to meet him following the river, missed him. The Brothers had been alerted and they welcomed Monsignor and brought him to the chapel. He addressed them with a touching allocution during which the good Father arrived in great haste and brought the bishop to his bedroom. At the same time the coachman brought the carriage into the yard and dropped Fr. Matricon who was quite sickly. After a friendly conversation with Fr Champagnat, the bishop got into the carriage again and returned to Saint-Chamond.” [Br. Avit’s Annals]

Brothers having made perpetual vows, 1836

The accompanying page of signatures dates from 1835 or 1836 and could well be regarded as a page from a Hermitage “Autograph Book”!
Another article in the newspaper, 1836

The accompanying two columns are taken from the Catholic newspaper, *L’Ami de la Religion*, from 1836.

The following is a translation of the article from the newspaper, *L’Ami de la Religion*, 1836. Be aware that the article contains some errors of fact as well as curious expressions:

“The society of the priests of Mary established in the diocese of Lyons and Belley of which we spoke in this journal on 3rd September, combines with its other good works the direction of Brothers who are members of the same Society, and who conduct schools in the country. This institution was begun about 20 years ago at Lavalla near St. Chamond, a sub-district of St. Etienne. Some pious clerics, afflicted at the ignorance and neglect of the children in country areas, undertook to train young men to perform the office of teachers. Ecclesiastical authority approved their zeal, and Pope Pius VII addressed to the superior a brief of encouragement. The Statutes of the Brothers have been approved by the royal council of Public Instruction, as may be seen in the “General Handbook of Primary Education”, April 1834 edition.

“The Brothers of Mary work in twos; they wear a costume somewhat similar to that of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. They have today about 30 establishments in the dioceses of Lyons, Belley, Grenoble and Viviers. Their mother-house built by themselves is at Our Lady of the Hermitage, near St. Chamond; the novitiate is also there. There is another at La Cote-St-André, diocese of Grenoble. The Brothers conduct at Lyons a home for orphans founded by a noble lady; there are three Brothers in this establishment which was begun two years ago. The Brothers number in all about 200. They teach school gratuitously, but the parishes must pay them a salary – set at 400 francs for each Brother.

“It is unnecessary to state that piety is the soul of this Institute. The Brothers are directed by a priest of the Society. They follow about the same method of teaching as the Brothers of the Christian Schools, without neglecting new methods whose advantages are proved by experience. The services they have rendered and those which they are still able to provide are such as to merit from the government a definite authorisation granted by royal ordinance.”
Sending of the first missionaries, 1836

Unfortunately, the *Life of Father Champagnat* is extraordinarily brief regarding the momentous occasion of the sending of three Brothers to the other side of the world – the first time outside France. Brother Jean-Baptiste merely notes: “He [Bishop Pompallier] was joined by four priests and three Brothers to share his labours and sacrifices.” And it is only in a footnote of the 1989 edition of the *Life* that we learn the Brothers’ names as we read: “With Bishop Pompallier there went, on December 24th 1836: Fathers Servant, Bataillon, Bret and Chanel; Brothers Marie-Nizier [Delorme], Michel [Colomban] and Joseph-Xavier [Luzy].” And Brother Stephen Farrell’s account is no fuller. The Hermitage would have been abuzz for weeks with talk of this dramatic development in the history of the Institute. Presumably there would have been poring over maps and calculating the length of the up-coming long journey etc. While the Fathers and Brothers were to gather at Le Harvre, coming from different parts, there would have been special interest at the Hermitage in Brother Marie-Nizier, being, as he was, a “local”, having come from not too far away when he joined.

In a letter to Father Fontbonne, who had gone to the missions in St. Louis in the United States, writing in the following year, Father Champagnat tells of the enthusiasm of the Brothers for this mission in the Pacific: “You could not believe what emulation the Polynesia mission has stirred up among all here. They envy the lot of those who had been chosen to be the forerunners of the Association in those islands; our Brothers said goodbye to them in the hope of going out to join them very soon.” The background to the area of the Pacific being “allocated” to the newish Marist congregation is that it was the custom of the Church, through departments in the Vatican, to entrust different geographical areas of the world to particular religious congregations. Originally the responsibility for Oceania was given to the Society of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in 1825; but the territory was judged to be too large, and the western portion was formed into a vicariate Apostolic and given to the Society of Mary in 1836 and Monsignor Jean Baptiste Pompallier (1807–1871) was appointed vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania. Later, the vicariate Apostolic of Central Oceania was created comprising New Caledonia, Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji. A later subdivision, reduced the vicariate to include only Tonga, the Wallis Islands, Futuna, and Niue.

In an article printed in 2016, New Zealand Marist historian, Br. Edward Clisby, adds a small detail: “The next group gathering was on 15 October 1836 in preparation for the departure of Mgr Pompallier’s party of Marist missionaries for Oceania. It was on this occasion that Chanel hung a silver gilt heart containing the names of the missionaries around the neck of the Black Madonna, thus initiating a practice which was to be followed by all succeeding groups.”

Brother Edward’s article continues: “Chanel describes the ceremony at Fourvière in a few lines in a letter he wrote to a friend from Le Havre on 29 October 1836: ‘On Saturday 15 October, the eve of our departure from Lyon, we had the consolation of hanging a magnificent silver-gilt...”
heart round the neck of the Blessed Virgin at Fourvière, taking care beforehand to insert our names and an act of consecration to our dear mother’. Another of the priests in the party, Pierre Bataillon, gives a fuller description in his letter to Colin on the 25th: ‘You know that we have hung a heart on the neck of our good Lady of Fourvière. You will be able to recognise it. It is the most beautiful of all and the words ‘missionaries of Polynesia’ can be read below. It encloses a very long strip of paper on which two columns of names can be entered on both sides – thousands could be entered. Please God it may soon be full. We also placed in this little monument of our filial piety a little consecration of ourselves and our savages to our good mother.’

Brother Marie-Nizier Delorme describes it in very similar terms in a letter to Champagnat on 8 November and adds: ‘It is to be devoutly hoped that it is pleasing to Mary to find her heart filled with the names of her children – there may be thousands in that very heart one day.’ It is to be noted that the Fourvière website states that it is now a question of a silk ribbon on which the names are written in ink, so at some stage they appear to have been transferred from the original paper.”

Death of the “brother of the cow”, Brother Dorothee, 1837

An insight into the nature of life at the Hermitage and the early Brothers can be gained by glancing at the short life of Brother Dorothee (Jean Villelonge, 1810-1837). He was accepted by Father Champagnat at the age of 13, having had little education. His main occupation was looking after the cow from which milk was obtained for the sick. He died at the age of 27! Yet he is singled out for special mention as one of “Our Models in Religion” (the original English title of the book from which the book Our First Brothers was derived; the French title, by Br. Francois was Biographies de Quelques Frères) because of his exemplary religious life. Br. Francois wrote: “...his humility and the low opinion he had of himself led him to insist on being given the care of the farm animals and the stable. His request was granted, and he spent nearly all his life in this humble job.”

The title, the “brother of the cow”, springs from a rather charming anecdote involving a visiting priest and Father Champagnat’s ready wit in defence of his humble Brother. Brother Alain Delorme’s rendering of it is as set out in the box:

Books and various materials Champagnat kept in stock for the Brothers

The following list, in Brother Owen Kavanagh’s handwriting, tells of supplies Father Champagnat kept on hand for the Brothers:

- Catechism
- Sacred History
- Livre d’Or
- School Management – de la Salle
- Sinner’s Guide
- Pens (a packet of pens for 8 sous)

- Rosary beads
- Principles of Religious and Christian Perfection
- Office Book
- Way of the Cross
- Way of the Cross
- Paper

- Bible
- Chronologie
- Grammar
- Politeness

- Communion Book
- Arithmetic
- Hours of Lyons
- Penknife

- Sacred History
- Principles of Religious and Christian Perfection
- Livre d’Or
- School Management – de la Salle
- Sinner’s Guide
- Pens (a packet of pens for 8 sous)

- Church Book
- Grammar
- Hours of Lyons

- Communion Book
- Arithmetic
- Penknife

- Books and various materials Champagnat kept in stock for the Brothers was derived; the French title, by Br. Francois was Biographies de Quelques Frères) because of his exemplary religious life. Br. Francois wrote: “...his humility and the low opinion he had of himself led him to insist on being given the care of the farm animals and the stable. His request was granted, and he spent nearly all his life in this humble job.”

The title, the “brother of the cow”, springs from a rather charming anecdote involving a visiting priest and Father Champagnat’s ready wit in defence of his humble Brother. Brother Alain Delorme’s rendering of it is as set out in the box:

Brother Avit tells the following anecdote. “The Hermitage had a cow from which it got milk for the sick. Brother Dorothee looked after the animal. He was a brother with little schooling but who was very pious, very obedient and of great simplicity of nature. One day, Fr Préher, the parish priest of Tarentaise, came to see the pious Founder, his friend. After dinner, they went for a walk in the garden. Noticing Brother Dorothee, who was tending his cow in the pasture at the bottom of the garden, Fr Préher greeted him, saying “Good day, brother of the cow!” The good brother, who mistook the curate for a Marist priest, naively replied, “Good day, my Father!” So, said Father Champagnat, laughing, this means that you are the cow’s father!” A little too late, Fr Préher resolved to no longer take advantage of the simplicity of others” (Avit, Annales de l’Institut, p. 179/180, Vol. I, Rome 1993).
First half of 1838, Champagnat away from the Hermitage -- in Paris

The reader may know of the lengthy and disappointing efforts Father Champagnat had made from the very beginning to have his institute of teaching Brothers officially recognized by the civil authorities. He spent much of the first half of 1838 in Paris arranging interviews with people in authority, writing letters, seeking audiences etc. That story is well covered in the detailed biographies of Champagnat. Suffice it to say here that the recognition that he so strenuously sought was not achieved in his lifetime, and his greatest stumbling block was the Minister for Public Instruction of the day, Etienne Nacisse Salvandy (pictured). To learn about this man, his background and possible motivation there is an excellent summary in Brother Stephen Farrell’s book, page 215.

When in Paris in 1838 Father Champagnat and Bishop Pompallier initially stayed at the Hotel du bon Lafontaine in the Rue de Genelle (No.16). They then moved on to the Missions Etrangères in Rue de Bac (pictured), Champagnat’s usual lodging while in Paris. The map shown here is from an 1830 map, and quite possibly Father Champagnat used this very map to find his way to his different appointments. One can clearly see in the bottom left corner the Missions Etrangeres. And interestingly enough this 1830 map gives the location of the Ministry of Public Instruction as being in the Rue des Sts. Peres which can be seen only a few blocks to the right. And the street of the earlier stay, Rue de Grenelle, can be seen on the map coloured orange and running diagonally across the map from the top left and crossing Rue du Bac.
To acquaint readers with where in Paris Father Champagnat stayed while there, the answer is in the almost exact centre of the 1830 map reproduced here.
The two postcards of the Rue du Bac are to give an idea of the city of Paris in the nineteenth century.

And, yes, Father Champagnat did pay his bill! The following facsimile is found in Br. Fredrick McMahon’s pilgrim’s guide, Marist Milestones – A Champagnat Pilgrimage:

An entry concerning Champagnat’s payment for lodgement at Missions Étrangères - June 30th, 1838.

Ceaseless visits/interviews/appointments while in Paris
Father Chanut (pictured), who accompanied Father Champagnat, kept a record in a notebook (kept at the Archives in Rome) detailing the various official appointments Father Champagnat attended to while in Paris:

January 15 Departure from Lyons.
Thursday 18 Arrival in Paris; staying Hôtel du Bon Lafontaine, rue Grenelle, (St-Germain).
Friday 19 Visit to the Picpus Fathers, where Bro. Marie Jubin remained. (He was a Brother who was to learn the printing trade)
Visit to Mr. Ardaillon, rue de Provence, nº 22, he made an appointment to see us at his home on Monday at 9 a.m.
Visit to Fr. Jammes, Vicar-General, rue Princesse.
Sunday 21 Visit to Mr. Sauzet, Quai des Grands-Augustins, Hôtel Bisson.
Visit to Fr. D., presbytery, St-Roch, nº 8.
Visit to Fr. Miollan, Seminary of the Foreign Missions, Rue du Bac, nº 120.
Visit to Minister of Public Instruction De Salvandy, with Mr. Ardaillon.
We left with him: 1° the Statutes of the Society; 2° the request for authorization drawn up for the committee of public instruction of the arrondissement of St-Etienne. This latter request had already been presented to Mr. Delebecque (4th September 1836), department
head at the Ministry of Public Instruction, along with other documents. The minister gave his approval to the documents, telling us that they would go before the Council of State.

Visit to Mr. Delebecque, division chief at the Ministry of Public Instruction. He promised to lend a hand in the completion of our business.

Visit to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Faubourg St-Martin, n° 55.

Visit to Mr. Millan and to...for, etc.

Visit to Mr. Sauzet, promise on his part to speak to the minister; urged us to keep him informed of our affair.

Visit to the Count de Bastard, rue des Saints-Pères, n° 13; he made an appointment with us for the next day at noon, at the Grand Luxembourg, Palace of the Peers, with the aim of gaining us an interview with Mr. De Gérando, member of the Council of State.

Visit with Mr. [Hammes], who advised us to see Mr. Schemitte, division chief at the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Visit to Mr. De Jussieux, deputy for the Seine, first secretary of the prefecture, at City Hall, Place de Grève; he asked us for a detailed account of the matter in question, so that he could get more directly involved.

Visit from Mr. de Reneville, former state councillor; request for brothers; promise on his part to speak to a friend of Mr. Delebecque, and then to take whatever action would be in keeping with the progress of our business.

Interview at the Luxembourg with Mr. De Gérando, who told us to see him tomorrow at his lodgings at 5 p.m., Rue Vaugirard, n° 52 bis.....

Then, from Paris, Father Champagnat wrote back to Brother Francois at the Hermitage thus:

J.M.J.
from the Seminary of the Foreign Missions, Paris, 25th January 1838

My very dear brother,

We arrived here eight days ago, but not without having suffered in various ways, as you can well imagine. We have already covered a lot of ground in Paris and made many visits, and the end is still not in sight. May God be blessed a thousand times. Everyone we have seen appears very interested in our affair. I do not believe Mr. Ardaillon would have done very much if we had not come. Continue to recommend the matter urgently to God and his holy Mother; without that, what can we do? We hope to succeed.

Send me at once two dozen copies of the prospectus. You know how to wrap them so that the postage will not be too high.

I am well, as is Fr. Chanut. The cold is the only thing that bothers us, since fuel is so dear. We keep warm by running from one person to another. We have not stopped running since we got here. We have no snow, but there is no lack of ice. The water in our rooms is frozen night and day. The cold set in again a few days ago.
We are firmly resolved not to loosen our grip until we have got what we want. We were told by the minister that the matter must go before the Council of State, and that that would take a long time, three weeks. Even if it takes three months, we are determined to push on to our goal.

I am writing things as they come to me. I am extremely busy. In a few days I will tell you how things stand.

Take care of everything just as I told you. Consult Frs. Matricon and Terraillon in difficult cases.

We are leaving the Hotel du Bon Lafontaine to go to the seminary of the Foreign Missions, Rue du Bac.

.... We are saying our Masses on behalf of the house. A Dieu, dear brother; best regards to Fr. Besson, Fr. Matricon, the priests who ask about us, Bros. Jean-Baptiste, Stanislas, Jean-Marie and the whole community.

The image here of the folded letter is exactly as it would have been received by Brother Francois. The original is held in the Institute’s archives in Rome and the present archivist (2016), Brother Colin Chalmers, emailed the present compiler the image of the entire page which he then folded along the images of the creases to make it into the form that letters in those days were folded and sealed. It was a period before postage stamps, but the rubber stamp of the post office is clearly seen. A facsimile of the letter is reproduced in the following pages.
18 avril 1806

Mon cher frère,

J'ai reçu hier soir votre lettre et je vous assure
que j'ai fait suivre votre ordre à Messieurs
et que je vous ferai parvenir le devis.

Je pense que nous ferons de même avec
les autres.

Vos affaires me concernant sont en bon ordre,
mais il est impossible de vous donner
les détails de cette situation qui est quelque
tout autre que je ne pensais.

Je vous prie de bien vouloir me faire
connaître les détails qui vous intéressent,
ainsi que des renseignements qui pourraient
me aider à bien vous conseiller.

Je vous prie de bien vouloir me faire
connaître les détails qui vous intéressent,
ainsi que des renseignements qui pourraient
me aider à bien vous conseiller.

J'espère que vous trouverez ma réponse
satisfaisante.

Veuillez agréer, mon cher frère,

Vos dévoués,

[Signature]

Archives F.M.S.
Doc. 111.41.
Il est important que vous ayez une note pour parler de voi...
Also, while in Paris
Br. Sylvestre adds considerably to our understanding of Fr. Champagnat’s time in Paris in 1838 but space does not allow details of all the comings and goings and disappointments. However, the following will be of interest: “For relaxation he went to the school for Deaf-Mutes to learn their method of teaching so that he could pass on the skill to the Brothers. Fr. Dubnois, the Superior of the Seminary, praising Fr. Champagnat said among other things: ‘Fr. Champagnat is the most virtuous man that I know. I have never seen such humility, mortification, and resignation to the will of God equal to his. His piety charmed and edified all our young priests who vied with each other for the joy of assisting him at Mass.’”

Down the road at the Louvre, 1838

Had Father Champagnat had the interest, not a long journey on foot across the river from his lodgings at the Missions Etrangères he could have visited two newly opened exhibits at the Louvre Museum. King Louis Philippe presented an extensive collection of Spanish art to the museum to be housed in a special Spanish Gallery. It was opened on 7th January 1838, just a week before Father Champagnat’s arrival, and featured a most extraordinary number of paintings by Zurbaran, Murillo, Ribera, Cano, Velazquez and El Greco. One of only two of the paintings still held by the Louvre is El Greco’s: “Le Christ en croix adoré par deux donateurs” (pictured). The catalogue ran to 115 pages, and the exhibition was virtually a religious exhibition with most of the subjects being of the Holy Family or saints or Gospel scenes. Also exhibited was an extraordinary large stained-glass window from the Renaissance: Vitrail de la Renaissance ou "des inventions, découvertes et travaux qui ont signalé l'époque de la Renaissance entre 1450 et 1550" (pictured).

A selection of images of Our Lady is given here to show what Father Champagnat might have seen (or missed!):

Clockwise from the upper Assumption painting, the paintings are: Antolinez: Assumption de la Vierge; Juan del Castillo: Assumption de la Vierge; Pedro de Vellegas: Nativity; Murillo: L’Annunciation; Francisco de Zurbaran: L’Annunciation.
Another feature of life in Paris of the time was visits of sight-seers to Notre Dame Cathedral, not to worship, but rather to see the different locations mentioned in Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1830).

And 1838 in Paris is also celebrated for what is said to be the first photograph taken of a human being by Louis Daguerre in this street scene.

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**A traditional letterhead invocation – V.J.M.J**

(The following jottings are taken from notes by Brother Owen Kavanagh based on an article in the *Bulletin de l’Institute* from 1938)

At the head of his letters to Brother Anthony of Millery, 5th August and 10th September, 1830, Fr. Champagnat wrote, for the first time on his letters we have: “VIVE JESUS, VIVE MARIE, VIVE ST. JOSEPH” (“Long live Jesus, Mary and St. Joseph.”)

His subsequent letters, for the most part, are headed with this invocation, in full or in part, sometimes abbreviated to simply the initial letters in capitals: V.J.M.J. The official badge of the Institute bears these three initial letters. We may ask what led Father Champagnat to place this invocation on his letters.

We note the time in which our Founder was writing; the July Revolution had just taken place (29, 30 and 31st in Paris): “The July Revolution seemed to be directed as much against the church and religion as against the government.” (Daniel-Rops); no one knew how far it would go; “scenes of frightful violence occurred in Paris and elsewhere, and religious buildings were sacked ...” H. Heine wrote: “The old religion is really dead; it has broken up; the majority of French people no longer want to hear it mentioned...” after he had witnessed the anti-clerical incidents that accompanied the revolution.

Father Champagnat’s invocation is a prayer of defiance against the anti-clerical and anti-religious spirit that was so prominent a feature of the revolution. It is a rallying symbol of faith and confidence, a proclamation of loyalty to God and the church; it is the same spirit that inspired Priests, Brothers and people during the persecutions in many other places – Mexico, Spain, Poland, ...

Church historian, Henri Daniel-Rops completely contradicts Heine’s opinion: “The truth was completely the opposite to Heine’s statements; the least we can say is he was a poor prophet; for not only in France itself but in many countries of Europe, “this really dead old religion” was showing signs of astonishing vitality and activity. A breath of youthfulness was reanimating the Church on all sides with new energies. It was nothing else but a veritable springtime that was bursting for the Church.”

Brother Owen concludes with a quotation from the *Bulletin de l’Institute*, Vol XVI, p. 205: “For us these symbolic letters indicate the triple devotion, love and knowledge which the true disciples of Fr. Champagnat should cultivate; they signify the object in life of a Little Brother of Mary – to know, love and serve Jesus, Mary and Joseph. When we write these letters at the head of our pages of work or of our letters, we intend to recall this ideal of our religious life, and to consecrate our activity to the Holy Family.”
The Hermitage would have rung to prayers, and celebratory talks and farewells for the Brothers heading off to the missions in New Zealand. This happened on the 2nd September 1838, and the Brothers were Brothers Eli-Regis Marin (pictured left), Marie-Augustin Drevet (no photo found) and Florentin Francon (pictured right as young man and old man). They were accompanied by Marist Fathers Epalle and Petit. Brother Edward Clisby, one of the Brothers archivists/researchers from New Zealand, was able to supply the photos and the following information:

**Brother Eli-Regis** was born not too far from Lyons and trained as a carpenter. He became a postulant at the Hermitage in 1835 making his first vows in October 1836. It’s quite probable that he added building around the Hermitage to his studies before being selected for the missions. A letter of thanks he wrote to Father Champagnat from Valparaiso, on the journey, is being sought by the current researcher.

**Brother Marie-Augustin Drevet** hailed from the Ain Department, northeast of Lyon, and was a classmate of Eli-Regis as a postulant and made his final vows in October, 1838. After initially being part of the foundation community at St. Didier-sur-Chalaronne in 1836 he returned to the Hermitage in 1838 to prepare for his mission apostolate. Marie-Augustine’s main tasks in the Pacific were in building. He left the Institute there in 1855 and is believed to have died in Fiji around 1870.

Brother Florentin Francon had been appointed to the community of St. Symphorien le Chateau in 1836-7 and returned to the Hermitage in 1838 to prepare for the missions. It is said of him he “had a fine record as catechist, builder, farmer, bookkeeper and farm manager.”

The chapel is inaugurated with Brother Francois organist, 1838

From Brother Avit again: “You remember how much Father Champagnat wanted to have a chapel for his community. Since he had procured that inestimable advantage we know also how anxious he was that church services should be well performed, and that feasts, especially those of the Good Mother be well celebrated. But he wanted the feast of the glorious Assumption of our Sovereign to surpass all the others, since it is the patronal feast of the Institute. He was wonderfully supported in this by the zeal of Br Stanislas, as he was in everything else. His sacristy was still not provided with rich ornaments, but he knew how to get the best out of what he had. Lacking a large organ, which the good Father would not have found sufficiently modest, he got by with a small cylinder organ which could be heard from behind the altar on big feast days. Its repertoire was not very big, but the pieces it did contain were very pious. The Brothers thought it was marvellous. Br François himself considered it an honour to hold the title of organist. After him good Brother Pothin thought the same.”

Brother Avit later clarifies this matter of the organ: “Since funds were lacking for purchasing an organ or harmonium, the saintly Founder had bought a cylinder organ, commonly called a barrel organ. It was only played on solemn feasts, and behind the altar, at the Kyrie, at the Gloria, before benediction and at the elevation. The organist had only to turn a handle. The first artiste was Br François, then Brothers Pothin and Marcellin. Sometimes they put this precious instrument behind the Altars of Repose at the processions on Corpus Christi. The Brothers had more pleasure listening to it than listening to our great organists.”

[The image shown here is taken from the net in the hope that it may be similar to the organ mentioned in the records.]

Professions of 1838

In his *Annals of the Institute*, Brother Avit lists every year the names of the Brothers receiving the habit as well as the names of the Brothers who have died. Here is his entry for 1838 of the professions. The reader might imagine a similar list at the end of each year in the 1830s. “That year, 1838, the uplifting feast of the Assumption was further enhanced by a clothing ceremony at which 16 postulants changed their worldly names for the religious names of Brothers Aubert (Chauvet), Aubin (Cotin), Justin (Perret), Marie Auzone
(Barrot), Babylas (Jay), Bajule (Favier), Barsabas (Celles), Barsanuphe (Perenon), Barulas (Mercier), Rasilée (Mouton), Basilide (Thiollier), Basilien (Gachet), Basilique (Meunier), Basin (Monteux), Aurelle (Dubessy), Attale (Grimaud).”

**Erection of cross, 1838**

Brother Avit tells the whole story: “Father Champagnat, having bought a beautiful sculpted figure of Christ, life-size and painted in the colour of flesh, got his nephew Philippe to make a large cross to which to nail it. At the end of the retreat, 10 October, after the ceremony of the profession and renewal of vows, they carried out, in the chapel, the blessing of the Christ figure placed on a stretcher decorated for the occasion. It was then carried in procession by the Brothers preceded by the retreat Fathers and several parish priests from nearby parishes before whom went the altar servers and the whole community. During the procession hymns and songs were sung fitting for the occasion. In the middle there was a large stone in the middle of which Fr Champagnat had had a hole made to receive the cross. When the procession arrived there, the presiding priest blessed the cross, which had been laid down beforehand, then the figure of Christ was attached and, by the use of a sliding ladder, it was raised and put into the hole that had been made for it, the face turned towards the house. When that was done, Fr Séon mounted on to a platform and gave a discourse on the seven words uttered by Jesus on the Cross. We then returned to the house by the direct way singing the Ave Maris Stella. (Later that cross was transported to the front of the big esplanade and placed on a pedestal of cut stone. In 1867, since the cross and the figure of Christ had been too badly damaged it was replaced with a cast figure of Christ and an iron cross on the same pedestal.)”

**Special property acquired, 1839**

A great acquisition of property was made in 1839 on the southern side of the river where the Reception and Dining Room are today (2016). What it contained, and the advantages of gaining it, are explained by Br. Avit: “On 1 January [1839], in the office of the notary, M. Finaz, M. Patouillard and his wife sold to Father Champagnat all they possessed in the place called des Gaux, both at Izieux and at Saint Martin, comprising fullers earth, workshop for bleaching cottons, dwelling houses, hayloft, stable, reservoir, levee, canal reach, stretch of water and water point on the River Gier, meadow, orchard, pasture fields, land, woods and rocks, toilets, appurtenances and dependencies, in a word, all such as has been acquired by the married couple Patouillard from M. Antoine Thiollère-Laroche, on 3 July 1824. This sale was agreed on for a payment of 39,000 francs, which M.
Champagnat undertook to pay as follows: 10,000 francs on 1 March next, 5,000 francs on 1 January 1841, and 24,000 francs on 1 January 1843, with legal interest.”

“This acquisition was rather costly, but the good Father was very pleased to be rid of awkward neighbours and of the disadvantages their proximity had caused him for 15 years.”

[The portrait of Mathieu Patouillard was photographed by Brother Andre Lanfrey in 2011 in the home of his descendants, Maryvonne and Marius Arnaud. The family later gifted the portrait to the Hermitage.]

“The Patouillard family had sometimes accused the Brothers of throwing stones into their meadow and taking water from the Gier to water their garden. Moreover, having that family as neighbours meant that lots of people came to do business with them, and that took away all the advantages of solitude which had decided the saintly Founder in 1824 to put the motherhouse of his Institute there. This acquisition was, therefore, an excellent arrangement.”

The position of this property can be seen in this coloured “Plan” at the very bottom — “Patouillard Property” -- which, interestingly, shows many of the other developments during the 1830s.

The other diagram is taken from Brother Owen’s research, while the contemporary photo shows the area being described… that of present day (2017), Reception and Dining.

A most interesting article by Brother Andre Lanfrey in Marist Notebooks, No.33, entitled “Mathieu Patouillard, Neighbour of the Hermitage” will reveal many fascinating aspects of the relationship of Father Champagnat and the Brothers with this neighbouring family.

New set of iron beds built by a new novice, 1839

On 2nd February 22 novices were received into the institute. Amongst them was Brother Caste, who, as time went by, was commissioned to make a new set of iron beds. The reader will recall the earlier mention of a forge being one of the crafts/trades set up at the Hermitage. An entry Br. Avit makes in 1838 tells of Brother Caste, his life and his death: “Br Caste was a geometrician, a mechanic, and a man who could put his hand to anything. He it was who made most of the iron beds with bars that the community used for a long time. He even invented them, for none of that kind existed then. The iron for the beds was given to the saintly Founder by the factory in Terremoire, that is, by M. Genisseux, its manager. Br Caste died an early death as a result of getting a speck of copper in one of his eyes. It was Br Polycarpe who had procured this excellent subject for the congregation.”

Father Champagnat, here, there and everywhere, doing everything

A vivid picture is given by Brother Jean-Baptiste of the many tasks of building and repairing Father Champagnat did. He would “… put his hand to any task. He would construct a wall with the masons, or a partition with the plasterers; make a piece of furniture or lay a floor with the carpenters; hew stones with the labourers; work in the garden; clear a field, haul stones or transport manure: it was all one to him; no task was too small for him …” And he goes on to list many other tasks he threw himself into:
Acceptance by Marcellin of all these tasks is found in a footnote Brother Jean-Baptiste provides in his *Life*: “Fr. Champagnat remarked one day: ‘I could have led a quiet life in a small parish instead of being continually weighed down by the government of this Society; but the glory of God and the salvation of souls demand this work of me. I could, likewise, have lived at peace, working away, instead of enduring the numerous troubles, cares and travels involved in the government and direction of the Brothers; but this is what God wants, and I am happy.’”

**Brother Marie-Jubin’s printing, 1839**

Brother Marie-Jubin accompanied Father Champagnat to Paris in early 1838 for the purpose of learning printing. The fruits of his learning are seen in a long letter Father Champagnat writes to the Brothers, dated 9th September 1839, summoning the Brothers to the Retreat. It is believed to be the first printed material from Brother Marie-Jubin’s press.

**Brother Pacome hangs up his boots, 1839**

As many of the Brothers from the Hermitage community, including Father Champagnat himself, as well as others from nearby, joined the funeral procession for Brother Pacome sometime in 1839, they would have been looking at their boots. Quite possibly Brother Pacome had mended them at some time, as he had been the Hermitage bootmaker. His place was then taken in that humble but very important occupation by Brother Spiridion.

**Marcellin’s deteriorating health and the election of a successor, October 1839**

A very succinct summary of the election of Brother Champagnat’s successor is given by Brother Stephen Farrell:

> Credit must be given to Fr. Colin who was the first to perceive the gravity of Marcellin’s health and took the trouble to organise a successor. So, at the close of the Brothers’ Retreat at the Hermitage, on 12th October (1839) an election took place for one of the Brothers to be elected Director General. Colin had taken the initiative of going to the Bishop to gain his approval. Then, as Superior General of the Marist Fathers (of whom Champagnat was a member) he told Marcellin that he would organise an election for one of the Brothers to become Director General. Marcellin quite willingly agreed. Colin decided that the ninety-two professed Brothers should each have one vote, but they would write three names on their piece of paper. Since Brother François gained more votes than anyone else (he was given 87 of the votes) he automatically became Director General. The next two: Brother Louis-Marie with 70 votes and Br. Jean-Baptiste with 57, became his Assistants.

This was one of the most important events in the short history of the Institute, in so far as the continuity and future of the Institute depended on it. The election was a very solemn affair and conducted with great ceremony. To create a mental picture, a tiny extract from Brother Avit’s very detailed account is given:

> “After the evening prayer, Brothers Jean Marie, Denis, Pie, Philippe and Andronic were chosen to make the preparations in the election hall as follows. At the far end, under the crucifix, a seat for the Brother Director General, and on each side chairs for his Assistants. In front, a statue of the Blessed Virgin on a table prepared for that. In the middle, the urn into which the voting papers would be put, 92 small, blue, square tickets and as many quills newly sharpened, all on a table covered with a green cloth. In front of the crucifix, at the opposite end, seats for the Fathers of the Society and on each of the sides for the professed Brothers. In front of the Fathers, and open to their inspection,
three separate tables for the secretaries. The non-professed Brothers and the postulants had their place in the outside part of the hall, which was split by a moveable partition. The chapel was decorated as for great solemnities.”

(A somewhat interesting insight into the nature of things in those days was this mention by Bro. Avit regarding the writing of the electoral tickets: “Tickets and pens were distributed and each person wrote in secret the names of those he had chosen. Since a few did not know how to write, Br Louis Marie and Br Jean acted as witnesses and Br Louis Marie wrote them down in presence of Br Jean.”

He follows by telling in great detail the election process and the declaration of the results. And after it was all over there was dinner:

“It was midday, the signal for dinner was given and the whole community went to the refectory. The Brother Director General and his Assistants, understanding that their first duty was to give their Brothers, following their divine Master, lessons in humility and abnegation, took upon themselves on this occasion the service of the tables and, during this meal, which was seasoned with peace, union and charity, the Brothers were free to indulge in the sweet and holy joy of modest and edifying conversation.” Note that the early title, later changed to “Superior General” was the “Brother Director General”.

Who managed what towards the end of the 1830s?

“Towards the end of life of the pious Founder, the novitiate was headed by Brother Bonaventure, Brother Sylvestre scholasticate, infirmary Brother Damien, the lapidary Brother Hippolytus, the shoemaking Brother Pachomius, and weaving Brother Jean-Joseph; Brother Stanislaus was sacristan and questor, Brother Louis Bookseller, Brother Jerome valet, etc. …” [Taken from an article in the Bulletin de l’Institute or 1912]

Writing in the late 1830s, Brother Avit lists the following Brothers and their tasks at the Hermitage, under the heading, “The Brothers at the Hermitage”:

“We would like to say a word about the Brothers whom the good Father was embracing. Br Jean Baptiste was helping Br François in the government. Moreover, he gave conferences to the Brothers and the novices and often stressed what he was saying by stretching out his middle finger.

Br Jean Marie was bursar and general supervisor. He had had some Judas windows put in different places in order to see without being seen.

Br Louis was librarian and master of ceremonies. He also gave lessons on good manners.

Br Stanislas was still sacristan, a great comforter of the afflicted, nurse, alms collector and general factotum.

Br Hippolyte was a master tailor and edified everyone by his unchanging patience in the midst of the most trying circumstances.

Br John Joseph was the timekeeper who was never one minute late. He was also head of the workshop where woollen sheets and other cloth was made. He was the last one to give up the blue habit of Lavalla.

Br Bonaventure was master of novices whom he formed by his example and by his lessons.

Br Etienne, his helper, often amused his disciples by his naïve ways, his scruples and his indecisiveness during catechism lessons.

Brother Pierre was still the master mason as well as Br Pierre Joseph who did iron work as well.

Br Théophile helped in the tailor’s workshop.

Among the Brothers of whom the good Father never spoke, Br Jérôme was still the perfect worker. Br François Marie was the doorkeeper. The intrepid Br Vincent was the head cook. Br Pacôme was the head cobbler. Br Isidore was the baker and the silent Br Jacques looked after the cows.”
Br Jean Claude was put in charge of the linen. Br. Avit adds: “He is still doing that job in 1889”, which makes his time with the “linen” to be 50 years!

The death [in 1838] of Brother Pacôme took away the head of the cobbler’s workshop. Br Basile, who was the most capable after him, was due to go to Oeania soon. The workshop was therefore entrusted to Br Spiridion. He was a good old man but not well educated, not very good at his trade, and a man whom the kindly Father had taken in out of charity.”

Deaths and burials at the Hermitage during the 1830s

While a number of Brothers died at the Hermitage during the 1830s, it became a special time for members of Father Champagnat’s family to be buried. In 1833 it was decided that the original cemetery of 1827 was too small and so in 1834 another had to be made near the first but a little more elevated. Fr. Champagnat with his Brothers built a high retaining wall at the side of the stream. This wall with three others formed the enclosure of the new cemetery, which was about 8 metres long by 6 metres wide. In 1833, Jean Pierre Champagnat, aged 46, a brother of the Founder, died and was buried in the cemetery; and the following year, 1834, one of Jean Pierre’s sons, Jean Champagnat, aged 5, was also buried. He was the first to be buried in the new (1834) cemetery, in March of that year. And later in the year Marie Champagnat, aged 14, and Barthélémy Champagnat, aged 18 (who had made his profession before he died), were also buried. And perhaps a specially poignant death and burial for Father Champagnat was another nephew, named Marcellin Champagnat, aged 6, who was also buried, presumably by Father Marcellin Champagnat himself, in 1837.

1836, a forecast of a passage later found in Champagnat’s Spiritual Testament of 1840

Those familiar with Champagnat’s final words to his Brothers – known as the “Spiritual Testament” – will be interested to read these words from a Circular he wrote to the Brothers in 1836:

“May union and charity, of which the well-beloved disciple speaks, reign among you always. May those who have to obey perform this duty with humility; may those who command, do so with sweet charity. By this means the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit will be always with you. May a real zeal for your perfection animate you and constant fidelity to your rule lead you to make real progress. But do not forget that it is the exact observance of the Rule that is the true means of acquiring that religious perfection. Take courage then, dear Brothers, the difficulties and struggles of life are of short duration. Fix your minds on that immense weight of glory which will be the everlasting reward with which the just Judge will crown only him who has conquered and persevered right to the end.”
Hermitage Brothers seconded as farmers, 1837

The property at La Grange-Payre was walking distance (at least for folk in those days) from the Hermitage. It was a generous gift from a benefactress and became a boarding school which also took the young aspirants to the Brothers who were under 15 years of age. We find this entry by Brother Avit in his Annals for the year 1837:

“The farmer working in Grange Payre had left. From then on, the Brothers cultivated that property themselves. They were not skilful farmers, but that land was easy to cultivate. To keep the fields in good shape and cut the hay in them, to plough the land, sow wheat there as well as potatoes and beans, to harvest them, gather the different fruits from the large number of trees and prevent raiders from taking them, that was all the cultivation needed. Br Joseph was put in charge of it and most of the workers came from the Hermitage in the morning and returned there in the evening. ”

The Annual Retreat, year after year, held at the Hermitage

From the earliest times a tradition began that all the Brothers would attend an Annual Retreat at the Hermitage. A circular was always sent reminding the Brothers to pray in preparation and listing what was to be brought. Each was to bring ten pages of writing and ten pages of the writing of various children. And there are records of Father Champagnat awarding prizes for the best presentations.

But the main purpose of the Retreat was to provide a time of quiet to pray, reflect on the scriptures and on Religious Life and the living of the virtues. Father Champagnat presented talks on the virtues such as Spirit of Faith, Devotion to Mary, Patience, the Presence of God etc.

The Retreat time, too, was a chance for the Brothers to catch up with one another and to learn of developments that had happened and those that were planned. There is occasional mention of settling up of accounts with the Brother who supplied books.

(Hermitage Brothers’ photo – it is provided to remind 21st century readers, enjoying personal en-suites, that the Brother on retreat and “en vacances” would have lodged in such dormitories)

Holidays … “les vacances”

The Retreat was followed by the holidays (“Vacances”) … very different from our twenty-first century concept of holidays, even for Brothers. You can read in the French “At 5 hours … rising; 5 hours and 20 minutes, Meditation; 6.00 O’Clock Mass …” till half-past seven in the evening; on the go all the time.

Read the accompanying letter from Father Champagnat saying what to bring etc.
Various customs  (as told by Brother Avit)

- If travelling the Brothers as far as possible walked and carried their clothes in a very simple black coarse cloth bag.
- Since the material used for making soutanes, cloaks and stockings was made at the Hermitage, it was rather coarse, but it lasted a long time. The soutane had to last for two years, the cloak and the hat five years, and each Brother received two pairs of stockings to last a year. At that time no one asked for clothing before the appointed time, nor did anyone have a trunk or a bag with a lock. Nor were the shoes in any way dainty. You could often see bits of hair on the uppers where the leather had been badly tanned.
- No Brother wore the cord before making his three temporary vows, for at that time they made only one vow, that of obedience. Novices were not allowed to use the rabat until such time as they knew their prayers. It was often taken from them as a punishment, as indeed was the soutane also. Moreover, not all the Brothers in the house wore the rabat.
- Morning and evening prayers were at that time those of the diocese of Lyons. On Sunday, the rosary consisted of ten decades. After the first Pater, the Good Mother was invoked as Daughter of the Father on the second bead, Mother of the Son on the third, Spouse of the Holy Spirit on the fourth. The Litany of Saint Joseph was not said.
- When he was at home, the saintly Founder used to eat in the common refectory at a small table with the other Fathers. He habitually made the young subjects repeat the reading, sometimes the older ones too, and sometimes added a short exhortation. He often also used to go round the tables to see if everyone was sitting properly and was not spoiling anything. Breakfast consisted of only one plate of soup and a piece of bread with water.
- The parents of postulants were not invited to clothing ceremonies or were invited only indirectly. Those who were invited did not have a meal at the house although the nearest inn might be quite far away.
- After their death, professed Brothers were clothed only in their religious garb. They were then seated on a chair and not laid on a bed. Novices and postulants were buried in a sheet, and covered with another sheet.
- At the funeral of a professed Brother, not only was the Mass celebrated with a deacon and sub-deacon, but at the end of the absolution, two Brothers, kneeling near the body, intoned the Salve Regina which the two choirs took up. After these words: exilium ostende, the two Brothers used to sing three invocations to the Blessed Virgin, as is still done in the diocese of Lyons at the obsequies of priests.
- Apart from the processions at the Assumption and Corpus Christi, every year the saintly founder used to have the 3 processions on the Rogation Days and the Ascension. They made their way up along the road leading to the big esplanade and came back by the cemetery.
Petty cash
Father Champagnat always had cash on the ready in case any Brother needed any. Sometimes when a Brother arrived at the Hermitage and the Founder knew he would have incurred expenses in travel, he would ask him how much he was out of pocket and give him that amount. And if he knew a Brother needed some money for expenses he would immediately make some available.

Brother Sylvestre has a rather charming story related to this. “I remember one Brother telling me”, he writes, “that when he was leaving on a fairly short journey, Fr. Champagnat wanted to give him some money for the road. The Brother refused saying that he had no need of anything. ‘Take it anyway,’ he told him, ‘because you don’t know what might happen in the course of the journey.’ And on saying that he took from his drawer a franc, I believe it was, which he handed over although he had only 2 francs left in the cash box.”

An insight into finances, 1839
Some readers may enjoy gaining a feel for the times by dipping into the finances and payments of accounts for the year 1839, which would have been somewhat typical of the 1830s and 1840s. The following page is a summary of extracts taken from various accounts.
The open books are signed copies of books owned by Marcellin Champagnat with the signature “M. Champagnat”, presumably at the time he was not yet a priest, but a seminarian.

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<th>Appendix 3: Father Champagnat’s Library (in his room at his death)</th>
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<td>1. Année chrétienne, P. Croiset, 17 volum. in 12.</td>
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<td>3. Breviare de Lyon, 4 volumes dom.</td>
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<td>4. Catéchiste (1e bon), M.de la Falze, 2 volum. in 12.</td>
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<td>7. Confession, St. Augustin, 2 volum. in 12.</td>
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<td>8. Corte de Valmont (1e), in 12.</td>
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<td>9. Devotion à M.S., Vaubert, 2 volum. in 12.</td>
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<td>10. Connaissance et amour de M.S.J. (Ial), St. Jura, 5 volum. in 12.</td>
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<td>16. Direction des âmes (traité de la), 2 volum. in 12.</td>
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<td>17. Evangile médité pour tous les jours de l’année, Duquesne, 8 volum. in 12.</td>
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<td>18. Espirit de Saint François de Sales, Mgr. Camus, 2 volum. in 12.</td>
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<td>19. Examens particuliers, Tronson, 2 volum. in 12.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Fondements de la vie spirituelle, Sardin, in 12.</td>
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<td>22. Histoires des plantes, 2 volum. in 12.</td>
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The Great Silence

Many visitors to the Hermitage in the twenty-first century may never have heard of “The Great Silence.” Had they been visiting the Hermitage during the nineteenth century they would have readily noticed the ancient monastic custom being observed. It is the custom of all the members of the monastery keeping silence, and avoiding speaking to anyone, from the last community exercise in the evening till after the first prayers or Mass the next morning. Br. Silvestre mentions how carefully this silence was observed in Fr. Champagnat’s time: “The Great Silence, as now [1886-7], began after evening prayer and lasted until after meditation the following morning. It was kept so rigorously that I do not remember anyone openly breaking it.”

The present researcher, and I guess many a twenty-first century reader, would be somewhat astonished at the amount of silence that was customary during the day in the early years of the Hermitage. While we think of meal times as times for conversation and conviviality, we find that meals were taken in silence. And moving to and from the chapel, and at other times, silence was the order of the day. And it is astonishing, too, to remember that we are told that during the building of the Hermitage in 1824-25, silence was observed!

Champagnat’s commendation of the Institute to Bishop de Bonald, Bishop Gaston de Pin’s successor, 1839

Following the death in 1839 of one of Champagnat’s greatest encouragers and supporters, Archbishop Gaston de Pins, Champagnat wrote to his successor, Bishop de Bonald, introducing himself and commending his Institute to His Grace. He gives this tiny summary about the Hermitage, which includes general numbers: “Present status of the Society of the Brothers of Mary N.D. de l’Hermitage near Saint-Chamond (Loire): very big house, built in 1824 under the auspices and by the liberality of the bishop administrator of the diocese of Lyons, in a valley surrounded by mountains, on the right bank of the Gier; 3 km from Saint Chamond, an unfrequented place conducive to the cultivation of the sciences and the exercises of a regular life; there are usually about one hundred Brothers there and the generosity of some good people is our chief resource.”

CHAPTER 7 The 1839-40 Illness and death of Father Champagnat

Advancing illness of Fr. Champagnat

Br. Sylvestre mentions that after Fr. Champagnat returned from Paris in 1838 it was very clear that he was very unwell. He writes: “... Fr. Champagnat returned [from Paris] to l'Hermitage drained by fatigue, because his illness in 1825 had left him with a pain in his side, which made walking very painful. And besides this illness he had acute gastritis, which resulted in his taking very little food, even on his journeys and he often went for long periods without eating.” He also tells of his coming to meals in the dining room, not to eat, but just to be there with the Brothers.

Marcellin’s “Spiritual Testament” (18th May 1840)

Realising that he had limited time to live, Champagnat sent for Brothers Francois and Louis-Marie and explained to them: “My dear Brothers, as I have not much longer to live, I would like to make my Spiritual Testament now so as to give my last advice to the Brothers; that will help them and give them pleasure”. He then dictated to them what he wanted to say, and they copied down his words. Then he asked that the Brothers be assembled in his room to hear Brother Louis-Marie read the Spiritual Testament to the Brothers and the chaplains of the time.
If anyone wanted to learn the deepest hopes of a founder for a religious institute that he had begun, it would surely be found in the one statement where he attempted to summarise everything of importance just before he was to leave them forever. It is therefore presented here for the reader in full:
TESTAMENT SPIRITUEL

de JOSEPH RENOIT MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT PRÊTRE

Supérieur et Fondateur
De la Société des Petits Frères de Marie.

Décédé à Notre Dame de l’Hermitage sur l’Isle-Chamond (Loir)
le 6 Juin 1840.

Au nom du Père et du Fils et du Saint-Esprit.

Ainsi-soit-il.

Soyons en la présence de Dieu, sous les auspices de la très-vierge et de Saint Joseph, veillant faire connaître à tous les Frères de Marie l’expression de mon désir et de mon bien et de mon amour pour vous, selon que je le crois le plus conforme à la volonté Divine et le plus utile au bien de la Société, mon testament spirituel.

D’avoir je supplie très humblement tous ceux que je pourrais avoir offensée, ou scandalisée, en quelque manière, quoique je n’en sache pas avoir fait volontairement de la
SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT

of JOSEPH BENEDICT MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT PRIEST

Superior and Founder
of the Congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary

Deceased at Notre Dame de l’Hermitage, St. Chamond (Loire)
the 6th June, 1840

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen

Here in the presence of God, with the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph as my heavenly witnesses, desirous of recording for all the Brothers of Mary, the last and dearest wishes of my heart, I summon all my strength to make my Spiritual Testament in terms of what I believe most in accordance with the will of God, and most conducive to the good of the Society.

In the first place, I humbly beseech all those whom I may have offended or disedified in any way, albeit I am not conscious of any willful offence on my part towards anybody, graciously to grant me pardon, pressed by the boundless charity of Christ, and to add their prayers to mine, asking of God in his goodness to overlook the sins of my past life, and admit my soul to the embrace of his all-loving mercy.

I die with sentiments of grateful and respectful submission to the Superior General of the Society of Mary, and in the closest bonds of union with all its members, especially the Brothers, who in the designs of Providence were to come under my care, and who have always had a special claim on my affection.

I desire that absolute and perfect obedience should always prevail among the Brothers of Mary; that those under authority see in their Superiors the representatives of Jesus Christ, and render them willing and implicit obedience, being ever ready to sacrifice at need their own will and judgement. Let them remember that the obedient religious will speak of victories, and that it is mainly obedience that forms the base and buttress of a community. With hearts thus disposed, the Little Brothers of Mary submit blindly to the guidance, not only of the Major Superiors, but also to all those whose duty it is to lead and direct them. They will let this truth of faith sink deep into their minds, that the Superior takes the place of Jesus Christ, and that when he commands, he should be obeyed as if it were Christ himself commanding.

Also, dear Brothers, I beg of you with all the love of my heart, and by all the love you bear me, keep ever alive among you the charity of Christ. Love one another as Jesus Christ has loved you. Be of one heart and one Mind. Have the world say of the Little Brothers of Mary, what they said of the first Christians: “See how they love one another!”
That is the desire of my heart and my burning wish, at this last moment of my life. Yes, my dearest Brothers, hear these last words of your Father, which are those of our Blessed Saviour: “Love one another.”

It is my wish also, dear Brothers, that the same charity that must bind you one to another as members of a single body, should embrace also all other Congregations. Oh, I implore you by the boundless love of Christ, cast out of your hearts all envy of anyone, and especially of those whom God calls like yourselves to the religious state, to labour for the education of youth. Be the first to rejoice at their success, and grieve...
at their misfortunes. Commend them often in your prayers to God, and to Mary, the mother of God. Give way to them readily. Turn away from any talk that would seek to discredit them. Let the glory of God alone and the honour of Mary be your one aim and ambition.

As your wills must be united with those of the Fathers of the Society of Mary in the will of the single Superior General, so I also desire that you be united with them in heart and mind in Jesus and Mary. May their interests be yours; may you find your happiness in going to their assistance as often as is required. May the same spirit, the same love, unite you together as branches of the same family to the one mother, the Blessed Virgin. Since the Superior General of the Fathers is likewise the Superior of the Brothers, he must be the centre of unity for them both. Happy as I was to receive the obedience and submission of the Brothers of Mary, it is my desire that the Superior General always find in them the same obedience and submission. His spirit is mine, his will is mine. I regard that perfect union and that entire submission as the basis foundation of the Society of Mary.

I ask also of God, and I desire with all my soul, that you be constant and faithful to the devout practice of the presence of God, which is the soul of prayer, meditation and of all the virtues; that humility and simplicity may ever be the distinguishing mark of the Little Brothers of Mary; that a tender and filial love for our dear Mother never fail you in all the changes of time and circumstance. Proclaim her love in every place, as far as in you lies. She is Superior of the whole Society, before all others.

With devotion to Mary couple devotion to her spouse, glorious St. Joseph. He is, as you know, one of our leading patrons. You act as Guardian Angels to the children entrusted to your care, so, to these pure spirits also, pay a special homage of love, respect and confidence.

Dear Brothers, love your vocation, be faithful and steadfast to the end with manly courage. Remain true to the spirit of poverty and detachment, and let the daily observance of your holy Rule preserve you from ever violating the sacred vow by which you are bound to the fasting of all the virtues, and the fidelities. There are difficulties in leading the life of a good religious, but grace sweetens all their bitterness. Jesus and Mary will come to your aid, and besides, life is soon over and eternity never ends. Oh, what consolation we have, when about to appear before God, to remember that we have lived in the favour of Mary and in her own Society. May it please that good Mother to preserve you, give your increase and bring you to holiness.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the imparting of the Holy Spirit be with you always. I leave you trustfully within the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, until we all meet again in eternal bliss.

This is my full and final will for the glory of Jesus and Mary.

The present Spiritual Testament shall be delivered into the hands of Father Colin, Superior General of the Society of Mary.

Declared at Notre Dame de l’Hermitage, the eighteenth of May, eighteen hundred and forty, in the presence of the undersigned:

[Signature]

Joseph Baudel Haradin
Of the Little Brothers of Mary

[Signature]

F. Louis Marie d’Haradin

[Signature]

F. Louis d’Haradin
The following is a facsimile, reduced in size, of the last two pages of one of the copies of the Spiritual Testament of Marcellin Champagnat:

Some remarks about this text
The facsimiles of an original copy of the Spiritual Testament of Father Champagnat reproduced here were very kindly emailed to the present compiler of this History from the Marist Brothers’ Archives in Rome by the Archivist of the time, Brother Colin Chalmers in 2016. Another copy is held in the Archives of the Marist Fathers, having been presented, as the reader will notice in the text, to Father Colin. That one bears only the signature of Father Champagnat.

Brother Colin, in answer to questions about the beautiful handwriting says that the text was composed from notes by Brother Louis-Marie and the handwriting is by Brother Francois. The handwriting was so beautiful that the thought was that it could have been professionally written. But if the reader would carefully look at Brother Francois’ signature it will be seen that the letters are in a similar hand to that of the text of the Spiritual Testament.

It seems odd that a document signed by Father Champagnat would have at the heading: “Died... the 6th day of June, 1840”. But it appears that a gap was left there and that sentence added later in a completely different hand to everything else in the text.

Final arrangement of temporal affairs, May 22nd, 1840
Just four days after the reading of the Spiritual Testament and two days after Father Champagnat’s 51st Birthday a legal arrangement setting up a “Civil Society” consisting of Brothers Francois, Stanislaus, Louis, Bonaventure and Louis-Marie was drawn up by M. Mioche which handed over to them the properties of the Hermitage and La Grange Payre. (I’m indebted to Brother Andre Lanfrey for providing the accompanying image of this document)
Final illness and death

The interested reader could not do better than read the account of Marcellin’s final illness and death written by one who witnessed it – Brother Jean-Baptiste – the author of his Life, first published in 1856. It is found in Chapter XXII.

It was during March of 1840 that Marcellin’s illness became very apparent when he was seized by a violent pain in his back which did not allow him to remain out of bed for any length of time.

Brother Jean-Baptiste mentions that Marcellin spoke of various regrets he had because of his illness. One of them was that he was unable to continue with a project of establishing a farm at which orphan children might be trained in order to become farmers and gain a foothold in life. Another was his distress that he could not care for sick Brothers as had been his custom.

There are various anecdotes related to the Brothers who were appointed to stay with him during the nights of his illness. One of these relates that he had called the Brother a number of times during the night but could not wake him from his sleep.

Champagnat’s final days and death

On Thursday, the fourth of June, Marcellin was filled with desire to receive Our Lord one last time. Remembering the words of the parish priest of St Peter’s, he was strongly confident that God would grant him this favour, which he fervently asked through the intercession of St Joseph. His prayer was heard, in fact. The vomiting having abated, Holy Viaticum was brought to him. On the Friday, his sufferings were intense. The internal fire which consumed him, combined with the vomitings, gave him so much pain that he fainted more than once. The doctor could’t understand how he was able to go on so long in that hopelessly stricken state. “I can’t make out what can possibly be sustaining him and delaying his death”, he admitted. Ten days previously he had forecast the end within twenty-four hours.

In the midst of his long martyrdom, the Founder maintained his steady converse with God; he continually glanced at the pictures of Jesus, Mary and St Joseph, and not being able now to say their names, he greeted them with his hand which was held up for him, and directed towards each picture. At last, it became clear on the Friday evening, that the end was close. A large number of Brothers was praying fervently in his room, and wanted to spend the night there for the consolation of receiving his blessing and being present at his death; but he wouldn’t hear of it and was still strong enough to prevail upon them to go and rest. Only Brother Hippolyte and Brother Jerome remained with him.

During the night, he continued his aspirations to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. At about half past two, he remarked to the Brothers that their lamp was going out. “Excuse me, Father”, one of them explained, “but the lamp is burning well.” “But I can’t see it”, he protested. “So bring it closer.” This was done without any improvement in the situation. “Ah”, he said, with a dying voice, “I understand that it is my sight which is failing; my hour has come; thanks be to God!” He then whispered a few more prayers and soon his agony began. It lasted for more than an hour but was mild and peaceful. The vomiting had stopped, for nature was utterly exhausted. At twenty past four, his breathing slowed up and became more laboured and then spasmodic. The Brothers were at that time assembled in the chapel for the singing of the Salve Regina. The Litany of the Blessed Virgin was immediately begun, and during its recital, without effort or struggle, the pious Founder fell asleep in the Lord.

His death took place on Saturday, June 6th, the vigil of Pentecost. He had declared several times during his sickness: “I would like to die on a Saturday, but I don’t deserve that favour, while I do hope for it from Mary’s kindness.” Not only was he given that grace, but also another: he died at the time, which for thirty years he had devoted to meditation and to union with God. It was during the prayer which followed the Salve Regina that the Mother of Mercy led him from exile to the fatherland, and showed him Jesus, the fruit of her virginal womb.
dozing. Recalling this in the morning he excused the Brother for not answering as he said he had been calling him by the wrong name! Another is illustrated by the sketches of Goyo presented here. Marcellin complained that the lamp was too dim; but he realized that it was his eyesight that was failing. It will be left to the reader, if so inclined, to read more about Marcellin’s sufferings in these final weeks of March and through April of 1840 in the major biographies that are available. The account by Brother Jean-Baptiste of the last two days is given here in the box.

Marcellin’s funeral
There is a certain irony in the grandeur of Marcellin Champagnat’s funeral considering his modest and self-effacing manner. Here is the description by Annalist, Brother Avit:

“After the death of our revered Father, he was clothed in clerical garb, that is in soutane, surplice and stole and was placed in an armchair holding in his hands the cross that professed Fathers of the Society of Mary carry. Near him, on a table, was a crucifix between two lit candles and the Brothers went in turn into his bedroom to recite the Office of the Dead. On the same day M. Ravery, an artist in Saint Chamond, painted his portrait. The following night, and the day after, the feast of Pentecost, the body remained exposed as on the day before and the Brothers continued to recite the same prayers near him. In the evening he was placed, still in clerical garb, in the double coffin which had been prepared: it is made of hard wood and enclosed in another made of lead. Before closing the lead coffin, a plaque of the same metal in the shape of a heart was put in observed by Fr Matricon, Brothers François, Jean Marie, Louis and Stanislas; on it were written these words: “ossa J.B.M. Champagnat, 1840”.

“The funeral was celebrated on the Monday after Pentecost, the 8 June. M. Thiollière du Treuil, the parish priest of Saint Chamond officiated at the ceremony. MM. Bédoin, parish priest of Lavalla, Janvier, parish priest of Saint Julien-en-Jarret, Préher, parish priest of Tarentaise, Dubrise, parish priest of Saint Martin-en-Coallieux, Vanel, parish priest of N.-D.-de-Saint-Chamond, and his two curates, Épalle and Matrat, Garel, parish priest of Isieux, Rossary, parish priest of Saint Paul-en-Jarret and Dubouchet, one of his curates, and Crozet, curate of Saint Just-Doizieux, were present with the Superior of the Lazarists of Valfleurie and the Rev Fathers Colin, the elder, Maître-pierre, Matricon, Besson, Bertholon, Chavas and Soton, Priests of the Society of Mary.”

“The body was carried in procession to the chapel by the professed Brothers, preceded by the priests, followed by MM. Victor Dugas, Antoine Thiollière and his brother Eugène, Antoine Neyrand, Richard Chamboret, Royer de la Bastie and Montagnier Gayot, persons of note in the town of Saint-Chamond and benefactors of the Society of Mary. It was placed in the middle of a chapel of rest.”

“M. Thiollière du Treuil, the parish priest of Saint-Pierre, was the chief celebrant at the Mass. M. Dubouchet was the deacon and M. Épalle was sub-deacon, M. Préher and M. Durbise were assistant priests. The Rev Fathers Matricon and Besson, in soutane, and Brothers François, Louis Marie and Jean Marie stood near the coffin and the whole community, as a sign of sorrow and bereavement, kept religious silence during the holy Mass which was sung by the priests and the gentlemen from Saint-Chamond in a low and mournful tone.”

“After Mass everyone went in procession to the cemetery. The professed Brothers took turns at carrying the body. It was laid, with the usual ceremonies, in the grave prepared for it. The procession then returned to the chapel in silence.” In witness of this and as a pious and perpetual memorial, the present act has been drawn up at Our Lady of the Hermitage, on 8 June 1840 and signed by the priests, the persons of note from Saint-Chamond, the Marist Fathers and the principal Brothers.”
Is this a photo of Marcellin Champagnat in death?
This photo came to light only in 2004 to the astonishment of all concerned. Could it be a photo of Marcellin Champagnat taken the day he died? Careful research was then undertaken by Brother Andre Lanfrey and published in Marist Notebooks, No. 33, May 2011. One paragraph tells the beginning of the story: “On 3 January 2004, Marius Arnaud, great-grandson of Phillippe Arnaud, nephew of Marcellin Champagnat, who lived at La Valla and the Hermitage, visited the Hermitage with his daughter. They asked Brother Gabriel Michel what was the best image of Champagnat possessed by the Institute? When given the postcard representing the portrait of Marcellin by Ravery they objected: ‘We have a better one at home: Marcellin on his death bed … and it is a photo.’ Brother Gabriel Michel was sceptical.”

The research in the article mentioned is very detailed, and it will be left up to the very curious reader to seek it out and enjoy the pleasure of reading it. Suffice it to say here, that this MIGHT be a photo of Marcellin Champagnat at the time of his death.

Portrait of Marcellin from a sketch made immediately after his death
Brother Jean-Baptiste tells of the painting of this portrait: “On the very day he died, his portrait was drawn by an artist especially summoned for the purpose.” The reader will recall the earlier description of how Champagnat was washed, shaved and dressed and sat in an armchair in his room. The painter summoned was John-Joseph Ravery (1800-1868) who later worked his sketches up into a coloured oil painting back in his studio. It was only in February 1841, that the completed painting was delivered. This painter had earlier been commissioned by Father Champagnat to do paintings which adorned the chapel of the Hermitage and a large canvas showing the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin.

Travels of this portrait through the decades
Some readers may be interested to learn of the vississitudes of the portrait, and a copy, in the years that followed. An article in the Bulletin de l’Institute, No.95, 1934, tells some of the story: “As mentioned above, the portrait was only delivered to the Hermitage in early 1841, and it stayed there till taken to St. Genis-Laval in 1858 when the “Mother House” and central administration of the Brothers moved there in that year. It remained there till 1903, the year of upheaval and the expulsion of Religious from France and the moving of the “Mother House” to Italy, but then it appeared to have disappeared, believed lost!

“Then in 1934, Brother Jean-Emile, Secretary General of the time, devoted an article to it in the Bulletin de l’Institute (No.95), reproducing the likeness from a photograph in the archives. That was sufficient information for a Brother to discover it in Italy, at Carmagnole near Turin, where it had been sent for safe keeping “for the time being” some thirty years earlier!”
This same article led also to the discovery in 1937 in a hiding-place at St. Genis-Laval of a second portrait of Father Champagnat, identified as authentic by a written message attached to it and by the signature of the painter, Ravery; except for the absence of the shield, it was identical to the first; if anything, it seemed to have been more carefully done – features, more subtle, more coloured; the face in general more life-like.

We read: “In his circular of 31st May 1870, Brother Louis-Marie, who had known the Founder since 1831, declared that this second portrait was ‘a truer likeness perhaps than the original itself.’ It had belonged to Brother Benoit from 1840 to 1870. So how did this ‘ordinary’ Brother come to have in his possession, the portrait of an excellent likeness of Father Champagnat, especially commissioned by Jean-Joseph Ravery, the official portraitist of Father Champagnat?

“And who was this Brother Benoit?

“Born Jean Deville in 1800 he found his way to the Hermitage in early 1826, asking to be admitted. At the time Father Champagnat died in June 1840, he was teaching at a school in St. Chamond.” The unlikely story recorded is that “his gratitude and affection for Father Champagnat induced him to ask M. Ravery for a copy of the official portrait.”

This seems to raise some interesting speculations. Did he pay for the commission? Where did that money come from? Was Ravery’s presentation of the copy of the portrait to him a gift? Where did he keep it? Did he erect it in his room in whatever community he belonged to?

The narrative continues: “This [the portrait copy] he brought with him when he replaced Brother Louis at the Hermitage in the Procure, and then to St. Genis-Laval where it was kept, now honoured, now hidden, according to the vagaries of religious toleration in France.”

The original is on the left and the “Br. Benoit” copy on the right so that the reader might compare the two.

Some sayings of Marcellin Champagnat

Brother Avit, when he reaches the time in his narrative of Father Champagnat’s death, lists the following “sayings he loved to quote frequently”:

1º “Beware of shifty, gloomy persons who love to be alone and remain hidden, for they are almost always a prey to perverse thoughts.”

2º “There are two kinds of men with whom the devil does what he likes, lazy people and those who wallow in sadness and discouragement.”

3º “We must not fear wicked people, but God, and still more ourselves, for we do ourselves more harm than wicked people and all the devils together can cause us.”

4º “We are wasting our time if we are counting on our own talents, or efforts, or diligence for success in our work, for God is the only one who can give us that. As for us, we are only good at spoiling everything.”

5º “It is not genius you need to do the work of God, but great dedication, solid virtue, great piety and complete confidence in God.”

6º “Pious Brothers are precious beings and we cannot have enough esteem for them. The more of them we have, the more will the Institute flourish, the more it will be blessed by God.”

7º “That thought: ‘God sees me’ is enough to overcome temptations and quieten down the passions. Indeed, if we do not dare to do evil in front of men, how would we dare to do so before God?”

8º “The body becomes used to everything, it is by refusing to satisfy it that it becomes less demanding.”

9º “A person who wants to be strong and not be overcome in big struggles, must be faithful in mortifying himself and overcoming himself in small things.”
10° “Impurity is the result of pride, gluttony and laziness.”

11° “When you are tempted by vain thoughts, turn the medal over and you will see how many faults you have.”

12° “Bringing a child up well is a more sublime function than ruling the world.”

13° “A religion lesson well taught is better than all the acts of penance you may perform.”

14° “When you give yourself to God, you must do so without reserve and without branching off. Woe to those who long for the fleshpots of Egypt, for they are not fit for the Promised Land of the religious life.”

15° “A Brother who loves his parents more than his Rule or his duty is not taking religious life seriously and we cannot get rid of such a person too soon.”

16° “When you stop being directed by the person God has appointed to lead you, you find the director you deserve. A person who looks to Egypt for advice will perish as a result of that advice.”

17° “Brothers who are talented are less likely to do good if they count on themselves rather than on God.”
1. He still speaks to us after his death (Hebr. 11). I seem to hear him! ... Our oldest Brothers recall this touching remembrance. ... Our good Father was there among his children. When we think of the morning prayer, at which we assisted every day with him, of the meditation he used to make in so pious a manner, in a voice so full of unction, with such a penetrating spirit, what sentiments do we not feel?

God allowed it as a reward no doubt for his faithful servant, but also as a pious souvenir for his children, that he gave his last sigh at the very moment when each day he entoned the Salve Regina, before meditation. Let us recall also the community Mass which he celebrated every day with so much recollection and spirit of faith! Let us contemplate his life so fully dedicated to the ministry of saving souls and sanctifying children. ... Let us delight in the pleasure he found in the most lowly and toilsome employments; let us think of those constant cares, that tireless vigilance, that really paternal solicitude exercised sometimes for the benefit of a single Brother.

He knew how to wait for a soul, and to stimulate his return by a thousand means. His direction did not consist of many words. It was often a paternal embrace, a word, the same word repeated several times; but spoken by him, it reached the depths of the heart to bring repentance, love of God, the desire to become better. How many with his help have found peace, confidence, happiness!

He was firm; yes, certainly; we would all have trembled at the very sound of his voice, or from one of his looks; but he was above all kind; he was compassionate; he was a father. ... In founding his Congregation, he wished to form a family, of which the head would be a father, and in which the older Brothers would watch over and protect the younger ones. Let us therefore be his family, his children. Love, respect, mutual help. Let us follow his example, let us be inspired by his paternal sentiments; let us make him live on, so to speak, among us.

2. Two officers came to visit the grave of a famous warrior; after a few moments of emotion, they took their swords and drew them back and forth across the marble tomb in silence, as if to catch the military spirit of the chief they had lost.

Let us imitate these soldiers; let us go to our venerable Founder's tomb, our good Father's grave; let our minds and our hearts go over again and again the circumstances of his life, his sufferings and his death, so as to catch something of his spirit and his heart.

Here everything speaks to us of him, and he speaks to us in everything. We live in the house he built and which is considered as his great reliquary. It is here that he worked so much, watched so much for the good of the Institute; the meditation room was the first temporary chapel where he said Mass as soon as this house was habitable; this was also his first room. It was here that later on he gave us his instructions during the year and especially at the Retreats. It was here that he received the last Sacraments and gave us such a touching address.

He prayed, said Mass and sang the Offices in the chapel he built. He ate in this refectory and parlour. He walked in these rooms, visited the sick in the infirmary. He passed along these paths, cultivated this soil, planted these trees, set up this cemetery where he has his tomb. But above all he sanctified that room in which he lived for 15 years, which he hallowed with his virtues; where he received so many Brothers, gave so much good advice, recited so many prayers, wrote so many letters, meditated on many things, experienced so many sufferings and consolations, until at length he drew his last breath.

Let us often tell ourselves in this paternal house where Father Champagnat and his dear children practised so many virtues: If this good Father saw me, was with me, how would I do what I do? ... If it is an honour for us to have had him as a Father, let us be in our turn his glory and his crown, as Holy Scripture puts it (Prov. 4, 17; I Thess. 2).
See the accompanying box for a full list of all living at the Hermitage in June 1840. And an insight into life at that time is provided by Brother Avit: “After making their beds, the novices and postulants went to manual work until 11.30. They had been studying the Method of Mental Prayer or the Gospel between the Little Hours (of the Office) and breakfast [6.30-7.00am]. In the afternoon there was Rosary at 1.00pm, manual work to 5.00pm, Singing class from 5.00 to 5.30pm, then Office and the study of the Catechism.”

Memories and mementos of Father Champagnat gathered

The Brothers at the Hermitage would have been amongst the most conscientious in responding to a request by Brother Francois, in a Circular of August 1841, for memories, letters etc. of Father Champagnat to be collected for safe keeping and for working into a biography. Part of the Circular asks the Brothers “… to carefully collect and send us all the memories which may be used for the history of our dear and holy Founder, letters of his that may be found in the houses, private letters he may have written unless they contain confidential material; anything that remains of his instructions, his sayings and the details of his life.” So, I think we might well imagine the Brothers at the Hermitage rummaging for any such letters or notes they may have taken of his instructions, etc. And quite possibly Brother Francois would give them occasional reminders of this request. And in Brother Jean-Baptiste’s Preface to his Life of Father Champagnat we read how he gathered “From those Brothers who lived with Father Champagnat, who witnessed his conduct, were closely involved with his actions, shared his labours and heard his instructions. Those Brothers gave us their written notes; besides we discussed the content of those notes with each of them. This enabled us to check the accuracy of their record and to gather orally other points and information that our questions brought to mind.” The reader might picture Brother Jean-Baptiste (pictured) interviewing Brothers at the Hermitage on and off over a period of time, recording what they said.
The flood at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage, 1840

Brother Avit relates the story of the flood of November 1840. The stone pictured commemorating the region-wide “inundation” is found in Lyons. “Early in November, there was a terrible flood which caused great havoc in the area. Torrential rain, accompanied by a violent storm, continued for several days. The water of the Gier, which runs alongside the house of N.-D. de l'Hermitage, rose extraordinarily high, and appeared to threaten it with imminent ruin. The refectory was already flooded. Fearful and apprehensive, Br. François, together with Fr. Matricon, led the community to the chapel to pray. It was evening, shortly before
supper time. They recited the Miserere and the litany of the Blessed Virgin with all the fervor which danger can inspire. It appeared that the Lord listened favorably to their humble prayers, and that the Blessed Virgin covered the house with her protection, for while they were praying, the sky became less dark and the waters receded considerably. When they came out of the chapel, they learned that the water had totally receded from the refectory. Only the garden and the pasture had been slightly damaged. This flood caused great destruction in Lyons and elsewhere. The Gier had broken its embankments as far as Givors.”

Chocolate, eggs and honey for the Infirmary, 1840

Knowing the frugal approach to most things at the time but keeping in mind Father Champagnat’s well-known anxiety to have the sick Brothers well provided for, it is of some interest to note that the account books for 1840, the year Father Champagnat died, show the items of chocolate, eggs and honey having been purchased for the Infirmary.

All manner of purchases in the account books for 1840

Insights can often be gained by peeping into account books. And the nature of the times is clearly in evidence in the accounts for 1840. Builders and building materials are prominently mentioned: wages, ironwork, timber for floorboards, tiles, bricks, glass, dressed stone, lime and plaster, joiner’s glue, sandpaper etc. Food expenses include the usual payments to grocer and butcher, grain and flour, wine and mineral water from St.Galmier, cherries, cheese, grapes … Clothing: bootmakers, hatters, tailors. Materials for the crafts/trades conducted at the Hermitage: leather, thread, tools, tacks, cloth, wool, the dying and fulling of woolen articles (at the fulling mill across the Gier), linings and sewing accessories. Chairs, cutlery, crockery, kitchen utensils. Travel: A good deal of expense was incurred in the Brothers getting to and from their respective schools. This sometimes required the payment for Passports for travel within France; and Brothers Visitors to the schools incurred travel expenses. Laundresses were on the regular payroll. Farm: Purchase of sheep, cows and a horse (and harness for the horse). Miscellaneous: coal, lithographic stones and ink.

Brother Marie-Nizier’s letters from the Pacific finally arrive at the Hermitage

Father Champagnat and the Brothers at the Hermitage would have been anxious to hear how the Brothers who had gone to the Pacific to try to spread the Gospel in 1836 were faring. Many of those left behind dreamed of themselves heroically taking the Gospel to unknown and exotic places, if only they had been chosen. Brother Marie-Nizier was one of the first Brothers so chosen, and he wrote to Father Champagnat from the island of Futuna on 30th September 1839. However, his letter did not arrive till after Champagnat’s death in June 1840. Exactly when the letter arrived is not known. But we might speculate that it was opened and read by the Brothers at the Hermitage – maybe some time in the second half of 1840 – with enormous interest. The letter tells of being received by the king but devotes much of its contents to recounting a brutal inter-tribal war with spearings, woundings and deaths. Customs of the people are described, and the difficulties encountered by Father Peter Chanel and Brother Marie-Nizier in their ministry. The description of bloody conflict may have prepared the Brothers somewhat for the tragic news in 1841 of the murder of Father Peter Chanel. As presented here the letter is heavily edited, there being much more detail in the full text. (Brother Marie-Nizier signed himself in his letters as “Cat.” for catechist.)

Jesus, Mary, Joseph. Futuna Island, 30 September 1839

My very Reverend Father,

The memory of the Hermitage is always dear to me. Being far from the place only attaches me to it more strongly. How long it has been since I received any news! Just about three years. O, what a happy occasion for me with the arrival of the second lot of Missionaries. It satisfied my hopes! Your letter also, my very Reverend Father, was for me a source of consolation in which I found as well, signs of your tender and fatherly care for us.

On our arrival at the island of Futuna, we had not even wet the anchor of our small schooner before it was surrounded by islanders in their small boats (canoes) and calling out to us in words that we could not understand. We tried to forbid them from coming on board our boat however they were too quick and the most agile were on board as soon as they saw that our team was occupied. Once
we had dropped anchor they were all over every part of our ship. The beach was also crowded with onlookers, some of whom, having no canoe, used tree trunks or logs and, if they had no oars, paddles with their hands.

The inhabitants of the island are divided into two groups, the conquerors and the conquered. About three months after our arrival, war was declared after the murder of a conqueror. When it happened the cry of alarm was heard loudly across the whole island and everyone left their work. All the supporters of each king rallied together each in their own valley. Gathering closely like this was not without real motivation, since in similar circumstances in times past there have been very sudden outbreaks of violence in the night which have resulted in the massacre of whole groups. This had led to much bad feeling.

On 5th April 1838, the higher King led his subjects close to us and told us, “We are going to make war.” We presumed that they would do it in the coming days … but they’ve not done it yet. They’ve gone close to the territory of the other king and close to his followers. They saw two young men, of whom one fell victim to a vile betrayal and the other managed to escape. The aggressors came back quickly, loudly applauding the death they called a victory.

War was declared openly by the victors, in much the same way, as for the previous one. Murder did not take place, nevertheless there was an attempt. Father Chanel did not neglect anything he could possibly do to divert them from this new outbreak and move them on to other things. He attempted to work with the two kings, but with no real success. The vanquished king was crowned and honours were rendered to him by his subjects as if to a legitimate king. Nothing could further exacerbate the anger of the victors (conquerors), if they had known about the crowning.

On 10th August, the conquerors were again assembled in the same place and the great King decided to send someone with presents to the other king with a view to engaging in talks to bring the fighting to an end; however the good intentions were not able to be put into action as on the same morning, the conquerors, enthused in the hope of victory and believing they could achieve it because they were under the unflagging protection of the two new gods they had recently taken possession of, began to march directly towards the land of the conquerors. Warned by the war cries of the attackers, the conquerors flew into action against their enemies to repel them.

For their return, the wounded were transported into a neighbouring valley where there were some houses. There they proceeded to extract the spears and balls (gun pellets?). The King was one of the first on whom they operated since the spear which had wounded him had entered into the right shoulder and come out low on the left. An incision about two inches long was made and it was enough to enable the end of the spear to be seen and extracted. Practically the same procedure was used for spears that had penetrated others, even for those that had not pierced completely through from one side to the other. Among the wounded, a brother of the King had an especially deadly wound. The spear that hit him, penetrated the left side and the point now formed a raised ar. During their painful and dangerous operations, each was encouraged not to be overcome by their severe pain. But at the end of the operation, flowing blood continued streaming from cruel wounds! The unfortunate could still have to cast dying eyes on his wounds and then raise his eyes to the sky as the pallor of death spread over his face in the few moments before he expired. Women received the flowing blood into their bare hands and then threw it onto their heads. Generally all the relatives of the wounded collected, so to speak, the last drop of blood that flowed from the wounds of those who were dear to them. There were some that simply used leaves and strands of grass to dry the blood.

Father Chanel was able to administer Holy Baptism. As there were a considerable number of wounded I’m afraid it would take far too long to tell you about each of them in particular. I had the happiness of baptising a sick child, of just a little more than one year old. Father Chanel was away travelling. I heard that the sickness was dangerous and went to see the child. “She is healed,” her parents told me, “we must wait until she is sicker.” I heard that to engage in talks to bring the fighting to an end, however the good intentions were not able to be put into action as on the same morning, the conquerors, enthused in the hope of victory and believing they could achieve it because they were under the unflagging protection of the two new gods they had recently taken possession of, began to march directly towards the land of the conquerors. Warned by the war cries of the attackers, the conquerors flew into action against their enemies to repel them.

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The indifference I showed helped lower their vigilance and permitted me to very quickly baptise the child without any of the friction (disagreements). The other was intended for baptising. The parents of the child learned that she was baptised and they did not seem unhappy. She died ten days after her baptism. We have the consolation of knowing that there are f...
Goodbye my very Reverend Father, I dare to recommend myself again to the prayers of the Society.

The following letter, written 10 days later (and most probably sent at the same time), was merely, as the following explanation suggests, to accompany the incident-filled much longer letter to Father Champagnat that Brother Marie-Nizier took for granted would have been shared by Father Champagnat with the Brothers:

12. BROTHER MARIE-NIZIER TO THE BROTHERS OF THE HERMITAGE, ISLAND OF FUTUNA, 10 OCTOBER 1839. (CSG 1. 298-300)

This letter appears to have been intended to accompany and complement the one to Champagnat, who, in the ordinary course of events, would have shared it with the others. The fact that it is included in the Volume of Circulars whereas Champagnat’s is not may indicate both letters did not reach the Hermitage until after the Founder’s death in June 1840.

Very dear Brothers,

I cannot tell you just how grateful I am for all the good things you tell us about your letter, for your fond memories of us. All I can do is offer you my sincere and generous return. When you are on the other side of the world, separated by an ocean, living on a little island - how heartwarming it is to get news of those you love.

I would like to have satisfied your wish for news of me sooner, but in the space of nearly 2 years only one opportunity has offered.

The island I am living on is no more than 9 or 10 leagues around. Geographers call it Aloufato or Horn and the Islanders Futuna (Fotuna). There is an even smaller island next to it called Avile, both are very fertile. Unfortunately, frequent rains on both have so depopulated them that most of the valleys are uninhabited.

Even in the middle of the Ocean I have a good share in your labours. But I am not so fortunate as you in that I haven’t yet had the privilege of being able to teach the truths of religion. I am not yet fluent enough in the language of the island.

I was so pleased to learn that so many of you have expressed a keen desire to come and share in our labours. But if you were familiar with all the folklore which most of the Islanders of Oceania have been reduced by idolatry, you would be much keener to come! From a thousand examples I could cite you to give you an idea of such folklore. Futuna I have chosen one which took place in quite remarkable circumstances. Not long ago, they performed a pagan ceremony lasting two whole days to obtain rain. For this they came to the top of a mountain, threw bananas, taro, fish, etc to win the goodwill of one of their gods. They spent a night there, most of them in the open. The second night was to be the one when their prayers would be answered. They were so convinced of it they talked about bathing in rainwater on the summit. A young man who shared favourable dispositions and his already renounced his false gods prophesied that none of their gods would bring them rain, but only Jehovah. But all his adversaries stubbornly maintained they would be answered that very night. Despite the fact that all appearances were in their favour, the prediction came true almost to the letter. The next day not a single one dared to make a remark against him, so humiliated were they. I don’t know everything they had to say among themselves about it, only they complained one of their gods had let them down. You can see how great their ignorance is. Please pray then, especially to the good God for their conversion. Already there are some whose eyes appear to be opening to the truth.

Goodbye, my very dear Brothers. I recommend myself in a special way to your prayers... etc.

Br Marie-Nizier.

News of martyrdom of Father Peter Chanel, April 1841.

The Hermitage would have been full of the news of Father Peter Chanel’s martyrdom in the Pacific. There would have been Brothers there who had met him, and all would have known of the sending of the early missionaries to “Oceanea”, the first area of the world entrusted to the Marists. Add to that the Brothers who knew Brother Marie-Nizier who was with Father Chanel and escaped being killed himself. Br. Avit’s ‘Annals’ records the facts of Fr. Chanel’s death thus:

“On 28th April 1841, Father Chanel was martyred on the island of Futuna, which he had been evangelizing for three and a half years, with the help of Br. Marie-Nizier. Having left Le Havre on 24th December 1836, the missionaries took eight months to complete their journey. Father Bret died during the crossing and was buried at sea. Having left Fr. Bataillon and Br. Michel on the island of Wallis, Bishop Pompliau brought Fr. Chanel and Br. Marie-Nizier to Futuna in November 1837 and entrusted them to the king of that island, who had promised to protect them. He did so at first, but when the zeal, privations, sufferings, and many painful sacrifices of the two missionaries brought about a few conversions among the savage inhabitants of the island, including that of the king’s son, his majesty’s protection was transformed into a thinly-disguised hatred. Desiring to win the king’s favour, several members of his court massacred the zealous Fr. Chanel, as he have already said, to destroy the new religion of which he was the minister.

Having gone to baptize an infant in a distant village, Br. Marie-Nizier, having been warned by one of the natives, escaped the massacre and was able to reach the island of Wallis on an American ship. Even though there was not a cloud in the sky, a violent clap of thunder was heard throughout the entire island after the massacre of the Blessed Chanel. Moreover, the king, who was very fat, soon became extremely thin and died after atrocious sufferings. His prime minister also died soon after and in tragic fashion. These three happenings stunned the savages, who saw in them the effects of the anger of the God whom the missionaries had preached to them. Within a few years, all the inhabitants of the island had become Christians.

[The card, reproduced here, commemorates the Beatification of Father Chanel in 1890]
Use of buildings gives an idea of life of the times, 1841

Buildings were purchased, where the Reception and Dining Rooms are at present (2016) and the proposal was that they be used for fulling cloth. Father Colin spoke against this idea and it was not followed up. But the buildings were used as stables, a workshop for the farrier and the metal-worker as well as the bakery and various storehouses that had been previously in the courtyard. These earlier buildings were then demolished.

Discussions in 1841 on possible fusion with the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux

Readers must realize that following the death of Father Champagnat in June 1840, the administration of the Brothers was in the hands of the new “Director General”, whom we would now call “Superior General”. This was Brother François, and he resided at the Hermitage. In all important decisions he was assisted by his “Council” of senior Brothers. During 1841 they had much discussion about the possible merger of another Institute of Brothers, the Brothers of Christian Instruction of the diocese of Valence, with the Marist Brothers.

The Annals of Brother Avit tell of the deliberation of the Brothers of the Hermitage:

“On 19th November, the enlarged council of the Hermitage drew up a long deliberation which we will transcribe here. In order to understand it, it is good to recall that Rev. Fr. Colin was still Superior General of the Marist Fathers and the Marist Brothers. Here is the deliberation:

"We, the undersigned, Br. François, Director General of the Little Brothers of Mary, Br. Louis-Marie and Br. Jean-Baptiste, assistants; and Br. Jean-Marie, Br. Louis, Br. Stanislas and Br. Bonaventure, councilors, having met in council with Br. François presiding in order to deliberate together with Fr. Matricon, Marist Father, on the proposed union between the Brothers of Christian Instruction of the diocese of Valence and the Brothers of Mary of the diocese of Lyons, having prayed for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and the protection of our good Mother, the divine Mary, have proceeded to examine this important matter and have reached the following conclusions, for the greater glory of God, the honour of Mary, and, we hope, the good of both congregations.

"Having seen the summary of 6th March presented by Fr. Mazelier, superior of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, covering the method to be used for the union; "Considering that this union:

1. is almost required and all prepared by the many services which the Brothers of Christian Instruction have rendered for many years, with absolutely fraternal charity, to the Brothers of Mary;
2. That the Brothers of Christian Instruction, with the consent of their very worthy and very venerable superior, place themselves in dependence on and under the authority of the Superior General of the Fathers of the Society of Mary, an authority and dependence which the Little Brothers of Mary recognize and consider, according to the thinking of their pious founder, as the foundation of their congregation, so that the wills of both groups may thus be united in the will of one Superior General; ...”

[There follow many items contained in the proposed agreement of union of the two congregations. It would have been the talk at the Hermitage for many months]

More excitement and interest in another letter from the “Pacific Missions”, 1842

As mentioned earlier many of the Brothers at the Hermitage would still have fond memories of farewelling the Brothers and priests who were the first to “go to the missions”, including Brother Claude-Marie. And when his letter arrived they would have been wondering whether it, like that of Brother Marie-Mizier, would be full of battles and slaughter. As you will read, Brother Claude-Marie had previously written, but his letter was not delivered. The zeal with which the first missionaries left France soon came face to face with the realities of life and missionary work on the other side of the world. The reader will notice messages addressed directly to Brothers at the Hermitage – Brothers Louis-Xavier, Paul, Julien-Marie, Hippolyte and others.
We can surmise that the letter would initially have been read aloud to the entire Hermitage community, and then, possibly, left on a table in the community room for perusal in the days following. And possibly, too, some may have been fired with enthusiasm to join their colleagues in bringing the message of Jesus to far-off peoples.

Letter from Brother Claude-Marie

Hokianga, N.Z.
26th July, 1842.

Very Dear Brother Director,

It is high time, no doubt, to take my pen and give you some particulars concerning the time I have spent in the Mission to which I have been appointed. More than a year ago (June 14th, 1841) I sent a letter to Kororareka, addressed to our good Father Champagnat, but the Fathers there, having heard of his death, did not send it to Europe, so if you did not get news of me earlier, it was not all my fault.

You have probably heard of my destination, but in case you have not, I shall tell you about it now. We arrived at Kororareka on the 11th July, 1840. After spending eleven days at the Procure, I was sent by His Lordship to the Mission at Hokianga, to replace Bro. Marie-Augustin. I set out on 22nd July, accompanied by a native who carried part of my outfit, and by M. le Baron de Thierry, who was on his way home accompanied by two native carriers. It would be very difficult for me to relate all I had to suffer on this long journey. It was in winter. We were following rough paths through the forests, often missed our way, had to cross mountains and streams, water at times above our knees, paths sometimes obstructed by fallen, half-decayed trees, mud often up to the ankles, so that we could hardly pull out of it. On the first day, after walking for nine hours, we arrived very much exhausted and were in the territory of a tribe called Waimata, and rested there in a native hut. A fire was made at which we dried our socks and then we took some food which I had brought from the Bay of Islands. After that we lay down to sleep, not on beds, but upon a few ferns placed on the ground. My sack was my pillow. I soon noticed that the natives were not Catholics, for I had hardly got to sleep when I was awakened by the singing of a hymn and by their grotesque actions whilst praying.

My occupation is not what I anticipated when leaving Europe, but may the holy will of God be done! My time is spent in the kitchen and in manual work. To my great regret it became necessary to put aside the livery of Mary and put on that of the world. How hard for me this trial! As you know I was not accustomed to pick and shovel work, still less to the use of an ear, but I submit cheerfully to these crosses in expiation for my sins.

Do not conclude from these lines that I regret having come to these distant regions. Far from it. If I have not the sweet happiness of teaching catechism to these good, uncivilized people and of teaching them how to love Jesus and his most holy Mother, the good Virgins, I have that of working for those who do instruct them. How my heart rejoices when I see these good New Zealanders coming in their canoes to assist at the divine mysteries of our holy religion, saying their prayers and singing the hymns which the Fathers have composed in Maori.

Dear Brother, we are all well scattered, some here, some there, and rarely, if ever, meet. For instance Brother Marie-Nizier is at Futuna; Brothers Joseph-Xavier and Attale are at Wallis Island; Brother Elie-Regis is at Wanganoa; Brothers Pierre-Marie, Marie-Augustin, Basile, Emery and two or three others at the Bay of Islands; Brother Edouge is at Tauranga; Brother Justin at Waitakere; Brother Florentin at Banks’s Peninsula in the South Island; and Brother Colombe and myself are at Hokianga. You will easily understand that we cannot easily see one another as hundreds of leagues separate some of us. It is the holy will of God and we hope that if we have to be separated here below, we shall have the sweet pleasure of being forever reunited in a happy and never ending eternity.

Permit me to greet in a few words certain Brothers whom I shall never forget, my very dear Brothers Louis-Marie, Jean-Marie, Jean-Baptiste, and yourself, very dear Brother Stanislas; I thank you for the fine letter you had the kindness to send me. I shall convey your message to the poor nates, and, moreover, I hope to write at more length and specially to yourself later on. In the meantime recommend me earnestly to her whose altars you decorate with so much love and happiness.

Dear Brothers Louis-Xavier, Paul, Julien-Marie, Hippolyte, I thank you; and you, my dear kind Brother Bartholemy, I thank you for thinking of me and making mention of me in your interesting letter to Brother Marie-Augustin. You are often in my thoughts. How useful you would be to the Mission with your ability to put your hand to so many things. If the Master of the Vineyard gives you the call, say quickly: "Lord, here I am", and do not fear to cross the oceans. In the meantime look well after your little flocks, the well-beloved children of la Providence that I love so much. Present my kind regards to the dear Brothers of the Hospital, to the good Sisters of the Hospital Saint-Augustin and of St. Joseph, especially to the good Sister Superior de la Charité. If you meet the Parish Priest, and if you think well of it, please present to him my respects. If you can let me know how things are going on at la Providence, you will give me great pleasure.

I shall never forget my dear cousin, Brother Ambrosine, nor Brothers Bernard, Pius, Denis, Luke, Aurelian, Damian, who brought me into the Society of Mary; Brothers Pathin, Jerome, James, Victor, Joseph, Liguori, Charles, Clement and all the other Brothers of my acquaintance, and whose names escape me for the moment. I have not written to my sister for a very long time. If the Brothers of Saint-Sacreur will kindly give her news concerning me, I shall be very grateful.

My Office book is wearing out. I would like to have another. If dear Brother Louis can send me one I shall keep it as a precious souvenir. In this case, please, get Brother Hippolyte to cover it for me. I shall also look forward to the favour of receiving a copy of our holy Rule and the biographical notes and portrait of our good Father Superior, regarding his last illness. I learned of his death not until thirteen months after the event, that is on the 6th July, 1841. How terrible was this news! The wound it made in my heart will bleed for many a day. I recite as well as I could the prayers prescribed in the circular for the repose of his soul, although convinced that he was already in heaven.

My letter is already rather long, but before closing I earnestly request a very special intention for me in your fervent prayers, and in those of the dear Brothers and novices of the Hermitage and of the Establishments. Yes, very dear Brothers, pray for me and never forget me at the Hermitage and in the parishes where you are employed, during the retreats, the month of Mary, and above all when you have the sweet happiness of receiving and possessing the Master of Heaven, begging Him to change my heart and to give me the virtues of humility, charity, obedience, a great religious spirit and the grace of final perseverance, that I may have the great happiness of sharing with you the crown of immortality.

Please present my very respectful homage to Father Matricon, my Director, and to good Father Beson and request them to think of me daily at the mementos of the Holy Sacrifice.

I have forgotten to accustom myself of a small theft from dear Brother Jean-Baptiste, that of a book entitled The Love of Mary. I found it much to my liking and resolved to keep it, so it has travelled everywhere with me and I read it at least once a year, during the month of Mary.

It would please me very much if you could add to the little packet something which belonged to our Reverend Father Superior, such as a small book, rosary, picture, sc.; even the smallest thing I would appreciate greatly.

I fear making you weary with so many requests and feel half ashamed of giving you so much trouble, pardon my impertinency, dear Brother Director, and believe me,

Ever yours sc.,

BROTHER CLAUDE-MARIE.

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Father Champagnat’s tomb, 1842
This extract from Brother Avit’s *Annals* may be of interest to the reader: “On the closing day, the Brothers went in procession to the cemetery for the blessing of the monument to the holy founder which the Regime [the General Council] had just had erected. This is how Bro. François described it:

“This monument, square in shape, stands in the middle of a tombstone which covers the grave. It is made up of:

1) a block of granite one metre square and half a metre high, decorated with three small moldings;
2) a base also made up of three moldings;
3) a block (quoin, dado), 1.05 metres high and half a metre wide, decorated with a crown carved in marble, and with two funeral torches in relief;
4) a cornice surmounted by a four-sided pediment, decorated with four cornes of fleur-de-lis, topped by a funeral urn, itself surmounted by a small cross.

“The following inscription is carved into the marble, above the crown and between the two torches: *Here lies Joseph Benoît Marcellin Champagnat* - Priest, Founder and Superior of the Little Brothers of Mary - born in Marlhes, 20 May 1789 - deceased at N.D. de l’Hermitage, Saturday, 6 June 1840.

“The following words are carved a bit lower: *Sit memoria eius in benedictione*; and above, in the center, a pansy.”

Conference on the Metric System, 1843
We are inclined to think that the Metric System came into France during the Revolution starting in 1789. And so it is a surprise to find that the Brothers are having a Conference to learn about it in 1843. It had, however, been changed by Napoleon Bonaparte. Now it was being re-introduced and many Brothers were unprepared as we read from Brother Avit. But before that, here is an explanation from Wikipedia: “Louis Philippe I by means of the *La loi du 4 juillet 1837* (the law of 4 July 1837) effectively revoked the use of *mesures uselles* [introduced by Napoleon] by reaffirming the laws of measurement of 1795 and 1799 to be used from 1 May 1840. However, many units of measure, such as the *livre* (for half a kilogram), remained in colloquial use for many years.” Now Brother Avit, writing about 1843: “It was announced that the metric system and the participle would be studied by the Brothers during the only conference that year. The metric system was brand new. The Brothers scarcely knew it and the different rules governing the participle often embarrassed them.”

Situation at the end of 1843
At the end of his records for each year the Annalist, Brother Avit, sometimes gives a summary in the following way:

“During that year, 57 postulants had received the religious habit at the Hermitage, 13 in Saint-Paul-3-Châteaux, six in Vauban, and one in Saint-Pol-Ternoise.

“During that same year, Brothers Galmier, Siméon, Josaphat, Mac, Abbon, Héliménas, and Ferdinand entered eternity.

Br. Louis-Marie’s accounts closed that year with receipts of 100,792.35 francs and expenditures of 91,365.65 francs. The difference, 9,426.70 francs, was in his safe. Thus, the budget of the motherhouse was growing every year along with the number of Brothers and schools. As for an inventory, it seems no one thought about it; they lived one day at a time.”

Visit of Cardinal de Bonald, May 1843
This new Archbishop of Lyons, following the path of his predecessor, was a great supporter of the Brothers. He visits again later in the year! The *Annals* tells of this visit thus: “On 20th May, His Eminence Cardinal de Bonald, Archbishop of Lyons, honoured us with his august and pleasant visit, celebrated holy Mass and conferred confirmation in the chapel. When he arrived, the bell was rung and the whole community went out to meet His Eminence who, having reached the inner courtyard, went into the reception room to put on his vestments. Then we went to the prayer room, where a prie-dieu had been prepared for His Lordship, who knelt there. Fr. Matricon, surrounded by the officiating clergy, and vested in surplice and cope, presented him with the cross, which he stood to kiss.”

“After that ceremony, we went in procession to the chapel where His Eminence celebrated a pontifical Mass and confirmed a score of Brothers or novices and about a hundred
outsiders. In his admirable discourse on this occasion, His Lordship the cardinal urged us particularly to pray ceaselessly for the assistance and light of the Holy Spirit, and to strive to acquire the perfection of our state in order to fulfil the designs of divine Providence for the Society and to work effectively for the sanctification of the children. “His Eminence dined at the house with the Fathers, the clergy who had accompanied him, Br. Director General, and several well-to-do citizens of the city of Saint-Chamond who had been invited. He was kind enough to spend almost the entire day with us, in our beloved solitude, to show us his great benevolence and to give us the most touching proofs of his interest in us.”

What the old (and other) Brothers were doing, 1844

We get some understanding of the activities of the Brothers at the Hermitage (other than the Superiors) from a letter written by several Brothers to the missionary Brothers in the Pacific. It gives tiny pictures of some of the Brothers at their tasks:

"The Hermitage novitiate includes about fifty good men. The superiors have just sent the youngest ones to La Grange-Payre, under the direction of Brothers Photius, Arsène and Fidèle. The others are being trained in the religious virtues by the highly respected Br. Bonaventure who is still very dear to the Society because of his zeal and devotedness.”

"The old brothers at the Hermitage often speak of you. They all love you very much. We think you will be pleased to have news of them, and to begin with their dean, we will tell you that Br. Louis is such a businessman that if the trip to Oceania were no more difficult than that to Lyons, he would go there every month to offer you books and paper. Br. Stanislas is always dreaming of pretty statues of the Blessed Virgin, beautiful vestments and beautiful ceremonies. The venerable [Br.] Jean-Joseph sends his shuttle flying [passe la navette] as determinedly as if he were only thirty. The soutanes and britches are still ruled by Br. Hippolyte and Br. Jacques constantly rides herd on his cows and chickens. As for Brothers Pierre and Honoré, they never stop working with stone and bricks. Br. Jérôme still knows how to guide the horse. Brothers Marcellin, Jean-Claude, Colomban and Pierre-Joseph are still doing the same tasks. You will doubtless be pleased to learn that Br. Spiridion would like to bring you some shoes and visit Br. Basile, but his strength is not the equal of his courage.”

Here are the accounts for 1844:
Br. Basil’s letter from the missions, 2 Nov 1843

Kororareka,
2 November, 1843.

My Very Dear Brother,

I am very late in writing to you, but I beg you to excuse my delay, for my occupations do not allow me to write often, and moreover, as you know, I am not a famous correspondent. I am still at the Bay of Islands, at the Bishop’s house, the mother-house of the mission. My employments are to do the cooking, sometimes to act as bootmaker, butcher and even baker. You know that in France I was always ill; here my health is marvellous; I have become rather portly, yet am very well; I thank God and Mary, our good Mother, for it; for in these countries it is essential to enjoy good health because of the many tasks we have.

From time to time I visit the natives with the Fathers, and I will tell you something of what we see on these trips. When the natives see us in the distance, they call out to us, “Haere mai, haere mai!”, which means “Come, come!” They welcome us like children welcoming their father. Their houses are very low, especially the doors, so that it is necessary to get down on all fours to enter. Throughout the night they have a large fire burning, so that it is unsupportable unless you lie down, for the smoke blinds you, and moreover all of them, men, women and children, have a pipe in their mouths, and with the door closed you can imagine what it is like. You lie down on a mat, and can sleep there as well as in the best of beds. That is a small part of the life of a missionary.

One day I made a journey with Father Garin to carry out a burial. We thought we would do it in the evening; but it was postponed until the next day, and when the hour arrived, we were told it could not be done until rain had fallen, that until then the body would not be brought out from where it lay. Father asked them if they would like him to bless at least the place where the body was to be laid, and the chief agreed. But as we were climbing a small hill an old woman cried out: “Tapu! Tapu! The place is sacred! The place is sacred!” We had to be content with blessing the place from a distance. You can see what patience you need with these poor savages. The men sit round the body smoking their pipes, the women weep in turn, and tear their bodies with sharpened shells; one of them came up to Father Garin and asked if it was good to do this and when he replied in the negative, she remained calm.

That day was another very painful one for us, because of the rivers that had to be crossed every minute and the mountains to be traversed, or rather to be climbed. That night, we had to sleep on the roadside again, not being able to reach our destination; the hut of a shepherd who worked for a Protestant minister provided us with shelter; he shared his supper with us, poor and all as it was, for it consisted of potatoes and the head of a fowl.

Sometimes I also act as a doctor; when the natives arrive at the house, they begin by saying to me, “I am very ill; give me a remedy.” Some say to me, “I have a terrible pain in the throat.” Others, “I have a very bad cold.” Others again, “I am aching all over.” To the first I give sugar in water, to those who have aches I give fat which I have boiled up with camphor—it is a remedy which they find excellent. They say that I am a very good doctor; as you can see one must do a little of everything.

Time will not allow me to say more: I have to write at night before going to bed. My dear Brother, I beg you not to forget me in your prayers; I ask also for the prayers of all the good Brothers at the Hermitage. Please give my best wishes to Fathers Matignon and Besson, as well as to Brothers Louis-Marie, Jean-Baptiste, Jean-Marie, Louis, Stanislaus, Hippolyte, Spiridion, as well as the Brothers of the Hermitage and all the others.

Yours sincerely,
BROTHER BASIL

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1845 Relics of Saint Priscillian brought to the Hermitage Chapel

Readers of the twenty-first century may be amazed by this story of the gaining of some bones of a Roman martyr from the fourth century. For very many years they were preserved in a large reliquary at the back of the chapel on the left hand side. This reflects a devotion in the Church of the time that suggested that the proximity of the bones of a saint gave a certain blessing.

First of all, a passage from Wikipedia will acquaint the reader with the saint in question:

Priscillian (died c.385) was a wealthy nobleman of Roman Hispania who promoted a strict form of Christian asceticism. He became bishop of Ávila in 380. Certain practices of his followers (such as meeting at country villas instead of attending church) were denounced at the Council of Zaragoza in 380. Tensions between Priscillian and bishops opposed to his views continued, as well as political maneuvering by both sides. Around 385, Priscillian was charged with sorcery and executed by authority of the Emperor Maximus. The ascetic movement Priscillianism is named after him, and continued in Hispania and Gaul until the late 6th century. Tractates by Priscillian and close followers, which had seemed lost, were discovered in 1885 and published in 1889.

Bishop Epalle (pictured) went to Rome in 1844 and obtained the bodies of several martyrs. Br. Avit says he “willingly reserved the body of St. Priscillian for our house at the Hermitage”. The following very lengthy account from Brother Avit’s Annals of the acquisition of the relics and their housing in a reliquary and the grand procession that brought them to the Hermitage will give an interesting insight into Catholic devotions of the middle of the nineteenth century as well as the standing of the Hermitage in the surrounding area (note the platoon of the National Guard):

“In order to honour the new protector which heaven was granting us, and make the transfer of his relics as solemn as our poor resources permitted, we had a reliquary made. Its frame was gilded wood, the front and two ends were glass, and the rear a gilded panel on which were placed two palm branches with the monogram of Christ in the centre.

“A wax dummy containing the saint's bones was placed in the reliquary. It was clothed in a tunic of gold and silver cloth. The head rested on two crimson velvet cushions edged with gold lace. Its belt was also of embroidered crimson velvet. In the right arm, there was a small opening through which the bone could be seen; the left hand held a gilded palm branch. The neck bore a wound, showing that the martyr had been beheaded. There were sandals on the feet, with gold lace thongs wrapped around the legs. At one side there was a footed vase of gilded wood, in which one could see a flask containing some of the saint's blood.

“The interior of the cover of the reliquary was painted sky-blue with stars and with gilded angels in each corner. On the outside, there were two gilded angels at the front corners. The dome was surmounted by a gilded cross with rays. The cover was encircled by a border of half-circles containing trefoils. In the middle of the frame, below the front pane of glass, there was a coat of arms, surmounted by the monogram of Christ and bearing the words: Body of St. Priscillian, martyr.

“The relics had been placed in the reliquary in the presence of one of the dignitaries of the archdiocese who then sealed it by placing the seal of His Eminence on the ends of the four red silk cords which were behind the reliquary, and in the middle where they crossed, making nine seals in all. The reliquary was 1.70 meters long by 0.62 meters wide at the base, and 1.95 by 0.75 meters at the top; its average height was one meter.

“Brother Jérôme, who drove the house's wagon, had gone to Lyons to pick up the reliquary and brought it back in the company of the man who had made it. On 16 June it was placed in a room in the little boarding school at La Grange-Payre.”

[The accompanying photo was taken in 1982 and is identical (other than being in colour) to the one reproduced in black and white in the 1925 Centenary Monographie]

Transfer of the relics “On 17 June, the day of the transfer, the reliquary was placed on a decorated platform and placed in the middle of the outer courtyard, under a dome held up by four columns. It was Br. Stanislas, the esteemed sacristan, who had had most to do with all the preparations for the celebration.

“Fr. Beaujolin, Vicar General, who had willingly paid us the honour of presiding at the ceremony in the name of His Eminence the cardinal archbishop of Lyons, arrived at the Hermitage the day before. The next day he said Mass, at which the whole community received communion, and then 18 postulants received the habit. Then he went to La Grange-Payre for dinner with the chaplains: Frs. Matricon, Chauvinaud and Séon; the latter was the preacher for the occasion. Also present were Frs. Besson, parish priest of Saint-Pierre in Saint-Chamond; Garel, parish priest of Izieux with his associate; Bedoin, parish priest of La Valla; Préher, parish priest of Tarentaise; Durbise, parish priest of Saint-Martin-en-Coailleux; Janvier, parish
Death of Brother Jean-Joseph, 1845

The Brothers who died during 1845 are listed in the Annals. Note that six are from the Province of the Hermitage. This seems a large number by twenty-first century standards. All the names are listed. The astute reader will remember the mention of Brother Jean-Joseph in the previous year, 1844, in the letter that some Brothers from the Hermitage wrote to the missionary Brothers in the Pacific. He was said, then, to be sending his weaving shuttle flying as if he were only thirty! Read on to learn of his devotedness, at the same time as remembering the others who died in 1845:

“Brothers Xavier, Alexandre and Nazaire left this life in the province of Saint-Paul, and Brothers Henri, Joachin, Philémon, Apronien, Brieux, and Jean-Joseph in that of the Hermitage. The last-named had always showed admirable simplicity and devotedness as door-keeper, as head of the weaving workshop, and especially as bell-ringer. Even though he had never studied, he possessed rare intelligence. It was he who gave the holy Founder the best answers during the catechism lessons and conferences the latter gave to the Brothers. As we have already said, the first stroke of the hour always found him with the bell-rope in hand. Br. Marcellin replaced him as bell-ringer and as weaver. He did so for thirty years, no less edifyingly than his predecessor.”

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Report of vision of Mary to two children at La Salette

Brother Marie-Nizier gives his account of the killing of Father Peter Chanel to the “Brothers of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage, France”

Letter from Brother Marie-Nizier
(Blessed P.M. Chael, martyred 28 April 1841)

Futuna, 14th June, 1846.

To the Brothers of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage, France.

My very dear Brothers,

For nearly ten years we have been separated by divine Providence and, alas! have had the pleasure of reading only one of your letters, that which you sent out with the second band of missionaries in 1838. Oh! If you only knew how great a pleasure it is to receive a letter in this distant land!

Permit me, while enjoying the pleasure of writing to you, to give you a share in the great consolations bestowed upon me by the good God without any merit on my part. Six baptisms, two of adults and four of children, are the fruits which the good Master permitted me to gather during the three years and a half that I spent in Futuna with Reverend Father Chanel. Do not imagine, however, that there was no trouble in obtaining this blessing for these favoured souls. It was not likely, was it, that Satan would lose his prey without a struggle? But Mary overcame all the evils of man’s unrelenting foe. I am sure our good Mother covers with the mantle of her protection several of the unfortunate little ones even when they are at death’s door. In a valley not far from where we live, there was a child who had been sick for a good while. His parents would not allow Rev. Father Chanel to baptize it. On that occasion he did not insist much, because he thought there was no immediate danger. One day when the Father was absent, I was told of the child’s illness and I promised to go to see it. I put in my pocket a small bottle of holy water. On entering the house, I was amazed to find it full of people, mostly women, and I feared they would throw the plan in my mind. To avoid raising suspicion, I said not a word about religion, otherwise my least movements would have been narrowly scrutinized. Here Providence intervened: the parents did not wish the child to be baptized, and nevertheless the mother invited me to sit near the little invalid. What joy filled my heart! I remained seated there a long while, fan in hand, keeping the flies off the child. God permitted the mother to become very sleepy, and without more ado she lay on the mat on which she had been seated and covered her face. She wished to stir up the child likewise, but I promised to look after the little one. It was the moment of grace. I poured the sanctifying water on the forehead of this privileged little creature and called her Marie-Philomène. Is it not strange that not one of the many persons present noticed what I had done? If they had, the death of the child would have been attributed to me, and that might have prevented other baptisms. I was not always successful in attempting to baptize dying children. I was once ordered off and told that my bead would be cut off with an axe if I persisted. I did not fear the threats, but boldly and more earnestly begged permission to baptize the child in vain. Fortunately, however, that child recovered. It is not reasonable to find consolation in such ministries, especially as I hope that those whom I baptized are in heaven (for they all died soon after)? I have then six more intercessors in the abode of bliss. May I not also claim a seventh whose prayers will help me greatly? Could the blessed martyr of Futuna, now in glory, turn away his eyes from me, or be unmindful of the continual longings and appeals of his poor catechist in this valley of tears, and still in the arena in which that generous athlete bore off the immortal crown of martyrdom?

I, very dear Brothers, will please you to learn what took place after the death of Rev. Father Chanel up to the moment of my departure from Futuna. You must have envied my happiness of being associated with the first martyr of Oceania and of having a share in his sufferings. I shall pass over the earlier trials and relate only more personal ones which I had to bear alone after his martyrdom. You are not unaware, dear Brothers, of what depraved use of the crown of martyrdom which I should have worn side by side with venerated Father Chanel, that intrepid soldier of Jesus Christ. First, alas! it was my sins. Here are the secondary causes: on the 26th April, 1846, Father Chanel sent me to the opposite side of the island to visit an invalid to do what I could for him, and then to travel through the different valleys on that same side of the island, so that if any children were in danger of death I might be able to open heaven to them by baptism. Having finished my work there, I was returning on the day he had appointed, the 29th. On the way, the path led over a steep mountain and I was within an hour’s walk of our house when I met a native coming down. He had a spear resting on his shoulder; around his head was a large sheet of white paper, and in his hand a roll of pictures. I knew at once to whom these things belonged, but made no remark about them. I had met him just near the edge of a precipice, so you can imagine how dangerous it would have been to meet an armed enemy there. Had I been forced back two paces, it would have meant a fall over the 100 feet.

Maatata was the name of the native who, in fact, became my liberator. He excitedly told me about the death of Father Chanel, which had occurred that morning, and he constrained me to turn back, offering to accompany me, God granted me the grace to hear of this martyrdom without much trouble of mind. On the way to Sigave with Maatata, I had several narrow escapes from being swept away by the waves on some reefs we had to cross at high tide. On arriving in the valley of the conquered, consternation was general at the news of the death of the holy martyr. All work was suspended for that day. I had escaped from inevitable death by meeting Maatata, and I narrowly escaped it where I had taken refuge. A Waillitian, a naturalized Futunan, determined to kill me, and stood outside the house with an axe, waiting for me to step out. I warned him in time that a murderer was ready to kill me. I had a peep at the would-be assassin whose face was blackened, he had an axe in hand, his eyes seemed to stand out, and he looked really terrible. I remained in the house. He kept up his watch all the evening until midnight. Some of the men then disarmed him and threatened that he himself would be slain, if he gave any more trouble. He was no doubt alarmed, for from that time, he showed no more hostility. The events of the day had prevented me from reciting the whole of the Office of the Blessed Virgin, and when I wished to make up for it in the evening by some rosaries, I discovered that my beads were lost.

I felt somewhat comforted, when I borrowed those of a nephew living close by. We spent the night in the forest under the canopy of the heavens. It was an act of prudence under the circumstances.

"This year [1846]", the Analyst writes, “was marked by the apparition of the Blessed Virgin in La Salette, by the death of our Holy Father Pope Gregory XVI and by the election of his successor, Pius IX of immortal memory.” So, presumably, this reported apparition would have been the talk of the Hermitage.
This neophyte had a child about ten years old, and as we were all convinced that we were in danger of death, that night perhaps, the child earnestly begged to accompany us that he too might die for the faith, but his parents would not consent. It was a beautiful moonlight night—a night for reflections, during which I slept for only a few moments, when overcome by fatigue and exhaustion. Before morning, a heavy tropical shower was convincing proof that the roof of a native hut is more useful at times than the giants of the forest. On the next morning we received a formal order from Nuliki (the king who caused the martyrdom) to go to see him. He had come to Sigave, the valley of the conquered, in the evening after the death of his victim, pretending that he very much regretted what had happened. For a long time I refused to go with the messengers of the king, as I considered it a stratagem to get me into his power. I told them that I knew the king’s intentions, that he could kill me if he so wished, but that I would not deliver myself up to him. At last Maatata came and advised me to yield, and I went with him.

The other white men wished to accompany me. When we presented ourselves before this king (or rather, this monster in human form) he made me sit beside him, he took me in his arms, and he wept, when speaking of Father Chantel; and, as a climax to his hypocrisy, he begged me to return with him and to live in the old place. Who was this object? Simply to destroy me at will. No hint would avail. I declared before them all, some of whom were the king’s followers, that I would not go of my own free will. We spent the following nights, until we were able to get away, in a house, in the company of some young men ready to defend us against any attack that might be made by the conquerors. As I had no coverlets at night my face and hands and feet suffered greatly from mosquito bites, but worse still were the countless bags that infested the place and took up their quarters in every seam of our clothing. It was impossible to get rid of them as we had no change of clothing. My whole wardrobe consisted of a much worn pair of trousers, a blouse, a shirt and a handkerchief. I had moreover, a small office book and a Christian Manual. If my sojourn in Futuna, at that time, had been prolonged a little, I would have had to depend upon the generosity of the natives for means to be clad as one of them.

Would you believe that the natives were less hostile towards me than one of the white men was? He raged against the religious exercises he saw me performing and did not fail to show his contempt and bitterness thereof. I pass over many other annoyance between the death of our martyr and my departure from Futuna. The Hamilton, an American vessel, appeared on the horizon on the 11th May. This event raised a corner of the mantle of hypocrisy which I had suspected, and showed me plainly that in the hearts of the natives (even of the conquered) there was much less consideration for me than they pretended. As soon as the ship appeared, messengers were sent to the king for his orders regarding our embarkation, and we were carefully watched to prevent us from going on board. On that same day the king had been among the conquered in the morning, and the ship appeared just after his departure. It was providential for me that he had gone, otherwise I would have been killed. These were for me marks of protection from above. Here is another: the ship was on its way to Wallis Island, and yet, almost at sunset, a boat was sent ashore, a thing that had not happened at Futuna during the three and a half years of my sojourn there. How true it is, as Our Lord Jesus Christ says to us, that not a hair will fall from our heads without the permission of our Heavenly Father. The duplicity of the natives was now revealed. The conquered (taking it on them- selves, for the king’s orders had not come) opposed my departure, and only two men energetically opposed the evil intentions of the crowd and helped me to embark. At last, when safe on board and sailing away, I recited the Te Deum in thanksgiving. The Captain seemed to hesitate at first about taking us but then promised a passage to Wallis.

Later on we learned that the king had held a meeting at which it was decided to prevent our departure even if they had to murder the whole crew of the Hamilton. They arrived during the night, but it was too late; we were already on board, away from shore.

In the morning several natives visited the ship, and one of them, in a harsh manner approached me. Why? He returned me my rosary, and, as an afterthought, asked me for some cloth in exchange. I was glad to have my rosary again for I had returned that of the catechumen, but I gave him only a reproach for having concealed it so long. As soon as the captain had taken in some provisions, we sailed for Wallis.

Now, of course, I am back in Futuna, and still the only Brother. This Mission consists of two establishments about twelve miles apart and my time is divided between the two. Ever since my arrival in Futuna, I have nearly always used the common privilege of those who have no footwear, that is, I go bare foot; a privilege made use of in New Caledonia also, as we have recently learned from the lips of Mgr. Viard, who has used it there, and who has paid us a visit. It is not a comfortable way of travelling at first. Our paths are at places very rocky and rough, and the beginner cannot make way without sweating drops of pain, but now, for me, they are almost meadows. A few words on the inhabitants of Futuna will close my long letter. Nearly all of the natives are baptized; most of them have also made their first Communion and they approach the holy table frequently. Their superstitions have been abandoned and they themselves are ashamed of their former practices. I hope none of you think that I am making complaints in what I write. Far from it: I have never regretted my position. Shall I not have the consolation of seeing many of you come to the aid of those poor heathens who inhabit so many of the islands of Oceania? Would they fear being swallowed up by the waves of the vast and immense oceans? But has not He who stifled the tempest for the Apostles as much power as ever? What is it to be feared in the hands of so good a Master? Is it death? Should it not be the goal of our desires? And is not she, who is the Star of the stormy sea of this world, Mary our good Mother, the one who will lead us to the port of a happy eternity? . . . Oh, when will that happy moment come?

Accept the expression of the fraternal sentiments with which my heart is filled. Do not forget me, please, in your prayers.

I have the honour to be in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and in the Immaculate Heart of Mary our good Mother.

Your humble and affectionate Brother,

BROTHER MARIE-NIZIER.
Government of the Institute after Father Champagnat’s death
The accompanying “poster” entitled “Les Trois Un”, prepared some years after the three pictured initially took on the leadership of the Institute, suggests Brothers Francois, Louis-Marie and Jean-Baptiste worked very closely together … as one. These three would have been coming and going at the Hermitage almost continuously from their election in 1839 till the movement of the General Administration, and the “Mother House” to St. Genis-Laval in 1858.

Another flood, November 1847
The *Annals* record the flood thus: “On the First Sunday of Advent, 28 November, the Gier became considerably swollen. The rain which had begun the day before stopped only around 7 p.m. The wooden bridge in Saint Mary’s courtyard was carried away, the stones and earth which protected the river side of the house were dragged along, and the water, which had caused the collapse of a large part of the wall which supported the garden, poured into the outer courtyard, then through the doorway to the interior courtyard and into the refectory. During the singing of vespers, since it was raining very heavily, Br. Louis-Marie, first assistant, with several brothers who had remained behind to keep an eye on the flooding, seeing the water invade the refectory and the scullery, entered the chapel and brought out several of the strongest postulants to carry out the dishes and the tables from the refectory whose asphalt flooring had already been lifted by the water in several places. They had hardly done so when the water invaded the whole place. Since they feared for the part of the house bordering the river, Br. Louis-Marie had the books removed from the library in Br. Jean-Baptiste’s antechamber, which, being at the southern corner on the river side, was one of the most exposed areas.

Br. Jean-Baptiste did not seem to be frightened by what was happening. He counted on the protection of the Blessed Virgin, whose statue he had placed in his window on the river side. He told those who were taking away the books, "The Blessed Virgin will not let the house be carried away because it's the only one we have. Where would we stay? If you take the books away today, you will bring them back tomorrow". And that is exactly what happened, since the rain stopped soon after.”

The Revolution of 1848 and the Hermitage
The following is entirely taken from the *Annals* of Brother Avit:
"The ministers of Louis-Philippe had publicly declared a few weeks before that their master, that "bourgeois king" who reigned but did not govern, was founded on a rock and that nothing could overthrow him. God decided that these men had defied him enough, that they had done enough damage to France, and he permitted them to be miserably driven out on 24th February. That fall provoked a popular uprising from which good people and religious houses suffered momentarily.

"Under the circumstances, the brothers at the Hermitage were also worried and apprehensive, and they took precautions and measures in case of an invasion. In reality, they were isolated among their rocks. The many workers in Saint-Etienne and Rive-de-Gier, who were unemployed and committed so many excesses, made no secret of their plans to create a disturbance at the Hermitage. However, thanks to God and to the protection of Mary, whose Miraculous Medal the brothers had placed on the doors of the house, nothing unpleasant happened to them.

"It is true that the nearby population centres were very well disposed toward them, and the national guard from Saint-Chamond, Izieux and Lavalla had made known their strong determination to come to their aid. To insure greater
protection and speed in carrying it out, the authorities had set up signals for these three localities, so that in case of need, they could be alerted at the same time.

“Mr. Michel, the mayor of Zieux, who had always been good and generous toward the brothers, came one day to tell Br. Superior that he was afraid that the rioters might be coming that night, and added that he would send a picket of national guards to guard the house. He did so, to the great satisfaction of the entire community.”

The Saint-Etienne rioters

“One morning soon after, some people of good will came one after the other to warn Br. Superior that the rioters from Saint-Etienne were headed for the Hermitage, and intended to go on from there to the Sisters in Lavalla. Br. François hurriedly sent a brother with a letter for Fr. Bedoin, the parish priest and for the mayor, to inform them. He also asked that good magistrate to come to the help of the house. The brother had hardly returned when drums could be heard along the Lavalla road. It was the national guard, with Mr. Thibaud, the mayor, at their head. When Br. Superior went out to welcome them, the mayor asked him, "Where are they?", meaning the rioters. "They haven't come yet; perhaps they'll come later."

"In that case, I'll leave you a platoon of guards." And after taking some refreshments with his guards, he went back home. These good people willingly guarded us from Friday until Sunday morning.

The following night, while they were sleeping on their camp beds, one of them, who was posted as sentinel on the road, saw several persons coming toward him. "Who goes there?" he called out. No reply.... He immediately gave the alarm, and all the others got up and came running. They were pleasantly surprised to discover that it was some of the national guard from Saint-Chamond who had come to patrol the area out of their devotedness towards the brothers. They were so glad to see one another that they mutually invited one another to a banquet in Lavalla.

After ransacking the religious houses in Saint-Etienne, 500 rioters, with a big fishwife carrying a red flag at their head, set out to visit the Blue Brothers. They were providentially stopped in Terrenoire and turned back."

Request for government permission to divert the Gier, February, 1848

In early 1848, following the flood of November, 1847, Brother François rather boldly applied to the Sub-Prefect of Saint-Etienne to give permission to divert the Gier:

"Mr. Sub-Prefect, I am asking you, in my own name and in the name of my fellow-workers, to please give us permission to change the course of the Gier for the length of our property, according to the plan which I have the honor to submit to you. This change is absolutely necessary for us, not only to make our buildings more healthful but also to safeguard them against that river’s flooding. Since it flows along the walls of our dwelling for the greater part of their length, it maintains in all the rooms on the ground floor and even on the first floor a level of coolness and dampness which is definitely harmful to our brothers’ health.

"For this reason alone, we would have asked to divert it a long time ago, had not our lack of resources made us recoil before the expenses this improvement would have entailed. But today, we are forced to bear them in any case, because of the damage done by the flood of 28th November last.

"Since our levees were carried away, most of our retaining walls knocked down, the embankment in front of the house totally destroyed, and the riverbed raised about a meter, it would cost us as much to repair all that damage as to dig a new bed for the stream, and we would still have to put up with the serious inconvenience of its too-great proximity. I therefore hope, Mr. Sub-Prefect, that you will take into consideration the difficult situation in which we find ourselves and grant us the permission I am requesting.

"Another, even stronger reason, why we want it, is that the river, because of the sharp, nearly right-angle turn it makes in front of the house, threatens to carry it away every time the water rises substantially. That was the imminent and frightening danger we confronted last November. As soon as the retaining walls had been overturned, the river poured into the unstable land of the garden, and in an instant it was beating against the walls of our buildings, where it could find no other openings but the doors and windows, openings totally insufficient for such a large and furious mass of water. Fortunately, Divine Providence came to our aid by stopping the rain and by making the water level go down almost instantly in the most rapid fashion. Otherwise, most of our garden would have been washed away, and I do not know what would have happened to our buildings.”

The Annalist concludes: “This long request did not meet with success.”
Another visit by Cardinal de Bonald, August, 1848

"Br. Superior drew up as follows the account of the visit which His Eminence Cardinal de Bonald had made to the Hermitage on 12th August:

The second visit with which His Lordship Cardinal de Bonald honoured us took place on 12th August 1849. Everything took place just about the same as on the first occasion.

"The talk which His Eminence gave to the community in the meditation room before Mass, was on what the brothers must learn, practice and teach."

"The chaplains, Br. Superior and his Assistants went to meet His Eminence at the main road. The community came out the main entrance, the oldest brothers first. They greeted His Lordship and we returned in two columns to the prayer room. When His Eminence reached it, he was greeted again and after his talk, we went to the chapel."

Establishment of Scholasticate, 1848

Prior to 1848 the studies of the Brothers to prepare themselves for teaching were carried out at the Novitiate. But with greater demands for formal qualifications, it was decided to devote an entire period (and building) as a Scholasticate, where the main occupation was studies in preparation for teaching.

The accompanying story tells an amusing incident in the early days of the new Scholasticate under the direction of Brother Sylvestre (pictured).
RULES OF THE SCHOLASTICATE

On his return to the Hermitage, Rev. Brother Francois wisely took measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents; about the month of March 1647, he drew up the following rules for what was called then "Brevet Class", or more simply, "The Class".

Class

1. Each one should have in his studies no other end than the glory of God, the salvation of souls and his own sanctification. He should take care to renew this intention often so that his studies may be more profitable and more meritorious.

2. The Brothers will neglect nothing to acquire the knowledge necessary for them to fulfill the end of their vocation; they will give themselves seriously and with constancy to study without recoiling before the difficulty they might meet at first, knowing that this work undertaken by obedience and charity is a work very agreeable to God.

3. As God is the master of knowledge, and as his divine Spirit teaches all truth, they must be careful to invoke his help and draw down his light by prayer and the practice of ejaculatory prayer, striving to merit by purity of heart and holiness of life to receive all the tokens of his grace and the abundance of his gifts.

4. The study of catechism and of religion should hold the first rank in the acquisition of the knowledge a Brother should possess; he should therefore prefer it to all others, and be convinced that it is the wisest and most sublime of all sciences. No matter how clever one may be in this divine science, he can always acquire new lights, and the more he knows, the more he feels the need of instruction.

5. Nevertheless, the other fields of knowledge must not be neglected by a good Teaching Brother; but he must apply himself to these firmly and constantly according to Rule and the wishes of his Superiore, so as to fit himself to fulfill the designs of Providence and to perform well the various tasks to which he will be called.

6. The Brothers must be careful to study with order and method, first reading what has to be studied, then trying to remember it a little at a time, and to understand it so as to be able to use it later on as occasions may require.

7. They should learn the principles of written composition of all kinds, for their own use as well as for writing to others. Their notebooks should be well kept, very clean and well filled.

8. All those who follow this class should show such deference, respect and submission to their teachers, avoiding contradicting them, answering them back or speaking to them in an unpleasant manner and without permission.

9. They will take great care of all school materials - such as books, paper, pens, etc. trying to preserve them and to use them becomingly. If anyone were to damage them wilfully, he would be guilty of injustice.

10. Neither should they talk to one another, nor leave their places for slight pretexts; if there is a necessity to do so, they will ask permission of the one who presides.

11. The Brothers will accept with humble submission and religious docility all the penances imposed on them; they will strive to do them as exactly as possible, with a view of pleasing God and satisfying divine justice; and they will carefully avoid allowing themselves to murmur or to show ill-humour, as this would be very reprehensible, especially in a Religious.

12. Those who experience difficulty in learning lessons or doing the various subjects will try to apply themselves with renewed ardour, without ever being discouraged, even when they are less successful that they would wish. They will remember that it is not success, but work and goodwill that God rewards.

13. Those on the contrary who learn quickly and seem to advance rapidly in learning, must take care they do not fall into the vice of pride, considering themselves better than others; let them remember that virtue alone has value in the eyes of God, and that they will have to render a rigorous account of their talent and knowledge given by God for his glory and the good of religion.
PLAN Géométral
des Bâtiments de l’Hermitage
vers 1840 et après 1850
Échelle de deux millimètres pour
un mètre.

Rez-de-chaussée vers 1840

19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12
11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4
3 2 1
20

Cour

LÉGENDE

Rez-de-chaussée
1 Entrée.
2 Cour.
3 Portier.
4 Parloirs.
5 Chambre.
6 Chambre.
7 Salon.
8 Passage.
9 Cuisine.
10 Passage.
11 Dépense.
12 Évier.
13 Refectoire.
14 Passage.
15 Escalier.
16 Caves.
17 Escaliers.
18 Boulangerie.
19 Habitation.
20 Rocher.

Premier étage
1 Chapelle.
2 Habitation.
3 Passage.
4 Sacristie.
5 Escaliers.
6 Salle.
7 Classe.
8 Classe.
9 Chambre.
10 Chambre.
11 Chambre.
12 Passage.
13 Escalier.
14 Atelier.
15 Escalier.
16 Dépôt.
17 Rocher.
18 Rocher.

Deuxième étage
1 Chapelle.
2 Lingerie.
3 Passage.
4 Chambres.
5 Escalier.
6 Librairie.
7 Escalier et dépôt.
8 Rocher et vide.
9 Rocher.

Le plan de 1850 est le même que celui de 1840 sauf la chapelle qui est indiquée par le n° 1.
CHAPTER 9 1850s up to the withdrawal of the General Administration in 1858

Numbers joining, 1849-50, and 120 Brothers in all at the Hermitage
We find these numbers in a letter written to the Missionaries in the Pacific in early 1850:
"Here are a few details about the Society. Last year at the Hermitage, 11 brothers made profession, 24 made the vow of obedience and 11 postulants put on the holy habit. On 8th December, feast of the Immaculate Conception, we had another reception of the habit for 12 postulants. On 12th February 1850, another for the same number, and on 29th May, one for 14 postulants. At this year's retreat, 18 brothers made profession, 28 the vow of obedience, and 15 postulants received the habit. We will also have a clothing ceremony for a large number next 8th December." This letter included the news of further numbers: "We are actually 120 brothers and novices at the Hermitage. There are about 30 brothers in La Grange-Payre under the direction of Br. Sylvestre. We have here Brothers Jean-Marie and Aidant to help us. The latter is in the novitiate and Br. Bonaventure is in charge of manual work. He does his job perfectly. Everyone is happy, and the work is well done."

Brothers at the Hermitage in 1851
Brother Francois, in giving a Report on the “Status of the Association in 1851,” gives these figures:
“PRINCIPAL HOUSE (N.D. DE L’HERMITAGE): Brothers or postulants doing full-time studies, 110; Retired brothers, 34; Total: 144”

Brother Stanislaus’ harmonium
The reader may enjoy the fun Brother Avit has in telling the tale, set in 1850, of “Brother Stanislaus’ harmonium”.
Here is the story:
“Br. Aidant replaced the esteemed Br. Jean-Marie at the head of the Hermitage novitiate. The remarkable Br. Stanislaus, still the zealous sacristan, persuaded Mr. Ginot from L’Ayat [or de l’Ayat?] to buy him a harmonium with four stops. He did all this in secret, wanting to give all the Brothers a pleasant surprise.
Once the instrument arrived, a lay pianist had to be called from Saint-Etienne to play it. Each time, he had to be fed and paid 5 francs. This artist did not know plain-chant. He wanted a Brother next to him to name the first note of each piece. ‘Under his hand the instrument produced only weak tones. Br. Stanislas was very upset. Instead of the compliments he had expected, he received only criticism. Br. Louis-Marie in particular did not spare him. ‘You bungler!’ he told him, ‘you were satisfied with a useless instrument; if you had known how to handle him, Mr. Ginot would have bought you an organ.’
“The harmonium was placed in the sacristy during the week. Our annalist seized an occasion when everyone was on the large terrace, slipped into the sacristy and tried to play. He had never touched a keyboard and had never had a lesson from either a teacher or a book. His ear was his only guide. Br. Aidant heard him and came closer to listen. He then went to tell Br. Superior that he had found an organist in the house and that there was no point in paying an outside layman.”
“Br. Superior called the makeshift organist and ordered him to play from then on. Br. Stanislas was against the idea. ‘This brother’, he said, ‘does not know how to play and he will damage my instrument.’ Br. Superior did not budge. So Br. Visitor played, and for lack of enough musical knowledge, he at least made some noise. Everyone was delighted. Br. Louis-Marie himself asked where they had got this new instrument. ‘It’s the same one,’ he was told.
“Br. Stanislaus was in seventh heaven and showered praise on the new player. ‘At least you proved that my instrument is powerful enough;’ he told him. This new task was a burden for Br. Visitor, since he had to come back for every feast day, which multiplied his travels and delayed his visits.
“Br. Marie-Jubin played on Sundays. The Brothers did not like to listen to him and said that he put them to sleep. One day he expressed his astonishment to his involuntary competitor, who told him, ‘My dear brother, you have as much music in your little finger as I do in my whole body, but you will only play sounds you studied mathematically. You search
around for them, you drag, and you make everyone tired. Imitate me: make some noise. Remember that the listeners don't understand anything about music, and that in the kingdom of the blind, one-eyed men are kings’. The good brother did not grasp the lesson and continued to blame him every time he played.”

The story of Brother Jerome and what it tells us about the Hermitage prior to 1850

“When it lost Br. Jérôme, the Institute lost one of its best religious. He was one of those men who take pains to stay in the shadows. To perfect modesty he joined exquisite judgment, habitual recollection, limitless dedication, a piety which was not affected but solid, and inviolable attachment to the Institute whose interests he took to heart better than he would his own. Fr. Champagnat loved him deeply and had heard or met him many times during the night, going around the house to make sure everything was closed. He had fulfilled the task of wagon-driver for many years, saying his rosary as he walked beside his horse, putting up with bad weather and many privations with inalterable patience and was obviously happy whenever he could do something for those he met. Most of the inhabitants of Saint-Chamond and its environs knew him and called him a saint.

“This wonderful Brother died a victim of his devotedness. His horse had taken the bit in its teeth in one of the streets of Saint-Chamond just at the moment when a group of children was coming out of a school and crossing that street. To prevent an accident, Br. Jérôme had seized his horse's bridle. The animal made an abrupt movement, and the good Brother found himself caught between his wagon and the wall. Badly crushed, he was carried to the hospital, where he suffered terrible torture, edified everyone who went near him, and finally fell asleep in the Lord on 3rd February. He had received communion that morning.”

Brothers go to St. Chamond railway station to glimpse Prince Louis-Napoleon, 1851

Brother Avit has this interesting entry in his Annals during 1851: “The replacement of this general [Cavaignac] by Prince Louis-Napoléon, and the good tendencies of the National Assembly then gave them some reassurance. The ovations that prince received on the journey he made across France in October 1851, and the good intentions he manifested, reassured the well-to-do even more. When they learned that he was going to pass through Saint-Chamond and stop for a while at the station, all the Brothers in the house wanted to see him and take part in the acclamations of which he was the object. I was left alone to supervise the novices and postulants and take them for a walk”.

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Legal recognition … at last!, 1851
Something Father Champagnat had sought so assiduously without success was finally achieved:

NO.3072. Decree recognising as a public service organisation the religious association devoted to teaching known as the Little Brothers of Mary.
20th June, 1851.

The President of the Republic,

On the basis of the report of the Minister of Public Instruction and of Worship;

In view of the request presented by the religious association of the Little Brothers of Mary dedicated to primary education, for the purpose of being recognised as a public service organisation

In view of the deliberations of the General Council of the Department of the Loire of 25th August 1838, 26th August 1840 and September 1850;

In view of the recommendation of the Superior Council of Public Instruction dated 8th March 1851;

In view of article 910 of the Civil Code and the ordinance of 2nd April 1817;

In view of articles 31, 34 and 70 of the organic law of 15th March 1850;

Having heard the Council of State, decrees:

Art.1. The religious association dedicated to teaching, known as the Little Brothers of Mary, whose principal seat is at N.D. de l’Hermitage in Saint-Chamond, township of Saint-Martin-en-Coailleux, Loire, is recognised as an institution of public service.

Art. 2. The statutes of the association of the Little Brothers of Mary, joined to the present decree, are approved.

Art. 3. The Minister of Public Instruction and of Worship is charged with the execution of the present decree which will be inserted in the Bulletin of Laws

Given at the Elysee Palace, 20th June 1851
Signed: 
LOUIS-NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

The Minister of Public Instruction and Worship
Signed: DE CROUSEILHES

Brother Francois, on the 3rd of July 1851, told the Brothers the good news in a circular he sent from Paris:

"Very dear Brothers, we finally have the consolation, which announcing the date of the retreat, of being able to give you at the same time the good news of the legal recognition of the Congregation. It was on 20th June that the decree of authorization was signed by the President of the Republic, and on the 26th we received an official copy. And so, this all-important step for the future of our Institute is finally accomplished, the step of its legal recognition for which we have been working for so many years and which has kept us in Paris since the beginning of February...."

From Brother Avit’s Annals we read: “Br. Superior here recounted the history of everything which had been attempted for 21 years to achieve this happy result. He recommended to the gratitude of the brothers those persons who had supported us, especially Mr. de Crouseilhes (left), Bishop Parisis (centre), and Count Portalis (right). He
urged them to thank God, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, the Guardian Angels, our venerated Father and our deceased brothers, who on this occasion as on so many others, had protected the Institute.

There follows a long list of prayers of thanksgiving, which was traditional at the time, for a special grace:

“Br. Superior added that on 19th March he had committed himself to the following, on his own behalf and that of all the brothers, as a mark of gratitude:

1. One hundred Masses of thanksgiving.
2. A statue of the Blessed Virgin and one of Saint Joseph in the environs of the house. ‘These statutes have been bought’, he said, ‘and we will see to it that they can be inaugurated after the retreat’.

3. A novena during which the *Te Deum* will be recited after mass, the *Magnificat* after the examen and the *Laudate Dominum* after evening prayer. At the end of the novena, there will be solemn benediction, exposition during the community Mass (His Eminence had given permission) and general communion:
4. From henceforth, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament with exposition during the community Mass, each 20th June.
5. One hundred communions by each member of the Congregation.
6. In all the houses of the Institute, for three years beginning on 1st August, the *Angele Dei* and the *Salve Regina* will be added to evening prayer.
7. During that same period, the litany of Saint Joseph will be added after meditation each Wednesday, and in the classes, the *Memorare* with the three invocations, ‘O Mary conceived without sin...Saint Joseph foster-father of Jesus and spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary...Holy Guardian Angels...’ will be recited daily.

Brother Avit finishes with a wry remark: “If the Brothers were lacking in gratitude for the favour received, it was not because our superiors had forgotten to give them the means to express it.”

Two statues at the Hermitage, 1851

The reader will have noticed above that as a mark of thanksgiving for receiving the official approval of the Institute Brother Francois purchased two statues. This is how Brother Avit tells of them:

“The two statues purchased in Paris were placed on stone pedestals: that of the Blessed Virgin in the southern courtyard, and that of Saint Joseph in the inner courtyard. The statue of the Blessed Virgin is 1.66 meters tall. She is standing on a cloud, her head covered with a veil, holding in her arms the holy Child Jesus who is standing beside her on a globe decorated with stars and carried on a rising cloud. He is holding out his little arms as if to invite everyone to come to him. One can read these words on the pedestal: Ecce mater tua.

“The statue of Saint Joseph is 1.5 meters tall, and represents the saint standing, holding on his left arm the Child Jesus who is sleeping peacefully while he looks at him with love and pleasure. One can read on the pedestal: Ite ad Joseph.

“Fr. Cholleton blessed both these statues at the end of the retreat. We sang the Litany of the Blessed Virgin while going to the southern courtyard, and that of Saint Joseph while going to the inner courtyard.”
Brother Francois provides a peep into Hermitage life during his time

On the occasion of the announcement of the members of the first “new” Hermitage community in 2009 the following appeared in Marist News and provides insights for the reader:

The community of the Hermitage

A description from Brother François

As for Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage, which has such moving memories for us, it is still the principal and largest of our Novitiate. Candidates come there each year by the hundreds, and the communities dependent on this Province have multiplied so much, that we are already having to divide it and appoint another Assistant, since the work is getting too much for Br. Louis-Marie. We will soon be also obliged to do the same for Br. Jean-Baptiste in his Midi Province. Br. Pascal has the North Province, which is the largest but has the least number of Brothers. This is why we have joined it to the West Province, which has its Novitiate at Hautefort, in the diocese of Périgueux. The latter has only been going two years, and Br. François-Michel, its director, is distinguished by his piety, humility, economy, and regularity. But he does not yet have many novices.

They are both very devoted to the Brothers and pray a lot for them, so they are well loved. Fr. Matricon is almost always in the same state of health. Fr. de La Lande, while living entirely on vegetables and taking only one meal a day, sings wonderfully and does the work of four. Every day he does the Stations of the Cross, spends a great part of the night in vigils, and wants no fire in his room. What fine examples of mortification, poverty and humility he gives us!

On several occasions, I have seen the Fathers who have come back from Oceania. You can imagine how eager and interested I was to ask for and receive news of the Brothers out there!... Fr. Rozet told us some very interesting stories at the last retreat of the Brothers of the North. Eyes and ears were open wide in listening to him. We have also been honoured with Bishop Bataillon’s visit to the Hermitage. He had three young Oceaniaans with him, who chanted in their language the canticle: United with the choirs of angels: the whole community chanted the refrain in French. It was beautiful to see how the Brothers gathered around these Oceaniaans during the recreation, and with that, they were not at all uncomfortable. One of them served in the parlour during dinner, and he managed perfectly.

I have gone into all these details, my dear Brother, because I know that everything which concerns our Society is of great interest to you, and I wish to make you a little compensation for the type of isolation you experience in our regard.

PONTY, Vie du Frère François, Vitte, Lyon 1899, p. 180-181
SECOND GENERAL CHAPTER (in three sessions) 1852, 1853, 1854 OUR LADY OF THE HERMITAGE

Examination and publication of the Common Rules, the School Guide and the Rules of Government; election of a third Brother Assistant.

Besides the 3 Superiors, 30 Brothers were present, elected in the 4 Provinces: 18 for the Hermitage, 5 for St. Paul-3-Châteaux, 5 for Viviers and 2 for the North.

Brothers Malachie and Louis-Regis were appointed Scrutators; Brothers Louis-Bernardin and Avit, Secretaries - for all three sessions, as also for the Chapters of 1860, 62 & 63.

27th May - Father Matricr, Chaplain, blessed the room and gave an address. There were 19 sittings which ended on 11th June, to prepare the Common Rules, promulgated on 8th September, 1852, feast of Our Lady's birthday, Queen of the Institute.

Second Session 1853 (16th May to 19th July)

Purpose: 1. To examine school methods and prepare the School Guide for publication - a valuable book for teachers and especially for Catechists; it was published on 2nd July 1854, feast of the Visitation; Brother Francois' letter on this occasion served as the Introduction.

2. The acquisition of the Dumontet property at St. Genis-Laval where the new Motherhouse would be established; Br. Francois explained this to the Brothers in his Circular: "I must tell you that the most pleasing feature of the new property is that it is secluded and removed from all noise, even though close to a great centre of communication. There we will have excellent air, a beautiful view and the space needed for a numerous community; also the solitude and isolation of Our Lady of the Hermitage, as well as that stamp of modesty, humility and simplicity which ought to be in everything and everywhere the distinctive mark of our little Congregation."

Third Session 1854 (1st May to 19th May)

Purpose: to draw up the Rules of Government for the Institute; and to elect a third Brother Assistant. Brother Pascal obtained nearly all the votes on the first scrutiny; he was not at the Chapter; he had been Director of Digoin for 2 years when Br. Francois placed him in charge of the Novitiate at the Hermitage in 1852 to replace Brother Aidant who had gone to Vauban. He was 30 years old. Really Brother Pascal became Vicar for Br. Francois and lightened his burden considerably by taking charge of the Province of the North, the District of the Isles and of the West which depended on it.

This Chapter decided that henceforth the head of the Institute be called Reverend Brother Superior General, that inspeaking to him or of him and in writing to him, the Brothers should that title or at least The Reverend Brother.

Though this School Guide is in English and printed in Glasgow in 1877, nevertheless this publication, in French, was first published following the General Chapter of 1852.
Inside the General Chapter of 1852-3-4

As can be seen from the heading, the General Chapter of 1872-3-4 was held in three sessions. And unless the reader might think that all discussions progressed with calm and a pious sense of holy unity, it must be known that some rather bitter divisions marked the proceedings.

One interesting thing to note was that the strict ban on the entry of women to the Hermitage was softened with the decision to allow a great benefactress of the Brothers, Madame the Countess de la Grandville, to attend some of the sessions.

An excellent summary of the “stormy” sessions of the Chapter are revealed in Brother Andre Lanfrey’s Volume 1 of the History of the Institute. He tells of the reticence of some to speak, of name-calling and insults. There were complaints made to Brother Francois about the conduct of the Chapter, some of them anonymous. And such was the bitterness of some Brothers that they left the Institute after the final session.

It is said that the “rather heated discussions and debates” of the Chapter deeply affected Brother Francois’ health. Brother Avit, the Annalist of the Institute up to the 1880s, and a delegate of the Chapter, suggests that, from then on, he took a lesser role in administration, though this has been disputed.

Death of the Secretary at the Hermitage, Brother Babylas, 1853

Faithful Brother Babylas had been the first appointed as Secretary when the position was begun in 1834. The simple entry into the Annals says that he was found dead at his desk! It would have been he who would have taken a great interest in the introduction of postage stamps into the French postal system on 1st January 1849. Those in the accompanying illustration are from 1849-1852. The Hermitage was to see many more developments in communications as the decades progressed.

Looking for an alternative site, 1852

Because the Hermitage was becoming overcrowded, another site was being considered. Furthermore, doctors argued that it was unhealthy and that heavy night chills, caused by the Gier, were harmful to the health of the Brothers, especially the disabled. After discussion in the General Council [the group of Brothers to advise the Superior General] where the majority opinion was to purchase, it was decided to visit the site to help make a final decision. The discussion resumed, and the aspects that the site was too exposed to the winds, too far from the station and too close to industrial centers, eventually won the day.

Death of Brother Stanislaus, November 1853

Readers attempting to imagine scenes around the Hermitage in the years from the earliest days to 1853 should try to conjure up the image of Brother Stanislaus – always present, always active, always encouraging. In early 1854 Brother Francois wrote a heartfelt Circular to all the Brothers telling in detail the life and personality of Brother Stanislaus. The following passages in English translation will give some insight into this extraordinary foundational member of the Institute:

Circulars Vol. 2, p. 178 (Brother Francois)  
Our Lady of the Hermitage 24th February 1854

My very dear Brothers,

On Wednesday 2nd November, Brother Stanislaus, one of the first and most faithful disciples of Father Champagnat, our pious Founder, died aged 53, after 32 years of community life and 26 years of Profession.

Nothing could be more touching or more edifying than the death of this excellent Brother, so true is it that death is the echo of life, and that we reap as we sow. Associated from the very beginning in all the troubles and the whole project of our good Father, the faithful imitator of his virtues and animated with his spirit, he was the living image of his right to the end. He died at about the same age, from the same illness, in similar circumstances, and leaving us all the same examples of patience, resignation and fervour.

All the religious virtues shone out in Br. Stanislaus, and even to a high degree; but the particular form they assumed in him were generosity and constancy; we cannot recall the life of this Brother without being convinced that nothing could lessen his fervour or break down his courage.
It may be interesting for the reader to realise that Brother Stanislaus almost never taught but spent all his time in being of assistance to Father Champagnat in any capacity, right up to Father Champagnat’s death. Br. Sylvestre makes particular mention of Brother Stanislaus being a very special confidant of Father Champagnat.

Right from the start Br. Stanislaus asked “for the blessing of staying close to the Founder in order to serve him and look after the practical, day-to-day running of the house.” And as you can see from the following extract from his mini-biography in Our First Brothers, he did everything: “He was capable in all areas. He did everything with taste and succeeded in everything he did: cooking, cleaning and organising rooms, looking after the laundry and linen, buying and storing the provisions, making the bread, working in the garden, seeing to the sick, acting as the servant of all the Brothers, that was his occupation, that was the life of Brother Stanislaus.”

1855 The Manual of Piety, and what it says about the hoped-for spirit of the Brothers

This book, the Manual of Piety, was published in 1855, and would have been used regularly in instructing the novices in the virtues and the spirit of a Brother that a Brother should aspire to.

Brother Andre Lanfrey’s summary of the characteristics outlined there of an ideal Brother reads like the description of a perfect saint:

“It demanded of them a character that was pleasant, cheerful and even-tempered, trusting in God and in Mary, filled with the spirit of prayerfulness and faith. Obedient, humble, mortified, filled with zeal, the Brother would be fit to do good among the children. By his openness of heart, his detachment from family, and his faith in the greatness of his vocation, the Brother would be sure of persevering in virtue.”

The titles of some of the chapters echo some of those virtues listed above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ch. VII</th>
<th>Ch. IX</th>
<th>Ch. X</th>
<th>Ch. XI</th>
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<tr>
<td>Regularity</td>
<td>Family Spirit</td>
<td>Cheerfulness and Holy Joy</td>
<td>Having a sociable spirit; too easily taking offence</td>
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<td>XII Gratitude</td>
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The reader might note the stress on cheerfulness and the early mention – 1855 – of the characteristic of “Family Spirit” which is still emphasised as a special characteristic of the Marist Brothers, and Lay Marists, well into the twenty-first century.

Not only was the publication of this manual important in the life of the Hermitage, it was important in standardising aspects of the formation of the Brothers in the various novitiates that had been developed outside the Hermitage, as well as assisting in spreading the same aspects of spirituality amongst all the Brothers of the institute.

Brother Andre Lanfrey states: “Novices and young Brothers would have been required to learn its contents by heart, which is why it is in the form of a catechism and is composed of questions and answers.” And Brother Lanfrey summarises this book’s importance: “Thus at least from the 1830s onwards, a program of formation for the novices had been elaborated, strongly inspired by Father Champagnat, which reached its first stage of completion with the Manual of Piety, which combined in one text a treatise on the theology of the religious life, a systematic expose of what constituted the spirit of the Institute, as well as an outline of Marist spirituality, especially through the maxims of the Founder and the official prayers of the Institute.”

Brother Lanfrey explains that the original 1855 publication experienced some evolutionary transformations in subsequent years, becoming Principles of Christian Perfection in 1863 and Directory of Solid Piety in 1865. And in support of his statement that “These two books would be used by the Institute until well into the Twentieth Century,” see the photo of Brother Augustine’s personal copy of an 1887 edition being used in Australia till, presumably, his death in 1926 at the age of 76.
1856 *Life of Joseph, Benedict, Marcellin Champagnat* published and its constant use in the formation of Brothers up to the 1960s

A fundamentally important book in the history of the Marist Brothers and the formation of Brothers at the Hermitage was the publication in 1856 of the *Life* of the founder, put together by Brother Jean-Baptiste Furet. He had conscientiously gathered as many letters, notes, sayings and anecdotes told by numerous Brothers and others as well as his own memory of his time with Marcellin to be able to put together a chronological history of Champagnat’s life and a description of his many virtues and personal characteristics. The book is divided into two parts, the first the chronological narrative and the second half a description, laced with anecdotes, of his many virtues.

Many commentators note that the way the biography is written is characteristic of the writing of the lives of saintly people in the nineteenth century with its emphasis on the almost blemish-free character of the subject to the exclusion of any slight failings or foibles that might distract from the example of an almost perfect life. The conscientious reader who perseveres in reading to the accounts of the 1960s and 1970s of this history will learn that it was only then that scholars determined to discover the “real” Champagnat.

Suffice it to say that both at the Hermitage, and throughout France and the world, this 1856 History served as the basis for understanding Father Champagnat and the origins of the Marist Brothers for many thousands of Brothers for more than a hundred years.

**August, 1858, the BIG move to St. Genis-Laval**

The time finally came that the accommodation at the Hermitage for the General Administration and all the other activities was inadequate. The decision was made to purchase a property at St. Genis-Laval and to build a substantial chapel there in preparation for moving most of the personnel, equipment, furniture and chapel materials to the new “Mother House”. In the history of the Hermitage this was huge!

A rough transliteration of Brother Avit’s account is as follows:

“At least 3/4 of the Hermitage furniture was transported to Saint-Genis in various trips by the horse and carts available at the Hermitage as well as others being rented for the purpose prior to the bulk of the Brothers following. On 6 August and the following days, key members of the administration and various employees left the Hermitage to go to the new place. The Feast of the Assumption [August 15th] was celebrated by them in the temporary chapel. Several chaplains moved also: Fathers Matricon, Lalande and Roll. Mr. Ram was also at Saint-Genis for several years. The novices, under the supervision of their Master of Novices, Brother Philogue, followed.”

The Novices and Postulants cause amusement at St. Chamond railway station

“The novices and postulants had to take their sheets, their nightcaps and towel in a small package under the arm to the train station of Saint-Chamond causing unintentional hilarity amongst everyone they met. Two special carriages had been arranged for the occasion. They landed at the Irigny station (pictured) and climbed the hill, each clutching their little bundle under his arm.”
The new building at St. Genis-Laval was built around an old mansion (circled), after which the original building on the site was demolished. The original property purchased was an old “chateau” called “Le Dumontet” (pictured).

Notre Dame de L’Hermitage almost abandoned!
So, with almost all its personnel and furniture moved out, the Hermitage, for the following ten years, was relatively empty except for some elderly Brothers, and possibly some other elderly folk living there and a few Brothers to care for them.

Possibility of selling!!
Knowing the situation, a buyer offered 100,000 francs to purchase the property. Whether serious consideration was ever given to selling in not known by this researcher, but it was never sold, but retained, in a phrase used by Brother Francois, as “a reliquary of the founder, Marcellin Champagnat.”

A list of what was taken to St. Genis-Laval
Many, what we might call “relics”, of Father Champagnat were taken to St. Genis-Laval. These included his best vestments; the cross that was used in the “Chapel in the woods” back in 1824-5, the cross and candlesticks from the altar of the 1836 Hermitage chapel, the wooden candlesticks that Father Dervieux, the Parish Priest of Saint-Pierre in St. Chamond had given to Father Champagnat on the occasion of his blessing of the first chapel at the Hermitage, most of Champagnat’s library of books, Champagnat’s breviary, his statue of Our Lady nursing Jesus with his finger in his mouth, known as “La Bonne Mere”, tables, chairs, a large earthenware inkstand, the globe of the world Marcellin used to teach the Brothers aspects of geography and much more.
And much general furniture as well. The transport companies of the time would have enjoyed a happy boost of trade!
Avant de quitter le paisible Hermitage, un des Frères exprima les sentiments de tous dans la poésie suivante :

Adieux à l’Hermitage (1858)

Le voyageur, brûlé par un soleil ardent,
Arrive, fatigué d’une pénible course,
Sous un ombrage frais, près d’une belle source,
Il savoure ardemment les charmes de ces lieux.
Puis, force de partir, de loin les suit des yeux.
Tel mon cœur aujourd’hui, gracieux Hermitage,
Se détache à regret du sein de ton bosque.
Je n’oublierai jamais la douce impression
Que mon cœur a reçue avec émotion.
Adieu, berceau chéri, demeure si modeste,
Où l’âme goûte en paix la parole céleste :
À rester près de toi, j’aurais un lit plaisant,
De vertus en vertus, je voudrais y grandir.
Adieu, Tombeau béni là, d’un vénéré Père,
Repose doucement la dépouille si chère.
Une dernière fois, sur un gazon mouillé,
Près de quitter ces lieux, je tombe agenouillé,
Au marbre glacial, que bientôt j’abandonne.
Je suspends, tout ému, ma plus belle couronne.
Daigne jeter sur moi, vénéré Fondateur,
Du séjour bienheureux un regard protecteur.
Que mes jours soient remplis de paix et d’innocence,
Afin qu’à mon trépas, mon âme, au ciel s’élance.
Et vous, qui reposez sous ces gazonnous touffus,
Vous, les premiers témoins de ses grandes vertus,
Vous, qui l’avez aidé dans sa noble entreprise,
Vous portez maintenant la couronne promise ;
Au devenir de son Tombeau, les vôtres sont rangés,
Près de son trône aussi, vous êtes arrangés !…
Adieu, bois, qui, poussant au fond des vallons sombres,
Répandez doucement vos bienfaissantes ombres.
Dans les mille sentiers, où pendant mon séjour,
J’aimais à m’égarer sur le déclin du jour !…
Adieu, roc escarpé, dont l’orgueilleuse tête
Résiste à tous les vents, affronte la tempête,
Comme un rempart géant placé sur le vallon,
Tu protèges ce lieu du terrible aquilon !
Adieu, bruyant ruisseau dont les ondes limpides
Coulent avec fracas sur leurs pentes rapides,
Je ne pourrai donc plus, quand reviendra le soir,
Solitaire et pensif, sur les rives m’asseoir,
Entendre le murmure de tes mille cascades ?
Que ne m’est-il loisible, ainsi qu’à tes naïades,
De rester près de toi, de goûter les plaisirs,
D’évoquer du passé les pieux souvenirs,
De prier sur tes hords, d’offrir une couronne,
Avec mes humbles veux, aux pieds de la Madone.
CHAPTER 10 Life at the Hermitage 1858 onwards, following the move of most activities and personnel to St. Genis-Laval, to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870

Period of unnatural peace and quiet, 1858-1868

With the departure of almost everyone and everything to St. Genis-Laval in 1858 a strange quiet fell over the Hermitage. Old and frail Brothers remained in the Infirmary as well as a number of the crafts and the Brothers who conducted them.

Brother Francois returns to the Hermitage in retirement, 1860

In July 1860 Brother Francois retired as Superior General of the Brothers and retired to the Hermitage which had been his home for many years.

In a short biography of Brother Francois, referring to these last 20 years of his life, Brother Pierre Zind wrote: “His greatest pleasure: to care for and comfort the sick and infirm. As one who himself suffers, he understands. For their needs he personally sets up a little garden of medicinal plants, and each morning goes around the dormitories to make sure that no one is worn out.” It was said that he felt at ease amongst the Juniors [the boys at the Juniorate] who readily gathered around him and called him “grandpa”! (Brother Francois spoke of his life thus: “I had twenty years of preparation for the role of Superior General; twenty years of carrying it out: will I have twenty years to make reparation for it?”)

While the hand-tinted black & white photo of Br. Francois’ garden is from the nineteenth century (It does not purport to show Brother Francois), the two, top left colour photos below are from approx. 1980, while the photos of plants are from 21st century photos by Br. Giorgio Diamanti, the garden’s curator, and Brother Francois’ successor in this role since 2015.

The herbs pictured here are (left to right): absinthe, sauge, pourere, verveine and arquebuse.
Some unruly scallywags less pleased with Brother Francois’ arrival!

[For the modern reader, the word “gay”, back in those days, meant “lively” and “carefree”.

Retirement of faithful Mrs. Fayasson, 1869

The Annals of the Hermitage for 1869 mentions that Gabrielle Fayasson retired that year. The entry reads: “She had devoted herself to the care of the linen, even after the arrival of the Sisters; she was paid 125fr. per year, perhaps the interest on a sum of money she had loaned to the Institute which she considered her family; her three brothers, Theodoret, Simeon and Marcel all died there”. Mrs. Fayasson and her three sons, we read in the Annals, are all buried “au cemetiere de la communique.”

Production of alpestre & arquebuse as a revenue raiser, 1857 onwards

For very many years the Brothers in Australia have referred to a very special liqueur, originally produced by the Brothers at the Hermitage, as “the spirit of the Institute”! It has a most interesting history going back to Brother Francois, who, amongst other duties in the time before Father Champagnat’s death in 1840 and his election as “Brother Director General” had been a most conscientious infirmarian within the Hermitage. He had prepared various remedies, as was the custom of the time, from a variety of medicinal plants and herbs. These he had studied, and after he died it was found that he had 840 pages of material related to the analysis of illnesses and their treatment.

When Brother Francois took on the responsibilities, in 1839, of “Director General” he handed over to Brother Emmanuel (Joseph Chirat) his “secrets” for his herbal remedies. We learn that this Brother Emmanuel had earned the reputation by 1857 as a healer. It was said that he knew the properties of plants by instinct. Many ill folk came to see him. And from his knowledge he produced a formula for “Eau d’Arquebuse”.

Brother Darius became the successor to Brother Emmanuel, and after some time, in 1869, they gained from the Tribunal de Commerce in Lyons the registration of the official name of the product as “Eau d’arquebuse de l’Hermitage.”

At this time, too, the whole enterprise was transferred to St. Genis-Laval where eventually, in 1893, a proper distillery was built.

To avoid copies of the label and name being easily passed off as original arquebuse, Brother Chrysogone arranged that his signature be part of the label. At the time Brother Chrysogone was the Brother in charge of the business side of the Institute.
Kept in the archives of the General House in Rome is the pictured book of herbs. It is believed to hail from the latter part of the nineteenth century and to contain samples of the actual herbs contained in the “secret recipe”. It is said that the aroma of each herb can still be experienced on opening each page.

The accompanying photo of the processing plant is held in the building at St. Genis-Laval, where the Eau d’Arquebuse was created. It is this building that has been converted to the Archives of France, a photo of which appears at the beginning of this Illustrated History under the heading “A note about sources”.

While the bulk of the production was moved to St. Genis-Laval, there must have been a substantial operation still at the Hermitage in 1900 as we find the following seven Brothers listed in the Annals of that year as being engaged in that work:

Various matters from 1863 to 1869

- Brother Francois, [in 1863] continued to direct the house of the Hermitage with Brothers in charge of various departments; in March Brother Louis-Marie came here to write his Circular on Fraternal Charity and often had recourse to Brother Francois. Brother Francois did some gardening, built retaining walls for soil, compiled notes about the house, prayed and preserved regularity in the house, especially the matter of silence. The members of the scatterbrained group passed on into the houses and continued their tricks, even playing some during the retreat at St. Genis. Brother Pascal spoke of measures to correct them or get rid of them.

- Brother Honore died during 1864; he had been the mason’s assistant for several years to Brother Pierre; he had no instruction but was obedient and devoted; though his voice was unpleasant he knew the hymns and sang them with zeal in the chapel; he had always a great appetite and could put away 1k. of bread each day; he was fat like a herring. Being at Chavanay one day he ate 80 apricots for his dessert, but a serious bout of indigestion made him pay for it.

- Brother Apollinaire had had an accident in 1848 and after several appointments came to the Hermitage to retire in 1869. In accord with his usual habit he asked and obtained each year permission to go to the Mother-House at Easter to sing the Haec Dies; his first work here was to extend the path along the river as far as the cemetery; then he directed the extension to the Novitiate playground of the terrace of the plane-trees.

- The reliquary of St. Priscillian needed cleaning; Brother Barlaam secured permission to open, clean and reseal it.

Guidelines for the formation of Brothers at Postulancies and Novitiates, 1867.

Very relevant to the “formator” Brothers at the Hermitage was a Circular written by Brother Louis-Marie, the Superior General, writing from St. Genis-Laval to all the Brothers, on the topic of the proper formation of aspirants to the Brothers. In it he drew attention to three prominent matters that he wanted to draw attention to. First, the necessity for study and reflection, given the paucity of religious knowledge and understanding of many joining the postulancy and Novitiate. Secondly training in the virtues, customs and habits of religious life to such a strong degree that any temptations will be readily overcome. And thirdly, the formation of a good conscience with which to cope with the great variety of tasks their religious life would encounter.
Rival grape vines! 1859

Brother Matthew, as the Superior of the Hermitage, had a problem on his hands with rivalry between Father Ruf, the chaplain, and Brother Adalbert who was in charge of the linen. Each of them asked Brother Matthew if they could plant and cultivate some grapevines, to which he agreed. But the problem arose when the "crop" from one was clearly of better quality to the other. Brother Adalbert was not happy that Father Ruf's grapes were superior to his own.

Brother Francois saw the Hermitage as "The reliquary of Champagnat"

Brother Avit wrote: "We give a list of things by which the Hermitage preserves the memory of the pious Founder, according to the C.F. Françoise: 'The whole house of Our Lady of the Hermitage can be considered the great reliquary of Fr. Champagnat. It was he who built it. He lived in it for 16 years. Everything speaks of him, everything reminds one of the good Father; walls, brick partitions, floors tell us that he was at once mason, plasterer, carpenter, that is to say he had a hand in everything and he did everything. He walked on these floors, he walked the corridors. He prayed, sang, confessed, said Mass, gave communion in this chapel that he built. He worked the land, garden, attacked the rock, etc. He ate in the community dining room and spent time in the community living room. He exhorted the novices in the novitiate hall, as well as giving his regular practical instructions and especially during retreats.' 'Here is his room where he received so many applicants, gave so much good advice to the Brothers in faith, direction and conversations, and where he wrote so much, prayed so much, suffered so much where he finally died.'"

Beginnings of a Juniorate, 1868

In May, 1868, the first "Juniorate", a training house for school-age boys who expressed interest in becoming Brothers, was begun at the Hermitage. This meant that movement and laughter and youthful activity returned, at last, to the Hermitage. This is how its origins are explained in the Annals of the Hermitage: "1868: The scarcity of vocations at St. Genis, led them to accept children who were not yet 15; some were that age but frail in health. This led to the idea of trying a Juniorate or Little Novitiate where children from the age of 12 could be received, provided they had made their First Communion and their parents could pay 250 francs. These were sent to the Hermitage – about 60 of them; this group began to bring a bit of life into the cradle of the Institute, to the house dear to Brother Francois." The Brothers in charge of the Juniors were Brothers Callinique and Romain, and Brother Francois was the superior of the house. Because so much material had been taken to Saint-Genis-Laval, Brother Callinique gained permission of the superiors to augment what they had.
Formation of Provinces, including the “Province” of the Hermitage, 1870

The Province of the Hermitage was successively governed for 16 years by the Brother Philogone (1860-1863), Pascal (1863-1867) and Euthyme (1867-1876); then, for 33 years by Brother Theophane (1876-1883) and Stratonique (1883-1903).

Death of two great builders, Brothers Pierre and Pierre-Joseph, 1868

As far back as 1827 these two Brothers were great builders. They were prominent in the building of the Infirmary in that year. When Father Champagnat was writing back to Brother François from Paris in 1836 he specially asked after Brothers Pierre and Pierre-Joseph. Both these Brothers died during the same year. And their lives tell of the nature of the communities and the Brothers in those years in that some Brothers were not teachers in schools but tradesmen of various kinds that helped build and maintain the material supports for the Brothers active in the teaching apostolate.

The Superior General of the day, Brother Louis-Marie, wrote a brief note in one of his Circulars: “Today therefore, I recommend to you the sincerity and simplicity the devotedness and love of work, the spirit of order and economy of the excellent Brother Pierre-Joseph. A simple working Brother, but always exemplary, always pious; well-loved by his superiors, his confrères and the whole Institute; he died a victim of his devotedness from an accident while working with timber which wounded his hand. It was the Founder who received him in 1835.”

All Brothers equal in every respect, irrespective of what they did

The reader might like to reflect on the arrangements in some other Religious Congregations in the history of the Church (including during the nineteenth century) where there was a division of status between the “professional” members and those members who did more menial tasks. But it was never the case with the Marist Brothers founded by Marcellin Champagnat! All the Brothers had the same status, same costume, same obligations and rights etc.

An anecdote recorded by Br. Sylvestre emphasises this: “Permit me to point out a small incident that took place on this occasion [Fr. Rouchon had been provided, at his request, with four Brothers]. When they came to discuss the stipends of the Brothers, Fr. Champagnat as usual requested 400 francs as remuneration for each Brother. ‘But, Fr. Champagnat,’ Fr. Rouchon said with great simplicity, ‘400 francs is too much especially for a cook. I believe that 300 is enough for him.’ Fr. Champagnat, who did not judge his Brothers by their knowledge or ability, but by their merit before God, gave him to understand that he could not regard his Brothers from this point of view. He always requested the same amount for all. I heard this from Fr. Champagnat himself or from Fr. Rouchon and I can vouch for it.”

Death of Brother Hippolyte, (1868) tailor for forty years

Brother Hippolyte is another example of a Brother, warmly welcomed by Father Champagnat in 1826, the year after the Hermitage was “opened”, who never did any teaching, but was seen as providing the services of a tailor from the very beginning. He had already trained as a men’s tailor before approaching Father Champagnat at the age of twenty-six, with the thought of joining his Brothers. Father Champagnat saw this as a gift from God. “Thank God, he said, ”today He has sent someone for our tailor’s shop.” And there he stayed faithfully for forty years.

It was said that he never lost his temper, that he was unfailingly courteous, and that he zealously “made, cared for and organised all the Brothers’ wardrobe for more than forty years.”

A particular kindness that he always fulfilled was to provide those men who discerned that the Brothers’ life was not for...
them, with suitable suits of clothes to return to civilian life properly dressed!
And there is a special anecdote regarding his earthenware water pot that has come down to us. His room was on the top floor of the Hermitage and he was lame, slowing his walking. And the custom was for the Brothers, on rising in the morning, to go downstairs and to the washing arrangements beside the river. But Br. Hippolyte was always late for the first prayer service in the morning. He explained to Father Champagnat his difficulty and one day, when Father Champagnat was in St. Chamond, he purchased a large earthenware pot for Br. Hippolyte to keep in his room for his morning washing. And this pot has been kept since 1829 and is displayed in the glass cabinet. Some readers may enjoy the fuller story in the box, taken from Br. Alain Delorme’s “Our First Brothers”.

**Brother Hippolyte’s lamp** also warrants a mention in the folklore of the Hermitage. It was his custom to hurry around the house the last thing in the evening to make sure windows were closed etc, and he lit his way with a lamp. He came in for some criticism on the basis of lacking frugality through using the lamp, but he excused himself by saying that it allowed him to hurry and not bump into things, and he used as little oil as he could. And a lamp (possibly this same lamp) is mentioned also as Father Champagnat is dying, as the particularly observant reader will remember from the chapter on Marcellin’s death. Brother Hippolyte was one of the Brothers who kept nightly vigil with Father Champagnat in his dying days and nights. The ailing Champagnat thought the lamp was going out and asked for it to be brought nearer. When he was assured it was still burning brightly he realised that his sight was going, and his death was near. [The image is of a generic lamp, not Br. Hippolyte’s lamp.]

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**Record of Receiving the Habit (Vetures), 1869-1915**

In some traditions of the church these ceremonies are called “clothing” ceremonies; hence the French word “veture”. In English-speaking countries they are called “Receiving the Habit”. It is the ceremony of receiving Postulants, and they are given the religious dress of the Brothers … but do not (yet) take vows. This very important book found in the Archives lists each postulant’s baptismal name and also his new religious name. Note that all the names in the left column are the signatures of the postulants. It was the custom in those days that the postulant would “take on a new man”, become a different, holier self through his acceptance of the habit … and a change of name was to symbolise that!
CHAPTER 11  1870 Franco-Prussian War and return of the General Administration from St. Genis-Laval back to the Hermitage

The Franco-Prussian War, 1870-1871

The reader is here presented with the briefest of brief outlines of the war, taken from a Wikipedia article:

[Prussia under Bismark had reasons for provoking war but then:] "Napoleon III and his Prime Minister, Émile Ollivier, for their parts sought war to solve their problems with political disunity in France. On 16 July 1870, the French parliament voted to declare war on the German Kingdom of Prussia and hostilities began three days later. The German coalition mobilised its troops much more quickly than the French and rapidly invaded northeastern France. The German forces were superior in numbers, had better training and leadership and made more effective use of modern technology, particularly railroads and artillery. A series of swift Prussian and German victories in eastern France, culminating in the Siege of Metz and the Battle of Sedan, saw the army of the Second Empire decisively defeated (Napoleon III had been captured at Sedan on 2 September). A Government of National Defence declared the Third Republic in Paris on 4 September and continued the war for another five months; the German forces fought and defeated new French armies in northern France. Following the Siege of Paris, the capital fell on 28 January 1871 and then a revolutionary uprising called the Paris Commune seized power in the capital and held it for two months, until it was bloodily suppressed by the regular French army at the end of May 1871.

Brothers killed in the War of 1870-71, and Brothers in Paris in danger

While this present History is of the Hermitage, the deaths of Brothers during the war, while not Brothers of the Hermitage, it would, nevertheless, have been an enormous grief to all those at the Hermitage. Mass would have been celebrated for them; the Office of the Dead specially recited in their honour and their deaths mourned for weeks and months following. Under the heading, Nos défunts, Brother Avit lists the names of the 47 Brothers and Postulants killed during this war:

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La mort fit de grands ravages parmi nous en 1871, c'est-à-dire les 47 victimes dont les noms suivent: Garde, Vanuxem et Convers postulants; les Frères Marie-Pascal, Aldegrin, Antonius, Emans, Basilique, novices; les Frères Dange, Augustien, Evrois, Marie-Béatrix, Anthime, Sosithée, Anectus, Térentien, Florentius et Diodorus, obéissants; les Frères Palmaque, Augustalis, Fabiani, Émile, Ezéchiel, Sigebert, Domnin, Antoine, Florus, Désidérius, Louis-Félix, Valérien, Basilius, Justin, Photiis, Majoric, Marie-Séraphin, Hégésippe, Stéphanie, Jonathas, Adrian, Gaspard, Macédonius, Jonas, Odéric, Illuminé, Girard, Saturnin et Isaïe, profès.
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In the same way that the Brothers of the Hermitage were concerned with the Brothers killed, they would likewise have been anxious on behalf of the Brothers resident in Paris. History records a period of Parisian history known as “The Paris Commune” as being particularly harsh. It was a sort of experiment in Communist Government. And the Prussians imposed a most harsh blockade that led to near starvation of the population and to some of them being reduced to eating rats.

To provide an insight into the causes for fear for the Brothers in Paris, the following brief extract from Wikipedia will be helpful: “From the beginning, the Commune had a tense relationship with the Catholic Church. On 2 April, soon after the Commune was established, it voted a decree accusing the Catholic Church of “complicity in the crimes of the monarchy.” The decree declared the separation of church and state, confiscated the state funds allotted to the Church, seized the property of religious congregations, and ordered that Catholic schools cease religious education and become secular. Over the next seven weeks, some two hundred priests, nuns and monks were arrested, and twenty-six churches were closed to the public. At the urging of the more radical newspapers, National Guard units searched the basements of churches, looking for evidence of alleged sadism and criminal practices. More extreme elements of the National Guard carried out mock religious processions and parodies of religious services. Early in May, some of the political clubs began to demand the immediate execution of Archbishop Darboy and the other priests in the prison. The Archbishop and a number of priests were executed during Bloody Week, in retaliation for the execution of Commune soldiers by the regular army.”
An English translation of a Circular by Brother Louis-Marie and also letters from Brothers in Paris have been found (thanks to Brother Owen’s collection of historical materials). They include the following extracts: “The people’s spirit is excellent; last Thursday I walked through the city with Brother Nemese to obtain our permit from the city hall; all the way we received not the slightest insult, but marks of respect and sympathy; now our classes are going well. Our sick bay has two wounded soldiers and we receive their ration of 100g. of meat per day; people queue up for 5 or 6 hours to get a similar ration from the Butcher’s. I cannot tell you of the noise of the cannon; we are shattered by it – day and night, night and day. The forts are holding the enemy two leagues away. The Brothers are all well and are not worried. In another extract we read: “Six times we were bombed; a 100-lb bomb came through the front of the building, burst on the 3rd floor and then came through onto the 2nd floor; everything was knocked down in these two rooms, holes everywhere, but not one of the 60 wounded there suffered any harm, not even a scratch.”

And the following is taken from a letter from Brother Gebuin, the Director of the Boarding School, north-east of Paris, 19th October 1870: “Dear Rev. Brother, You have heard of the bombing and capture of Breteuil on 12th October; I hasten to tell you that we have to thank our Saviour, His Mother and St. Joseph for in the midst of a hail of bombs we have been divinely protected and miraculously saved. Three bombs burst in our garden, 10 metres from the house; another came over the wall of the yard, went through a staircase and took off a ridge of stonework surrounding our property. We picked up, only a few feet from the house, a quantity of iron, copper and lead; just a look would show you that our escape was miraculous. … Some people took shelter here with us; at the worst attacks we all went to the chapel – Rosary, prayers, Office; the children prayed aloud; about 1.00pm the explosions came with such rapidity and intensity, we had to take the younger ones to the cellars.”

Though all the above terrible events relate to Paris, the details have been given here suggesting that the Hermitage would have been filled with anxiety for the Brothers in Paris and worry, too, that the fighting could move south and affect themselves in St. Chamond. (The illustration is taken from a series of pictures picturing the time of the Commune.)

How did the War affect the Hermitage?
The most dramatic effect of the war was that the General Administration moved back from St Genis-Laval to the Hermitage. So once again the Hermitage became a centre of life and activity.

And the flight of the Superior General was full of drama. Brother Avit, who was a “Brother Visitor” at the time, as well as the chronicler of the History of the Institute, was involved himself in the drama. While the following translation is imperfect, it nevertheless will give a keen sense of the tension and drama:

“We were carrying 30,000 francs in banknotes. Brother Louis-Marie, the Superior General thought it wise to lighten the load by only carrying 17,000 francs in gold and silver, the rest, 13,000 francs in banknotes. The plan was to take the 2.00pm train from Roanne to Lyons and Saint-Etienne. There was, however, some fear of attack on the way. And add to that the train was delayed for two hours out of Saint Etienne. So, we had to wait for a bus. There was a group of National Guardsmen at the entrance to La Mulatiere (pictured), most of whom were drunk. They were searching everyone who came by. We became separated from Brother Louis-Marie in the crowd and he was arrested. Our arrests followed, and we were taken to the guardhouse. There we waited for a considerable time for someone in authority to arrive to decide our fate. They wanted to see what we were carrying. We were scared our cache of money would be discovered and seized. So, we disguised the bag of money with lots of crushed paper on top. They ordered us to open the bag, which we did; but they only saw the paper on top. We acted all innocent and the moment passed. The proposal was to take us to Saint Joseph Prison where earlier some priests had been jailed. Brother Louis-Marie was very fearful and ashed-faced. Finally, the fellow in charge arrived and it was decided to take us to Oullins. He arranged for our escort of six to walk in front and for us to follow so as not to attract the attention of the crowd. The moon shone above us, and our escort was proper; but when we arrived in Oullins there was a crowd of about 1,500 in an angry mood. Particularly nasty were some women who shouted: ‘Finally you will hold these black-capped rascals. Keep them securely!’ Four guards brandished their rifles in front of us, treating us as criminals. Brother Superior General was finding it difficult to walk at this stage. Occasionally a guard would shout: ‘Halt Citizen!’ Brother Louis-Marie requested that we be taken to our home, as we had been promised by the Captain of La Mulatiere, but this suggestion received a brusque response.”
**Hermitage Brothers arming themselves, 1871**

Nerves were frayed at the Hermitage as Brother Andre Lanfrey dramatically relates:

“In 1871 the Brothers had brushes with the Commune in two places, Paris and the Hermitage. After the assassination of the Prefect of the Loire, ‘the louts of St. Etienne and St. Chamond’ would have been planning a ‘visit’ to the Brothers. The Brothers made preparations to defend themselves with daggers. The others brought in piles of stones from outside, which they intended to launch from the windows. As usual nothing happened, but the alarm made a deep impression on the Brothers.”

**Changes in Juniorate and Novitiate as a result of the 1870-71 War**

In Brother Alain Delorme’s *Our First Brothers* we read under the heading September 1871: “The Hermitage saw new life, becoming the centre of a Marist Province. Once again the house was filled with a great many young people in formation.”

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**Anti-clericalism growing after 1871** (The reader will gain some insight into the political background of the growing tide of anti-clericalism in France from this extract from the Britannica on the net):

The creation of the Third Republic in 1871, however, intensified the old-time conflict between clericals and anticlericals. In the struggle between 1871 and 1879, royalist-clerical parties opposed republican-anticlerical parties. Léon Gambetta phrased the slogan, *le cléricalisme, voilà l’ennemi* (“clericalism is the enemy”). The victorious republicans enacted a good deal of anticlerical legislation. The Jesuits were suppressed (1880); and the Ferry laws (1881–82) established free, secular education, compulsory civil marriage, and the opportunity for divorce. The second conflict took place as a result of the bid of Georges Boulanger for dictatorial powers, and ended with a republican, anticlerical triumph.

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**Brother Ludovic sleeps in Father Champagnat’s bed prior to leaving for Australia, November 1871**

A foundation of the Brothers in Australia had been approved by the General Council in August, 1871, and Brother Ludovic Laboureynas was nominated as the first superior. He was a native of Eglise-Neuve (Puy de Dome). For some time, he had been teaching in Great Britain, and when he got the message of this appointment he was at the school in Dundee in Scotland. He was told to return to France and say goodbye to his family (his elderly father and sister), and to prepare to leave for Sydney, Australia. He followed the custom of the time of missionaries leaving for foreign countries to visit the Hermitage. In the *History of the Brothers in Australia* we read: “Br. Ludovic made a short pilgrimage to the Hermitage where he prayed very fervently at the tomb of the Founder, Father Champagnat, and slept in his bed”. And, like the first missionaries in 1836, he also prayed at the shrine of Fouviere, before leaving for Beauchamps where he met up with his fellow missionaries, then on to London for the journey to Sydney.

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Here is a transcript and translation from his diary:

14 November: Went to get my passport signed by the mayor of St. Genis-Laval. I was accompanied by dear Br. Chrysogone the Procurator-General. Left St. Genis for Our Lady of the Hermitage. Stopped a while at Isieux – The Rev. Br. Francois received me most kindly. I prayed very fervently on Father Champagnat’s tomb. Slept in his bed. Had much pleasure to meet my old Dr. Br. Ristoche – Went to Confession.

15 November: Received the blessing of the Very Rev. Br. Francois and of the almoner. Left the Hermitage for Lyons at 7.30 a.m. Went to the Prefecture for my passport. Paid a last visit to Fourviere. Dined at the Providence. Left Lyons at 8.30 a.m. Went to bid farewell to the Rev. Father Poupinel who introduced me to the Very Rev. Fere Faure Sup. General. Met Father Lefevrier who was to be the leader of the missionaries to Sydney. Returned to St. Genis with Br. Ammon.
CHAPTER 12  1870s following the Franco-Prussian War; Building and other developments; Floods, Chapel, Stations of the Cross, Building for the Sisters

1871, “relatively calm”

The following extracts are quoted from the Annals of the Hermitage:
“The house of Father Champagnat remained relatively calm during the Prussian occupation; there was a Clothing ceremony for 21 new Novices on 31st March. All the horrors of the war did not crush the gaiety of the Novices, and their games of marbles. Some had their pockets full of them. One day, when one of them was serving Mass his trousers fell down and marbles rolled all over the chapel floor creating noise and distraction that produced general hilarity; the server arranged things as best he could and the others took measures to see that the same thing did not happen to them.”

And at another stage there was amusement when Brother Jean-Baptiste, by then elderly, arrived at Mass wearing his nightcap, and only realizing he was still wearing it sometime later during Mass.

An entry in the Annals for 1870 tells us: “Franco-Prussian war; St. Genis is occupied; some sections return to l’Hermitage which becomes a Novitiate both for St. Genis and also, now, for the Province of l’Hermitage; Br. Azarias was director; it became a Provincial House. The Brothers remained on to do a Scholasticate; the trades returned: tailor, shoe-repairer, etc. and the house prospered.”

Death of Brother Jean-Baptiste, 5th February, 1872

While Brother Jean-Baptiste died at St. Genis-Laval, he had spent some time following the Franco-Prussian war at the Hermitage where he continued his custom of writing. The reader should recall that it was Brother Jean-Baptiste who wrote the Life of Father Champagnat, which was published in 1856. However less known are his many other writings in the service of the Institute, amongst them: The Directory of Solid Piety, and also The Principles of Perfection (1865), The Good Superior (1869), Subjects of Meditation (concerning the Incarnation, the Eucharist and the Passion) (1868), Opinions, Conferences and Sayings (1868), The Teacher’s Guide (1854).

Brother Jean-Baptiste was remarkable for his long hours of work each day. Brother Avit says of him: “… as ill as he was in his last years, he could still spend twelve hours a day at his desk.”

And the Annals of the Hermitage has this to say when recording his death: “For many years he had lived only on his energy, contenting himself with a small breakfast about 9.00am and a very modest dinner about 4.00pm after which he walked a little as a recreation. All the rest of the time, from 4.00am till 10.00pm was devoted to his correspondence, interviews with the Brothers, Council meetings or the writing of his books. Although he had never studied outside the Institute, his style is strong, clear and without faults; he slept little and usually in an old armchair; he worked right to the end and an hour before he died he was writing to a Brother. He died almost suddenly in his armchair.”

And an insight into his prolific letter-writing is a remark he, himself, recorded: “When you have written eight or ten letters in a day, you must stop because after that you will do nothing but repeat yourself – you won’t be able to get anything right. You need then to take a break from this activity and go and restock your provisions through study or meditation.”

Brother Jean-Baptiste, amongst his many virtues, was known as a great encourager!

[The reader would do well to read the fuller, yet abbreviated, life of Brother Jean-Baptiste in “Our First Brothers – Marvellous companions of Marcellin” by Brother Alaine Delorme.]
1872 Laundry arrangements and the Sisters

From the Annals we read:

“Three Sisters of the Holy Family came to join Gabrielle here to take care of the linen [laundry] of the house; they were given food and lodging, heating and light plus 200fr. a year for each one.” And in the mid-1870s there is reference to the construction of a separate building for the Sisters, costing 14,000fr. being paid from a legacy of Brother Azarias, the Director of the Hermitage at the time.

The Sisters of the Holy Family were founded in 1806 by Jeanne-Claude Jacoulet (b.1772). The group was a revival of the Miramiones, who had not survived the Revolution. Their modern foundation was at Besançon. As time progressed they became in charge of day-schools, boarding schools, asylums, and schools of domestic economy. (The picture of the nuns has been adapted from images found in a biography of Sister Jeanne-Claude Jacoulet)

Chaplains, 1872

“Father Chapuy, Chaplain, was replaced by Fathers Rabier and Chalvet, Marists; they were given food and lodging, heat and light plus 200fr. each per year. Father Chapuy had been a Capuchin and had to leave that Order for reasons of attacks of epilepsy; he had made a pilgrimage each year to Our Lady of La Salette and had obtained a cure there. In gratitude he went to consecrate himself to Mary in the Sanctuary.”

Flood, May, 1872

1874 Re-location of the Infirmary

“By the generosity of Br. Azarias, Director,” writes the Annalist, “the infirmary, rather badly located for many long years under the novitiate, was much better organized in the former St. Mary dormitory, where it is at present.”

[The accompanying photo, as can be seen, is taken from a 1936 publication. It could be the Community Room of this relocated Infirmary]

1877 Building of a bakery

A bakery was built in 1877 with approx. 4000fr. being provided by Brother Platonique. The building formed the basis for part of the Scholasticate that was eventually built on the same site.

1874 Furnishing and decoration of the Chapel

The reader may pick up an amusing sense of rivalry regarding the decoration of the chapel(s) of the different communities! This is an extract from the Annals of the Hermitage:

“Brother Barlaam, by his skill as a collector, had richly furnished the chapel and the sacristy at the Hermitage and had outdone the Mother House [at St. Genis-Laval]; this was a second matter that caused pain for the Rev. Brother [the Superior General] who did not like that any provincial house should have the lead over the Mother House in any respect.”

[The photo of the dusty chair is from the Hermitage attic, taken in 2008. At the time of writing it was not known its age. But it could have been similar to some of the furniture Br. Barlaam had acquired. And the photo of a monstrance and reliquaries are the sorts of objects treasured by sacristans of the time. These items were photographed in the sacristry of the Hermitage in 2008 before the renovations]
1876-1877 Building of new Chapel

The very bare facts are that in 1876 the old chapel, which had become unsafe, was demolished in May and a new chapel built which was blessed and opened on 15th August 1877, by Father Souteyran, Superior-General of the Marist Fathers. Brother Theodore was its architect. This led to the disappearance of the chapel beloved of Father Champagnat and the building of the chapel that is substantially (except for the reliquary of St. Marcellin) the chapel visitors see today (2016).

Note in the accompanying photo, the middle third, the section partly hidden by the tree, is where the chapel for the reliquary was built in 1955 at the time of the Beatification of Blessed Marcellin.

Just before the demolition of the 1836 chapel, there had been the donation of an organ to the chapel in 1874. Presumably it became the first organ installed in the “new” chapel. The date chosen for the blessing and opening of the Chapel was 15th August 1877, the patronal feast of the Institute, the Assumption of Our Lady, was the same as that of the opening of the very first Hermitage chapel, on 15th August 1825!

Previously, on 27th May 1876, there had been a ceremony, in the presence of Brother Francois, of the breaking of the first stone as part of the demolition of the old 1836 chapel. It was broken “In the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, St. Joachim, St. Anne and Father Champagnat.” The story is that Brother Francois, himself, was the one to break the first stone.

Those present at the opening, and the principal benefactors are listed in the accompanying boxes.

A description of the chapel, and other areas in the Hermitage, is found in the Annals of 1889, and though it may not be exactly what was in the chapel ten years previously, soon after the chapel was completed, it is one of the earliest descriptions of the chapel and its contents.

There is mention of the statues of the four evangelists, said to have been brought back from Paris by Father Champagnat in 1838.

The windows, the gift of Mme Balas Joseph, and the creation of M. Alexandre Mauvernay (1810-1898), master glassmaker of Saint-Glamier, near St. Etienne, are as follows:

Mentioned also are two confessionals; one seen here at the back wall of the chapel, and also the reliquary of St. Priscillian in the wall on the opposite side and the position of the pulpit with the four evangelists carved in wood in relief. A full image of the pulpit is in a separate photo. A confessional (pictured separately) that is still extant and can be seen on one of the staircase landings in the present (2017) Hermitage. It bears, above the centre panel:

It is not, however, the one in the photo.

There being two, they may not have been identical.

An interesting feature of the 1876-7 chapel is a “barriere”, a railing, separating the community from visiting parishioners.

A statue that seems to have disappeared since 1878 is that of Saint Philomene. This statue had its own position on a pedestal within the chapel.

The annalist sums up the new chapel saying: “En resume, cette chapelle est reguliere, simple and graceuse.”

1876-7 Death of Brother Marcellin and also Brother Barthelemy

In the Annals of the Hermitage we read: “Brother Marcellin died; bellringer without a failure for about 30 years; he was 72; he was employed in manual work and towards the end in caring for the cattle; it is said that the cows, fowls and dog refused to eat or drink for three days after Brother’s death.”

And in 1877, telling of Brother Barthelemy: “Brother Barthelemy was a good soul of upright and timorous conscience. He founded the house at St.
Symphorien-d'Ozon in 1827 and there he suffered much during long years. … He directed several other houses in the south and retired here [the Hermitage] where during his last years he made cords in the shed which is on the road to the cemetery.”

Statue of “Our Lady of the Hermitage”, 1876

Readers may be interested to know that for more than 100 years the statue pictured here was known as “Notre Dame de l’Hermitage” and stood in a niche above the altar in the Hermitage chapel. In the following extracts from an article by Brother Owen Kavanagh, written in 1983 when this statue was still in its original position, we learn of its origins and history. At the time of writing, (2018), this statue is found outside the main door of the chapel.

“Father Champagnat had no special statue or picture made to illustrate or embody the title of Our Lady of the Hermitage … It was only in 1876 when the 1836 chapel was due for replacement that the Brothers thought it desirable to have a special statue to embody the title of Our Lady of the Hermitage; Brother Barlaam, the sacristan, was appointed to seek gifts in money and kind for the larger chapel; several statues were donated by devout friends, and that of Our Lady of the Hermitage by Madame Perichon, a benefactress of the house. We have no details of the origins of this statue; larger than life-size it is a focal point of attention in its richly ornamental niche behind and above the main altar …

“She is the Queenly patroness of the House, crowned and holding a sceptre in the right hand …”

“This statue (and all others) had to be concealed with friends from 1903 to 1917 when the religious institutes were legally out of existence in France. Thousands of pictures, photos, slides and reproductions have been distributed all over the world where the Marist Brothers have communities.”

The accompanying photo shows the present (2017) position of the statue – outside the back doors of the Hermitage chapel in the atrium.

1876 death of staunch and most generous benefactor, Antoine Etienne Thiollière

In the record of Father Champagnat’s funeral in 1840 we learn that “… the body was carried in procession to the chapel by the professed Brothers, preceded by the priests, followed by MM. Victor Dugas, Antoine Thiollière and his brother Eugene …” And he was one of those who signed Father Champagnat’s burial certificate. It’s thought that this iron-master industrialist from St. Chamond had befriended Father Champagnat as far back as the Lavalla days where it was most probably he who supplied the Brothers with the materials for the making of the nails. Brother Paul Sestor’s account in Volume 2 of Father Champagnat’s letters is as follows: “When the school in Lorette was established for the children of his workers, Brother Avit already describes him as an outstanding benefactor. To show his gratitude, Father Champagnat made an agreement with him, under which they shared mutually in each other’s spiritual merits – what today we call affiliation.”

It is very difficult to calculate the value of his gifts since they were of different kinds, and no record of them was kept before 1837. According to the account book, he made three contributions of 1000fr. in 1837, and then 3000fr. a year from 1839 to 1841. According to Brother Avit, he gave a gift of 9000fr. during the construction of the new chapel at the Hermitage in 1836 and covered a debt of 22,000fr. in 1840. According to the testimony of Brother Stanislas, his
gifts to Father Champagnat totalled over 100,000fr." And it is clear from correspondence we have from both Brother Francois and Brother Louis-Marie that he continued his generosity well after Father Champagnat’s death. Brother Louis-Marie writing to his son, Eugene, at the time of his death: “In him, the Little Brothers of Mary have lost one of their benefactors, he who more than anyone else shared by his gifts and his prayers in the trials of Father Champagnat, our Founder, and for forty-six years, those of his two successors. His abundant alms constantly came to our aid and helped us overcome our most trying needs. For twenty-one years I myself witnessed.

[The portrait is taken from the internet, but it is not clear if it shows Antoine or Etienne]

1876 Brother Francois suffers a stroke
On 28th May 1876 Brother Francois suffered a stroke that paralysed his right side. As happens in a family when sudden illness strikes there is enormous concern; interest in learning the opinions and prognostications of visiting physicians; anxiety to prepare and provide suitable meals; attend to laundry; see to his comfort etc. And all this especially as Francois was the Superior of the Community. It’s recorded that he recovered well from this setback.

Brother Jean-Stephen’s extraordinary skills
From 1877 onwards, Brother Jean-Stephen would have been seen here, there and everywhere at the Hermitage. After spending ten years in the houses he returned to the Hermitage in 1877 till he died. To quote the Annals of the Hermitage: “He spent 45 years of edification, constant, regular, holy; in charge of work at the Novitiate; clever mechanically, made iron beds and mattresses. For his last 20 years he was blind but had eyes at the end of his fingers and often was seen repairing a lock or a tap, sharpening knives or razors, repairing electrical bells; but he also had eyes in his ears for at the first sound of a voice he would recognise a Brother; he remembered the position of every tap and switch of water, gas and electricity; Brothers referred to him as a dictionary. He was most exemplary in prayer, in charity and in attachment to his superiors and to the Congregation.

Construction of the “Way of the Cross” and its inauguration, 17th August, 1879
An outdoor Stations of the Cross was constructed by Brother Appolinaire on the other side of the river from the Hermitage building in 1879. This construction may have been inspired by, or at least encouraged, by a Circular the Superior General, Brother Louis-Marie, wrote in 1876 centred on the apparition of Our Lady to four children in the small town of Pontmain in 1871 (see box). In the black and white photo from the Centenary Monographie (1925) you can just make out tiny white crosses. The other photo is of the calvary station. Each large ornamental metal cross was fixed to a stone base, and during the blessing and inauguration of the Stations, 14 small wooden crosses were blessed and attached to the metal crosses at each station. Father Rabier spoke on the occasion of the inauguration, telling the history of the Stations of the Cross, the advantages of the devotion and the indulgences to be gained. The Brothers and the congregation walked in procession from station to station, and the ceremony ended with a blessing with a relic (so it was said) of the true cross!
Brother Louis-Marie had a special devotion to the Stations of the Cross, the Five Wounds of Jesus and the Precious Blood. He recommended these devotions to the Brothers and printed in 1878 a small booklet of 32 pages, entitled: “Exercise du chemin de la Croix”. The accompanying colour photos were taken in 2017. The white cross is the only cross remaining. The calvary scene is much as it was in 1879, and the pathway beside trees shows the only remaining cross in the distance. Many of the concrete bases of the crosses, -- see VIII, -- are still in place and clearly visible (2017).

The accompanying photo shows the present (2017) dining room and part of the parking area. The wooded hillside immediately beyond is the location of this Chemin de Croix or Stations of the Cross (circled in yellow).

In 1893 there were additions to the Stations, and that story is told, with photos, in the coming chapter.

Brother Louis-Marie and the apparitions of Pontmain of 1871

An insight into Brother Louis-Marie’s special devotion to the Stations of the Cross, The Precious Blood and the Five Wounds is assisted by a knowledge of the reported apparition of Mary to four children in the tiny town of Pontmain in the far north-west of France in January 1871 at the time of the Franco-Prussian War.

In 1874-1876 Brother Louis-Marie devotes a very long Circular (180 pp.) in three sections, one section during each of the years 1874, 1875 and 1876, to the message of Pontmain. In the third one he includes a very thorough outline of prayers and reflections for each of the fourteen Stations of the Cross with an exhortation to the Brothers to follow the devotion to the Stations.

As can be seen by the illustration based on the children’s vision, there is considerable emphasis on the cross. Brother Louis-Marie explains: "This is why, in the Apparition of Pontmain, Mary constantly shows herself with the cross: first, a small red cross on her chest; then, a cross bearing Christ of the same colour in his hands, calling on her children to meditate on the suffering of her son, to seek their salvation in the painful way of Calvary; finally, two white crosses on the shoulders, symbols of triumph and resurrection ... manifest signs that the salvation of his people, which began with the Incarnation, the Ave Maria, the Rosary, will end with the Passion and by the cross -- the Way of the Cross." It was believed that Mary urged the children to promote the practice of prayer, especially through the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross. Regarding the Stations of the Cross Brother Louis-Marie writes: "May this salutary devotion win all our hearts and make us find, in the adorable wounds of Jesus crucified, the cure for all our ills, our own salvation and the salvation of all those who are dear to us!"

(The black & white illustration is taken from a 1931 English translation of the Circular as is the heading in the box.)
CHAPTER 13 1880s: Beginning of restrictive laws: Death of Brother Francois; Military service; Departure for “missions”; Centenary of birth of Marcellin; Exhumation of his remains.

Anti-clerical laws begin, 1880

In 1880 we see the beginning of laws that in the coming years lead to greater and greater restrictions on Religious Institutes like the Marist Brothers, culminating, eventually, in the 1903 expulsion of Religious Orders from France. The first of these laws was the Decree of Jules Ferry on 29th March 1880, for the expulsion of all Congregations not authorised.

Another Decree of June 1881, made the Brevet certificate compulsory for every teacher. The Superior General, Brother Nestor, immediately published a Study Programme for the trainees, with Scholasticates being set up to prepare the Brothers for the Brevet. The new laws of 28th March 1882, suppressed the teaching of religion and prayers in communal schools.

How the schools coped is another matter, but our present concern is the effect on the Hermitage. That effect was the growing pressure on the training of those Brothers at the Hermitage being prepared to teach, and their gaining the required qualifications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti-clerical laws from 1881 to 1903</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1881, 16th June, The Ferry Law</strong> which decreed that all primary education in public schools was to be free of charge. In itself this did not have any grave consequences, but it was paving the way for the laicisation of public schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1882, 28th March, Another Ferry Law</strong> on compulsory and secular education, which outlawed the use of religious symbols and the teaching of catechism in schools.</td>
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<td><strong>1884, 29th December, The Brisson Tax.</strong> This was a tax of 5% imposed on congregations of the gross value of their property, movables and immovables, either owned or occupied.</td>
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<td><strong>1886, 30th October, The Goblet Law</strong> which decreed that only laypersons could teach in public schools, thereby excluding the teaching religious. This required the setting up of a system of “free” schooling in opposition to the public schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1889, 15th July, The Military Law</strong>, which imposed military service on religious and clergy.</td>
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<td><strong>1901, 1st July, The Waldeck-Rousseau Law</strong> granted to all the right to form associations, with the exception of religious associations. They would be required to obtain a decree of authorisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1903 Combes Law</strong> by which the government refused authorisation of any sort to religious congregations engaged in teaching or preaching. Their members would thus be obliged to choose either exile or laicisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1904, 5th July, Combes Law</strong> prohibited any members of congregations from teaching, even members of congregations which already had authorisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1904 Law of the separation of Church and State.</strong></td>
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Hermitage Brothers off to military service!

It was not only the Hermitage Brothers who had to leave their tasks and their regular religious life and studies or work at the Hermitage and head off to a period of military service, but, of course, all French Brothers falling under the requirements of the 1881 Law. But since this History is of the Hermitage, it is with the Hermitage Brothers in mind that the reader might read the details of their military obligations as told by Brother Andre Lanfrey in volume 1 of his History of the Institute:
1880 and 1883 Grand visits of Superiors General, Nestor and Theophane

The twenty-first century reader may be astonished to read of the lavish preparations the Brothers at the Hermitage made for the visit of a Superior General, who, after all, was coming from "just down the road" from St. Genis-Laval. This was the case for the first visit of Brother Nestor in May 1880. Sixty Brothers from nearby communities gathered with the Brothers of the Hermitage community who, in their best soutanes, gathered outside the front door awaiting his arrival. At the sight of his vehicle the cry went up: "The Reverend Brother ... the Reverend Brother". On alighting he was surrounded by two Assistants General, the Provincial of the Hermitage Province, two chaplains and elderly Brother Francois. After the singing of the Magnificat the gathering processed to the chapel, illuminated as for a feast day, where a special predieu had been prepared for "the Reverend" in front of the altar. Following prayers, accompanied by Brother Romain on the organ, another procession was formed, leading to the community room during which the Ave Maris Stella was sung. Once there the Reverend was set in a special “throne” while the youngest Brother, Br. Marie-Severin, made a speech of praise and welcome on behalf of the entire Hermitage community, to which the Reverend replied in kind. The ceremonies culminated in a grand dinner in a splendidly decorated dining room.

It was not long before another similar lavish welcome was afforded Brother Theophane on 5th May 1883, following the unexpected very short reign of Brother Nestor.

Numbers at Novitiate (at the Hermitage) becoming less numerous, 1881; however ...

An entry in the Annals recording that the political situation of the time, and various Brothers’ works being laicized, parents were wary of allowing their sons to join the Brothers, seems to have been premature. In 1888, combining two ceremonies of taking the habit, 49 young men joined; and we’ll later see, in 1890, that 50 young men did so.
Death of Brother Francois, 1881

The calendar showing 1881, 22 Samedi was found in Brother Francois’ room the day he died, as were some personal effects.

See a detailed account of Brother Francois’ death below:

(The portrait of Brother Francois is by Ravery)
Washing arrangements and improvements, 1880s

The novitiate dormitories on the 5th floor were 25 m. above the level of the Gier; for the morning wash, for a long time, each one went down to the Gier to wash himself; later on, each one was given a basin and a water-pot in earthenware, but each one had to remember to fill his pot from the river. Then washbasins were set up, made of galv. iron, but it was necessary to bring up water in wateringcans to fill the tanks. It was then that Br. Azarias, Novice-Master, planned to channel the springs he had discovered in the Fatouillard wood at the far end of the Calvary and to collect these waters into a large tank well cemented above the level of the roof of the House. By pipes passing under the road, under the sloping garden of the Chaplain and under the river, the water reached the house near the parlours and so could be distributed all through the house. The work was done in large part by the Brothers. Br. Azarias was always at the head of those working and was the most energetic.

Further interesting laundry developments with new machinery

1882 New rooms provided for the chaplains
From 1875 the chaplains to the Hermitage had taken the rooms their predecessors had occupied since the time of Father Champagnat. Now new places were made ready for them behind the sanctuary, with a vestibule for the Brothers preparing to go to Confession.

1882 Novitiate building
The south wing of the novitiate was demolished and completely rebuilt. Brother Nestor, Superior General, came to officiate at the blessing and opening.
1885 departure of Brothers for Canada, 1886 for New Caledonia, 1887, a foundation in Rome, 1888 North America, 1889 Colombia

Brother Avit remarks that following the General Chapter of 1883 there was a surge in zeal for expanding the Institute throughout the world, and so, in 1885 Brothers set out for Canada. The farewell to the Brothers would have been similar to that of the Brothers leaving for New Caledonia the following year. In May of 1886 the Brothers who were destined for establishing the Brothers in New Caledonia visited the Hermitage for their “Ceremony of Farewell”. They visited the cemetery to silently pray at the tomb of Father Champagnat … a long-standing custom for those heading to the “missions”. “The Brother Assistant, Brother Priscillien, read the Spiritual Testament of the Founder after which they went in procession along the avenue of trees singing the “Ave Maris Stella.” Returning to the Hermitage there were speeches, then Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the blessing of farewell, concluding with dinner.

1885 Scholasticate and Scholastics doing well

Brother Avit notes in 1884 and 1885 that the Scholasticate (the house of studies) was known as “Class .. Ecole Speciale”, shortened to “Speciale”. And there is mention of a good number of successful applications for the Brevet: 28 in 1884 and 59 in 1885. So, the reader might imagine the young student Brothers, while everything else was happening around them, having their heads in their books preparing for their important exams, which, besides equipping them as competent teachers, also gained exemption from military service.

1888 Some urgent repairs

“In 1887 the Superiors granted permission to have very urgent repairs done to the Hermitage: to cement the foundations of the walls of all the building along the river; to concrete the interior courtyard and to plaster the walls of the whole house.”

1888 Committee for the Juniorate

A surprisingly long list of prominent clerics and laypersons is listed as members of a Committee to oversee the Juniorate. They were to meet each year at St. Etienne. Related to this is the group, the “Dames patronesses”, which gets mentioned every now and then as supporting the Juniorate.
1889, Centenary of birth of Marcellin Champagnat and the exhumation of his remains

In the *Annals* of the Hermitage there is the following reference to the centenary of Marcellin’s birthday – May 20th 1889 – “The Little Brothers of Mary spread all over the world these days look at the crib that sheltered the baby Marcellin Champagnat on the 100th anniversary of his birth, as their spiritual Father ... a touching family moment in this special year,” noting that the day was fittingly celebrated as a family feast … but no details. But there was much detail related to the exhumation of his remains as can be seen below:

This timber box with the labels attached is preserved (2017) in the attic of the Hermitage, and the notes declare that the bones of Father Champagnat were temporally stored in it when removed from the cemetery.

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**Life and death of Brother Delphinus**

In January 1889 died another of those Brothers who could do everything and was a thoroughly good fellow – Brother Delphinus. In the *Annals* we read: “We have in Brother Delphinus one held in universal acclaim and rejoice that we can now name him among our saints. ... He was distinguished by three highly precious qualities: his intelligence, his skills and his strength. Nothing was an imposition for him; he was enormously helpful in masonry, carpentry, metalwork, baking, tailoring, gardening. On the religious side he was the most regular amongst our Brothers. No matter his many tasks, he never missed a religious exercise and was found at prayer in the chapel deep in adoration and making the Stations of the Cross. Brother Delphinus knew the Gospels and Epistles off by heart, and occasionally he would surprise and edify the young Brothers by reciting the Gospel and Epistle of the day in a most simple and child-like manner.”
The detailed narrative of the exhumation of Father Champagnat’s remains

The Rev. Father Nicolet, the zealous postulator of the cause, had come to the Hermitage on the previous day, to direct the preparations for the ceremony.

The members of the Committee arrived at nine o’clock, viz., Monsignor Déchelette, V.G., Chamberlain to His Holiness Leo. XIII, Canon Conte, Secretary-General of the Archbishop, Canon Pagno, Notary of the Committee, Canon Bouvard, Archpriest of St Chamond, and the Rev. abbé Sorlin, P.P. of St Martin-en-Caméliax. The following were also present: the Rev. Father Nicolet, Postulator, Canon Blance, P.P. of Notre Dame de St Chamond, the abbé Chammier, P.P. of Lavalia, and the Rev. Fathers Champix and Chalvet, Chaplains of the Hermitage. The Congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary was represented by its Superior-General, accompanied by six of his Assistants, the Procurator-General and Secretary-General. Besides the community of the Hermitage, there were some Brothers from the neighborhood, and a few of the older Brothers from a distance. There were also Mr Finaz, ex-Notary of St Chamond, and two grand-nephews of Father Champagnat, Brother Thomas and Mr Armand, jun.

After a visit to the Chapel, the members of the Committee proceeded to the Cemetery to examine the state of the place, and order the exhumation. Having returned to the Chapel, they vested and after a short adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, Canon Pagno read the official appointment of the Committee, and specified the object of their mission, and the manner to carry it out. Then the customary oath was administered to those who were called upon to help the Committee in their work, viz.:—Dr Charrin and Dr Mermet, a joiner, a mason, and a plumber. Brother Amphil, Director of the Provincial House, and Brother Azarias, Master of Novices, both called as witnesses, took the oath like the others, kneeling, and resting their right hand on the Gospel.

In the meantime, the work of exhumation was being proceeded with in the Cemetery, and the mortal remains deposited there fifty years ago were soon to be brought to light. The mason was working with great energy; he was evidently pleased, even proud of the task he had to perform, and would not readily have ceded it to anyone else. It is true, Father Champagnat was no stranger to him, for in his youth he had seen the good father and had heard him spoken of with respect and veneration by his father, who was also a mason and who had helped Father Champagnat in building the Hermitage. He was further spurred on to his work by the circle of Brothers who surrounded him with a pious eagerness to see.

At last, every obstacle being removed, the coffin is distinctly seen in the vault. An air of satisfaction is visible in every countenance, but this soon changes into a kind of anxiety; the wooden coffin, under the combined action of time and damp, is reduced almost to dust; the wooden shell itself is perforated towards the feet. What remains of him who was once Father Champagnat? Such is the anxious question that every one longs to see solved.

Everything now being ready, the clergy, followed by the community, came in procession to the Cemetery. The President of the Committee, after the verification prescribed in such cases, orders the coffin to be withdrawn from the vault. It is immediately placed on a bier and covered with a fine white shroud cloth adorned with a beautiful cross made of artificial roses.

The Vicar-General then read the burial certificate of the Venerable Father, which had been written fifty years before; he afterwards read in Latin, the prescriptions of the Church regarding the respect due to the remains of a servant of God. He explained in a few words the sense of these prescriptions, and said that anyone who should appropriate to himself anything belonging to the
servant of God would ipso facto incur major excommunication.

After this, the procession, preceded by the cross, moved slowly towards the house, singing the Litanies of the Blessed Virgin. Many of the assistants held candles in their hands. After the clergy came the members of the Regime, who alternately relieved each other and felt happy in bearing so precious a burden.

What a contrast between this ceremony and the one which, fifty years before, had been performed in the same place! Then, the Brothers in tears, broken down by fear and discouragement as much as by grief, confided to the earth the mortal remains of a beloved Father; today, several survivors of the former ceremony together with a large number of new children of the family are there, full of joy and confidence, at receiving their cherished Father back from the earth, and the earth itself, which had been sanctified by his presence, seems, as it were, to start with joy in returning this precious deposit; but the remains of those who rest in that quiet abode, seem to revive for a moment to utter their loving complaint at being separated from their Father; still they must rejoice with the angels at this first triumph over death.

On arriving in the large reception room, the coffin is placed on a table covered with a white cloth. At the request of the Vicar-General, all then retired with the exception of the clergy, the members of the Regime, the two doctors, the plumber, the three principal Brothers of the House, the delegate of the Mayor of St-Martin-in-Confl dieux, and the relatives of Father Champagnat.

The doors being closed, the opening of the leaden coffin is proceeded with; all the spectators are watching the movements of the plumber with the greatest anxiety; the precious contents of the coffin are soon uncovered. The skeleton appears intact and in a perfect state of preservation; it is there with the hands joined over the breast in the same pious attitude in which it has been placed in the coffin. Along with these venerable bones were found the tassels of the good Father’s stole, the buttons of his soutane, nearly the whole stock of the right leg, and at the head of the coffin, the metal plate upon which are engraved the words, _queen J. B. M. Champagnat, 1846._

But how can we render the thoughts and feelings that filled the hearts and minds of the spectators, at the sight of those remains of a body which had been hallowed by such a great, noble, and virtuous soul, and whose breast had contained such a good and generous heart? It was some-

thing truly ineffable. It seemed to us, O Most Holy Virgin, that angels sent by thee were bending over those sacred remains and whispering into our ears words of praise and confidence, such as those:

It is the child of Roset, the good pastor of Lavalla.

It is he whom the Little Brothers of Mary expect one day to call Blessed.

He is an honour to the priesthood and to the clergy of Lyons. He is the benefactor of youth and of his country.

The remaining portion of the programme was to enclose the sacred bones in a case of varnished walnut, and carry it to the place which had been prepared for it in the chapel; but owing to the humdrum state of those precious relics, the doctors recommended them not to be closed up at once, and the Committee decided to leave them some time longer in the leaden coffin in a dry place. They were deposited therefore under lock and key, and in the custody of Brother Amphien and Brother Asarius, in the room in which the Rev. Brother François died, to be transferred in due time, and with the prescribed ceremonial, to the chapel, where they must remain until the day fixed by Providence for another and more glorious translation.

And now, remember, O faithful servant of God, our good Father! remember that all this is but a prelude. Like Blessed Peter Chanel, and even long before him, thou hast fought the good fight; like him, hast thou set a right to the triumph? This, his triumph, he has just had in the Eternal City. We have seen it, and were enchanted with it. May we soon hear the joyful tidings that thy turn is at hand, and that Rome awaits thee for thy triumph. Help us, help thy children, and may the Immaculate Virgin aid us to hasten the day when thy venerated remains shall also be called to the Eternal City.

In the meantime, we will remember this spiritual bouquet given by the Vicar-General to the community of the Hermitage: _We are the children of saints; nobility has its obligations._ Noble oblige.
A little more of this narrative is known. In the evening the Vicar General stayed on and speeches were made. Finally, the Vicar General addressed the assembly. He thanked the Brothers for the compliments paid and for the beautiful hymns with which they were welcomed into the reception room. Speaking especially to the Novices, he stressed the lessons to be learned from the present circumstances: “Father Champagnat”, he said in his very pleasant manner, “built the house of the Hermitage on the rock; this rock, my dear young men, is the image of the solid faith, of deep convictions which at that time of disturbance were needed to build the spiritual edifice of your profession.”

“Today your good Father has come nearer to you; know how to repay him; do not step back but rather step out into his paths, into the way of his spirit and his virtues. The blessed remains will stay from now on in the place where you play; may their proximity bring to your minds that great piety, that constant fervour which characterizes your Founder. May his counsels, whose substance only have been recalled, be now heard with more intense interest.”

“The Vicar General then gave on behalf of His Eminence permission for the community to make an extra Communion – a favour much esteemed. He also granted a walk or a holiday.”

Final “burial” of the remains of the Founder, eight months later.

“Since 12th October 1889, the precious remains of venerated Father Champagnat had been transferred from the community cemetery to a room in the Provincial House, Our Lady of the Hermitage; eight months thereafter, Saturday 14th June, 1890, the Vicar-General at the head of a Commission appointed by His Eminence Cardinal Foulon, came here to the house to preside again at the ceremony of transferring and re-burying the precious remains. All prepared in a religious manner for this ceremony.”
Since 12th October 1889, the precious remains of Venerable Father Champagnat had been transferred from the community cemetery to a room of the Provincial House, Our Lady of the Hermitage; eight months thereafter, Saturday 14th June 1890, the Vicar General at the head of a Commission appointed by his Eminence Cardinal Foulon, came here to the house to preside again at the ceremony of transferring and re-burying the precious remains. All prepared in a religious manner for this ceremony.

On Saturday 14th June at 10 a.m. this Commission was again at the Hermitage; after adoring the Blessed Sacrament, they took their places at the foot of the altar of the Sacred Heart. (The chapel was being repaired.) A beautifully decorated prie-dieu held the Gospels, and this gave the chapel a solemn and grandiose appearance.

The ecclesiastical tribunal was again established: the two doctors, Gerset and Charrin, took the oath to fulfill their duties faithfully in regard to the venerated remains. The metalworker, Mr. Moulin, the mason, Mr. Rivory and the carpenter, Brother Simon-Joseph and the dear Brothers Amphi and Azarias - all took the oath. From the chapel all went up to the room where the pious relics were; it was very small and could not hold all the members of the Commission whose presence there was indispensable. Then, to a good number of the senior Brothers wished to come and pay their final respects to the pious remains of their beloved Father. So all were told to leave except the members of the Commission. The bones had been arranged by the doctors in a small leaden coffin, lined inside with white silk; this was sealed by Mr. Moulin, and the seals affixed. This small coffin was then placed inside a coffin of nutwood, firmly closed down and tied with red ribbons which were also sealed with the Archbishop’s seal. The case which contained the other material found in the original coffin was also sealed, and tied with ribbon. Finally the other objects which had belonged to Father Champagnat and which had been carefully collected, were also placed under seal.

When all these operations were ended, a statement was drawn up formally on parchment; all the members signed it, then it was placed in a metal tube and placed with the bones in the lead coffin.

After this long series of operations, the procession formed up: Brothers Norber A.G., Césaire, Procureur, Marie-Junien, Vice-Provincial and Azarias, Master of Novices have the great honour to be the bearers. They were accompanied by four venerable old Brothers carrying candles. The whole community was in the procession: Postulants and young brothers of the novitate opened the way, preceded by the Cross; after them came Brothers of the Special School (Scholastics), professed Brothers with candles in their hands, then the clergy and finally the precious treasure.

The procession went down the main staircase and into the courtyard St. Mary, then entered and crossed the inner court and so on into the chapel. The whole journey was made in silence at the request of the Vicar General, each one occupying himself with his own thoughts.

The vault provided under the floor of the chapel received the coffin onto three iron bars which guaranteed its safety; the walls of the vault had been draped in cloth impregnated with alum, and then it was covered with an iron plate 2cms thick, set in with mortar-plaster, and finally the floorboards were replaced.

From now on the cherished remains of our venerated Father rest in the chapel under the shadow of St. Philomena whose statue is opposite the reliquary of St. Friscillian; the Brothers will be able to visit it at will and to pray as they wish, while people from outside will also be able to invoke the good Father in the hope of obtaining some favour.

On a marble plaque we read the inscription: "Here rests the body of the Servant of God, Marcellin Benedict Joseph Champagnat, priest of the Society of Mary, Founder of the Little Brothers of Mary; he died in the peace of the Lord on Saturday 6th June 1846. May his memory be in blessing!

Exhumed Saturday 12th October 1889, and placed in the chapel on Saturday 14th June 1890.

The ceremony over, all retired from the chapel; it was 12.15.

After dinner the Vicar General and the official party went up to the Novitiate assembly room where the whole community was awaiting them. A choir of Brothers sang a welcome; Monsignor replied, allowing an extra Communion and a holiday also. He was in a hurry to depart, though we would have wished him to stay.
Summary of 1889

The Brothers of the Hermitage sent a letter to the Brother Superior-General at the end of 1889, the centenary year of Father Champagnat’s birth, headed “Letter for the good year 1889”

It included mention that “The year 1889 had begun sombre and menacing, but now it has dissolved into entire and perfect calm. It’s true to say that this has been obtained by the blessings of the jubilee [of Champagnat’s birth] and the helpful actions of Rev. Brother Superior General.”

The accompanying handwritten list is headed: “And finally we repeat here the names of the administration of the Province [of the Hermitage],” and amongst the names are some that are prominent in the history of the Hermitage, and in the case of Brother Stratonique, in the history of the Institute, becoming Superior General.

Outbreak of smallpox, December, 1890

One young Brother died from smallpox during this outbreak, and a number of Brothers were in danger. The doctor ordered the isolation of those affected, and a novena was made to Father Champagnat and Saint Philomena “that the scourge end.”
CHAPTER 14  1890s: Laicisation; Paintings in the sanctuary; Electricity; Introduction of the cause of Marcellin’s beatification

1891 Laicisation of many schools and its effects on the Hermitage

Br. Stephen Farrell states: “In 1886 the government announced that after a delay of five years all public schools in France would be laicised and only lay personnel might teach in them. As a result, in 1891, 83 of the Institute’s 87 communal schools were laicised. However, since all were provided with an “Ecole Libre”, very few students left them.”

What secularisation/laicisation meant to the Brothers at the Hermitage

Readers unfamiliar with French history may benefit from some detail of what laicisation, also called secularisation, meant in the life of the Brothers.

Most overtly was the wearing of lay dress. For some Brothers this remained their manner of dress for the rest of their lives. The accompanying photo is of Brother Pierre Gonzales (1871-1944) and is taken from Volume 2 of the History of the Institute and will serve as an illustration of a “secularised Brother”. This Brother was also known as Louis Riboulet and was the author of a number of books on education. He gave some lectures in pedagogy to the Scholastics at the Hermitage in the years following 1914.

As can be seen by the photo he is dressed as a “man of the world.”

Brother Lanfrey in his research found a dossier quoting someone familiar with the period of laicisation. Written in 1944 it reads:

“When 1903 came around the Brothers had to quickly take on the appearance of people of the world. Blazers and straw boaters quickly changed their looks. Then moustaches and beards appeared. They had to go out with friends at least from time to time to have something to eat and drink in a café. During the holidays it was dangerous to remain in the monastery, so they sometimes went to their families for an extended break.

“If this behaviour scandalises our successors, it should suffice by way of reply to hope that they never have to undergo the trial of secularisation and that, if it lasts 39 years, ask them to remain faithful to their vocation, save their apostolic works, maintain Juniorates and Novitiates during such a period.”

It appears that there developed some antipathy to laicised Brothers by Brothers who had retained the religious dress and the traditional distance from “the world.” This would have flowed over to Brothers at the Hermitage both through laicised Brothers coming to the Hermitage to retire, or with various Brothers passing through or visiting or arriving for the annual retreat. The present compiler of this history believes that for some time following 1903 there would have been a mixture of Brothers at the Hermitage – some regularly wearing the religious soutane alongside others in lay dress. Research may turn up photos of this variety of dress.

Brother Lanfrey prepared a chart of secularised Brothers divided by Province. In 1906 he lists 48 retired Brothers in the Province of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage, and it might be presumed that the majority of them were resident at the Hermitage. Twenty of these were over 70 years of age, so a number may have been in the infirmary.
Fifty young men take the habit and become Postulants, 1890

Despite the growing air of anti-clericalism in France at the time it is interesting to see vividly in the accompanying list of those receiving the habit in 1890, that there were 50 young men taking this step towards becoming Brothers. The name on the left is the family name and beside it is the religious name.

1894 Statue additions to the Stations of the Cross in the woods

The outdoors Stations of the Cross along the hillside on the opposite side of the Gier from the Hermitage was originally completed in 1879. In the Annals of the Hermitage of 1894 we read: “Brother Romain [the indefatigable superior of the Hermitage] commissioned at the statuary firm Barabin of Lyon a statue of Jesus in agony in the Garden of Olives along with an angel of consolation. Also statues of Our Lady, Joseph of Arimathea and Mary Madeline to be placed in the “cave” beneath the Calvary. The total cost was 600 francs. Two angel statues in iron completed the ensemble. The statues were polychromatic. ... The statues were solemnly blessed at the end of a grand procession during the retreat of 1894, preached by a Jesuit priest.”

The statue of the Agony in the Garden seems, at the time of writing (2017) to have been lost. The other statues, however, are still to be seen, more than 120 years later.
“Our Soldier Brothers” mentioned in the Annals of 1891

It is necessary to remind the twenty-first century reader that at any one time during the 1890s and beyond, each Province had a number of young Brothers away from their communities fulfilling their national duties of military service. The continual solicitude of the Brothers back home for these Brothers is revealed by the following extract from the Annals of the Hermitage: "Our good Superiors are well aware of the dangers in the barracks concerning our numerous soldier Brothers. They write to them and visit them often; and urge them to write and visit as much as possible in return. While sadly exiles, they are always members of the big family of the Marist Brothers. The Superiors are not only interested in their souls and spiritual welfare, but also material matters, where they ensure they lack for nothing – money for sustenance, and even to purchase some small pleasures. On 23rd January 1891 Brother Theophane, Superior General, wrote a 15 page letter to the Soldier Brothers assuring them all of his paternal affection and tender concern.”

Gas motor

A gas motor was installed in 1883 to make up for the unreliability of the electricity-generating water mill generator that had been ingeniously installed by one of the Brothers at the canal/race from the Gier.

Very grand visit of Cardinal Pierre-Hector Couillie, 1899.

Various bishops had visited the Hermitage to pay respects to Father Champagnat over the years. But the fact that Cardinal Couillie was the Archbishop of Lyons made his visit very special, as the Brothers made clear by their lavish preparations. A decorative arch had been built at the door of the chapel. The accompanying (abbreviated) press article remarked that it was a “half-century” that had passed since such a similar visit had taken place. Flags and bunting in the colours of France and Pope Leo XIII were fluttering from a great portal of tree branches at the entrance to the property with signs to left and right proclaiming “He’s our father; he’s come to bless us.”

Once the cardinal’s vehicle had arrived the children’s choir with red soutanes and lace surplices fluttering in the breeze led the procession into the brightly illuminated chapel and sanctuary. The chaplains sprinkled the congregation with holy water to the chant of the Benedictus while the Archpriest of Saint-Pierre gave Benediction, after which the Acclamations (“Blessed be God”; “Blessed be his Holy Name” etc.) were intoned, to be strongly responded to by the 500 voices of the congregation.

Once outside the children were presented to the cardinal … amongst them the 12-year-old Marie Lyonnet, who six years earlier had been cured through intercession to Marcellin Champagnat; and this cure was taken as a possible miracle in favour of his cause of Beatification.

Much more is told in the records of this enormous event including the entwined letters M and C picked out on the hillside in white painted stones and the dates 1840-1896, the last being that of the introduction of the cause of beatification.

These selected features of this event are presented here to convince the reader of how important it was considered at the time, and to give an insight into how things were done at the Hermitage in those days.
Cardinal’s visit boosts pilgrimages to Father Champagnat’s tomb

The Hermitage Annals remarks that “Since the visit of His Eminence Cardinal Coullée, more and more pilgrims have visited the tomb of the venerable Champagnat.”

1883 Electricity … turbine

The Annals of this time tells: “The recent repairs at the Hermitage, the organisation of the laundry and the heating of the chapel with steam cost about 12,000fr. and electricity is to be installed -- generated from a turbine using the flow of water from the Gier. So, you can see the second cradle of the Institute is really going ahead as you can see!” (The photos show the remains of the water courses associated with this turbine.)

Chapel decoration, 1890

In 1890 a renowned artist from Saint-Etienne, M. Victor Zan (pictured), was commissioned to decorate the sanctuary with various paintings. He included Saints Pothin and Irenée, the patron saints of the Diocese of Lyons, Saints Peter and Paul, the Guardian Angel and Saint Michael. In the centre was a column painted to represent the Holy Spirit and on each side Saints Anne, Philomena, Louis Gonzaga, Blessed Peter Chanel, St. John the Baptist and Saint Stephen. Victor Zan created a number of sculptures found in Saint Etienne today (2016). His paintings in the Hermitage chapel have now long gone!

The accompanying sketch of the chapel in sepia is from a booklet of 1895, and most interestingly shows an organ on the left.
The accompanying colour photo gives some idea of M. Zan’s paintings, one of which, a Guardian Angel, has been reproduced a little larger.
It’s not known at the time of writing (2018) whether the statues of the evangelists were part of the 1890 chapel decoration, but the statue of at least St. John was definitely there in 1951, since there is a dated photo showing it. It’s presumed the statues of the other three evangelists were also present in 1951.
1891-1892-1893-1894 departure of Brothers for “du Cap” [Cape of Good Hope] and also for Constantinople, New York, Peking, “America”, and Columbia ... farewelled from the Hermitage

The developing expansion of the Institute throughout the world noticed earlier in the 1880s continued in the 1890s. During 1892 the Brothers who had been appointed to go to South Africa and to Constantinople visited the tomb of Father Champagnat before being farewelled from the Hermitage to begin or join their foundations. And similarly in 1893 Brothers called in to the Hermitage before heading off to New York and China. Besides the prayers at the tomb of Marcellin there was usually a specially prepared speech of well-wishing from a Novice, a speech of response, singing and solemn farewell. And later in 1893 Brothers left for “l’Amerique”, but there was no mention of a specific country. However, in 1894 it is clear that Brothers set out for Columbia.

In the years immediately following, whenever a Brother or Brothers were sent to these foreign lands, they continued the custom of visiting the Hermitage to pay their respects at the tomb of Father Champagnat and commend their mission to his good care, while drawing inspiration from his example and zeal.

(Note in the caption to the photo of the missionaries heading for China, the ages of the Brothers)

The Superior of the Brothers heading for China, Brother Marie-Candide, told of the group’s visit to the Hermitage in this way: “According to a tradition among all departing missionaries, a pilgrimage was made to Notre Dame de l’Hermitage to the Tomb of our Blessed Founder, and to Lavalla, where he gathered his first disciples; they recommended themselves and their Mission to the protection of their Venerated Father and asked to be given something of the spirit of the Institute: simplicity, modesty, humility, love of Jesus and Mary, zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

“The view of the countryside that had been sanctified by the Founder and his first disciples, the valleys and the ridges and spurs that had made them sweat so much, the pathways, roads they climbed so often to teach catechism in hamlets in the mountains, the many souvenirs relating to the origins of the Institute, all are lessons quite suitable for fortifying the courage of departing pioneers.”

Brother Marie-Candide died in China of typhus a mere four years later while nursing back to health his sick confreres from the same illness.

1893 Grand farewell and welcome back to Brother Superior General related to an extended visit to the Brothers of Oceania

Both before and after undertaking this adventurous visit to the communities and ministries in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, Brother Theophane, Superior General, visited the Hermitage. First of all, he was farewelled with great ceremony; and on his return welcomed back with equally grand ceremony. On his return in early 1894 he would have regaled the assembled Brothers with stories of exotic customs of far distant places, along with, of course, reports of the zeal of the Brothers and their work for Our Lord.

1893 The cure of young Marie Lyonnet attributed to Marcellin Champagnat

Big news at the Hermitage during 1893 was the exciting story of the apparent cure of a six-year-old girl thanks to prayers to Champagnat. The excitement related to the hope that if it were proven to be a miracle, it would be an important step closer in the process of the Church towards Marcellin’s canonisation. The girl’s father and mother visited the Hermitage to pray at the tomb of Father Champagnat for the recovery of their dear daughter from meningitis that their doctor, Dr. Mumet, had declared to be fatal. The community joined in prayers to Father Champagnat for her cure, and the next day she had somewhat recovered and three days later was up and well.

1893 First mini museum

A passing reference in the Annals in the final days of 1893, tells of the setting up in the parlour of a small museum. Over the years this transformed into an “Historial” along with mementos for sale and was most popular with visitors.
Death at Hermitage of pious young postulant (pub. 1895)

This most unusual booklet was found in the records of the French Archives. It tells in 66 pages the very edifying life of the Junior, Jean Gras, whose final months were spent at the Hermitage as a Postulant. It is believed to be a true story, not just a fictional story to inspire young boys to follow his example. Its publication (and presumed circulation amongst Juniors at Lavalla and Postulants and Novices at the Hermitage) probably had that intention, along with providing a suitable memory to a devoted young boy who had died well before his time.

It may seem a bit macabre to twenty-first century readers, particularly the images of his receiving the Last Sacraments and the sketch of him in death with a garland of white roses on his brow. {Interestingly the title “Petite Fleur” or “Little Flower”, a name made famous when attributed to St. Therese Martin of Lisieux, was given to this young lad two years before St. Therese’s death, and before the publication of her biography, The Story of a Soul.}

Introduction of the Cause for the Beatification of Marcellin Champagnat, 1896

The "introduction of the cause for beatification" is the beginning of a process of commending to the relevant department in the Vatican that a particular person is worthy of being considered a saint in the eyes of the Church. If that is accepted, a long process looking into the person’s life is begun.

The following extract explains why Brother Theophane, the Superior General of the time, thought the time was auspicious:

BEGINNINGS OF THE CAUSE - REV. BROTHER THEOPHANE

The Decree of Pope Leo XIII in 1896 conferred the privilege of calling Fr. Ch. Venerable; this was confirmed by that of Benedict XV in July 1920.

The Diocesan Process took 5 years to accomplish its work; the Beatification came 59 years later.

Rev. Brother Theophane S.G. was responsible for setting things in motion; these events, which he judged Providential, led him to the work:

1. The Beatification of Jean-Baptiste de la Salle in 1888; he was present and looked forward to the day when his own Founder would be raised to the Altar.

2. Father Nicolet, Procurator of the Marist Fathers had brought the Beatification of Peter Chanel S.M. to a successful end; he offered himself as Postulator for our cause; he was very acceptable at Rome, and especially to Cardinal Burtolini. In his circular of 22 Oct., 1886, just after the Rome ceremony, Br. Theophane urged devotion to Ed. de la Salle and wished his picture to find a place in all our Houses. N.B. Peter Chanel was beatified 17th Oct., 1889.

3. Two others encouraged him: Cardinal Cavel of Lyons, and Father Martin, Superior-General of the Marist Fathers; "It is with all our heart that we make common cause with you in this matter; our two Societies are both interested in the highest degree that this venture be successfully achieved."

4. His canonical visit to Pope Leo XIII, April, 1886; on that occasion he had the great happiness to hear the Pope express words of encouragement to introduce the cause of Our Founder,
A very grand TRIDUUM (a period of three days of prayer) was held at the Hermitage which included devoted locals as well as the Brothers. Walls and windows were decorated with flags and drapes in the Papal and French colours and the chapel likewise brightly decorated including illuminations. The Juniors came down from La Valla to sing and their singing was compared to that of St. Peter’s in Rome. Various sermons and talks were given, and the whole thing was quite grand. The purpose was to commend to God the “Cause of Beatification” of Father Champagnat …the first step along the way to sainthood.

From this time on the Pope had ruled that Marcellin’s virtues had been “heroic” and it was allowed to use the title “Venerable” from now on. While the bestowing of “Blessed” had to wait 69 more years, the actual canonisation was still three years short of 100 years to come.

Hundreds of thousands of images of “Venerable” Marcellin Champagnat were distributed around the world over the following 69 years.

1897 Death of great benefactor, Francois Gillet

This building, just down the river from the Hermitage, is the former factory of Francois Gillet. In an extract from the Annals of the Hermitage below, with the heading, 1897, you will learn of the assistance this leading manufacturer was to the Brothers. And to acquaint the reader with this man, the following from a site on the net is given also:

“The Balas brothers and two other braid manufacturers, Francois Gillet and Ivan Grangier, were numbered among the founders of the Association of Catholic Employers, which grew to over 100 members. “Braid manufacturer François Gillet earned a reputation for his "works of charity, assistance, and familial organization." Employers in Saint Chamond established other social, economic, and political institutions which manifested their solidarity. Their spirit of cooperation is best symbolized in the Association of Catholic Employers formed sometime in the 1870s. The twenty-two founding members included Adrien de Montgolfier; braid manufacturers Gabriel, Florian, and Jules Balas, François Gillet, and Léon Chaland; forge masters Camille Thiollière and
Charles, Eugène, and André Neyrand; notable Charles de Boissieu and Victor, René, and Louis Finaz; and eight other industrialists and notables.”

1902 Death of Mr. Francois GILLET, a great industrialist, 5 young children; he was 52. A fervent Christian; to prevent the cemetery from being desecrated, he bought it, erected a monumental cross below which was a vault for his family; there he was buried. A great stalwart for catholic undertakings in Isleux and elsewhere; a signal benefactor of the Brothers; the whole school and equipment at Isleux was donated by him and he frequently visited it and the Hermitage; the Brothers watched at night during his illness and sang the Requiem in the Isleux church.

If visitors to the Hermitage take a leisurely stroll down the road beside the river away from the Hermitage they will come to “Allee Gillet”, and if they climb that road they will come to a large chateau (pictured) that was the home of Francois Gillet. It overlooks the factory site, that at the time of writing (2017), was quite substantial.

The Hermitage in the early 1890s
Published in 1892 these pages will show the buildings of the time along with an interesting text.
Australian Marists visiting the Hermitage may be interested to learn of Brother Ludovic’s association with the Hermitage in his later life. (Earlier it was told how Brother Ludovic had slept in Father Champagnat’s bed in November 1871 before heading for Australia.)

Brother Ludovic Laboureiras was the founder, in 1872, of the Marist Brothers in Australia, and when ill health forced him to return to Europe he filled various roles in Scotland and at St. Genis-Laval and Vallenboite before finishing up at the Hermitage with the task of teaching English to Brothers who were destined for the “missions” in English-speaking countries.

He took the time to write the accompanying greeting card to Brother Augustine in Sydney, one of his fellow founding Brothers in Australia, to commemorate twenty years since the foundation in Australia.

He explains his arrival at the Hermitage and the activities he became engaged in in the following extract from his Memoire where he refers to himself in the third person:
The interest in tidying up led to beautifying the Hermitage grounds with flowers and shrubs, as well as the upkeep of the cemetery. And Brother Ludovic shared with Brother Romain, the Director of the Hermitage, an interest in the Stations of the Cross on the wooded hill on the opposite side of the Gier to the main Hermitage building. Together they planned a calvary and some grottoes. He mentions in his diary: "It was decided to build a Calvary ..." and grottoes similar to some seen in a pilgrimage to Valflurey. "Brother Ludovic undertook," he writes of himself in the third person, "to do preparatory work, and then help the grotto builder as best he could." He mentions a Gethsemane grotto constructed under the first station. This work occupied him when not taking the English class. But after it was decided that the teaching of English to future missionaries was to be conducted in New York, Brother Ludovic found employment for 7 or 8 years with the arquebuse distillery at St. Genis-Laval, eventually returning to the Hermitage in his final years, where he busied himself with the maintenance and improvement of the cemetery. His Memoire tells of this work:

Although he was slightly apprehensive about the change of climate, he went there joyfully. On arrival, one of his first concerns was to visit the scene of his former work. He found it, alas, in a sad state of neglect, except for one grove on the other side of the river. The chaplain, Father Doumant, had looked after it and embellished it with rosebushes and different plants. The Calvary grotto had a lot of damage and this was worsening daily; the cemetery was in a pitiful state. The crosses on the graves had scarcely legible names of the deceased.

Having prepared for a couple of days, he began to repaint all the crosses and to repair the plaques with riplin enamel, both those on the graves and those on the walls. It was a long and difficult task, but he saw it through.

Winter forced him to rest, because his bad heart and his other infirmities reasserted themselves. When the fine weather returned, he proceeded to arrange and touch up each grave which was no longer distinguishable, and planted flowers symmetrically. In this way, he restored the cemetery's former beauty and attractiveness.

Le sol de l'ancien couvent, bordé de hautes bûcherons, résonne dans le calme de la longue carrière, respire dans le silence. Les moments passent de son lointain passé, aimant à aller reprendre ces lieux de demain, ces diverses missions dont il a tant aimé.

His Memoire concludes:

"So there he is at the end of his long career, expiating in this dear Hermitage, the numerous sins of his past life, and preparing to go and give to the Eternal Father a detailed account of the diverse missions He entrusted to him."

He died at the Hermitage on 1st March 1924 and is buried in the cemetery he so carefully tended.
On this page you will find “Testimonies” collected from various ones associated with the promotion of the “cause” of Marcellin; however, some seem to be no more than statements that the witness knew of him or knew of.

TESTIMONIES OF WITNESSES

1889 Postulator of Father Champagnat's cause - Father Forestier S.M. Procurator-General

Father Jourjon Br. Théodore, 81, "I knew Father Champagnat first of all through Father Jourjon P.P. of St. Victor-Malescours who then gave me a note so that I might present myself to him. The venerable Servant of God himself admitted me to the novitiate in 1836."

BR. NARCISUS: "Br. Stanislaus, right arm of the Founder, often spoke to me of him, and especially by the example he himself gave of practising the virtues of the venerated Father. Having entered at the Hermitage in 1841, less than a year after the Founder's death, I often heard him spoken of and always in a manner to inspire me with great esteem for this holy priest.

During my novitiate and the first 10 years of my religious life, I had the happiness of living at the Hermitage and of being assigned as an aid to good Br. Stanislaus for the care of the sacristy. This excellent Brother, one of the first and dearest disciples of the Founder and who was called his right arm, constantly edified me by the example of all the virtues."

BR. AMPHIEN, 72 "... by Br. Cassien, my novice-master ..."

BR. BERILLUS, 57, entered 14 years after the Founder's death: "It was the author of his life who received me at St. Paul-3-Châteaux."

BR. MARIE-REGIS, 58: "I knew several Brothers his disciples, especially Brother Raphael who died recently."

FATHER JEAN-BAPTISTE VANEL P.P., 54: "A former P.P. of St. Genest-Nalibaux, Father Gillibert often spoke of him in terms which denoted that he regarded him as a saint."

SISTER BEATRIX, Superior of the Congregation of the Holy Childhood, 44: "I did not know Father Champagnat, but I have heard him much spoken of at La Valla where I have been since 1866 (i.e. since she was 23); many of those who knew him have spoken to me about him; I have read his Life."

FATHER ANDREW NEYRAND, 59 (born 1830): "I did not know the venerable, but I have heard everyone speak of him as of a saint; such is the universal opinion. My teacher, Father Chappard who was from La Valla, used to speak to me of him with veneration, and I have never deviated from him the slightest word that could indicate a weak side in Father Champagnat. If there had been anything to find fault with, I am sure that those who often came to the presbytery would have spoken of it. My family had a profound veneration for this holy priest. My second teacher, Father Bachelé, also spoke of Father Champagnat in similar terms, and these gentlemen seemed convinced that he was a priest out of the ordinary, a real saint."

BR. MARIE-JUBIN, 68: "I knew the Servant of God for 7 years, from the age of 13 years to 20; I lived with him in the house of the Hermitage."

BR. AVIT, 70: "I knew Father Champagnat for 2½ years, having made a retreat at the beginning of October 1837; he heard my general confession. I saw Father Champagnat only rarely and each time for a short while, but I have heard him spoken of very much by the older Brothers - Brs. François, Br. Louis-Marie, Jean-Baptiste, Louis, Stanislaus."

BR. CAMILLUS, 67 (born 1823): "I knew the servant of God in my childhood, for he came into my father's house; I had a brother who was of his Institute, and I knew him especially after my own entry into the Society into which he received me, and for 2½ years he was the director of my conscience. I have also known Father Champagnat through the old Brothers who spoke to me very much about him, as also through several persons of Marilhes."

BR. MARIE-LIN, 76: "I knew the Servant of God for 6 years, and I lived with him during my novitiate and the vacations; he was my confessor. I knew all the old Brothers and lived with them. I lived for 12 years with Br. Louis, the most senior, and from 35-40 years with Br. Jean-Baptiste; a long time also with Br. François and Br. Louis-Marie."

This was Antoine MOREL from Marilhes: District superior for 2 years 1838-40 at Ampuis; 1840-50 Director at Usson; Novice master at the Hermitage for 2 years; he was elected Delegate to every General Chapter till his death. After 1852 he asked to be
CHAPTER 15  Building and opening of the large Scholasticate building, “Scholasticate Champagnat”, (“Le Rocher”), 1898

The origin and opening of the new Scholasticate building will be given in the words of the Annals of the Hermitage of 1898:

“Statistical figures showed that it was most necessary and useful to have, at the Hermitage, a separate building for the scholastics. It became a special project of Brother Romain [the Superior of the Hermitage]. It was to be complete, spacious and solid. The bakery (pictured, with the chimney) that had been built by Brother Azarias [former Superior] on the intended site would form the basis of some of the building. But the rock posed a great obstacle and taxed the intelligence and ingenuity of Brother Romain. However on 6th June [Feast of Marcellin], 1898, numerous personalities made their way to the Hermitage: Four Brothers Assistants from St. Genis-Laval; the Marist Fathers’ Provincial and many Marist Fathers from Lyons and St. Chamond; the Chaplains of LaValla and de Valbenoite all came to the solemn blessing of this new house by the Parish Priest of St. Martin.”

The accompanying short printed extract is found pasted into the Hermitage Annals with the heading “Benediction du Scholasticat”. It tells of a procession from the chapel including the parishioners from de Valbenoite, the Juniors from LaValla, the novices, the students (scholastics), all proceeded by their respective banners, making their way to the area in front of the new building which featured a portrait of the venerable Founder decorated with flowers and drapes. Then the principal clergy plus representatives of the builders went through the different rooms to the accompaniment of the singing of the Miserere. This completed, a statue of St. Joseph, the work of M. Vermare, was blessed by Father Lombard while the homily was delivered by Father Boucher. “At the conclusion, two soloists, without which no Hermitage celebration was complete, sang; and proceedings were concluded with benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

At 8.30 the whole new building was illuminated, and the rain, which then began to fall, slowly extinguished the lights, bringing to an end a great and holy day.”

The personnel of the new Scholasticate were: Brothers/Professors Francois-Marie, Marie-Pascal, Marie-Vincent, Platone, Adonius, Jean-Felix and Joseph Alphonse.

There were 64 Scholastics: 22 following the St. Francis course, 21 the St. Louis Course and 21 the St. Joseph Course. [Quite possibly the three courses were First, Second and Third Years].

Studies and books
The scholasticate was a place and time of study, both religious and secular. Many texts were produced and published by the Brothers, as can be seen by the “Marist M” logo on the cover and frontpiece of those reproduced here. Especially important would have been
familiarisation with the approved (and required) Catechism with its questions and answers.
Photo said (on e-Marists) to be “Scholastics at prayer”

Interesting to note what appear to be large portraits of former Superiors General

1893 Ten Brothers’ remains re-buried

In 1893 the remains of 10 Brothers who had been originally buried in the temporary cemetery were placed in a single coffin and buried near the grotto of Notre Dame de Montligeon. A cross and a heart bearing the ten names was placed over the common grave.

The departure of the Brother-soldiers for three-year military service, 1898

The accompanying extract from a local newspaper is found pasted into the Annals of the Hermitage for the year 1898. It reads: “The Brother-soldiers at the Hermitage, near Saint Chamond. At the High Mass, the chapel of the Hermitage struggled to contain the faithful from the nearby areas. Seventeen Brothers were to leave the following day to begin their military service. Before leaving for three years, setting aside their religious habit, they had decided to take time out at their Provincial House to farewell their superiors and members of their religious family.”

After the gospel at the solemn Mass, one of the chaplains drew attention to the fact that the young Brother-soldiers were at the tomb of Father Champagnat and below the image of Our Lady of the Hermitage in the marble niche above the altar, seeking the necessary protection for their time away.

Extracts were read from the letters of Joseph Brunon (Brother Henri-Désire), a young Brother-soldier who had died on service in Algeria. Much was made of the need for courage and perseverance in the face of distractions and temptations associated with military life and the company of a wide cross-section of the population.

In 1896, Brother Theophane, Superior General, had written a Circular in which he devoted a substantial part addressed to “Our soldier Brothers”. Because of the relatively large numbers at any one time under arms, he coined the phrase, “La Province Militaire.” He urged all material and spiritual assistance be given to the soldier Brothers, and that they be continually remembered.
1890s Recurring activities and customs

Liturgical ceremonies — Christmas, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, Feasts of Our Lady, the anniversary of the beginning of the Institute (January 2nd), the “Feast” of Marcellin Champagnat (June 6th) and other days were fittingly celebrated with solemn liturgies, often with special decorations, speeches, singing, etc.

Profession ceremonies — Each year Postulants would become Novices in “Veturie” or clothing ceremonies and annual vows would be pronounced. This usually occurred during the Annual Retreat. At the same time some Brothers would pronounce their “perpetual” vows.

Celebrations — Besides the days of the liturgical calendar, it was customary to celebrate the “name day” of the Superior of the community. Special birthdays were, likewise, celebrated. But grand celebrations were held virtually every year for Brothers’ Jubilees – Diamond (60 years) and/or Golden (50 years).

Outings — Occasionally the Novices and Postulants would go on a “conge” or outing. Often the same day was chosen, but each group would go to a different location. The most popular destination was Valfeurly, but other places included St.Genet-Malifaux, Pilat, Bessat, Puy, Cote de l’Aillon, Rochetaillé, Valenote and others.

Annual retreat and holidays -- These were annual events.

Funerals — Almost each year there would be several funerals, either of elderly Brothers resident in the Hermitage, Infirmary or ill Brothers specially brought to the Hermitage for care in their last weeks/days, or for easy access to the nearby hospital.

Examinations for the Brevet — The “Brevet” was a teaching qualification gained by public examination. Regularly a group of scholastics would head off to a nearby town to present for this examination, and the number successful was recorded in the Annals.

Visit by “Second Novices” — Starting in 1897, the “Second Novitiate” was an arrangement whereby Brothers professed for about 30 years were given the opportunity to take time away from their ministries (and countries) to gather at either St. Paul Trois Chateaux or St. Genis-Laval and spend approximately six months attending lectures and participating in prayer and sharing, appropriate to their age of life. The idea was to gain a boost in zeal and energy. For many years these courses were only conducted in French, making it difficult for Brothers with a poor grasp of the French language. And it was the annual custom that these groups of Brothers would visit the Hermitage and the neighbouring areas associated with the life of Father Champagnat and the origins of the Brothers.

1899 cleaning of the relics of St. Priscillian

The last time the relics of St. Pricillian were cleaned was in 1866. We learn that in 1899 the reliquary was entrusted to the Sisters of the Five Wounds in Lyons for cleaning and tidying. A generous gift of 800 francs by the widow, Madame Gillet of Izieux, made this possible. The reader may recall that Francois Gillet, a local prominent businessman, was a most generous benefactor of the Hermitage and he had died at the relatively young age of 51 in 1897 … the same age as Father Champagnat. Madame Gillet was continuing the generosity of her husband.

Life and Death of faithful Brother Omer

“Brother Omer came with his father on foot from Ardeche, received the Habit at 19 in 1853; he was Brother Cook in several houses, returning to the Hermitage in 1884; here he was door-keeper for 22 years. Giving entire satisfaction in this position; he was well known by the poor who often came to take soup. A heart complaint caused him to retire to the infirmary, living there as always as an excellent religious. He was sharp but frank, of kind heart and good judgement; strong, pious and very discreet; he was one of our good old men who edify us right up to their last breath. His body was taken to the cemetery on the truck as there were not enough Brothers strong enough to carry him.” He died in 1899.

1899 Retreat at the Hermitage of 400 Brothers and Novices!

Brother Avit, in his summary of the Hermitage Annals for 1899, has the most extraordinary statement that on 15th August 1899, 400 Brothers and Novices concluded their annual retreat. He writes: “During eight days, with a zeal that never wavered, the Rev. Father Hilereau, Marist Father, the chaplain at the Mother House at St. Genis-Laval, preached four times a day, and in spare moments heard confessions. And it was remarked that perfect silence reigned throughout the entire week. The retreat concluded with a Solemn High Mass at which were present two children brought by their parents claiming cures for illness through the intercession of Father Champagnat.” They were adding to a long list of such claims, though the annalist notes that the Church is very slow to pronounce on such claims. The accommodation of the enormous number of 400 Brothers and Novices was made possible by the recent completion of the “Scholasticate” building, It’s not recorded whether each Brother had a proper bed, but it is quite possible that a good number of them slept on the floor with a primitive, makeshift mattress.

The Annals for August 1900, tells of a Retreat with 300 retreatants. And in August 1902, another retreat for 400!
Personnel at the Hermitage

The accompanying list taken from the Hermitage Annals of 1900 will give the reader an excellent insight into the Brothers resident at the Hermitage and their numerous and diverse activities. They include:
- Staff for Juniorate, Novitiate and Scholasticate
- Collector
- Recruiter
- Tailors
- Manuisiers
- Laundry
- Bootmakers
- Cooks
- Arquebuse. Biophosphate and liqueur
- Bakers
- Infirmarians
- Librarians
- Fruit tree gardeners
- Sacristans
- Cowherds
- Gardeners
- Arborists
- Masons
- Secretary
- Concierge
- Bookbinder

Juniors, Postulants, Novices, and Scholastics as well as the above, 1900

The reader must add to that list the following: “Students at the Hermitage – They comprised, in August, 1900, 44 Juniors, 22 Postulants, 33 Novices, 57 Scholastics and 11 reservists [?] Perusal of this list, even with slight knowledge of French, will be found to create a mental picture of enormous activity of every sort.
June and July, 1900, storms and floods

In June 1900, there was an enormous storm that blew away walls, roads and gardens, with damage estimated at 30,000fr. The Hermitage became a place for sight-seers to come to view the devastation. A careful look at the accompanying photo from 1900 will be rewarded with an amazing realisation of the amount of rubble brought down in this extraordinary deluge. The top left of the photo is the arch over what was then the main entrance under the chapel. In the Monographie, published in 1925, we read: “The water flowed down with such fury it carried all before it. The soil, rocks and debris piled up in front of the main entrance to the depth of several metres.”

Then in July, there was another, though less ferocious storm. And in September, “a violent hailstorm devastated all this region, breaking all the glass on the western side of the buildings and caused great damage on all sides. The retreat was to begin the next day and efforts were made to repair things as fast as could be arranged.”

Altar of Repose, 1901

The accompanying photo is of the Altar of Repose from 1901. It was traditional in those times, and up to the 1960s, that after the “Tenebrae” liturgical celebrations of Good Friday the altar in the chapel was stripped of all coverings and ornamentation, and the Blessed Sacrament taken in procession to a special, lavishly decorated altar away from the main altar. In the case of the Hermitage, this was outside near where the statue of Our Lady of Victories stood. You can see in the photo in the extreme right the characteristic archway that helps locating where this elaborate altar was erected.

Death of Br. Romain, Superior of the Hermitage, 28th February, 1900

One source said: “Brother Romain was described as “builder and master of everything.” It was he who built the grotto of Notre Dame de Montligeon in the cemetery. At the time of his death he had plans and money to build a small monument to recall the first “Chapel in the Woods”; and for a statue of the Founder.” But he should be remembered, rather, for the building of the bakery, the Scholasticate building and the house for the Sisters. He also helped supervise the construction of the Chemin de Croix on the hillside in 1879 and the purchase of the additional statues of the Agony in the Garden and the Burial statue group under the Calvary from 1893. He had become sub-Director of the Hermitage in 1876 and went on to become Director.

Persecution intensifies, 1901; Diocesan day of prayer, and arrest for wearing the soutane

The reader will recall the laicisation of the 1890s in the previous chapter. We now find in the Archives of the Hermitage: “1901 Prayers were ordered by the Cardinal for the threatened congregations. At St. Etienne the wearing of the soutane in public was forbidden.” The full story is that on 10th February 1901, a deeply moving circular letter from the cardinal, Archbishop of Lyons, cardinal Couille, was distributed in all churches and chapels declaring two days of prayer and penance for the “Threatened Congregations” and a pilgrimage to Fouviere. At the great gathering at Fouviere on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, our Brothers representing the Mother-House were restricted in the time they had for prayer in order to...
make way for others entering. 1,000 people gathered outside, leading the Annalist to rhetorically ask: “How can anyone say the Congregations were not loved by the people of Lyon?”

And on 18th February, Ledin, the Mayor of St. Etienne, made an arrest of priests for walking through the street in their clerical costume. And though they were acquitted on 28th February, the annalist adds: “Nevertheless it is an indication of the spirit of the times and a premonition that persecution will escalate.”

The precursor of the expulsions of the Religious Orders from France was the Law of Associations, 1901. It was formulated by all the republican groups in the Chamber of Deputies, determined to oust royalists, militarists, and clericals from public life. It suppressed nearly all of the religious orders in France and confiscated their property.

1901 18th June Visit of 8 Superiors Generals of different Congregations to the Hermitage in a pilgrimage to the tomb of Father Champagnat.
CHAPTER 17 1903 Anti-Religious upheavals in France and their effects on the Hermitage; Expulsions; Few remaining; Removal of remains of Father Champagnat to Les Masionettes

Expulsion, and “sealing” of the Chapel, 1903
The persecution of the Church and Religious came to a peak with the famous Waldeck-Rousseau Law of 1903 which expelled all Religious Orders from France. Almost all those at the Hermitage left, mainly for parts of Italy, leaving only a few old men who were allowed to stay on account of their age and frailty.

On 22 July, M. Marecat, the Commissioner of Police of St. Chamond, arrived at the Hermitage with his secretary to put into effect the Decree of M. Combes. They took the keys to the Chapel from both the inside and the outside doors. There was just time to remove the Blessed sacrament to the sacristy. Brother Marie-Junien remarked that these intruders “had the eyes of the Devil.”

Mr. Rivory, the master-mason of the Hermitage used a cart to take away furniture etc. In what was described as an eloquent gesture, some locals, devoted to the Hermitage, fashioned 22 fabric crowns and laid them at the chapel door. The chaplain, Father Boucher took to Blessed Sacrament to the sacristy.

The locking of the chapel was not, however, completely secure. The Hermitage Annals mentions: “The door of the organ-loft was not closed with seals; no one mentioned it. The door of one sacristy lost its seals and the Brothers were able to go in through there each morning; the Chaplain made the Stations there each morning. The statues were covered with drapes.”

The seals remained till a decree by President of the Republic, Raymond Poincare, in 1914 tacitly allowed their removal and the use of the chapel once again. The Community Room was transformed into a temporary chapel for the duration.

In a curious footnote in his History of the Institute, Vol.1, Brother Andre Lanfrey refers to a dossier in the archives of the Hermitage, 1903: “The Superiors directed some forty or so elderly Brothers to go to the Hermitage ‘so as to have a good number ready to protest in case there was an attempt to expel them by force.’”

Note the cover of the booklet of the Annals of the Province of the Hermitage (including, of course, the history of the Hermitage itself) where the annalist, Brother Beatrix, declares that the following is the Annals “Since the Dissolution of the Congregation, starting 3rd April 1903”. Of course, at that time there was no knowing what the future would hold!

1903 Brother Marie-Junien arranges a delay in the expected expulsion of the old Brothers

When the police inspector, M. Marecat, arrived during the morning of Mar 19th, 1903, to see how the evacuation of the Brothers was proceeding he found 80 old Brothers still in residence. The annalist continues: “Why hadn’t they left according to government instructions? Ah! It was because our devoted and indefatigable Brother Marie-Junien, the Director Provincial, had not been idle. He had made all the possible and imaginable appeals, and finally, through the persistence of his spirit the biased Massle, Prefect of the Loire, granted a stay till 31st July.” That was, however, just for the elderly and frail, along with some young Brothers to care for them.
1903 the visit of the Liquidator and removal of furniture

The present researcher is somewhat confused about details of this “liquidation”. Liquidators were appointed throughout France to see to the removal of pious objects or items related to public worship. However, when the “Liquidator” arrived at the Hermitage various circumstances hindered his carrying out of his duties. At the same time that he was visiting the infirmary, an ill Brother, 57-year-old Brother Jeremiás, was dying and the bell started to toll his imminent death. So, thrown off guard by this turn of events, and out of respect, the liquidator did not continue his inventory. His embarrassment was exasperated when he met his old teacher from St.Etienne, M. Careme, Brother Clement. They chatted together affectionately. He was quite affected and they hugged. Afterwards this Brother was taken to task that he had embraced someone excommunicated. The Justice of the Peace did not go back to the house; he contented himself with chatting with Brothers Gentianus and Sigisbaud at the bakery on various matters without any allusion to the purpose of their visit.

Benefiting from the delay he gained in the expulsion of the Brothers, Brother Marie-Julien wasted no time in disposing of lots of chapel furniture, partly with a view to getting them back, if and when this anti-clerical phase might pass. The furniture removalist, M. Ravery of Izieux, the Hermitage’s master mason, helped ferry the different items across the Gier. Towards the end of June the organ was sold for 4,000fr. to the Parish Priest, J. M. Chausse of St.Genis Tarrenoire. It was valued at between 15-20,000fr. It was dismantled by two agents of M.Bourbon, the manufacturer of Lyons, and reassembled successfully in the parish church. The furniture removalist, M. Ravery of Izieux, the Hermitage’s master mason, helped ferry the different items across the Gier. Towards the end of June the organ was sold for 4,000fr. to the Parish Priest, J. M. Chausse of St.Genis Tarrenoire. It was valued at between 15-20,000fr. It was dismantled by two agents of M.Bourbon, the manufacturer of Lyons, and reassembled successfully in the parish church. The choir stalls were also sold to Father Chausse.

The Annals continues: “The oak timber chapel pews, a gift of the late Brother Azarias, were sold for 19fr. which had cost 75fr., to Father Mersier, PP of de Calandiere. The large painting of the Assumption, [specially commissioned by Father Champagnat] from M. Ravery, the plasterer/painter of St. Chamond, was bought by the Parish Priest of St.Genet-Leryit, and the two magnificent confessionals went to the new church at Terrenoire. On the 1st July the Brothers Chenu, cloth merchants of St. Etienne, came to buy miscellaneous items.” The annalist remarks how sad it was to have to cooperate in seeing these things go, and launches into a diatribe against the government, its recent laws and regulations.

Occupations of Brothers remaining

The elderly Brothers remaining tried to make a few francs through a variety of money-earning devices. The Annals of the Hermitage tells us: “The community exercises, singing rehearsals and fraternal conversations were not the only things occupying the old Brothers. They worked the property as best they could; some of the big shops in St.Etienne brought them bags of beans and coffee beans to sort through. There were 3 groups of beans: the first quality went back to the shop, the second was for the Brothers and the third was for the fowls; for the coffee they were paid 4fr. for each 100 kilos. A printery sent thousands of books to be sewn. Some Brothers made string bags which women use when going to the market. Many excellent pairs of rosary beads were made and sold; and they always found time to go to funerals or celebrations of the friends of the Hermitage. Some Brothers gave lessons to students from St. Chamond who came here privately. In the different seasons they gathered the fruit, made hay, gathered sticks, cut dead trees, gathered leaves for stable litter, picked ferns to protect the root vegetables during Winter. One evening they gathered five bags of chestnuts from M. Vial’s field ... to everyone’s delight; a present from M. Vial!”

The annalist adds that some helped in schools, worked as sacristans, carers for the sick, tutors etc. He remarks that with these many occupations the old Brothers were useful and happy, there was a contentment amongst them, and 1904 passed joyfully and healthily.
Some examples of anti-clerical images in the press of the period
Some magazines began in France, among them *Les Corbeaux*, with the chief function of ridiculing religion and the clergy. *Les Corbeaux* began in Belgium but moved to Paris in 1906. It produced “images of anti-clerical propaganda” -- posters to be pasted up on posts, distributed at conferences, polling station doors, cafes, as well as calendars, almanacs and postcards. While it is not known at the time of writing (2018) whether these images were widely displayed in and around St. Chamond, the knowledge that such propaganda existed throughout France must have been depressing to the Brothers, including those at the Hermitage.

Brothers remaining at the Hermitage

There are very few photos preserved in the *Annals* of the Hermitage, and so it was an absolute delight to find that these four photos of Brothers who remained at the Hermitage have been kept. They were pasted into the pages of the *Annals*. They are each taken in front of the vine-covered wall between the main building and the Scholasticate building and are hand-tinted with colour.
Notice below the photo with the date 10 avril, 1904, there is a short biography of Frere Adauctus and the beginning of a similar short biography of Frere Agathonicus. In the following pages of the Annals are found short biographies of ALL the Brothers who remained at the Hermitage.

Brothers leaving for North America and Australia, 1902-1904

Farewell song, 1905

Brothers Henri-Emile (music, pictured) and Francois-Marie (words) wrote a song of farewell for the Brothers going into exile in foreign countries. It reads:

“As you leave your dear mother [the Hermitage], we implore support, dear Mary, mother of us all forever. You now leave my sanctuary my dear children, my very dear children, goodbye! I will always be your Mother; and you will always find my shrines wherever you go.

“But in leaving the Hermitage, guard the spirit of your Founder; always mindful of the love of Our Lord.

“And for your children, left behind in France, Oh! For pity’s sake treasure their memory that they always remain hopeful; I pray my Son will bless them.

“See, how on distant shores this tree with flourishing branches will thrive; and in vain will Satan in his anger try to kill it; for I will keep guard over it from Heaven.
The reader might well imagine Brothers and Novices loading their possessions into vehicles like those in the accompanying advertisement (St. Chamond, 1904) and heading either to various countries of Europe or travelling far further to other countries of the world. The picture of the figure walking along a track is found in the 1925 *Centenary Monographie*, suggesting Brothers forced to leave France (and the Hermitage) in 1903.

Writing in 1912, and not knowing the future, the author of a brief History of the Hermitage in the *Bulletin de l’Institute* wrote: “Will some of those left at the Hermitage in 1903 live long enough to see the house restored to its original purpose and in its heyday, and under the blessing of Our Lady become once again the home of religious training? Why not hope? In the history of the Church, we see that Providence often has unexpected outcomes in the fullness of time. We have to confide in her and live in hope. That future time is not known; but when it happens there will be nothing that can stop the fulfilment of its purpose.”

The reader, and also the compiler of this History, looking from the perspective of the early twenty-first century, will see these 1912 hopes fulfilled in the years that followed 1912.

**Other Brothers opting for secularisation, and some returning from secularisation**

While farewelling Brothers heading to other countries with song, there may have been mixed feelings about Brothers from the Hermitage community who decided to become secularised. The following extract from the *Annals* of 1906, under the heading of “Movement of Hermitage personnel during the year 1906.” While most of those accepting secularisation went to various schools, one (from this short list) finished up at his family home, and one went to the school in Tarentaise in Winter, but returned to the Hermitage in the Summer.

Then we read that Brother Honore returned from helping in the Gresson school in 1908. And five other Brothers are listed in 1908 as returning to the Hermitage from their times elsewhere as secularised Brothers; one, Brother Henri-Albert, returned, sick, from England!

**Father Champagnat’s remains taken to Les Maisonettes**

As a precautionary measure the remains of Father Champagnat were removed to a niche in the wall of Les Maisonettes, the former Rivat home, that of the future Brother Francois. The accompanying photos show the building and the niche. The remains were brought back in 1920.
A note of urgency is found in this letter of authorisation of December 1902:

“Permission to remove relics – Given at Lyons in our Primatial Palace – 5th Decembe, 1902.
“Relics – threatened not only with profanation, but with perhaps utter destruction, if without delay, they are not taken to a safe place ... crisis ... no chance of waiting for authorisation from the Holy See, nor for canonical procedure – without compromising the success of this pious undertaking.
“We authorise ... to remove them and place them ...Cardinal Couillee, Archbishop of Lyons.

Further details on transfer
We read in another place: “Saturday 21st March 1903: Translated at 8.30am; exhumed – red ribbon – seals – into sacristry – white cloth perished; 1.00pm. new rubberised white cloth – all in wooden case of pine, screwed down and transported the same evening to a house situated in Maisonnette hamlet – Brother Francois’ Home. It belonged to the Pacalet family for about 50 years; occupied now [time of writing unknown] by Mr. and Mrs Pacalet, nephew of Father David P.P. of Bussy-Albieux. Slid into a cavity arranged in the S-W wall of the small room situated to the right as you enter the house; the cavity was closed with bricks, covered over with plaster.”

Fate of the Hermitage after its forced “closure” and “take-over”
Since the Marist Brothers were now not allowed to own the Hermitage, a group of faithful, dedicated and generous layfolk formed a “Civil Society” which managed to “own” the property in the meantime.

534 Brothers departed France for other countries
Brothers who left France went to the following countries:
China, 28; Syria, 67; South Africa, 41; Egypt, 3, Seychelles Islands, 2; Canada, 10; United States, 7; Brazil, 139; Mexico, 110; Argentina, 14; Colombia, 4; Cuba, 4; Australia, 15

Motherhouse relocated at Grugliasco, Italy
The Mother House had not been at the Hermitage for some time. Now it moved to the relative safety of Grugliasco in Italy, where it remained till 1939. The photo to the right bears the caption: “House of Grugliasco (Piedmont); purchased and renovated in haste in 1903...”
Novitiate relocated to San Mauro near Turin in Italy

Juniorate also re-located to Italy

See in the box a letter from a Junior’s mother agreeing to his going to Italy with her blessing. Brother Andre Lanfrey in his History of the Institute, Vol.1 mentions that “At the Hermitage the youngsters were left free to either return to their families or else move to another country.”

L’installation des élèves. — Un certain nombre de noviciats de Saint-Genis, suivant les premiers arrivants, s’étaient installés dans la vieille bâtisse, au commencement de mai et tous ensemble travaillaient avec aise à réparer l’immeuble, aidant à construire les murs, nettoyer le parc embroussaillé, et loger, à mesure qu’il arrivait, l’immense mobilier arraché à la confiscation. Ce fut d’abord une installation de fortune. L’ombre du tilleul servait d’oratoire et la plus grande salle de la villa devint une chapelle provisoire.

Les jeunes se passaient au milieu des plâtras, des terrassements, des charroyages et des dérangements. Pendant tout un mois, il sembla que l’on ne faisait qu’augmenter le désordre. Puis, lentement, la nouvelle organisation prit le dessus.

Arrivé le R. P. Thiéphane — Le 3 juillet, dernier délai, le R. P. Thiéphane, Supérieur Général, véritables vieillard de 80 ans, chassé de sa patrie par des lois sarrasines, quittait Saint-Genis, franchissait la frontière à Modane et, le matin suivant, mettait le pied sur le sol hospitalier de l’Italie, où tant d’autres communautés françaises s’étaient réfugiées, elles aussi.

La cloche du campanile, muette depuis huit ans, annonça joyeusement à la nouvelle maison-mère et au voisinage sympathique l’arrivée du chef d’une grande famille religieuse. L’Institut avait désormais un nouveau centre. La Vallée avait été le centre pendant huit ans : 1827-1835 ; Nouille-Dessus de l’Hermitage, pendant trente-tous ans, de 1825 à 1853 ; Saint-Genis, pendant quarante-cinq ans.

However, many French Brothers remained in the schools within France

We read in Stephen Farrell’s Appendix A: “Nevertheless, it is of interest to note that after 1903 the Brothers maintained most of their French schools and still taught in them – but as civilians in civilian dress: no externals such as the Crucifix in the classroom.”

Some figures from the end of 1903:

Brother Andre Lanfrey, in Volume 1 of the History of the Institute, writes: “We had 414 schools out of 605 still taught by Brothers who had secularised. Brothers: out of 4,548, there had been 957 who left the Brothers, mostly young, though between 115 and 120 Professed. 575 left Europe, and about 500 more went to other European countries. 400-500 old and infirm remained in the houses (including the Hermitage) and about 1,500 secularised. The Bishops encouraged the Brothers to secularise: ’under another costume, but with the same heart and mind, remain!’”
Secularisation, 1906, 1907

“The French government had failed to destroy the congregations, and the administration, like the congregations, judged that it had lost by this operation. **For us, 1906**: 840 Brothers secularised; 279 old brothers, and 103 in various positions, with or without permission. Compared to 1903, about 60 schools had been lost together with some 400 to 500 Brothers, nearly all professed, and so an unprecedented loss. The schools that we did retain were selected carefully with an eye to recruitment.”

**“Chapter, 1907**: Secularisation was an unusual state – not to be encouraged; those secularised had the right to return when they wished. The Institute had no way of replacing the 1,000 Brothers in France, and so the works were given up. As some secularised Brothers went to the theatre, etc., rumour accused them of sacrificing the religious life for one of ease; but then, the good were passed over in silence, and yet these good men made it evident that another form of religious life was possible, and the 1907 Chapter recognised this.”

The accompanying photo, supplied by the Archives in Rome, though it shows Brothers from Varennes, gives a good idea of Brothers in secular dress. It is presumed that the Brothers in this photo continued with their secular dress for the 30 or so years since original “laicisation” back in 1902-3. The date of the photo appears to be 1932. In another place we read: “1941 Brothers resumed the Religious costume.”

Bringing the Hermitage Brothers face-to-face with secularisation was the presence of secularised Brothers at the annual retreat. It also seems that there were annual retreats specially for laicised Brothers. They would have attended, of course, in their secular clothing while most of the resident Brothers at the Hermitage would have been daily wearing their religious soutane. Such a retreat was that of October 1904, where 9 Brothers “non employes dans l’enseignement” (not employed in the schools … secularised Brothers). Their names are given, and their occupations, which included tutors, carers for the sick, concierge and tailor, bursar and security officer. At the end of the retreat was the renewal of vows, clearly showing that these secularised Brothers considered themselves, and were considered, Marist Brothers. The accompanying list is of a 1906 retreat of secularised or “etranger” Brothers and their occupations similarly listed.

An arrangement at the Hermitage in 1907 was for a special Sunday Mass just for secularised Brothers! Earlier, in a direction from a Provincial Council meeting, presided over by Assistant general, Brother Stratonique, there had been many rules and regulations set out regarding secularised Brothers.

A most thoroughly scholarly account of the secularisation period of the institute is found in Volume 1 of Brother Andre Lanfrey’s *History of the Institute*. Most interestingly, the annalist of the time refers to “…this sad yet glorious and apostolic phase in the life of the secularised Brothers.”

This matter of secularisation is extremely complicated and the short account here is woefully inadequate. For a most thorough and interesting history of secularisation of the Marist Brothers in France, see Brother Andre Lanfrey *History of the Institute*, Vols 1 and 2.
The original of this painting of Marcellin presenting a bouquet of flowers with words entwined to Our Lady was the work of talented artist, poet, Master of Novices and Provincial -- Australian Brother Stanislaus Healey. (The painting reproduced here is a copy).

Accompanying the painting is this explanation: “When he went to the General Chapter at Saint-Genis-Laval in 1903, he took the painting with him to seek the approval of the delegates for its publication. It was duly approved and given to Benzinger Brothers to print. For the next half-century it was the most widely circulated picture of the Founder in the world, and appeared as the frontispiece of the official Life.”

Many religious objects from our houses in France were hidden, sold or given away at the time of the expulsions from France, and when Brother Stanislaus (pictured) returned to Australia after the Chapter of 1903 he brought with him a beautiful set of Stations of the Cross, though it’s not known exactly where he got them from.

In Br Michael Naughtin’s book “A Century of Striving”, the history of St. Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill, Sydney, Australia (established 1881), we read: “Of other valuable works brought from France by Br Stanislaus, we must mention also the Stations of the Cross (with titles in French). They were canonically erected on 14th November 1903 as a memento of afflictions endured by our Brother in France. The Stations of the Cross were transferred in 1940 to the new Chapel where they are still to be seen. The figures are in full relief, and together with the moulded frames are of considerable artistic merit.”

Old Brothers organised into a choir, 1904 onwards

Now that there were few activities happening at the Hermitage, after so very many had left, Brother Francois-Marie organised a group of the old Brothers into a choir of 26 Brothers, and a number of them had particularly fine voices. They sang at all the feastdays up till Brother Francois-Marie’s death in 1921. Other Brothers – Br. Jean-Felix, Seguier and others – continued the tradition. They would sing High Masses, Dies Irae at funerals in 4 parts. Adept accompanists were not lacking. The Annals tells of their beautiful voices enhancing the celebrations of various feasts. The name days of Br. Francis, that of St. Cyril, name day of the Chaplain, Easter, Feast of the Holy Rosary, were some of the special feasts mentioned. Now that the Scholastics no longer took the carriage of the singing, the old Brothers’ choir took over the role.

Readers who know their music would appreciate glancing through the accompanying list of hymns, dated 8th September 1905. The heading reads: “songs sung by the choir of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage.” And one can imagine the many enjoyable hours of “singing practice” in preparing the program.
Anti-clerical atmosphere

It is hoped that the reader will excuse the presentation of these crude images from the French press of the time in the interests of realising more vividly the anti-clerical atmosphere encompassing the Brothers, other religious and priests throughout France. There was, of course, an extremely supportive Catholic press, but abuse of the clergy and religious was widespread out in the public square.

The newspaper *Pour La Republique* is dated December 1904. The other cartoon is from 1908.

Some slight joy with the restoration of the clock, 1904!
The clock had been taken down from the belfry on 24th July 1904, for repair by M. Boucher, the son-in-law of Lagier, clockmaker of St. Chamond, who came to re-install it in the belfry on 24th October. The *Annals* records: "There was no doubt a great joy for the Brothers when it struck for the first time at 5.00pm This clock is a souvenir and a relic of Father Champagnat." The disappointing news is, however, that M. Boucher had to be called again not a long time after, following its not working for 4 months!

1905 Big Jubilee celebrations, October 1st
A special song written for the occasion was sung in honour of the Jubilarians, and speeches of praise and well-wishing given for each. But, unusually, the menu for the Jubilee feast, prepared by Brother Menalippe is given: "Entrée: Charcuterie Melon – pommes de terre en veau roti ensemble; canards – salade et roti – Desserts: fromage, pâtisseries, dragees – Vin blanc, rouge – Café."

The 1905 French law on the Separation of the Churches and State

The following is taken from Wikipedia: (French: *loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des Églises et de l'État*) was passed by the Chamber of Deputies on 9 December 1905. Enacted during the Third Republic, it established state secularism in France. France was then governed by the *Bloc des gauches* (Left Coalition) led by Émile Combes.

The law was based on three principles: the neutrality of the state, the freedom of religious exercise, and public powers related to the church. This law is seen as the backbone of the French principle of *laïcité*. The French Constitution of 1958 states: "The Republic neither recognizes, nor salaries, nor subsidizes any religion". However, France's republican government had long been anti-clerical. The 1905 Law of Separation of Church and State, following upon the expulsion of many religious orders, declared most Catholic church buildings property of the state (cathedrals) or communes (existing village churches), which maintain them and make them available to the Church, and led to the closing of most Church schools. The formal repeal of these laws had to wait till 1940.
Pilgrimages to Valfluery

V.J.M.J

Regulations for the Pilgrimage to Valfluery
24th May, 1904
And the same each year

2.20 am -- Rising; toilette
2.45 -- Prayer in the Chapel; talk on the subject of the day
3.00 -- Departure – Meditation to the train station Sub Tuum – Regina Coeli
Decade of the Rosary at the St. Chamond cemetery
6.00 – Arrival at Valfluery
7.30 – Breakfast – walk – games – rest
12.30 – Visit to the church – Decade of the Rosary
1.00pm – Lunch – Visit to the Calvary
3.30 – salut – Ave Maris Stella – Talks: one by the Parish Priest and the other by the Chaplain – A bouquet to Mary – O Salutaris – Magnificat – Ave Maria – Oremus – Tantum ergo – the church on the sea of the world
4.15 – Return through Chavanne – two decades of the Rosary; the first before Chavanne, the second in the Chavanne church
7.30 Evening meal – recreation
8.30 Prayer and bed.

A custom grew up for the Brothers to make a pilgrimage to Valfluery each year.
The accompanying box gives the arrangements (or “regulations”) for this pilgrimage for 1904, with the note that it was the same “each year”.
Note how things began at 2.20am! Exactly which Brothers went on this pilgrimage, given the number with walking sticks in the photos, is not known.

魏尚廉 1907 A Chinese Junior (Scholastic?), arrives, passing through

In the *Annals* of September 1907, we read this interesting entry: “Brother Louis-Michel, Vice Provincial of China, arrived, a delegate to the General Chapter, -- in China since 8th May, 1891, born in Dolonieu (Isere). He was accompanied by a 15 year old Chinese Junior. He is to make a 4 year stay at the Novitiate at San Maurizio (Italy) He is wearing the national costume, with pigtail. He speaks and understands French very well. He is polite, amiable and always pious. This is the first time that the cradle of the Institute has received a visit from a future Brother from the Celestial Empire. Our Lady of the Hermitage, our Venerable Father and the first disciples give you a cheerful greeting and pray for all our Missionary Brothers.”

The painstaking research of Mr. Spes Stanley Ku, the celebrated historian of the Brothers in China, has discovered that the young Chinese student was Wei Shan Lian (魏尚). And he has identified these photos of him from archival photos.

While the dates from the records are confusing he became Brother Andre-Joseph and it was as a Scholastic, not a Junior, that he travelled to San Maurizio, via the Hermitage, in 1907. We read of him: “Br. Andre-Joseph was one of the first Chinese Brothers and spoke French and English fluently. A good administrator, he served the Institute in many capacities, especially he translated and edited the Teacher’s Guide, which was published in 1933.” Following a long life of zeal and fidelity he severely suffered the persecution of the Communists and died in 1975 during sessions of public humiliations under the period of the “Cultural Revolution.”

Big reception for Brother Stratonique, Superior General, November 1907

It was always a special occasion when the Brother Superior General visited. As can be seen by the extract from the *Annals*, a special “Cantate” or song was specially composed for his reception.
Bulletin de l’Institute begun, 1909, lasting till 1984

A periodical publication for distribution to all houses of the Institute was begun in 1909. It served as a way of communicating messages from the Superior General as well as news of developments throughout the world. We will see in the next chapter how it was a greatly valued source of information for the Brothers who were conscripted to fight in the 1914-1918 War. Letters of appreciation from the Brothers at the front have been preserved. Happily, the complete texts in French of all the issues of this publication can be found [2016] on the Institute’s website, “Champagnat.org”.

1913 Re-opening of the Chapel after 10 years of being “sealed”

For the first time since 22nd July 1903, when government inspectors had closed and sealed the doors to the Chapel in the anti-clerical movement of that time, the Brothers rejoiced to be able to celebrate the feast of the Ascension, 1913, in the chapel. It was written up as “re-taking possession”, and “to the great joy of the old men.”

The accompanying list is headed:
“Personnel – Here, documented, is the list of the members of the Retreat House of the Hermitage, 26th January 1910”
A decree of 1st August 1914 enforcing conscription meant that, in theory, all Frenchmen under 40 had to enlist.

Immediate effects of the start of the war

The Hermitage annalist, under the heading 1914, remarks that other than the heating of the chapel “…there was nothing special of remark during the first 6 or 7 months of the year. Everything went along normally under the direction of Brother Antoninus, Provincial, Brother Francois-Marie, Director and Brother Marie Junien, Econome.”

But then, at the end of July, murmurs began of a possible war with Germany, and on 2nd August, in all the towns and small villages there resounded the doleful alarm bells of a general mobilisation. About 300 Brothers, either in the schools in France or overseas, answered the call of their country. Believing in the superiority of French armaments, all were patriotically convinced that they would quickly be victorious and classes would resume in October. How deceived they were since the war was to drag on till 11th November 1918. More than 150 of our Brothers would die on the soil of honour, and others wounded and rendered ill. Others came home with infirmities that in part put an end to their activity of devotion in their mission as educators of the young.”

[Press extract reproduced here is from Le Monde]

Request to take in refugees

There was an immediate proliferation of refugees throughout France fleeing to safer areas and the Hermitage was determined to contribute to giving some of them shelter. The Annals records: “At the invitation and direction of the Mayor of St. Martin en Couilleux, the area where the Hermitage was situated, M. Moleyre, and M. Chatin, our friend and neighbour, the manager of the Gillet factory, helped prepare the access to the Hermitage in anticipation of receiving the extraordinary number of 400 refugees being sent to us. On Saturday, 8th August, we received planks and frames to build beds in readiness for the probable imminent arrival of our guests. We also received stones and rubble to improve the road access to the Hermitage. But it was not till 25th November [almost 4 months] that merely 44 arrived. They had come from a refugee camp at St. Etienne (College St. Michel). They were poor, miserable souls, who for two or three months had gone from camp to camp. We organised them as best possible on iron bedsteads in the St. Marcellin dormitory along with the rest of the mattresses and bedding from the Hermitage. The beds were surrounded with white curtains and covered with red bed-covers. Included were about twelve children under the
age of 10, and more women than men.” These refugees spent their time between meals at the Hermitage, but they travelled to M. Chaland’s for meals. The authorities responsible for looking after these refugees realised that the travelling to meals was exhausting for some of them, so it was decided to find unoccupied rooms with M. Balme. It took about 12 days to make preparations, then everything required was transported to the new lodgings. This included 40 of everything: solid beds, straw palliasses/matresses, pairs of curtains, 100 to 110 counterpanes, 40 stretcher beds and 40 red bed covers. These were returned at the end of the war.

Some refugees relocated, others arrive
The *Annals* continues: “Not long after the refugees had left the Hermitage they were replaced by children and soldiers from Alcasce. For the latter we recovered our beds from M. Balme and bedding and benches were arranged in the Scholasticate building.”

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**Death of Brother Marie-Junien**

Now an old man, after many years of devotion, many of them at the Hermitage, Brother Marie Junien spent much time in recent months attending to the refugees. One December day of 1914 he was visiting them at the Scholasticate building in the company of one of the Administrators of refugees and was startled by the cold between the building and the rockface. He developed a bout of pneumonia as a result and his health steadily declined and he died on 26th December 1914. His funeral a week later was attended by numerous dignitaries of the surrounding district and numerous others. A funeral notice in *Le Croise du Forez* told of his many roles in the Brothers, including Visitor, Provincial and Provincial Director saying he had “a heart of gold and extraordinary zeal.” He played a prominent role in delaying and preventing the eviction of the old Brothers from the Hermitage in 1903.

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**Prisoners of War arrive, 1915**

Initially the authorities enquired whether the Hermitage could take in 500 prisoners of war. But following a visit by an advance party it was decided that there was insufficient provision for cooking and access to the property was a problem and escape easy. And it was believed that the presence of the prisoners would frighten the old men. However, it was decided to install a small kitchen in the Scholasticate, and in the middle of May 60 Alsace volunteer prisoners arrived with four soldier guards. They were organised to do work for various people in Izieux, St. Martin, Lavalla etc. The *Annals* records: “We were given two stone masons and two farm workers who worked well.”

Different prisoners came and went at the Hermitage in the same way during 1916, also.

Because of the scarcity of beds, their having been given away for refugees, and the presence of the prisoners, the Annual Retreat was confined to only 42 Brothers.

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**The Brother in the field, the POWs, the soldier and the bayonet**

An amusing incident at this time, July 1915, recorded in the *Annals* is the following:

“The soldier Bonhomme, for greater comfort while supervising the prisoners working at LaValla left his bayonet and belt with Brother Sigisbaud who was raking hay for Madame Vial, and he went on with his work. When soldier Bonhomme returned the bayonet and belt could not be found. Greatly worried Br. Sigisbaud told the story to the St. Chamond police who placed notices in la Tribune and le Memorial to assist in the search. The thief soon after left the items at the yard of the St. Etienne police station and a telegram was sent to the intensely worried Bonhomme to his enormous relief.”

*(The newspaper extract is from *Le Memorial de la Loire et de la Haute-Loire*, 17th July 1915.)*

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**Circular of the Superior General concerning the War, 1915**

In February, 1915, Brother Stratonique, the Superior General, issued a Circular urging prayers for Peace, exhorting the Brothers to Regularity, Prayer and Penance “… to intensify their recruitment with the purpose of replacing the good Brothers who had been taken from us in such large numbers.” The *Annals* records that by the end of 1915, 40...
Brothers had already been killed. An ensuing Circular in June urged the benefits to the Brothers in making a retreat in their own houses. He invited the soldier-Brothers to try to find a suitable time to attend also.

1917 at the Hermitage
The Annals for the entire year of 1917 takes less than half a page; presumably the annalist was preoccupied with other more pressing tasks. There is, however, mention of the appointment and inauguration of a new Brother Director of the Hermitage, Brother Jean-Alphonse, in April, as well as the sad news of the death, at age 13½, of a Junior, Eugene Bargeaud. The last entry reads:

“2nd June, Feastday. The return of the Procession that had been interrupted since 1903. The children from Izieux sang during the procession and in the chapel.”

The end of the War, 1918
The Hermitage Annals entry for the entire year of 1918 is reproduced here. The reader might carefully search and find the entry for the 11th of the 11th. One line only! The last 5 lines sum up the year: “During the first part of this year of 1918, influenza claimed innumerable victims. The victims of the war were 154 dead from more than 1,027 mobilised, amongst which were many decorated and also wounded. 78 from the Province were at the war.”

Army life of Brother Claude-Casimir as an insight into the French Brothers during World War One.

Australian and New Zealand readers will be surprised to learn that one of our French Brothers not only was at Gallipoli but survived, returned to France to fight again, survived that also and then returned to teaching and school management, finally retiring to the Hermitage where he died in July 1974.

He was Brother Claude-Casimir (Jean Claude Berne). And his story will serve as an introduction to how the First World War affected the Hermitage and the Brothers of France. The compiler of this history is enormously indebted to Mr. Eric Perrin, a Loire historian, for his research into Brother Claude Casimir. He put his research together in an article for Marist Notebooks, No.33, entitled, “Jean Claude Berne (Br Claude-Casimir): soldier in War of 1914-1918.” His story is used here as an illustration of the situation of French Brothers of call-up age during the First World War.

Conscription of young Frenchmen to the forces in 1914 did not exempt our Brothers. Not only the Brothers residing in France, but also those who during or after 1903 had left France for other countries, were recalled and obliged to fight.
And if the reader is wondering whether this narrative is related to the history of the Hermitage there are two clear connections – at both the beginning and the end of Brother Claude-Casimir’s religious life: he did his training and novitiate at the Hermitage, and at the end of his life retired to the Hermitage where he wrote down his memories of his war service.

For another Marist Brothers’ connection, it could be pointed out that the photo of the French landing at Lemnos shows ships lying off shore. In one of those ships, the “Essen”, during part of 1915, was a young Australian naval communications officer, Norman Thomas Gilroy. He was an Old Boy of the Marist Brothers’ school at Kogarah in Sydney, and went on, famously, to become the first Australian to become a cardinal. And in 2017 there was published his biography, “Norman Thomas Gilroy – an Obedient Life”, by Brother John Luttrell, an Australian Marist Brother.

Fortunately, we have access to this Memoir of Brother Claude Casimir’s war experience that he completed while residing at the Hermitage in 1971. It tells of his various placements and the extraordinary circumstance of meeting up with his own brother in the Dardanelles. In the accompanying photos you can see the two brothers together. Australians and New Zealanders will be fascinated to see that part of his service includes Lemnos, an island well known to those familiar with the Gallipoli campaign. (You can see “Lemnos” written in the left margin.)

Postcards sent from the front have been preserved and are reproduced here to attempt to make the reality of Marist Brothers fighting in the First World War more vivid.
This map shows Brother Claude-Casimir’s journeyings in his time of military service with a list of places visited.
The accompanying photo shows Brother Claude-Casimir in old age. And what an extraordinary life!! He was awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Medale Militaire.

The flag bearing the Sacred Heart was presented to Brother Claude-Casimir in 1915, and he kept it from then on throughout all his life. Eric Perrin, in his article in Marist Notebooks, No.33, tells the story:

“At the beginning of his voyage [to the front in 1915] he kept all his life a memento, fastened to his communion certificate, accompanied by the following caption: ‘Banner of the Sacred Heart of Jesus offered to me, Jean-Claude Berne on 22 March 1915 when a soldier in the great war, I passed through Paray-le-Monial thinking to be leaving for the French front when actually I was leaving for the East by a roundabout route. This banner has followed me faithfully everywhere as far as the Hermitage today, 24th August 1969.’”

The tan-coloured page behind the flag is Jean-Claude’s First Communion certificate.

Of the 708 Marist Brothers who were mobilised, 101 were killed!

The large plaque records the Brothers from the Province of the Hermitage who died in the Great War. And a plaque is also found in the Hermitage cemetery.
Hermitage Brothers yearning for news of Brothers killed (and also decorated)
Brothers throughout France, including the Hermitage, were continually anxious to hear of the safety of their colleagues in the different areas of the war. They were greatly helped by regular up-dates in the issues of the Bulletin de l’Institute.
The editors of the Bulletin, also, included letters from numerous Brothers written back to the Brother Superior General or Brothers Assistants, telling of their situation. Often, they told of their fidelity to their prayers and attendance at Mass when they could. They also told of their enormous gratitude for being sent copies of these Bulletins, as, not only did they keep them informed of the works of the Brothers, it also told of how the soldier-Brothers were faring.
The following are examples only of those who were members of the Province of the Hermitage. Many more were listed:


**Bulletin 1917** Ont été cités à l’ordre du jour, à notre connaissance :
Frère Henri-Albert, de la province de l’Hermitage et le postulant Maleysson, de la province de l’Hermitage.

**Bulletin 1918 Sept** ONT ÉTÉ CITÉS A L’ORDRE DU JOUR, à notre connaissance, avec attribution de décorations diverses : Frères Charles-Bonaventure, Marie-Cécilien, Giuseppe-Maria et Antoine-Marie de la province de l’Hermitage.

**Bulletin, Dec, 1918** Ont été cités à l’ordre du jour, à notre connaissance, avec attribution de décorations diverses:
Frères Eugène-Amédée, Marie-Lambert, Paul-Daniel et Louis-Salvatoris, de la province de St. Genis-Laval.
Frères Joseph-Félicien, Claude-Casimir (2° fois), Louis Germain (2° fois) et Giuseppe-Maria (2° fois), de la prov. de l’Hermitage.
Centenary of the Birth of the Institute, 1917

Unfortunately, it was during the war that the centenary of the beginning of the institute was to be celebrated on January 2nd, 1917.

Festivities, of course, had to be somewhat muted, though it would have brought some much-appreciated joy into the lives of the Brothers enduring the sorrows, fears and privations of the war.
CHAPTER 19  1920s & 1930s: Father Champagnat declared “Venerable”; 1920 Return of the remains of Father Champagnat; 1925 Centenary of the opening of the Hermitage, and more!

July 1920, Champagnat declared “Venerable”

“In 1885 Father Detors, Chaplain at the Hermitage, began enquiries into the life of Father Champagnat by interviewing witnesses. 1888, July: Opening of the Process in view of the cause of Father Champagnat. For the next 32 years the Process continued when conditions were favourable and witnesses could be called, until July, 1920 when Pope Benedict XV declared the heroicity of his virtues, and he could really be called by the title “Venerable”. An account of two miracles for the Beatification was sent to Rome in January 1925.”

The accompanying cards would have been common around the Hermitage after 1920 and regularly used as bookmarks. Immediately there began prayers for the next step, namely “Beatification”, when Marcellin might be declared “Blessed”. (see prayer card)

(The red dot on the card and the corresponding Marist M logo on the reverse side conceals an attached “relic” of Champagnat. But it may be something as insignificant as a tiny piece of cloth that had touched his bones!)

Return of the remains of Fr. Champagnat, 1920

In 1903, at the height of the anti-clerical hysteria in France, the remains of Fr. Champagnat were removed to Les Maisonettes, the reader will remember. Now they were brought back to the chapel at the Hermitage. The photo shows the room at Les Maisonettes with the niche in the wall.

Re-opening the Scholasticate, October 1921

Scholastics, once again, took up residence in the Scholasticate building after some years housing refugees and prisoners of war. Brothers Andre Marins and Platonide were in charge.

Piecemeal return of religious objects stored elsewhere since 1903

During the early 1920s there is occasional mention of getting back various items that had been stored or hidden since the threat of confiscation back in 1903. In January,1923, the old pews were returned, and in July, Father Marie Abraham returned some paintings. And Mme.Reyrand presented the Hermitage with various items for the sacristry.
Big Jubilee celebrations at the Hermitage, September 1920

The following Brothers celebrated Jubilees:
Frères Cadroës, Ferjeux, Agéricus, Pontique, Tiburce, Gordien et Sauveur; et les seconds, deux fois plus nombreux, les Frères Maxime, Carloman, Rufinien, Clet, Rolland, Blanchard, Ruben, Ludovinus, Marie-Joannice, Eparque, Aquilinus, Régis-Marie, Antoine-Régis et Marcel.

The usual ceremonies were conducted with speeches, prayers and honour given to the Brothers; some for 60 and others for 50 years of service. In the recorded account it is mentioned: “Many edifying things could be said about these sterling fellows who have carried on through difficulties to hard-won victories, during many years under the sweet yoke with willing constancy and energy, sustained by the grace of God.”

Magazine for Juniors, 1921-1932 and booklet for children, 1923

Recommending prayers for peace back in 1915, Brother Diogene, the Brother Superior General, also urged greater efforts in recruiting young men to be Brothers to replace those killed in the war. The accompanying covers of the magazine “Le Petit Juveniste”, which was published from 1921 to at least 1932, was a way of helping bind the Juniors to their interest in joining the Brothers with stories of Brothers around the world and poems and matters of interest. The booklet, published in 1923, may well have been a way of commending the life of the Brothers to young people in our schools. The Juniors’ magazine ran to more than 30 pages. Typical contents may be gleaned from the Sommaire of the January-February 1928 issue.

1924 The exhumation of the remains of Brother Francois

On 20th March 1924, there was the exhumation of the remains of Brother Francois from the Hermitage Cemetery and their transfer to a place of honour in the Hermitage Chapel, where they remain to the present day (2016).
The casket that contained the remains of Brother Francois, and which was exhumed in 1924 is kept (2018) in the Hermitage attic.
Booklet marking 100 years of the Hermitage, 1925

In 1925 a booklet in French was produced presenting a short history of the Hermitage. Reproduced here is the cover: “MONOGRAPHIE du N. D. DE L’HERMITAGE”. Copies of this booklet were given in appreciation to numerous benefactors.

Festivities marking the Centenary of the building of the Hermitage, 13th September 1925; plus the honouring of 32 Jubilarians: Golden, Diamond and Ruby

The centenary Monographie waxes lyrical about the delicate voices of the young Juniors alternating with the richer tones of the Scholastics in singing the Mass of the Angels. Brother Statonique, former Superior General, was in attendance adding solemnity. The great Novitiate Hall had been decorated “avec une elegance et une magnificence” that did honour to the skill of the decoraters! And truly “a surge of joy warmed every heart”! A Junior recited a poem entitled, “Les Batisseurs”, recalling how this very house, the Hermitage, had been built by Father Champagnat and the first Brothers.

This was succeeded by a song, “La Nacelle Mariste”, which was said to have been “executed to perfection and producing a lively sensation”! It told of the times of persecution and how the Hermitage and Brothers at different times had been buffeted by storms and tempests brought on by Satan and the world.

Brother Marie-Vincent thanked Brother Diogene for what he had done for the various Jubilarians. When he suggested that the Jubilees of 1925 be given the name of “Promotion du R. F. Diogene” (“Class of Br. Diogene”), it was met with loud applause. It was remarked that Brother Statonique in earlier years, through his courage and faith, had led the Brothers safely through the trials of the imposed secularization, encouraging their perseverance. “After God,” it was said, “it was to him that thanks were due.”

Monsieur de Boissieu got special mention at the ceremonies. His name, it was said, was written in gold in the annals of the Institute. He was praised and thanked for his wonderful generosity to the Brothers and the Institute generally. Various speeches were delivered and after a visit to the Blessed Sacrament the bell sounded loudly, summoning everyone to the dining room for a feast. The Jubilarians sat at the “top table” with the Superiors. The lavish spread had been prepared under the direction of Brother Lin, the econome.

Finally, Vespers were sung, followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, bringing to an end a most memorable day. Special praise was given to the Provincial, Brother Joseph-Philippe, whose idea the festivities were. It was he who had put so much work into the preparation of the Monographie, talking different ones into contributing and gathering
various relevant documents. In this regard special mention was made of Brothers Jean-Alphonse, Modestin, Almaque and Maxime. Brother Maxime, the Director of the Hermitage, took on the task of the organisation of the day with zeal and thoughtfulness and attention to detail; and as a result, all passed smoothly and successfully. His assistant superior, Brother Andre-Francois, came in for special mention for always having his eye out for whatever needed to be done, and doing it in an unobtrusive manner.

[When it says “today” it means 1925; extract from the centenary Monographie.]

Hermitage life in the 1920s
Community life followed a routine of daily Mass and prayers, celebrations of special feast days with special liturgies and refreshments, the occasional funeral and the occasional outing. The Annals of the 1920s include pages pasted in that show that an early “duplicator” was in use, as the accompanying slips of paper show. It also allowed for some artistic expression.
One shows the Christmas programme for 1926, another for Christmas, 1928 and a Christmas end-of-year concert program. See also the details of an outing to Chevrieres in 1929, and a liturgical procession, also in 1929.
This booklet contains four photos that may be of interest to the reader. And so they are reproduced here. This Guide lists 80 articles that are displayed in Father Champagnat’s room and in accompanying glass cases. Included in the Guide is a similar list of articles related to Brother Franconis.

The displays reflect the attitudes of the time, what should be placed in Father Champagnat’s room and what should be displayed in the glass cases. As time passes, we will find, tastes and sensitivities change and so will what is displayed!

Visitors from the twenty-first century may be a little dismayed to find displayed in the 1930s the instruments of penance, both of Father Champagnat and of other Brothers. These include little whips, or “disciplines” and also “cilices”.

Wikipedia explains celice as:
A celice was originally a garment or undergarment made of coarse cloth or animal hair (a hairs) worn close to the skin. It was used in some religious traditions to induce discomfort or pain as a sign of repentance and atonement. Clices were originally made from sackcloth or coarse animal hair, so they would irritate the skin. Other features were added to make clices more uncomfortable, such as thin wires or twigs. In modern religious circles, it simply means any device worn for the same purposes.

As time goes by, such items disappear from the display cases!
Sample page from the Guide of 1932

Various improvements during the 1930s
- Renovation of the Scholasticate classrooms
- Painting of the outdoors statues of St. Joseph and Our Lady of Victories
- Replastering of refectory walls
- Preparation of rooms below the chapel to house the relics of Father Champagnat and Brother Francois
- The orchard trees and fruit trees were pruned
- A machine to iron the linen was installed in the laundry
- Planting of young cypress trees to replace the old
- Complete overhaul of storage batteries for the electricity installation of a furnace in the Scholasticate;
- boiler for hot water above the wash basins in the dormitory
- The bootshop floor is transformed into rooms
Since the very foundation of the Hermitage it has been the place that sick, and as time went by, elderly Brothers would come for medical care or convalescence, or to live out their last years. The infirmary, therefore was an integral part of the Hermitage. The photo above shows the Brothers in the Infirmary Community Room in 1936. But the scene might easily be that of the 1890s or the early 1900s or the 1920s.

**Cause of Beatification of Brother Francois introduced, 1934**

The card reproduced here (front and back) encourages the recitation of a prayer for Brother Francois’ “Beatification” -- the stage preceding canonisation as a saint.

Note the small brown dot in the bottom right of the portrait and the patch in the bottom left of the prayer. This contains a small piece of timber from a plank from the room in which Br. Francois died. This is known as a “third class relic” and such relics were much prized in the early to mid twentieth century.
Juniors at the Hermitage, 1935 onwards

“Juniors” are school-age boys who have expressed an interest in becoming Brothers. They attend school at the “Juniorate” and learn about the life of the Brothers as well as their school studies. In 1935 there were a large number housed at LaValla and it was decided to move the older boys to the Hermitage and form a branch of the Juniorate there while the younger ones remained at LaValla.

Brother Jean Roche recalled those times in 2016 thus: “We were about fifty juniors. In September 1935, a senior Juniorate was created, our older colleagues left us. I was to join them in September 1936. We were under the direction of Brother Marie-Désiré, a holy brother who was a true copy of the Founder. He was very demanding but we loved him a lot. We were a veritable novitiate ... as evidenced by the perseverance of his charges. I have attached some photos of that time. They show that the juniors were many, ... mostly recruited by Brother Louis Colombat.”
The above «Ceremonial» was the prayer service for the admission of the Juniors of 1935 into the Jubniorate.

Le juvénat de l’Hermitage 1935-1939 avec Frères Henri-Noël, provincial et Marie-Désiré)

Perpetual vows, Hermitage, September, 1934

Scholastics during 1930s
“An excellent day at Notre Dame de l’Hermitage” (8th August 1935)

Such is the heading in the Bulletin of the Institute, 1934-5. It refers to the return – AFTER 30 YEARS – of 35 young Brothers to make Retreat. These Brothers had come from seven Provinces. The physical space had been prepared with 35 new desks, and the dormitories had been divided into individual cells with heaters installed. Other spaces for gathering and recreation had been prepared. “It was within this perfectly adapted environment that the 28 days of Retreat unfolded. The retreatants could be seen reading their notes at their desks and visiting the different corners of the property as if on an endless pilgrimage. ... Here was the spot where the Chapel in the Woods stood in 1825 during the building of the Hermitage; here the rocks over which Champagnat scrambled; here the pathways and walls that he built; ... all these things speak sweetly to the heart of the young disciple of the Institute.”

Jubilee celebrations photo, December 8th, 1936, recalls secularisation

Earlier in this narrative, more than 30 years earlier, there was an explanation of how some Brothers chose to be “secularised” – many of them for the purpose of being able to keep our schools open during the bitter anti-clerical years – and a clear sign of their “difference” was the wearing of “secular” dress. This continued to 1940 and is clearly illustrated in the accompanying photo from the Bulletin of the Institute of 1936-7, of one of three Brothers being celebrated at the Hermitage for their 50 years as Brothers in layman’s clothing with suit, collar and tie. He is Brother Joseph-Francois. And in the personal tributes made to each, there is no mention of secularisation or otherwise. The words for Brother Joseph-Francois include: “You have especially spent your zeal for the Christian education of the children. In particular you are the ‘Apostle of Ambierle’, earning the Medal of Honour for your long and eminent service.”

And echoing the sentiments of joy at the return of retreats at the Hermitage for young Brothers the previous year, the account of the celebrations spoke of the happy sound of laughter “within the walls so long silent.”

Some miscellaneous events of this time

- Early 1939 a BUST of Fr. C installed in the parlour; other statues etc.
- Feast of Purification ... lots of activities including cinema. Jubilarians ... and a wine 50 years old.
- 27 Feb. arrived the statue of St. Joseph, cream colour to harmonise with the walls of the oratory and that of The Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Lourdes. Election of Pacelli as Pius XII ... to the chapel for the Te Deum and various hymns.
- 5 April arrived from the Novitiate at Santa Maria 18 postulants and 18 Novices, 8 from British Isles and 5 from St Paul 3 Chateaux.
September & October, 1939, at the Hermitage

The entry in the Annals of the Hermitage, recording the beginning of World War II, is as shown:

One of the immediate consequences was the loss of some of the Scholastics from the Hermitage into the schools. Some Scholastics with the “Brevet”, the licence to teach, but who were at the Scholasticate continuing their studies, were sent to schools where some teaching Brothers had been called up into the army. There was, also, some immediate camouflaging of the windows; and it was announced that the retreat that had been set down from 4th to 11th September would be truncated to a two-day recollection. Some changes to the staff of the community and to the scholasticate were announced on 19th September, but it is not known if they were hastened by the declaration of war.

Immediately began a bit of a procession of displaced, or “refugee” Brothers from nations outside France, beginning with a couple of Spanish Brothers who found themselves stranded.

Exams, the eternal constant of student days, went ahead with five young Brothers gaining their “Brevets” out of nine presenting.

Happily, a good harvest of pears, peaches and grapes is recorded. And at Christmas, 1939, there was the traditional Midnight Mass with decorated crib, lots of singing and all the trimmings.

Hermitage giving shelter to “refugee” Brothers

Immediately the war began in September, 1939, two young Spanish Novices found themselves stranded and were given accommodation at the Hermitage. After some days they had gained certification as “Refugees”. On 19th March 1940 25 young Belgian Brothers arrived having fled the proximity of the German army. If the reading of the handwriting of the Annals is correct, a further 50 arrived at St. Genis-Laval seeking shelter. It was decided to open a room at LaValla which had been empty, but the Mayor of the Commune had requisitioned all the beds for refugees. After sorting out who was to stay where, 25 finished up at the Hermitage. The following day they were shown all around – the different floors of the Hermitage, the Crypt with the mementos of Father Champagnat, the cemetery, the vestments used by the Founder etc. They showed great interest in everything. They were then taken on a walk up the hill to LaValla, the “cradle of the Institute”, but they found it very tiring. But it appears that after a while they gained their identity papers and left the Hermitage.

In June, a further 23 Belgian Brothers, who had fled Arlons, spent some time at the Hermitage.

Scholastics getting in the hay

The time came during 1940 for making the hay and the Provincial called for volunteers from amongst the scholastics. It was remarked that those who responded were able to make use of their hidden talents!

Rationing and “the restrictions”, during and after the war

Many readers would be unaware that in many countries of the world during the war there were very strict restrictions on how much bread or flour or sugar etc. each citizen was allowed to buy each month. Such a system held in France (and at the Hermitage). This arrangement is mentioned in the Annals in relation to festivities where a regret is sometimes mentioned that the festive meal would have been better had there not been the “restrictions.” The following illustrations may bring home to those for whom this “rationing” in wartime is a matter of curious study rather than personal experience.
Each citizen had a “book” of “ration tickets” and one of these small squares had to be torn out and presented to the shop-keeper before purchasing a quantity of sugar or flour or meat etc. The reader is invited to consider the administrative nightmare of collating the “coupons” for these purchases when considerable quantities were involved for the large numbers at the Hermitage.

Recipe books were available to suggest recipes for cakes without butter etc. and other ways of living healthily within the restrictions. In a number of countries, including France, these restrictions continued well after the end of hostilities.

Centenary of the death of Father Champagnat, June 6th, 1940

The war prevented any “big” celebration of the centenary of Father Champagnat’s “Feast Day”. This had to wait another year, to 1941. But the actual centenary day was fittingly celebrated at the Hermitage itself. What is given here is everything entered into the Annals for the day:

“6 June – Centenary of the death of Venerable Champagnat. The feast is very special. The chapel was decorated as for a big feast day and Father Champagnat’s tomb was specially decorated. The bust in the refectory was not forgotten.

‘Here is the order of the day! – 5hr [5 O’clock in the morning] Meditation on the Blessed Founder given by our dear Brother Assistant – Our Father, our Model, our Protector. Some figures of the state of the Institute: 10,000 Brothers; 150,000 children – 6 martyrs in China; 170 in Spain; anticipation of the Beatification; 5½ Communion and sung Eucharist; big festival breakfast; recreation 8½ High Mass in honour of the Blessed Virgin; Salve Sancte; 1½ Rosary; walk to La Valla, the Juniors come to sing Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament -- 4½ Office – 6h 25 Solemn Benediction of the month of the Sacred Heart.”

Brothers fleeing from the Hermitage on foot, 1940, and their adventurous journey

Just two weeks after the low-key celebrations of the centenary of Father Champagnat’s birth, during 19th June, 1940, and fearing that the German army might swiftly progress down the Rhone Valley, it was decided that the Novices and Postulants at the Hermitage should leave and head for safer places. And so, starting on 20th June, they packed a bag and began a journey on foot to St. Julien-Molshabate. First leg to St. Pal-le-Mons through St. Genest. Finding places to sleep and gain lodgings was by no means plain sailing. However, with the signing of the Armistice by Marshal Philippe Petain on 22nd June 1940, the fear of invasion of the area around Lyon, and so the Hermitage, evaporated. The Novices and Postulants immediately turned around to return to the Hermitage. But the reader may enjoy the adventurous narrative quoted directly from the Annals of the Hermitage in the accompanying box.

[The newspaper shown here is dated 20th June 1940, and the article “La situation militaire” has been enlarged and superimposed.]

The old, sick and infirm only ones remaining at the Hermitage (June 1940)

The Annals of the Hermitage mentions, that once the scholastics and novices had left and begun their trek south the only ones left were “Les vieillards, les malardes et les infirmes” with a few to tend them.
The flight of the Novices, Postulants & Scholastics from the Hermitage, June 1940

20 June 1940 – With the approach of the Germans, which was expected to reach St. Etienne and St. Chamond, the advice to Brother Henri-Noel, the Provincial, was to send the Scholastics, Novices and Postulants away to a less exposed place. This was a prudent measure. At 5 O’Clock in the evening, each had his bag containing his clothing and study books ready. The bags were put in the vehicle to take them at 2 O’Clock on the way to Lavalla where a van that Brother Andre-Marie, the Director of the St. Louis school in St. Chamond had acquired, would take to their destination. 21st June, — after breakfast they set out. The Scholastics went on foot to St. Pai-Le-Mons to the Brothers’ house. The Novices and the Postulants, about 40 in number, made their way on foot, to the house in St. Julien-Molhabate (Haut Loire), a distance of 60 kilometres. First stop was the Big Forest, for something to eat, then onwards to Tarantaise, and then onwards again. Brother Henri-Emile, the Master of Novices, Br. Dervies-Dei, infirmarian, Br. Regis-Aime, Canadian, Br. Gerald from Ireland, Br. Ligouri, Canadian, and a novice went ahead to prepare for the arrival of the Novices and Postulants. They made the journey in the automobile of Mr. May, the Master Carpenter of Creux, who had lent them his vehicle. During the journey they frequently passed people carrying bags on their backs, fleeing the invasion. … They arrived at St. Julien-Molhesabate at about 11.00am, where they got out and Mr. May returned. The Brothers approached a small boarding school serving as a holiday lodging run by Father St.Olive, S.J. The Brother Master [of Novices] explained that he had been sent by his Provincial to find a place for the Novices and Postulants but the Brothers’ lodgings, for certain good reasons, was unable to be used. … Father St. Olive mentioned de Montregard, about 9 kilometres away where there was a hostel for girls that lay unoccupied. He added that the Parish Priest was familiar with the situation and would welcome us. This fitted in with the directions of the Provincial so the Master accepted, and the group had dinner with him.

After the meal the priest offered to drive them to Montregard, happy to help at his expense. They went straightaway to the Parish Priest. After passing some pleasantries the three set out for the lodging house where a war of words began. The directress, a secularised nun, made a spirited opposition to taking in the young men. The exchange became nasty. In turns Father St. Olive and the Parish Priest became worn out with arguments. The directress, in a spirited manner and with cold calculation, countered all their arguments. During all of this the Brother Master had kept his silence and observed everything. Eventually the Parish Priest abruptly ended the exchange and with the other priest declared to the Brother : « You arrange everything with the directress ! » And they left.

Then the directress, still smarting under the barrage she had received, told of her justification for her stand. She began to summarise all her grievances with this outburst : « These two mess everything up. They spoil everything for me! I’m sick of badly behaved holiday-makers! » And she told of her apprehensions about taking in any more. But then after the Novice Master explained that this group were not holiday-makers, but rather a novitiate group, she relented a little.

They looked through the establishment. The dormitory was suitable and also the classrooms and dining room. But the kitchen stove was unusable. There was another in a good state but it belonged to the community of Sisters, and she was not inclined to lend it. However, in spite of everything, she agreed to lend it for the preparation of supper, due to the circumstances and the fact that a Brother cook would be preparing it. The future was finally becoming clearer!

It was close to 5 O’Clock in the evening, and without delay the Brother Master sent someone to find bread and cheese. This was difficult as a detachment of soldiers had, in the morning, cleared out the bakeries of bread. However a brave baker, seeing the situation, agreed to do a special bake. It was Saturday at 6.00pm. The next morning we would have bread. For supper we had two loaves of bread, 8 litres of milk and two blocks of cheese.

While this was going on the 5 other Brothers were busy transferring beds from the nearby hostel of the Brothers of the Sacred-Heart to the Sisters, a distance of about 200 metres, taking several trips.

[The image of the refugees is taken from the net but follows the description in the Annals of people carrying loads on their backs. The two portraits are of (left) Brother Marie Vincent (1922-2004) and on the right Brother Francois Emile (1921-1978) who were Scholastics at the Hermitage at the time ... so we can presume they were part of the group fleeing the Hermitage as recorded here.]

“Supplement relative to the facts mentioned in the Annals of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage of 21st June 1940:
Enormous destructive downpour of rain, June 21st, 1940
Following fast on the entry in the Annals telling of the fleeing of the novices and scholastics on June 20th is a harrowing account of an enormous downpour of rain, bringing with it a deal of soil and rubble blocking entrances and flooding rooms and courtyards. The perceptive reader might draw comparisons with a similar disaster of June 1900, a pale photo of which is shown in the chapter relating events of that time. How the clean-up was achieved without the ready help of the novices and scholastics is not known. But after a vivid description of the extent of the damage the annalist finishes by remarking that “by dinner-time everything was in place”!

False alarm rings through the Hermitage
At 3.00pm, following the Armistice Petain arranged with Germany, a news report came over the radio, the T.S.F., (as reported in the Annals) that Russia had declared war on Germany! The annalist – rightly understanding the trouble this would be for Germany – was ecstatic. But it was not true! There must have been enormous disappointment throughout the Hermitage as the reality sank in. They quickly realized it was not confirmed. (The T.S.F. is the radio.)

Novices, Scholastics return … 28th and 29th June 1940
Nothing more is learned from the Annals than the mere statement that these Brothers, plus two Belgian Brothers, had returned after their time away fleeing the anticipated German advance. This followed the Armistice signed by Petain with Germany on 22nd June. There must have been much rejoicing and delight at the Hermitage that things were returning to normal.
French Brothers as prisoners of war and young Brothers in national service camps

A little insight into what may have affected the Brothers at the Hermitage is found in Brother Lanfrey’s mention that “In the defeat of 1940 at least 80 French Brothers were taken prisoner … In addition, 75 young French Brothers were called up to Youth Production Camps for periods of eight months at a time.” It’s not known at the time of writing [2017] whether any of these young Brothers were drawn from Brothers studying at the Hermitage. [The accompanying photo is NOT of young Brothers, but taken from the net showing similar youths from the Camps des Juennese, and the Certificate is such as was given for completion of the time spent in the Camps]

These camps called “Camps des Jeunesse” or “Chantiers de la Jeunesse” took young men for compulsory non-military duties contributing to the war effort. They might be employed in forests or in fields. They lived together in barracks under strict discipline with a very regulated timetable of activities. At various times throughout the war there are entries in the Annals that a particular young Brother (or two or three) have arrived at the Hermitage on leave, during which time they renewed their vows.

Two causes of celebration, July 14th and July 15th, 1940

The French National Day was celebrated at the Hermitage by a number of the Brothers attending the patriotic ceremonies at the monument to the fallen soldiers. And then the following day there were celebrations occasioned by it being the Feast day of Saint Henry! It was a tradition in France at the time for a community to specially celebrate the Feast day of the community’s superior’s name day. And the provincial superior’s name being Henri-Noel, and the Master of Novices’ Henri-Emile, the day was filled with festivities. Words of well-wishing and praise in French, in English, in Spanish and in Latin and in patois were accompanied by songs; along with the presentation of both Spiritual and floral bouquets. After a celebratory dinner both the Novices and the Scholastics went for different walks … the Scholastics returning drenched after a heavy fall of rain.

Giving sanctuary to a Brother from another congregation

At the end of July, 1940, a Brother arrived from Alsace looking for shelter. He was Brother Paul de la Doctrine de Nancy (M. Bach) “who had been demobilised but was unable to return to his community either at Nancy nor at Saverne, nor able to get in communication with his superiors. Asking our Provincial for help he was referred to us and we made him very welcome.”

The Brothers at the Hermitage also provided a safe haven in the infirmary to a colleague of Brother Paul, and his interesting story, including his 100th Birthday celebrations at the Hermitage, is contained in the box.

Pictures and statues in the Community room, 1940s, 1950s

(Left to right): Brother Louis-Marie (second Superior General), clock, statue of St. Joseph, Pope Pius XII, Brother Francois (first Superior General), Statue of the Sacred Heart, Crucifix, Statue of Mary, (picture obscured), possibly the local bishop/archbishop, statue of St. Therese of Lisieux, Brother Leonida, Superior General of the time (1946-1958).
Fitting celebrations were held at the Hermitage for a resident’s 100th birthday on 20th July 1940. He was Brother Alfred, but not a Marist Brother. He was a Brother “de la Doctrine de Nancy”. His congregation was a tiny one, and it conducted a school in Nancy, east of Paris. However, with the German invasion of France, his Brothers had to flee. His Brothers had a close connection with the Marist Brothers, and Brother Alfred was accepted into the Hermitage infirmary. So close were the Marist Brothers with the Brothers de la doctrine de Nancy, that a secularised Marist Brother, M.(Brother) Chalencon, took over in charge of the Nancy school, and came to the Hermitage to join in the celebrations of Brother Alfred’s 100th birthday, along with one of Brother Alfred’s confreres, Brother Paul (Bach), who had also been displaced due to the war. The Brothers de la Doctrine de Nancy had become, over time, according to Brother Andre Lanfrey, leaning on the work Brother Jean Rousson had done researching the history of the Brothers, “more or less Marist Brothers”! Brother Alfred died at the Hermitage on 24th January 1941, and the annalist records that his age was “101 and a half and 3 days.”

Tons of potatoes and death of old guard dog “Sultan”, November 1940

With many mouths to feed and the restrictions on food purchases, there would have been delight at the arrival of a cart delivering 6,000 kilos of potatoes, followed by another of 5,000 kilos. The annalist remarks that now there is enough for 6 months! And with all the concerns associated with the war there is the mention that the faithful and old guard dog, “Sultan”, had died. He was remembered for his faithful service.

Exam season, 1940

In the last days of September, 1940, there were various trips to examination centres for the student Brothers, reminding the reader that days and months of study were the regular program for the bulk of Brothers at the Hermitage. And the cycle of Novices finishing the Novitiate and progressing to be Scholastics continued as had been the case for many years prior.

Some further events of 1940-1941

- Talk on Germany and resurrection of France,
- Story told by Brothers expelled from Alsace/Lorraine of property taken etc.
- Mass and prayers for Peace, Sunday 24th November
- Christmas Mass sung to the composition for three voices by Br. Henri-Emile. Christmas party with songs in English, French, Greek and Longrois; and listening to the Christmas Message of Marshal Petain.
- Deaths of 2 Brothers in January 1941, but also the death of Doctor Cheveron who had given 30 years free service to the Brothers at the Hermitage!
- Death of the 100-year-old Brother (story in box)
- Scholastics go for outing to St F. de S. to the mountain of Perezin. Left at 9.30am arrived home 9.45pm somewhat drenched. (The English Brothers very tired!)
- 2 soldier Brothers and 2 camp des Jeunesse Brothers arrive on leave and head off on retreat. ... and later several finish their camp des Jeunesse and after a retreat are given their appointments, while others depart for the camps.
- March 1st Visit of Marshal Petain to St. Etienne. Described by the annalist as a “Journee Splendide” (A great day!) Reception at the Town Hall ... speech etc. Then short visit to St. Chamond. (The accompanying photo has this caption: Le maréchal Pétain en compagnie d’Antoine Pinay à Saint-Chamond, mars 1941)
• 27th March the Scholastics help put out a fire threatening the property of M. Chatin. He sends a letter of thanks with 300 francs.

• At Easter 200 attend the ceremonies; and the following day the Religious refugees from St. Genis-Laval come to the Hermitage for the day, taking in all the sites, accompanied by the Brother Provincial. They were very happy with everything.

• An outing for both the Novices and Scholastics. Beautiful day ... the vegetation was flourishing; the branches of the trees were full of flowers. The Novices went to St. Paul-en-Jarret and the Scholastics to Rochetaille. On return a fine rain did not spoil the day.

• 1st May (“May Day”) a patriotic day celebrated with flags and songs. And in the evening, because of the rain, the new Provincial of St. Paul-3-Chateaux gave a most interesting 2-hour talk on the Spanish Civil War and the execution of 200 our our Brothers. It was said that their story, like an odyssey, could be the basis of a novel.

• A new farmer, M. Chapuis, begins and takes up residence with his two boys and three girls in the “Sisters’ Residence”

• Juniors return on June 6th, Father Champagnat’s Feastday, from a pilgrimage.

• Request to take 200/400 German soldiers. But after an examination of the location of the Hermitage and its relative inaccessibility from the centre of St. Chamond, the authorities decided against it.

New organ installed in the chapel, 3rd May 1941, and the interesting story of its purchase

The story, as told in the Annals, is an interesting one, and one to raise the spirits of the Hermitage Brothers in the midst of the war. Three-and-a-third pages are taken up with the saga. The annalist begins with: “Because of the laws of persecution it was necessary, in 1903, to sell the organ to assuage the rapacity of the liquidator”. He goes on to tell how various ones – Brother André-François, around 1922, the sacristan at the time, -- had the idea of purchasing another organ. With the permission of his superiors he had put aside different moneys from time to time for this purpose. But with the devaluation of the currency following the 1914-18 war the value was greatly reduced.

Then Brother Priscillien, when Provincial Econome, with the same intention, quietly managed to put aside some funds, without touching the Province funds. Then with the coming of the Novices back from Italy to the Hermitage at the declaration of war in 1939, and with the young voices again filling the chapel, the matter of an organ was raised again by Brother André-Francis who asked the Assistant General, Brother Francis de Borgia, longtime associated with the Hermitage, and he liked the idea. However, there was still a shortfall in the money required of the type of instrument they had in mind. So, the Brother Assistant asked a group of Old Boys from New York if they could help. Yes! They contributed $1,000 USD, which, with the good exchange rate, arrived at the necessary sum.

Then followed the contracting of the building of the organ by Mr. A. Durand of Villeurbanne and its delivery and installation --- all told in great detail in the Annals. However, space here does not allow the telling of the whole story, except to remark that Brother Henri-Emile, who endured the heartbreak of seeing the organ sold in 1903, played this organ at its inauguration almost 40 years later.
Hanging lamps installed in the chapel, December 1942
The hanging lamps were replaced by electric hanging lamps…. ready for Christmas.

Consecration of the Institute to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, January 2nd, 1943
A special ceremony was held in the Hermitage Chapel, presided over by Brother Michaelis, following a sung community Mass. Each community in the Institute was to hold such a ceremony of dedication. (This followed Pope Pius XII's Consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on October 31, 1942.) A few days later the children from St. Francis school in Izieux came to the Hermitage to make a similar consecration.

Transfer of the school, St. Francis, of Izieux to the Hermitage for safety, October 1943
The Annals states: “The threat of shelling obliged the civil authorities to evacuate the schools. A lorry arrived with the school furniture.” The school was to be re-established in the Scholasticate section of the Hermitage. On 3rd November we read: “The classes from the School of St. Francis of Izieux began for the first time in the Scholasticate building. The children had dinner with us, then returned to class for the afternoon, finishing at 4.30. The two teachers had their dinner in the parlour.”

Miscellaneous events of 1943
- All Novices, Postulants and Scholastics had identity photos taken.
- A Brother from nearby, Brother Andre-Francois, was knocked over and killed by a motorcyclist.
- 10 Juniors from LaValla came down to the Hermitage to become Postulants.
- As in previous years, some young Brothers left the Camps des Jeunesse, and others joined.
- Some young Brothers were asked to take it in turns to guard stretches of railway tracks.
- Brothers travelled to St. Etienne to gain the Jubilee Indulgence of St. John, which previously they would have gone to Lyons for.
- The director of Charlieu arrived with an enormous truck to take a number of beds and mattresses on account of an increase of need at his place.

Horrific Allied bombardment of St. Etienne, 26th May 1944
A little talked about catastrophe that occurred only a few kilometres from the Hermitage on the 26th May 1944, was the Allied bombing of St. Etienne that killed 984 and destroyed 1100 buildings. While it is not mentioned in the Annals of the Hermitage, it is the closest the destruction of the war came to the Hermitage and would have been heartrending and enormously worrying for the Brothers at the Hermitage; particularly so since a school was bombed killing the teachers and children.

The strategic importance of this bombing was related to preparations for “D Day”, Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy, which finally began on June 6th, 1944, a mere 11 days out from the bombing. The rationale for the bombing was to prevent the Germans gaining the arms factory and the coal mines and marshalling yards which at the time were under the control of the “Free French”.

Amongst the deaths were the teachers and children of the Primary school, l’ecole de Tardy (destruction pictured).

There is a monument in the city of St. Etienne to the teachers and students, and a square has been named in memory of the school’s principal, Alexandre Jacob.

The only reference in the Annals is three days later the cancellation of a traditional outing!

“29 [May] Monday after Pentecost – no annual outing this year because of the military events ['evenements militaires'].” And the following day 11 young Brothers went by truck to Lyon for their Brevet exams because of the uncertainty and disturbance of the trains.

August 22nd, Scholastics see signs of victory on way back from St. Chamond

On August 22nd, 1944, the Scholastics had gone to the Carmel in St. Chamond to sing at the perpetual adoration. On their way back, on the road, they came upon a large truck, while coming through Creux, and a gathering of “Marquisards” (Resistance fighters). So clear evidence was emerging that the war was finally being won. There were liberation ceremonies in St. Etienne three days later, as the accompanying photo and its caption declares.

(Appearance of Saint Etienne: liberation ceremony with combatants from the maquis the 25th August 1944)

(And in the September 2000 Annals there is an entry telling of a local commemoration of the liberation of St. Chamond of 1944 by a parade of military vehicles. The drivers stayed at the Hermitage.)

The end of the war, as far as the Hermitage was concerned, September 3rd, 1944

For the Brothers at the Hermitage, and for the French people in and around Lyons, the date, “September 3rd, 1944”, was the end of the war. The entry in the Annals is as follows:

The “Te Deum” is the traditional hymn of thanksgiving in the church.
The Jubilee celebrations at the Hermitage, fifteen days later, of 22 Brothers celebrating 50 years of Religious Life, would have had the added light-hearted joy of the end of the war. Add to that 3 young Brothers arrived the following month to begin the Scholasticate; and different candidates headed to St. Etienne and to Lyon for their Brevet exams. So, things were getting back to normal. Then in November we read that Tavernier Benoit “having attained the canonical age took the religious habit after Mass, taking the name Brother Benoit-Marcellin.”

1944 French and German (and Australian) Brothers killed in the War
In the Chronologie of the Institute the following entry is found:
“Statistics of Brothers killed in the Second World War: In Europe, a total of 540 Brothers were mobilized, of which 5 died in France, one in Athens and one in Syria. Of the 130 Brothers mobilized in Germany approximately 50 died, one of whom died in Dachau. Three Australian Brothers disappeared, presumed killed, in the Solomon Islands during the War in the Pacific.”

1945, French Brothers, prisoners of war, return from Germany. and a German Brother POW arrives at the Hermitage
An entry in the Annals of 17th May 1945 reads: “Ces jours-ci, plusieurs Freres prisonniers revinrent d’Allemagne” (“Over these days several Brothers who were prisoners of war returned from Germany”). And in August 1945 there is mention of a special festive dinner for the Brothers liberated from Germany. Interestingly, too, there is the mention of a German Brother, Brother Joseph Lazarus Kissler, a Prisoner of War held by the French in St. Etienne, being given permission to be cared for in his convalescence at the Hermitage. And during his stay he recommends two German Prisoners of War who would be suitable for working at the Hermitage as part of their incarceration. The two that he recommends are good workers and their help much appreciated. They stayed till March 1947 when they were repatriated. They were replaced with younger prisoners. Brother Joseph Lazarus (pictured) gains his repatriation back to Germany and leaves the Hermitage on the morning of 9th March 1946. It was said that during his time, “he had shown himself to be an edifying and good confrere.” After returning to Germany he was appointed to the Brothers schools in Straubing, Mindelheim and Recklinghausen and later to Saint-Gingolph in Switzerland and Vaduz in Liechtenstein. Retiring with ill health to Furth, he died in 1977.

German Prisoners of War arrive for Mass, 1946
The first group of German prisoners, 35 in number, mentioned as visiting the Hermitage to attend Mass was on 27th October. Then on 29th December 23 visited with the Hermitage chaplain celebrating. They sang three hymns in German, which was said to be beautiful, clear and harmonious, and perfectly in unison. They then visited the museum and returned to their camp at Varizelle delighted.
While the Second World War raged, 1940 brought its own tragedy to the Hermitage in the shape of a fire. The following is a very edited summary from the *Annals* of the Hermitage:

**Other miscellaneous events from 1940 (from *Annals* of the Hermitage)**

- **April 1st**: Roof of the Novitiate finished; work begins to make the roof of the old dormitory of St. Louis Gonzaga the same level as the big dormitory.
- **April 4th**: Sale of the whole factory and contents and looms of Thouilleux to Mr. Poyeton of St. Julien.
- **April 14th**: Scholastics take a holiday; dinner at Col de Doizieux, then climb to Mt. Pilat, La Jasserie, Bessat, La Valla, Hermitage. Great day – a bit trying; War refugees; beds taken from La Valla. 25 young Brothers from Arlon given shelter. Brother Assistant General shows them the house and property; they were able to help with a lot of work, repairs, etc.
- **June 6th**: Centenary of Father Champagnat’s death; feast-day – meditation etc.
- **June 18th**: The Arlon young Brothers pack their bags and leave on foot for Doizieux and Pelussin; then to Aubenas via La Louvesc; reach St. Felicien – the Germans moving down the Rhone valley; postulants and novices on the march – like 1903 again. Germans had occupied St. Chamond (Story in box).
- **June 20th**: Terrible rainstorms; a barrel blocked the canal entrance (near the fowlhouse) water poured over the Novitiate yard and flooded the house; some retaining walls were washed out.
Important repeal of repressive law, September 1940
From the 1940 chronology of the Institute we read: “3rd September: In France, a decree of Marshal Petain: ‘The law of 7th July 1904, for the suppression of Congregations, is abrogated; and likewise Article 14 of the law of 1st July 1901 against associations.’ (Newspaper extract from Journal des Debats, Jeudi, 5 Septembre, 1940)
Brother Andre Lanfrey mentions that “The General Council, ‘blessing God for this happy event’, ordered the Brothers ‘to again wear our complete religious garb as soon as possible, at the very latest before the start of school in 1941’ and to resume all the practices laid down by the Rules.”

The accompanying pamphlet appears to have been issued during the 1940s. The recruiting of vocations to the Brothers was a constant activity.

June 6th, 1941, belated Centenary of death of Marcellin Champagnat
Celebrations on the actual centenary of the birth of Father Champagnat had to be postponed due to the war. But there were celebrations at Marlhes in 1941. The Scholastics from the Hermitage led the singing at the various celebrations.
Miscellaneous events of 1946-1947

- Big celebration for Brothers making the vow of stability and Ruby and Golden Jubilees *
- The Postulancy was “restored” after an interruption (15th October) *
- Visit by new Superior General, Brother Leonida (pictured). Great reception and ceremonies with specially composed songs in 3 parts (words by Brother Pierre-Raphael and music by Brother Henri-Emile). “Three addresses were made to the Reverend Brother, one by Brother Pierre-Augustine, another by a postulant and the third by a Junior.” There was singing by the Scholastics and the Juniors and toasts. And after some recreation there was visit to the chapel and the recitation of the rosary, and at the request of the Reverend Superior the song “Cantique a N. D. de l’Hermitage” was sung. *
- Local municipal elections were voted for and a referendum on the Constitutions of the Republic also. *
- The showing of films became more frequent. *
- 11 Scholastics went to St. Chamond to do a course of “pre-military preparation”... to join “the class of ’48” *
- The large number of Juniors for 1947 is given as 246!

Some miscellaneous events from 1948, taken from the Hermitage Annals

- April: some windows in the community refectory in bad state were replaced.
- Both refectories were repainted by 2 German prisoners, with the help of another from Lavalla, a plasterer by trade, they replaster the Infirmary corridor.
  - Much repair to mattresses by two tradesmen who came – there was v. great need; Also, much washing of blankets, pillow covers, etc. – long years – v. great necessity!
- August: Scholastics of St. Genis, on holidays to Pelussin, come over to us; they arrive shortly before evening meal, spend part of the next day here and leave after dinner passing through Doizieux.
- August 23rd – return visit: the Scholastics leave here at 7.00am, pass through Doizieux where they had to undergo an examination in Gregorian Chant by Father Bounel, who directs in this area study sessions in the chant; the Scholastics had not seen the full programme of the examination and so it was postponed. They reached Pelussin about 7.00pm, tea and bed; next day two Masses – a hot game of football; towards 4.00pm they left and arrived here about 8.30.
- September: the scholastics go to Marlhes for 3 weeks – Brothers make retreat here.
- October: Our 2 German prisoners are repatriated; their going will be felt for the work of the house and property.
- Several members of the Regime [the General Council] come; three of the Brother Assistants still do not know the native country of Father Champagnat.
- December 28th: Scholastics set out on foot for St. Genevillers.

Father Champagnat’s museum-like room, 1940s

The bare, austere arrangement of Father Champagnat’s room at the time of writing (2018) is in stark contrast to the way it was furnished with all manner of mementos of both the founder and Brother Francois around the 1940s. It seemed as if there was an attempt to cram in as many souvenirs as possible. Glass cases displayed extracts from Father Champagnat’s Will, his passport, and notes from his sermons. There were objects including tools and clothing, a bed-warming pan and some vestments. One could have seen the water pitcher that Father Champagnat purchased for Brother Hippolyte. Gilded statues of Saints Louis Gonzaga (pictured earlier in this history) and John Francis Regis were found in the room also. The statue of Our Lady from the first chapel, the cherry-wood door of the large bed in the Donnet house was also displayed along with Brother Francois’ prie-dieu, his “brevet” and his clock. One of the Ravery portraits in a gilded frame was displayed on the wall.
A photographic record of the Hermitage in 1948

Most happily there survives at the Hermitage an album of beautiful and clear photos of life at the Hermitage in 1948. The youngest boys are Juniors, the older young men are Postulants and the young Brothers are Novices and/or Scholastics. And there are photos of elderly Brothers, presumably from the infirmary. The photos speak for themselves:

Of the Juniors pictured, several did not proceed to the Novitiate; two became Brothers for a time; one died at St. Genis-Laval; one died in an accident in New Caledonia and two continued as Brothers in New Caledonia.
Snapshots from 1948
Recruiting brochure, 1949

Brochures like this, aimed at attracting boys to consider joining the Brothers, were common in Brothers’ schools throughout the world in the 1940s and 1950s.

Some miscellaneous events of 1949

- March 2nd – first snow of the year.
- May: Collapse of the roadway towards the junction of our road with the Lavalla-St. Chamond road.
- June: Scholastics go by truck to La Vouvesc; on way home visit to Graix, “Memorare” – they had refreshment among the broom in flower.
- A Sister died at St. Mechilde’s; we go to Mass and lend a lot of things for funeral.
- September: The Scholasticate is being remodelled to take the higher class of the Juniors; later, “The Juniors return to Lavalla.”
- October: Mr. Bache, master-tradesman of Lavalla, comes to sweep out all the chimneys; in the evening the heaters are lit – to everyone’s satisfaction.

Some miscellaneous events of 1950

- April 5: Restoration work was begun on the Way of the Cross in the wood above the stables and also the Calvary; it was blessed and opened again for use in July. The painters also painted all the new crosses and the statues; inner court, St. Mary’s; Infirmary court, great cross of the plane-trees, cemetery, Our Lady of the Ivy in front of the Novitiate – at present the Juniorate. On the entrance doorway “Missions of Oceania” was painted out and a much more meaningful “Notre Dame de l’Hermitage” painted instead. On account of the works being done on the water-canal leading to the turbine, the funeral procession was cut short.
- September: Br. Jules-Victorin came to check the documentation of the history of our venerable Founder, with Mr. Arnaud, a descendant of the Champagnat family; he will then go to Marlhes. Father Coste, S.M., came to say Mass before leaving for Le Tchad.
- November: For several weeks this region has suffered from drought; we have never seen the water so low in the dam of La Rive. Specialists have tried to cause rain – but it fell in areas where it was not needed. Thank God we have water from our own spring.
The 8th July 1950, Franciscan priest, Father Bertrand from St. Etienne, officiated at the inauguration of the new Stations of the Cross (pictured). The annalist remarks that the ceremony was “very interesting”, taking an hour and a quarter.

The coloured Stations being replaced (one pictured) is believed to have been the set of Stations presented to Father Champagnat by Monsignor de Pins at the time of the blessing of the first chapel in 1825. The black and white photo shows the new Stations in situ in 1951.

The number of Juniors in 1950 was around 35, and in 1954 there were 54 Juniors.

Celebration of the declaration of the Assumption of Our Lady, 1950

The following extract from the Annals tells of the special celebrations at the Hermitage on the occasion of the declaration by Pope Pius XII, in November 1950, of the doctrine of the Assumption of Our Lady.

The annalist gives special mention to a particularly ornate gothic chasuable that was made in honour of the new feast. It was designed by M. Giron of St. Etienne and made by the Benedictine Sisters of Pradines (Loire). Besides solemn High Mass there was consecration to Our Lady by the Provincial and then adjourning to the big refectory for a special feast at which everyone “without exception” – which included the Juniors -- took a little glass of the liqueur of the Hermitage.

(The photo of the chasuable may be the one mentioned in the above description. It is from the stored historical collection of vestments held at the Hermitage, and follows the description in a number of aspects.)
The black and white photo is from a magazine, dated 1950; so, the two photos present a before-and-after. A summary of entries in the Annals of the Hermitage for 1951 includes: “May: The work of repairing the chapel begins tomorrow, 15th, Pentecost Tuesday. “The precious remains of Father Champagant and of Br. Francois have been removed from it.” The inauguration ceremony after the repairs was featured in L’Essor”, 22nd July 1951; Rev. Brother Superior General and two Assistants; paintings in the sanctuary; decorations on the walls; at 3.00pm the juniors’ choir gave a sacred concert from the steps of the sanctuary. New statue of Cure d’Ars; Father Ronzon, S.M. newly ordained.”

Such is a lightening summary. However an article in the Bulletin of the Institute of 1951 gives a much fuller account of the changes. It declares that “It’s with pleasure that the whole institute hears that the chapel of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage … is to be restored and happily transformed.” The descriptions are based on an article in l’Essor de Saint-Etienne, 15th July, 1951. It mentions that the Stations of the Cross have been replaced. See the accompanying photos of the replacements… portraits rather than scenes. The altar rails were removed; pews replaced the chairs in the nave of the chapel and neon lights were installed on the chapel walls. The timber features of the sanctuary were varnished and the walls and vaulted ceiling were painted in a simple, light colour.

The solemn inauguration, conducted on 15th July was attended by the Superior General, two Assistants General and the Provincial Council as well as the Brothers Superiors of nearby communities along with many of the Brothers; the Chaplains of the Hermitage and LaValla and many lay people. High Mass was celebrated at 9.30am with the Juniors singing the Gregorian Mass of the Day “to perfection”. This was followed by dinner for all the attendees and regaled by three songs presented by the Juniors.

At 3.30 a sacred concert was presented by the Juniors who, robed in white with gold edging and wearing small wooden crosses on their breasts, presented a dozen pieces in several parts on the theme Paradise, accompanied gently on the organ by Brother Henri-Emile. The ceremonies ended with Benediction and a sermon on the meaning of the restorations.

[While the accompanying photo of a white-robed choir in the sanctuary is from an earlier decade, it is presented here to evoke the 1951 scene.]

Pictorial presentation of the Province of the Hermitage (including the Hermitage itself) 1951

To honour the Superior General’s, Brother Leonida’s, Silver Jubilee as a Brother (1901-1951), each Province throughout the world presented him with a pictorial and statistical summary of their Province. And so we are lucky to have – kept at the Archives of the General House in Rome – the presentation book which includes numerous photos of the Hermitage in 1951. Some of the photos are from the 1948 collection of photos, but some others are presented here to further bring the Hermitage alive at the mid-point of the twentieth century.
Features of Hermitage life in the 1950s

The activities of the Juniors are a very prominent feature of Hermitage life during the 1950s. There is mention of their coming back from holidays, of being visited by the Juniors from LaValla, of going on outings to nearby towns, and singing in nearby churches on special occasions, and enjoying the occasional movie. So, the reader might imagine the activities featured in the foregoing photos from 1948 continuing, bringing chatter, laughter and song, as well as outdoors games here, there and everywhere around the Hermitage. Favourite outing destinations included Izieux, Valfleury (pictured), Pilat, Molsalathé, Rochetaillies, Bessat, Saut de Gier, Puy and also Lyon. The cinema presentations were provided by M. and Ms. Roynard. In 1954 there were 30 Juniors. There was, also, the occasional visit of groups of schoolchildren (and others) to learn about Father Champagnat and pray at his tomb. Scattered through the Annals of the 1950s is the remark: “La serie des visites continue”

Some miscellaneous events of 1952

- January: Workmen in the crypt of souvenirs; walls and partitions covered with fibro-cement sheets, patterned like green veined marble.
- February: A new carpet for the sanctuary; Fr. Coste says Mass for us, Abbe Vignon, of Lyons, but living in Paris, comes to see details for a popular LIFE of Father Champagnat; he visits Lavalla and Marhles also.
- April: a new stove is installed, a fuel-oil burner.
- May: Juniorate chapel at Lavalla was repaired and repainted; the iron railing along the Gier towards the Thoullieux factory was erected by the Commune of St. Martin-en-Coailleu – a much appreciated work.
- October: We receive from Paris the newly published popular LIFE of Father Champagnat.

Some miscellaneous events of 1953

- January: We have taken on a young servant, Marcel Granet, 24, -- St. Julien-en-Jarez.
- March: He has taken the job as cook; his beginnings are satisfactory.
- June: After long months of silence, the worn-out clock of the house has been replaced by the present electric clock that strikes every quarter of an hour.
- September: A mechanical thresher came (probably for the first time) to thresh our barley; work began at 7.30 and finished at 10.30am.

Two events recorded from 1954

- June: Arrived about 40 boys and 5 or 6 Brothers from the Caille Orphanage; short visit, then on to Pilat, etc. [The accompanying photo could be of this visit]
- Visit by Pensionnat de Valbenoite, 1954 (pictured below)
Early research, 1954

The title page to the right of a work of scholarship by Brother Louis-Laurent on the origins of the Brothers is presented here to show that as early as 1954 there was research progressing into the Life of Father Champagnat and the early days of the Little Brothers of Mary. Previously most knowledge had been gleaned from the 1856 *Life of Joseph Benedict Marcellin Champagnat* by Brother Jean-Baptiste. Brother Louis-Laurent became better known as “Paul Zind”, one of the remarkable scholars whose research into primary sources assisted the revising of our knowledge of Father Champagnat and the foundation years of the Brothers.
CHAPTER 22 The Beatification of Marcellin in 1955, and the building of the chapel annex for his tomb.

The building of the chapel within the Hermitage chapel for the reliquary of Father Champagnat, 1955-56, and the Beatification of 1955

The two photos above show the position of the chapel, pre-1955 and post-1955

Preparation for the Beatification, including the exhumation of Father Champagnat’s bones

Yet again the bones of Father Champagnat were exhumed!

1955 April; in view of the beatification and the need for first-class relics, the Superiors came to the Hermitage along with a Commission of Priests and two doctors, to exhume, identify and remove a small part of the remains of Father Champagnat. All was found to be in perfect state as left in 1920; the bones were still perfectly preserved. After taking was necessary, the precious remains were again treated, placed in a new coffin of metal to await their transfer into the new gilded bronze reliquary on the altar of the new chapel yet to be built.

The Bulletin of January, 1956 speaks of the intense cold at the Hermitage during the whole month of February; water froze and no cement work could be done; for the next three months the work was pushed ahead well, so that all was ready for the end of May.
The “beatification” of Marcellin was huge. For decades Brothers and students had been praying “for the Beatification of Venerable Marcellin”. “Beatification” is the declaring, by the Church, of a holy person to be “Blessed”! It is the last step before the final step of “canonization” – the declaration of the person to be a saint! The Brothers of the Hermitage would have felt that they had a special place in the beatification. They were living in the very house Father Champagnat and the Brothers had built and in which he died. They were close to his reliquary where his mortal remains were venerated.

Beatification of Marcellin Champagnat, Rome, 1955

The following Annals entry is dated 27th May 1955, and lists the fortunate Brothers going by train to Rome for the Beatification. Included are several Brothers celebrating their Golden Jubilees of Religious Life as well as two Juniors.

Hermitage Brothers going to Rome for the Beatification

A future research sleuth might be able to identify which of these Brothers attending he Beatification ceremonies in St. Peter’s Basilica were from the Hermitage community. And when they returned they would have been excitedly asked, “And what was it like?” To which the lucky attendees would almost certainly have replied: “Oh! It’s hard to describe, You would have had to have been there!”
Those remaining at the Hermitage attended Mass in unity with the celebrations in Rome on Pentecost Sunday, 29th May 1955, the day of the canonisation. Appropriate short homilies were made regarding the “Blessed”, with much singing and celebration. And in the evening the “dinner was most happily fitting the feast.” The accompanying photos show the grandeur of the occasion.
The frescoes were completed in 1958 by M. Gerard Crepin.

The following is an explanation of all the frescoes:

**THE PAINTINGS IN THE COMMUNITY ROOM OF NOTRE DAME DE L'HERMITAGE**

In this room Father Champagnat instructed his Brothers and received the Last Sacraments; here in 1839 Brother Francois was elected Director General; it seemed natural to create something of a Marist atmosphere to remind Brothers and visitors of the well-known spiritual themes of Fr Champagnat. These symbolic paintings were done in 1958 by Fr Gerard Crepin, who also designed the Historic altar beneath the Chapel. The strongly-marked black lines that flow through the paintings are intended to show Fr Champagnat's strength of character and enthusiasm; Marist simplicity is recalled through the use of unpainted materials: lime-coated walls, low tones of colour in the paintings, ceiling in old gold, and oak woodwork stained with white-lead; such was the usual decor for rooms in the days of our Founder. These are symbolic rather than abstract paintings, and suggest spiritual themes more than objects and scenes; for example, not the Blessed Virgin, but her attitude of humble confidence. Hence the paintings require time for reflection; they are powerful sources of inspiration and of prayer.

This is how they are arranged in sequence in the community room:

**RIVER SIDE**

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**COURTYARD SIDE**

Paintings 1-5 may be taken as illustrating the life of a Brother given to God and lived according to Fr Champagnat's teaching and practice: thus, when you come to the Hermitage to be a Brother with Fr Champagnat, you bring your human gifts, (No 1, water and wine), but they will be transformed into something better for God. By your work and goodwill (No 2), you work for God in a spirit of generous sacrifice signified by the lamb (No 3); you live like Mary (No 4) in her acceptance of God’s calls; you keep close to Jesus (No 5) humble, loving, suffering, and so come to Bethlehem (No 6) with the Magi and shepherds, there to find Jesus and Mary in the bosom of the Church. These paintings, then, symbolise the main outlines of the formation of a Brother - as taught by Fr Champagnat. Paintings 6-10 symbolise the life of a Brother when he begins his apostolate in school or wherever obedience sends him; they illustrate Fr Champagnat's main teaching re the Brothers' work in the apostolate: in his work (No 6) the Brother must rely on prayer to lead souls to God; he is to regard his work as (No 7) a sowing of seeds that will issue forth in new life; he is to work zealously (No 8) in God's garden; he works with all whom God sends him (No 9), doing his best for each; in all his life and work he will be strengthened and inspired by the Spirit (No 10), full of love and enthusiasm. Finally he will come, with the many he has influenced for good, to Calvary and redemption; with Mary and St John he will enter joyous and triumphant into God's eternal kingdom.
Not everyone approved of the frescoes as can be seen in the accompanying terse typed note attached to a photo, found in the archives in Rome, of the room prior to the painting of the frescoes.

**The windows**

The windows were created by Théodore-Gérard Hanssen. He was a renowned Belgian artist who worked mainly in France. Part of his fame was that he created some of the windows in the basilica of Sacre-Coeur in Montmartre in Paris. He died just two years after the completion of these monumental windows at the Hermitage. Each window tells a story from the life of Blessed Marcellin along with symbolic motifs. The scenes feature the young Marcellin with sheep at Rosey; his call to vocation; as a seminarian teaching catechism at Marles; the pledge of the early Marists at Fouviere; Champagnat receiving Gabriel Rivat, his first recruit; the young vicar at LaValla; the story of the loss in the snow; Mass during the construction of the Hermitage; Father Champagnat blessing his Brothers from his deathbed; the expansion of the Institute. In the centre is Blessed Marcellin in heaven with the Virgin Mary. Amongst the symbols represented are Charity, Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.

**The Reliquary**

The Reliquary is a masterpiece of the goldsmith's art; it was made by Mr. Cheret in Paris; it is a small coffin in gilded bronze, 1 metre long, ¾-metre wide and 60 cms high. The two sides contain large enamel panels, 32 cm by 22 cm; the Blessed welcomed by Our Lady; then there are the two mottoes. The horizontal bands contain enameled, 15 in number, rich in colour. Inside is the new metal coffin containing the precious remains of Father Champagnat. The reliquary rests on an altar of grey granite, 2 m. 20 long, 1 m. wide, so placed as to allow freedom of passage all around; it stands on a massive block of the same granite while its ends are supported by three columns of rose granite. One single step leads to the altar and on it in mosaic is the Marist monogram. Mass is often said at this altar.

Do we say that that is all that remains of Father Champagnat? The new chapel, and reliquary were the gift of Brothers and boys from all over the world. The chapel was blessed by Cardinal Gerlier on 27th May 1956 in presence of some 3,000 people.
The following story of the creation of the beatification portrait is given on the Champagnat.org website: “Tito Ridolfi was the painter chosen to create the official portrait for the beatification of Marcellin Champagnat. He enthusiastically accepted the commission and set to work. Periodically, Br. Alessandro di Pietro, Postulator, would go to check the progress of his work, usually accompanied by another Brother. Br. Alessandro was not averse to expressing his observations. Mr. Ridolfi, quite exasperated by the many instructions he was getting, said he had put all his passion into painting the portrait, that he would often kneel before it, thinking of how he had wanted to give the Brothers the best of what he considered the results of his insight, after having analyzed the different pictures that had been provided him. When he showed the Brothers his sketch, their response was favorable. While working on the portrait, Mr. Ridolfi unexpectedly suffered the loss of his sight. Once more, he knelt before the image of the Founder, this time asking that his vision be restored. It was, partially, enabling him to finish the portrait, but not to faithfully reproduce the sketch he had previously done. This difference caused a certain amount of uneasiness among the superiors, which they expressed to Mr. Ridolfi. But the artist was in no condition to retouch the portrait, and the day of the beatification was fast approaching. So, the Founder’s human facial characteristics remained incomplete, lending an angelic transcendence to his face, which would have been agreeable to a certain form of spirituality of the time, but which did not correspond with the original intent of the artist’s rough sketch.”

A note in Brother Owen’s handwriting, in relation to this portrait gives a quotation from the artist, but its source is not given: “I painted Father Champagnat kneeling, for he was essentially a man of prayer; it was because he was that first of all that God made use of him to do great things.”

(Many hundreds of thousands of this “holy card” were distributed to the Brothers’ students throughout the world in the years following the Beatification. It would have been displayed throughout the Hermitage, and as a bookmark in many a prayer and Office book.)

Grand inauguration of the chapel annex to house the relics of Blessed Marcellin

Prior to the actual consecration of the chapel on 27th May 1956, there was a triduum of prayers at the Hermitage. This had followed a series of triduums, commencing in Marlhes the previous October. For the day itself a grand outdoor podium had been erected surmounted by an altar. At 6 O’clock His Eminence Cardinal Gerlier (pictured) arrived and a procession of specially invited guests, priests and religious drew up in front of the chapel, the crowd estimated to be between 2,000 and 3,000. High Mass was celebrated by the Archpriest of St. Chamond. The Scholasticate choir was joined by those of the Juniorates of the Hermitage and LaValla in the singing. “All the Brothers from St. Genis-Laval, with the exception of the sick, came and it would not be an exaggeration to say there were 300 Marist Brothers at the celebration.”

After Mass all were invited to visit an exposition organised in the old scholasticate. And then, at 12.30 the special guests were invited to a banquet in the Juniors’ refectory. There were a number of clergy, religious from different Congregations from around about, lay friends and benefactors, members of the General Administration, the Provincial Administration and the prominent
Brothers of the Province. The choir from St. Genis-Laval entertained the guests with “rare perfection” with selections from their repertoire. Later in the afternoon there was an address by Father Bouvet, Marist Fathers’ Provincial, Benediction, and homage to the relics of Father Champagnat. Pilgrims and visitors came and went to the new chapel to admire and to pray. A plaque was attached to the outside wall of the chapel reading: « Cette chapelle a été érigée grâce aux dons des 250.000 élèves des Frères Maristes du monde entier ». "This chapel has been erected through the donations of 250,000 students of the Marist Brothers throughout the world."

**Great Community Outing for the Beatification, June 7th, 1955**

After rising at 4.30 there were prayers, Mass and communion for those staying, while the travellers left at 6.00am for Mass and Communion at Fouviere. Then continuing to Ars with lunch in a beautiful shelter, the Juniors, combined with those of La Valla and twelve Brothers from the Hermitage community along with two Juniorate chaplains visited the souvenirs and the church of the Cure d’Ars where rosary was recited. Then off to the Trappist monastery of Notre Dame de Dombes, where a monk gave a most interesting tour of the church, the monastery and surroundings. All joined in part of the Office. Then on to the village of Perouges to watch the film “Monsieur Vincent”, starting at 5.30. After that, through Le Mas Riller without stopping to return at 9.15. It was declared to be a great day.
The accompanying page, while only an extract, gives some idea of the steps preceding the Beatification.
1955-6-7 Prominence of Juniors at the Hermitage continues
It is the activities of the Juniors that continue to dominate the Annals of the Hermitage through to 1957. Their studies results are mentioned, and their outings, holidays, visits by parents etc. are also detailed. Following the Beatification in 1955 they watched films of the ceremonies. And various popular films of the time were also enjoyed; the accompanying posters telling of some of them. On December 8th, 1957, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a football match was played between the Juniors and the Scholasticates, which the Juniors won.

1957 Diaorama opened
For many years there had been a display of historical materials and objects below the chapel just near the front door of the Hermitage. Taking different forms over the years, it was once again reorganised into various diaoromas and opened in April 1957. These displays were popular with visitors and pilgrims.

1958 Formation of the Champagnat Centre at the Hermitage
As will be seen in the pages that follow, this Centre was responsible for a great deal of published information on the history of the Institute and the life of the founder. In September 1959 it was announced that the Provincial had appointed Brother Remi-Antoine to be the director of this Centre, and “everyone rejoiced at this announcement.” Pilgrimage guidelines to the surrounding Marist places were available as well as a considerable collection of brochures, pictures and memorabilia.
More frequent visits/pilgrimages recorded in late 1950s and through the 1960s

“Since the beatification of our Blessed Founder in 1955, the movement of pilgrims to Notre Dame de l’Hermitage has increased significantly. Every Sunday and often also on week days, the faithful come to pray in the small chapel. Some are from nearby, but other groups are coming from further distances in France. Former students of the Brothers come. Sometimes even groups from other countries come to pray at the tomb of our Blessed Founder.”

An article from the Bulletin of the Institute from 1960 tells of visits by Parish Groups, Catholic Action movements, students from Brothers’ schools, first communicants amongst others. A group of Alumni from Belgium came in July 1959, and were joined by another group from Marseilles. And in December 1959, presidents and representatives of Former Students of the Province of the Hermitage accompanied by Brother Directors, gathered for a day of prayer and study.

Note De La Salle Brother pilgrims, and pilgrims from Birmingham, England, arriving with their own bus.

Hermitage pilgrimage to Lourdes, 1959

1958 marked the centenary of the apparitions of Our Lady to St. Bernadette at Lourdes. During 1959 a pilgrimage was organised by the Brothers at the Hermitage Province to visit Lourdes. The accompanying photo shows the large group participating. On 23rd July at the end of the retreat the names of the Brothers from the Province of the Hermitage were announced. They rose at 3.45am on 31st July to head off after Mass
and breakfast into the brisk morning accompanied by the prayers and well-wishing of the community, and their bidding to take the affection of all the Brothers of the Institute to Our Lady of Lourdes.

— Le 8 : Les Grands Noces de Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux.

— Le 9 : Les premiers communiant de Veauce viennent assister à une messe d'action de grâces à l'autel du Bienheureux. Le Père de Saint-Victor avec M. le Curé.

— Le 11 : Les Juvénistes de Ferrières.

— Le 12 : Les Cours Vaillants (une centaine) viennent avec leur aumônier célébrer une messe à son autel, etc.


Et le dernier jour du mois ?

— Le 30 : Les premiers communiant de Neulise, avec M. le curé. Un Père Mariste avec un groupe de jeunes de Lyon. La paroisse du Sacré-Cœur de Saint-Etienne, avec ses premiers communiant. Un groupe de Frères Maristes de la Province de Saint-Genis.

**Visitors during June 1960**

Translation is hardly necessary for the reader to see the different groups who visited during just the ONE month of June 1960 (see box). See, too, the cover and a page from a brochure for pilgrims of the same period, and one of the postcards from the Champagnat Centre.
The above provides a sample of the materials available from the Champagnat Centre

Welcoming the statue of Our Lady of Fatima and solemn procession, 1958

A religious phenomenon sweeping the entire world during 1958 was the pilgrimage of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima. The statue was taken from country to country and grand processions and prayer services were conducted, supported by the attendance of tens of thousands of the faithful. Such ceremonies were conducted at the Hermitage while the statue was visiting France. Much preparation was made to decorate the route the procession would take, finishing in the chapel for a special High Mass. The statue, too, was taken to the infirmary to the Brothers who were not able to go to the chapel.
Long and illustrative life of Brother Henri-Emile (1874-1961)

The accompanying notes in pencil follow the Annals entries for 5th-7th December 1960 – the last entries in Brother Henri-Emile’s distinctive handwriting. His long life of 88 years reflects the history of the Hermitage over 70 years. He was a Scholastic at the Hermitage in 1890, and after a short appointment at St-Etienne Mi-Careme, returned to the Hermitage in 1891. He experienced the upheavals of 1903 and went with many others to Santa Maria in Italy, as well as other appointments at the formation houses that had moved there. He was Master of Novices at San Mauro in 1912, returning to the Hermitage as Master of Novices in 1939.

Throughout his life he loved music and composed numerous pieces for different occasions, including a Farewell Song to the Brothers leaving France at the time of the expulsions, and a special piece for the Feast of the Assumption.

An accomplished organist, he saw the removal of the chapel organ in 1903, but happily was present at the installation of the organ in 1941, immediately performing on it and accompanying the singing in the chapel. In his list of appointments, we find: “1944: Hermitage Organiste”.

A translation of Brother Antoine Parrel remarks are as follows:

“These unsigned Annals were written by Brother Henri-Emile (Johannes Juthier) who died on 24th November, 1961. He recorded regularity, singing, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Masses, pilgrimages, retreats, care for visitors, examination results, the work of the Juniors, Novices and Scholastics. All this very serious! But what was not mentioned were the interesting and amusing bits. He kept to a particular genre. While he did not bend the truth, he tweaked it somewhat!”

Scholastic moves to St. Genis-Laval and Juniorate morphs into “Foyer des Jeunes”

During 1964 the Scholastics left the Hermitage and moved to St. Genis-Laval. And while the Juniors are recorded as returning to the Hermitage after their holidays in September 1965, we find that by 1969 the group of young people living and studying at the Hermitage is called “Foyer des Jeunes” with three Brothers staffing it. The Foyer des Jeunes was a small school at the Hermitage for boys in the area, whether they expressed an interest in the life of the Brothers or not. Exactly when this arrangement ceased was not determined by the present researcher, but it was believed to be in the early 1970s.

The Hermitage in 1969 consisted of just three groups: the community, the infirmary and the Foyer des Jeunes.

1964 Installation of a lift, and altar facing the people

During 1964 there was the installation of a lift “for the benefit of the infirmary”, but, of course, for everyone else’s benefit as well! And the next year, following the reforms of the Vatican Council, the chapel altar was arranged so the priest faced the people.
“Route Champagnat” becomes a “must” for visitors.

We read, too, that Brothers from various provinces, in their pilgrimages to the Hermitage “travelled the Route Champagnat: a circuit of a hundred kilometers by car, to visit Saint-Genest-Malifaux, Marlhes, Le Bessat, La Valla, as well as the Hermitage. The lucky recipients told us of their entire satisfaction.”

(Photo shows Belgian pilgrims to the Hermitage, 1962)

Who remembers slides?

The accompanying photos have been printed from slides taken by two Australian Brothers in 1964 as part of their pilgrimage associated with their attending the “Second Novitiate”. (They kept these slides from that time for 50 years!).

You will notice two slides from the “Historial”, the display of Champagnat, Hermitage and Marist history, housed at that time, and for many subsequent years, below the chapel.
Sets of slides sent around the world

“The Brothers’ press service launched a year ago [1959], to provide all the Provinces with up to date material on the Hermitage and everything about Blessed Champagnat and Venerable Brother François, developed two welcomed additions: A series of 56 slides (Gamet Art Direction) and ‘postcards’ in color ... which sold out fast! Many slide sets were sent to all the Provinces of the Marist world. Demand is heavy. This lively material in rich color allows a better understand of the life of our Blessed Founder and the origins of the Institute. Each user can adapt the material and prepare a recorded audio tape to accompany it. For Brothers responsible for vocations and recruitment, it will be very useful. The first part (1-32) embodies the life of the Blessed and the founding of the Institute. The second part (33-36), takes us on the ‘Route Champagnat’ and ends with a ‘vision of the final dream’ in a powerful invitation to answer the Master’s call. The music is cheerful and lively, which adds to the beauty, cohesion and interest of the presentation”.

[From a Bulletin de l’Institute article]
Dedication of Gouttard statue, June 6th, 1963

This statue by sculptor Gabriel Gouttard was blessed by Mons. Maziers on “Champagnat Day”, 1963. M. Gouttard gives this explanation of his work: “I am worried to have to say something of this statue, for I think I have no more to say of it than a mother has of her newly-born child; she has done her best ... and so have I. I cannot call it a failure – that would not be true; nor can I say it is beautiful, as that would be too pretentious. What I simply ask of you – because I know quite well that this statue is not made to please everyone straightway – is that you try to contemplate it very calmly, very patiently, ... to become acquainted with it.

“This statue is not there just for you to look at; it is there for you to make use of; and to make use of a statue means, I think, that you should try to pass beyond it, to try to learn what it has to say to you, i.e. what Father Champagnat has to say to you and to each one. If this statue says nothing to you, it is perhaps because I have failed in my intention; but it may also be that you have not been sufficiently ready to learn.” He explained which characteristics of Father Champagnat he hoped the statue would enshrine in the following words: “... a man, such as one calls a man, tough like the granite of his native district whom grace has polished to a smooth stone changed into a form of humility, poverty, welcome ... a welcome to the less favoured, so that they also may become men – sons of Abraham, branches of the same trunk on the cross.”

Popular image of the time

The accompanying image, by J.B. Conti, is dated as 1964, and it became a much-reproduced card and was known to tens of thousands of Brothers’ students around the world during the 1960s. The image, sixty years later, is an almost exact copy of the painting by Australian Brother Stanislaus Healey, which he brought to the General Chapter of 1903, and which was then reproduced in hundreds of thousands of copies by Benzinger Brothers.
CHAMPAGNE PILGRIMAGE

May 1973

THREE, MAY 20th: Four Lamps - 7.30 a.m.

7.30 a.m. : Breakfast
8.30 : Departure for Le Neillère
10.30 : Departure for Fournières.
12.00 : Arrival at Fournières. Mass, Visit, Lunch.
1.30 : Departure for Taillé.
2.30 : Arrival at Taillé. Supper and lodging at Taillé.
(See pages 15 to 17)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21st: Ave - St. Genis - Hermitage

7.30 a.m. : Breakfast
8.30 : Departure for Ave.
10.45 : Departure for St. Genis.
11.30 : Arrival at St. Genis. Visit.
12.00 : Lunch at St. Genis.
1.30 : Visit to the Hermitage.
(See pages 15 to 21)

TUESDAY, MAY 22nd: Champagnat Route

7.30 a.m. : Breakfast
8.00 : Departure from La Valla.
9.00 : Mass at La Valla.
10.30 : Departure for Le Bezet. Visit to the church and Montagne House. Ride to Mount Plast.
12.00 : Lunch at L'Hermitage.
2.00 p.m. : Departure via Le Bezet and St. Genest-Malifaux.
3.30 : Arrival at Le Rosay. Visit to Marcelet church and school.
5.00 : Return via St. Sauveur and Bourg-Arsental. Stop at Graix: "Moncure House".
7.00 : Supper at the Hermitage.
(See pages 23 to 27)
CHAPTER 24 1970s Research scholarship – “Rediscovering Champagnat” – leads to impetus for pilgrimages

Increase in Visits and Pilgrimages to Notre Dame de l’Hermitage

The Guide for a visit to the Hermitage -- the cover and page 17 reproduced here -- is typical of the abundance of such guides for visitors and pilgrims gathering pace in the 1970s. Several Brothers were particularly instrumental in researching the Life of Father Champagnat from original sources and giving lectures and printing brochures spreading the latest insights that thorough research had found. One of the prominent figures in this resurgence of scholarly research was Brother Alexandre Balko. While recognising that Brother Jean-Baptiste, the author of the Vie to J. B. M. Champagnat, first published in 1856, was a man of his time with the attitudes expected of a biographer of a saintly figure in the middle of the nineteenth century, he also greatly regretted his lack of thorough scholarship and his inclination to suppress certain matters (if he knew them) and to highlight only clearly praiseworthy aspects of Father Champagnat’s life and
personality. Brother Balko set himself the task of “finding the truth” of the full story of Father Champagnat’s life, including that of his family, particularly his father.

The reader may like to read from Brother Balko’s own lecture notes to better understand his attitude to his task as historian and his analysis of the portrait of Marcellin Champagnat handed down to us from Brother Jean-Baptiste. Brothers throughout the world, right up to the 1960s, studied Brother Jean-Baptiste’s *Life* to the exclusion of any other … there being no other. This had now begun to change.

It was common from the 1970s onwards for Brothers attending the “Second Novitiate”, whether in English or French or Spanish, to include an extended visit to the Hermitage where they attended talks which explained the latest research, much based on the Letters of Father Champagnat, as well as books of Accounts, and material held in the State Archival repositories.

The box that follows is a continuation of Brother Balko’s explanations of the limitations of our understanding of the Life of Father Champagnat if limited to a reading of the *Life* by Brother Jean Baptiste.

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### II

**BR. JEAN-BAPTISTE WAS A WEAK HISTORIAN**

+ He had little preparation.
+ He did not take very much trouble to collect information on Fr. Champagnat from outside the Brothers themselves and their written testimonies he received. e.g. The intimate friend of Fr. Champagnat, his constant counsellor in his difficulties, Father Jean-Louis DPLAY, is not even mentioned.

+ Br. Jean-Baptiste lacks concern for historical details; and so it is that he gives us only vague ideas of the family and the youth of our Founder. Really, it is only ascetical doctrine that interests him. He was in a unique position as an historian, since his work was undertaken almost at once after the death of Father Champagnat.
+ He omits very many details, especially those which did not agree very well with his tastes, such as the political career of Jean-Baptiste Champagnat, Marcellin’s father.
+ He touches up historical statements and even the writings: the youth of Marcellin, his resolutions…
+ He simplifies events and problems, often reducing them to an outline only, which does not give a sufficient idea of the true situation according to the facts; e.g. the attempts made by Father Champagnat to obtain legal authorisation.
+ He suppresses the documentation which the Brothers have sent him, and probably a good deal of Father Champagnat.

### III

**Br. Jean-Baptiste DIFFERED IN CHARACTER from Father Champagnat**

Father Champagnat was a man of heart, full of goodness and sympathy, dynamic, having the relish for temporal affairs …
Br. Jean-Baptiste was cold, intellectual, dogmatic and uncompromising, having only contempt for temporal matters. As the perfect man of his century, he saw nothing else of much concern but “the salvation of the soul”.

**CONCLUSION**

Do not accept the equation: Br. Jean-Baptiste = Father Champagnat; he is a privileged witness, but he has not an absolute value.

Make a new study of Father Champagnat, starting from direct documents in order to acquire a more immediate knowledge of him, and to present him in the manner characteristic of our time.
Brother Romuald Gibson, from New Zealand, was another who spent time researching and analysing aspects of Marcellin’s spirituality. Note that this was in 1971.

“Rediscovering Champagnat” a recurring theme

The 17th General Chapter of 1976 inspired a Brother from the United States to prepare a simple booklet for use at a Retreat in the USA soon afterwards, presenting to the Brothers some of this new research. Note his use of the description, “Rediscovering”. He refers, also, as you can see, to “How recent scientific research has brushed away the 19thC externals and “cobwebs”, so that we are rediscovering the real Champagnat, ...”

In the Introduction of the excellent work of Brother John Coles (1980), the reader will note his subheading to “Champagnat”, namely “Sources for a renewed understanding.” It is reproduced in full here since it summarises what many such similar booklets and materials were saying at the time:

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**Introduction**

Marist historian Father J. Coste, in his *Origines Maristes* refers to Brother Jean-Baptiste’s *Life of Father Champagnat* as a first-hand “irreplaceable source” for our understanding of the Founder.

There is no doubt about that. Our problem is (as Brother A. Balco makes clear) that Brother Jean-Baptiste writes the life of a saint in the moralistic style of hagiography of that time. It is written to edify, so that some of the human qualities and failings that we like to see as part of growth are either glossed over or excluded. Consequently, too, there is an editing of source material that annoys the modern researcher.

So the work of the Marist historians like Brother A. Balco, Brother P. Zind, Father J. Coste, Brother G. Michel, Father S. Hosie, Brother J. Roche, Brother Owen Kavanagh and Brother J. M. Merino has been to extend our understanding and appreciation of our beginnings, by re-examining the source material still available to us. Concerning Champagnat, this includes what we have of his five notebooks of personal resolutions and reflections, his sermon notes, and copies or drafts of 344 of his letters.

Until recently there has been comparatively little of this research available in English. With the advent of English Champagnat Courses in Rome and now at the Hermitage, this situation is changing. Following the Sydney Convocation sessions of 1980, there was a request that more of this research be made available to the Province.

Brother Romuald Gibson (New Zealand) has translated Champagnat’s letters to his Brothers, and I am using his translations in this selection of source material that I offer you as an aid to a renewed understanding of Champagnat. The annotations of some letters are made with the assistance of Brother Owen Kavanagh and Brother Desmond Hornsby (Melbourne).

I am grateful, too, for other assistance given by Brothers Barry Lamb, Brian Horton, Gregory Robinson, Mrs. S. Marsh and Mrs. C. Henry.

**BROTHER JOHN COLES.**

May, 1980.

25th Anniversary of the Beatification.
In 1977, Brother Charles Howard, then Assistant General, asked Brothers John Coles and Desmond Hornsby (from Australia) to come to the Hermitage to study this new scholarly research and then to take back the results of their “renewed understanding”. One of the results was the publication of Brother John Coles’ insights into many selected letters of Father Champagnat with numerous explanatory notes that allowed a fresh understanding of his personality and spirituality. The “Champagnat File (1978)” of Brother Desmond Hornsby (picted) was a collection of many articles, book extracts and translations of Champagnat’s letters, bringing to the general reader some of this new understanding of Champagnat and the early years of the Brothers.

As a result of all this research and its propagation, the pilgrimages that were conducted from the mid-1970s were filled with this up-to-date research. Some pilgrims were lucky enough to have talks by Brothers Alexander Balko or Owen Kavanagh or Gabriel Michel and later Brother Frederick McMahon.

This scholarship, furthermore, stimulated pilgrimages, which now began to flourish even more than before.

**“Route Champagnat”**

“Route Champagnat” becomes a phrase used in English, in spite of its French structure, for similar maps of places to visit while based at the Hermitage. The one reproduced here is from 1970 and accompanies the Guide to the Hermitage that began this chapter.

The Hermitage was also featured on a tourist postcard of St. Chamond at about this time. (The date is uncertain.) Other postcards of St. Chamond, at different times, also show the Hermitage.
Scholars, researchers, lecturers and tour guides: (Besides Brother Balko): Brother Gabriel Michel, Brother Pierre Zind, Brother Frederick McMahon and Brother Owen Kavanagh

The accompanying photo of a group of Brothers on a rocky hillside shows Brother Gabriel Michel in the bottom right corner. It is to serve as an example of many such guided trips to the various Marist and Champagnat sites.

The “portrait” photos are of (top) Brother Gabriel Michel, (middle) Brother Frederick McMahon and (bottom), Brother Owen Kavanagh.
The time will come -- indeed may be here! -- when some readers will never have seen, much less used, a “spirit duplicator”. So below is the sort of primitive machine the accompanying “Walks from the Hermitage” was printed with.

[The reader should be aware that the exact dates are unknown of the various “Guides” etc. in this chapter and the next. And it is not known when longer “live-in” pilgrimages with talks backgrounding the visits to different sites began.]


The “Souvenir”, of which two pages are reproduced here, is representative of the sorts of pictorial and other souvenirs being produced at this time. (The actual date of this Souvenir is not printed on it.)
CHAPTER 25  1975: 150 years anniversary of the opening of the Hermitage; An “International Community” established to welcome Brothers as visitors/pilgrims; Thousands of Brothers pass through; New life at the Hermitage with new purpose

New life at the Hermitage with a new purpose

The following extract from Volume 3 of the History of the Institute by Brother Michael Green mentions the most extraordinary suggestion in 1974 that the Hermitage be sold!! But then the decision to re-animate it and form an International Community of researchers, and make it a centre of renewal and pilgrimage rescued it. Note the names of the early Brothers in this international community in footnote 644 below the extract (see box).

Note, too, the mention by Brother Green that “thousands” of Brothers, calculated at “more than half the Brothers of the Institute” were to pass through in the 30 years from 1975.

A book with the very distinctive black and red mottled cover held in the Archives at St. Genis-Laval, numbers and lists by name all those who passed through the Hermitage between February 1975 and September 1988, and the last entry is numbered 7,948!

Brother Alexandre Balko writing about 1975 and “adapting the old house to its new purpose”

In an article published in FMS in 1975 Brother Balko wrote about “…a happy initiative on the part of the Superiors in this Jubilee Year to make the Hermitage once more the heart of the Institute. Apart from the incidence of the Holy Year, Brothers will recall that it was in 1825 that Fr. Champagnat installed the community in the as-yet unfinished building, so it was exactly 150 years ago. It would be hard to imagine a better way of celebrating this anniversary than by adapting the old premises to present needs, so that once more the house might become ‘the seedbed of the Institute’, as Br. Francois used to call it.”

And in 1980 he looks back to 1975 in the words in the box:
In the 1970s, at least in Australia, no Religious Education class, nor virtually any educational activity, could be conducted without the assistance of the Gestetner! That was the most common brand of duplicator, and it involved flimsy “stencils” and tubes of sticky ink.

The accompanying “cyclostyled” sheet appears to be from Australia (exact date unknown) and serves as an introduction to pilgrims (in this case, Brothers) who are visiting the Hermitage.

And with the coming of 1975, being the 150th anniversary of the Hermitage, there was a surge in interest in visiting the Hermitage, and visits by Brothers became longer and better organised.

Brothers from around the world in their mid 40s usually were given the opportunity of making the “Second Novitiate” and Brothers in their late 60s and 70s attended “Third Age” courses. A pilgrimage to the Hermitage and related Champagnat and Marist sites was usually included in the programmes.
Father Champagnat’s museum-like room in the 1970s – 1980s

The clutter of Father Champagnat’s room noted in the 1940s continued into the 1970s and 1980s.

A reminder is given here of what was crammed into the room:

Several glass cabinets and cupboards held documents, including Father Champagnat’s will, his passport, some sermon notes, his priestly faculties, a rough draft of the Rule, amongst others. Some of his vestments, tools and clothing were on display as well as a bed warming pan and the green water pitcher he had purchased for Brother Hippolyte. There is mention of “the wooden stalls and statue of Our Lady are from the first chapel (1825-36)”.

Gilded wooden statues of St. Louis Gonzaga and St. John Francis Regis were also displayed in the room, along with Brother Francois’ prie-dieu, his clock and his Brevet. There was also the wooden door “of the large bed from the Donnet house”, a reminder of being rescued from being “lost in the snow”.

And displayed in a gilded frame was the second portrait of Father Champagnat by Ravery, painted, it is said, for Brother Benoit Deville. The story of this portrait is told in the narrative of 1841.

This photo was taken in 1984 and shows only one corner of Father Champagnat’s room at the time.

1979 Return of former Juniors and their families

In the publication FMS for July/August 1979, we read: “On Easter Monday, 120 ex-Juniors and their families came to the Hermitage to renew the spiritual links they had with the Institute and bring back memories of their youth.” This shows the affection in which a good number of Juniors held the Juniorate during their early years and the company of the Brothers at the Hermitage (and, presumably, LaValla as well).
Early (Gestetner) Guide notes:

1. To visit St. Chamond and the two churches: Notre Dame, gothic, rebuilt about 1878; Father Terraillon was P.P. here for some 10 years, and the young curates there were a help to Father Champagnat. The square in front is Place Notre Dame. Note the special window for St. John Francis Regis. St. Pierre, on the expressway and faced by the Place St. Pierre; far older than Notre Dame, a renaissance church of special interest & beauty. Father Dervieux F.P., at first prejudiced against Our Founder, became his great friend. TIME: about 45 minutes each way. Another visit could take in the shops, etc. Read the story of the parrot in relation to St. Pierre to get the composition of place.

2. IZIEUX: a much shorter walk; turn left at Le Creux square; the spire of St. André’s church stands out, and this church has a special charm. Pass on through the square and take the road to the left; through the cutting you reach Le Grange Payre, our property from 1833-53. St. Francois’ School of our Brothers is on your right. Further on and below is the large factory making army vehicles. Return by the same road or take the main road from St. Chamond. Time for the round trip - about 1 1/2 hours.

3. FONTAINE is a new suburb of St. Chamond, well-planned and built - shops, residences, church (a new concept). It takes 1 1/2 hours to arrive there via the Boulevard and the Marist Fathers College; the return journey along Rue du General de Gaulle is shorter, but it is better to take the bus which will bring you to Le Creux.

4. ST. MARTIN is a small village 45 minutes away; climb the paths behind the House, pass under the high tension lines and pick up the road at Les Roches; the square white tower of St. Martin’s is your landmark. It was “our parish” for many years; there are date-plaques in the church and many interesting features. Our Brothers taught the school there for long years.

1979 Renovations (see newspaper double spread L’essor de la Loire, 12 January, 1979)
Thousands of Brothers leaving the Institute, and Brother Basilio’s response, 1978-1984 … the Circular on FIDELITY

From October 1978 onwards, the older Brothers at the Hermitage (and throughout the entire Institute) would have been asking one another: “Are you going to write something for the Superior General, Brother Basilio?” What was leading to this discussion was the invitation by Brother Basilio for the older Brothers to write to him, telling of their experience of Religious life from their first joining as young men, through their initial zeal, through mid-life and up to old age; and what had sustained them and nurtured their fidelity. He explained he was drafting a Circular on FIDELITY, but that it would be drawn from the lived experiences of the Brothers. Five hundred older Brothers responded to this initial invitation.

This was at a crucial period in the history of Religious life in the church with many leaving their congregations. Brother Andre Lanfrey in Vol.2 of the History of the Institute mentions it was a time when 3,000 had left in just 16 years. The present researcher has not attempted to find which Hermitage Brothers (if any) decided to leave the Institute; but when friends and colleagues leave there is an acute sadness that must have been experienced by many Brothers at the Hermitage. Brother Basilio’s thinking in preparing his circular on Fidelity in this way can be seen from this extract (in the smaller box) from an early heading, “MY PURPOSE IN WRITING”.

Later, in 1983, he extended the invitation to all the Brothers in the Institute, irrespective of age, and he received 400 further contributions … some, quite possibly again, from Brothers at the Hermitage. The upshot of all this consultation was a Circular running to over 600 pages, fundamentally written by the Brothers throughout the world, sharing their life experiences as Marist Brothers who had stayed the course. The attached box showing very brief statements is only a miniscule fraction of the testimonies of hundreds of Brothers; but it shows the style of presentation.

The initial years of the Institute had difficulties, as did the time of the expulsion of the Brothers from France, and the periods of the two World Wars. But in the last half of the twentieth century there was never such a time of need for encouragement as the 1970s and 1980s. And it was partly by way of his Circular, FIDELITY, of 1984 that Brother Basilio Rueda, Superior General, provided it.

(The reader may be interested to know that the “Cause of Beatification” of Brother Basilio has been begun; that is the first step in recommending to the church that he eventually be declared a saint!)
CHAPTER 26  1980s, including the bicentenary of the birth of Marcellin Champagnat; Enormous gathering of several thousand; Growth of Champagnat Lay Marists; Second Novitiate pilgrimages

Brothers attending the Second Novitiate courses in the 1970s and 1980s were regular residents at the Hermitage for periods of several days attending talks and visiting the various nearby sites of Champagnat and Marist history.

Several photos are displayed here from an English-speaking Second Novitiate group from 1982, and they will give a good idea of the nature of the Hermitage at that time.
These photos of the courtyard are from 1982 also.

Third Age courses begin, 1981, 1982, 1984
The first French language “Troisième Age” was held in 1981 and was led by Brother Alain Delorme. It was conducted at the General House in Rome and its sessions continued there till 2007 and thence at Manziana. Spanish and Portuguese Third Age courses began in 1982 at the General House under the direction of Brother Jose Maria Romero. They continued at various locations: l’Escorial, the General House and Manziana. In 2008 the programme took the name “Amanecer” and was led by Brother Inocencio Calvo.

The first English-language session of the Third Age was conducted by Brother Kieran Geaney at the General House in 1984 and moved to Manziana in 1993.

In a similar manner to the Second Novitiate groups, the various Third Age groups would also spend some time at the Hermitage as a base for talks and excursions.

In November 1987, the English Language Centre in Fribourg (Switzerland) was closed and the building sold. Several five-month English sessions took place from 1989 to 1992, either in Nemi (Italy) or at the General House in Rome. From 1993 onwards, they are held in Manziana (Italy) in the Centre of Spirituality. Since the House at Manziana was closed during the year 2009, a session of Spirituality in the English language, called “Horizons” was held in Nyungwe, Malawi, under the direction of Brother Barry Burns.

Publication of “Achievement from the Depths”, 1984
In 1984 there was the publication of “Achievement from the Depths—A critical historical survey of the life of Marcellin Champagnat 1789-1840” by Brother Stephen Farrell. Researched and written as a doctoral thesis for the University of New England, New South Wales, Australia, it is a work of great scholarship of research, adding enormously to our understanding of the Hermitage from its beginnings in 1824 to the death of Marcellin in 1840.

Some of the material used in this Illustrated History up to the year 1840 has been taken from Brother Stephen’s book.

In his Preface, Brother Stephen makes reference to the limitations of Brother Jean-Baptiste’s 1856 Life of Marcellin Champagnat, somewhat in the same way as the research scholars of the previous decade wrote. He put it this way: “Let it be said, finally, that the work of Br. Jean-Baptiste Furet in 1856 on Marcellin Champagnat was an excellent production in accordance with the requirements of the hagiography of the time. The present author, in presenting this critical historical survey of Champagnat, has had the tremendous advantage of ready access to both
national and local government documents that would simply not have been available to any author in 1856. This is really the first attempt of anyone [1984], I believe, to write a critical history of the man, Marcellin Champagnat.”

(The page with two coloured photos is taken from Brother Stephen Farrell’s thesis, 1983-4)

Brother Owen’s notes

Brother Owen Kavanagh was prodigious in the amount of research he did on innumerable aspects of the life of Father Champagnat and the history of the early Brothers. Shown here are just some of the numerous cards he prepared on a variety of topics … in this case, profiles of various individuals who contributed to the story. Note Brother George Fontana’s appreciation for Brother Owen’s materials is noted in his postcard of thanks.

Pilgrimage publications produced

Brother Frederick McMahon, from Australia, went to the General House in 1985 to do research. He eventually wrote several books on Champagnat, his letters and our Marist origins. One of his most popular (in Australia, at least) was Strong Mind, Gentle Heart, a “popular” and accessible life of Father Champagnat.

He also put together an excellent Pilgrimage guide, entitled Marist Milestones, A Champagnat Pilgrimage, and he accompanied groups to the different sites giving his insightful explanations.

Previously, as can be seen in preceding pages, pilgrimage guides were roughly typed and duplicated. Now begins the more professional production of very professionally printed Guides.
Champagnat Movement … embracing Lay Marists, 1985 onwards

The illustration above by Goyo (2012) showing Brothers Sean Sammon, Benito Arbues and Charles Howard, tells of an important turning point in the history of the Marist Brothers and the Hermitage. It heralds, in a special way, the coming in the years that follow, of many more “Marists” to the Hermitage who are not Brothers. In 1985, the Institute’s General Chapter launched the lay movement called: The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family; describing it in Article 164.4 of the Marist Brothers’ Constitutions as follows: This Movement is “an extension of the Marist Brothers’ Institute. It is a movement for people attracted to the spirituality of Father Marcellin Champagnat. In this Movement, affiliated members, young people, parents, helpers, former students, and friends, deepen within themselves the spirit of our founder; so that they can live it and let it shine forth.
The Institute animates and co-ordinates the activities of this Movement by setting up appropriate structures.”

Brother Charles Howard (pictured), the Superior General, in a Circular of October 1991, explains the purpose of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. The following are extracts from this important circular:

“Dear Friends,
“You may be rather surprised to see this Circular addressed to “friends” rather than to ‘Brothers’. Like all Circulars, it is indeed addressed to the members of the Institute, but the main subject of this one will be of interest to some lay people as well”. Brother Charles goes on to say he sees signs of hope in particular movements in the church and in the “Marist Family”. He writes:

“The second special sign of hope has to do with another way of sharing our charism, through the launching of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. This is another very important event and a cause for great joy. We have not moved in this direction lightly or precipitately, but rather as our response to a call which is being heard more and more clearly in and from many parts of the world.”

Suffice it to say here that from then on throughout the world there were movements to have the Brothers join with like-minded supporters of the Brothers in various forms of joint enterprises. These groups took a variety of forms in different countries, but quickly led to a sense of the wider “Marist Family” that was more all-embracing than just Brothers alone. This, too, led to pilgrim groups of a mixture of Brothers and Lay Marists, and, as time went by, to groups consisting almost entirely of Lay Marists.
Novices and postulants in Marist Spain, 1988 FMS Echo
Brother Pierre Zind, 1988 FMS echo, May
A Night on Mont Pilat, 1983 FMS, No.55

**A NIGHT ON MONT PILAT**

Fifty pupils of our boarding school, St Joseph's at Pelussin, made a prayer march across Mount Pilat, as part of the exercises of the Holy Year.

The march began at the Hermitage, after a Liturgy of Reconciliation.

Nine hours of marching, obviously, with stops for reflection and prayer, in a low enough temperature, gave those young people a taste of asceticism, sure enough, but we hope not without a taste of joy at having accomplished it.

Brother Pierre Zind. Very well known for his thesis (1969) "The New Congregations of Teaching Brothers in France, 1800-1830", Brother Zind died at Mendes, Brazil on 19 March. He was in Brazil to give a lecture series on Marist History and Pedagogy. On the fifth day of the course which was planned to run from 10 to 22 January he was struck by a stroke. Surrounded by the loving care of the Brothers he was able to get well enough for plans to be made for his return to France in the company of Brother Luiz Silveira, the former General Councillor who was organiser of the course. But on the morning of the 19th Brother Zind had a heart attack, which was fatal. He was in his 65th year. As we pray for this confere we should also thank the Lord for his gift of Brother Zind to our Institute.

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**NOVICES AND POSTULANTS IN MARIST SPAIN**

The figure given below ought to make us thankful. The young men in formation in the various Provinces of Spain are the hope of the Institute at the beginning of the second century of Marist presence in this country. Apart from this the Novices of Venta de Banos, belonging to the Provinces of Central America, Venezuela and Ecuador, are a happy reality, and a stimulating example, of what can be achieved by a vocational pastoral that is well planned and enthusiastically carried out.

In this Marist year we remember that each of these young men is "a gift from God and a sign of Mary's care for us". (Const. 53)

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Champagnat Rediscovered, 1983 (a personal story)

An excellent insight into what might have been a typical “conversion” of a Brother thanks to his exposure to the new scholarship on Father Champagnat and the “Route Champagnat” experience. This article, by Brother Desmond Murphy from Australia, was published in the Australian Marist Monthly, September 1983:

“Coming to Fribourg Marist Institute of Spirituality (“Second Novitiate” is passe) after thirty years of profession behind me, I had a problem. Champagnat had ceased being significant in my life for quite a while. It was really an identity problem and it was one of my aims (modest!) to try to resolve it.

“Like many others it could be explained by the rather unattractive man who came from the pages of Brother Jean-Baptiste’s book. And it was decades before I knew this to be a quirk of 19th century hagiography. While I accepted that I could never be a friend of his I could still admire him … but over the years even that faded.

“So, it was with a sense of mission that I went to Champagnat’s own house, the Hermitage, in France …

“We had been well prepared by way of input about the background and the early history of the Order. Brother Balko had spent a week at Fribourg and Brother Romuald had his own sessions. I had hoped for a ‘conversion’.

“I caught my first sight of the Hermitage buried down in the deep valley with steep rocky sides (Not unlike Pot Hole Falls country at Mittagong). It’s been transformed by generations of monks who’ve really made it a nice slice of promised land with the terraced gardens, flowering trees, vegetable gardens, little nooks and charming places tucked away. The building is massive. And that’s where I started to get a new look at Champagnat. To think he could build this for 120 with 30 or so young, sturdy country boys that he had trained back there in 1824 showed much of his vision. And hope, as well as his confidence in his Brothers. And I did kind-of find him lingering around the house. In our very first tour, we spent some two hours steeping ourselves in its past. And his presence is still there. It’s in his corner room, over looking the rushing Gier, only about 15 feet wide, but providing a watercourse of power which the early Brothers used for their mill; he’s in the conference room where he gave his last Will and Testament; his bones are in the beautiful side-chapel, and of course, he’s more palpably present in the old monks who seem to breathe his spirit as they till the gardens or tend the cemetery.

“But I think I discovered him most outside, in his country, on his terrain. Normally we alternated days home with pilgrimages out to places like Le Puy, Marhles-Rosey, LaLuvesc (where Champagnat and his mother pilgrimaged to when he was politely told NOT to come back to the Seminary), Fouviere, in Lyons, Lavalla – just 40 minutes walk away from the Hermitage – Les Maisonettes (Francois’ house), La Neyliere, Father Colin’s house; with days at home. It was on these days out and also the afternoons when I roamed around, and I slowly became aware of the real Champagnat. I’d take his letters with me and wander off up the valleys. At places I’d sit down in the Spring sunshine and read his letters while taking in the scene and imagining the situation. Extraordinary the feel he had for his Brothers and their problems. More extraordinary, for me, was his sense of humour and his quips and jokes.

“On the last day all that came together better. I decided I just had to accept the challenge of getting up to the Pilat range and walk more in his footsteps … actually go tramping with him. It meant a 6-7-hour walk. With a packed lunch and a bottle of Chianti in my bag I headed out at 9.00am. Very light cloud cover with bursts of sunshine encouraged me as I headed up the valley. Up to La Valla, across, down the valley, along the track he used and onto the road which leads past Francois’ tumbling house. Ever-present was the glorious array of Spring colour – floating white or flowering apples or cherries, fresh light green of deciduous trees and splashes of wild flowers … all the while the birds were in fine tune.

“Every hour or so I would take out his letters or very selected chapters from his life – untouched by me for more than two decades and read them with a new pondering and fascination. It was an experience in “transposition”. It was easy to imagine him calling into that hamlet down below – practically unchanged, apart from a tractor in the barn – and see him chatting to the farmer about his crops, cows, his kids, his wife, his problems and his hopes. I think he would have enjoyed a drink before moving on!!! The road ended but the ridge was still up above. There is an old mule track which climbs up quite steeply. A bit of blowing but not really a touch pull and at that stage the rain came briefly. By the time I reached the top it was just midday and so I found a spot out of the wind, with a glorious view down the valley, over the town of St. Chamond in the distance to the hills beyond. With the larks rising and singing I chopped the buns and slurped the wine while reading a bit more.

“It was a lovely walk to Le Bessat where Brother Laurence used to work solo, teaching catechism, but come down to La Valla to enjoy a bit of community and pick up his spuds. Around 2.00pm I moved on down the long slopes. Yes, there’s still a bit of snow around but as I travel on down I feel something of Champagnat’s aspirations … as he trudged down here after visiting the dying lad, just a kilometre over the way.

“Just a kilometre over the way. I also thought that I knew many missionaries who have tougher walks … but then this was the Spring, without the 2 feet of snow and various ‘white-outs’ which could swallow you up and leave you stumbling around in real peril. Champagnat had his experience of this, too. Back down through La Valla again, popping into the school with its near 200 boys and girls … and I felt his presence again in those tiny poor rooms where he’d lived with his Brothers, after moving out of that very comfortable presbytery just 50 metres away … I arrived back at the Hermitage just on 4.00pm, not all that tired but certainly feeling satisfied deep down.

“Our final Mass around the tomb before leaving the next day was a special celebration as we each renewed our vows, using our own formula. I certainly felt more Marist. I found I had discovered him along the way. I was happy to be travelling with him, even if there was still a long way to go.”
Changes to the chapel, 1989

The picture of the traditional statue of “Our Lady of the Hermitage” at the left is taken from a postcard from 1975 while the “new” statue replacing it on the sanctuary is from a book dated 1984 and bearing the title: “Our Lady of the Hermitage”. This is but one example of the changes to a simpler, some might say, minimalist style of decoration of the altar and sanctuary at the Hermitage. This newly installed statue dates back to the very earliest time of Father Champagnat himself. Occasionally Father Champagnat would end a letter to a Brother or group of Brothers with a phrase such as: “I leave you all in the hearts of Jesus and Mary”; meaning both in prayer, but also physically, as the heart was able to be opened allowing the placing of names inside.

The long-standing statue of “Our Lady of the Hermitage” was moved to a position just outside the external door at the back of the chapel (see photo taken 2017). The larger photo of the chapel shows the modern Stations of the Cross individually lit, and the seating arrangements.

Starting on 15th September 1988 and completed (except for the organ, the porch and the parvis) before the great celebrations of Pentecost, 1989, there were considerable alterations to the decorations of the chapel. The reliquary to Saint Priscillian was also greatly simplified and the decorations of the sanctuary considerably simplified, tending towards austere.

Inauguration of the renovations, June 6th, 1989

The grandeur of the occasion can be seen in the accompanying photos with the many robed priests taking part.
The new, and strikingly creative, Stations of the Cross are the work of a Flemish Brother, Brother Jozef Bossaert. (former Master of Novices in Belgium), seen here at his work bench and in a self-portrait.

The *Annals* of January 1990 mentions that the carved statue, “Marie Educatrice”, the work of J. R. Chazalet, was placed in the welcome hall of the Hermitage. After the renovations of 2008-2010 it was placed in the new reception area. In an article in *Le Progress* of 24th January 2018, he goes under the name of Roger Chazalet, and counting back from his age of 85 then, we find he was 56 years old when he created the *Marie Educatrice* statue. A resident of La Ricamarie, near St Etienne, he enjoyed fame throughout France as a sculptor in wood. His signature on this sculpture includes the letters “MoF” which stands for “Meilleurs Ouvriers de France”. This is a rather exclusive group of master craftsmen who have been awarded this prestigious award through a competition held every four years.

Photo from a 1989 publication
The enormous Youth Gathering at the Hermitage, Pentecost, 1989
Celebrating Champagnat’s 200th Birthday (which fell on 20th May 1989) was a most enormous gathering of youth from all over the world. The photos on the accompanying page are taken from the cover of the magazine Presence Mariste and convey a good idea of the vast crowd of pilgrims. The gigantic tent, too, gives a good idea of the magnitude of the event.

Bicentenary, 1989 FMS Echo

Photo shows Brother Charles Howard, Superior General, in very informal, relaxed mode, with students at the gathering.
The cover of the magazine, *Presence Mariste*, showing some of the scenes
The International Community is replaced with one of Brothers from the Province of N.D. de L’Hermitage.
Mementos for sale
As can be seen by the pink slips the “Centre Champagnat” was well organised; and the days of the Gestetner duplicator, come the 1980s, are probably over!
CHAPTER 27 1990s to 2007, Pilgrimages continue in earnest for all Marists, Brothers and Lay; Canonisation of Marcellin, 1999

Search for identity?

An introduction to this section of the Chronology of the Institute suggests a reassessment of identity of the Brothers as they move into the 1990s. It was common for the Brothers to try to define their “identity”, but with the decline of vocations to the Brothers and the growth of “Marist Movements” led by what came to be called in Australia, “Lay Marists” (and later, just “Marists”), there was yet again a re-thinking of the identity of the Brother.

1990 Installation of new organ

It was during 1990 that the renovations of the chapel of 1989 were completed with the installation of the new organ. The Program of the first recital is attached.

At the ceremony for the blessing of the organ and the inaugural concert were the Superior General, Brother Charles Howard, with Brother Benito Arbues, the Provincials of Europe, Brothers from the International College in Rome, numerous Brothers from different communities and friends. Special guests included: Mr. Joseph Barrou, architect, who oversaw the renovation of the chapel, Mr. Tillet, the architect of the recess of the organ, Mr. Faure, the architect responsible for the decoration of the chapel and Mr. Pierre Saby, the manufacturer of the organ. Jean Paul Ravel, the young and brilliant organist (pictured), Old Boy from our school, St. Louis in St. Chamond, winner of the Premier Prix du conservatoire de Lyon, gave the recital. The evening was one of both aesthetic and spiritual intensity.

Great variety of visitors and pilgrims constantly coming and going

The photos below show (centre and pointing) Brother Gabriel Michel with a group of attentive pilgrims, and likewise (right) Brother John McMahon telling something of the story of Father Champagnat, the Hermitage and Marist origins.
1990 Special closing celebrations in June
During 2nd and 3rd June, 1990, bringing to a conclusion an entire year of Jubilee celebrating Marcellin’s “200th Birthday”, there was a fitting ceremony of days of closure, with a great gathering in the presence of the Superior General, Brother Charles Howard. The theme was: “You are the sowers of the Gospel”

40 Young Magyars in the Hermitage

We look upon any reference to our work in Hungary with special interest and affection. This item of news comes to us from Br Mateo of the newly established community in Győr.
At the beginning of July, forty young men from the city of Győr in Hungary came on pilgrimage to the Hermitage. They were accompanied by the parish priest of Benkovich and Brothers Rémi, Ignacio and Mateo. They spent four whole days visiting places of Marist interest. Their watchword was: “Veled Marcellin! Jesus es Maria ut-jan!” (With you, Marcellin, by the way of Jesus and Mary.) A real spiritual adventure! No doubt our Founder will have planted good seed in that fertile ground.

Young Magyars in the Hermitage, 1991, FMS Echo, November
Groups of Spirituality, 1991 FMS Echo, June

GROUPS OF SPIRITUALITY. These are the Franco-phone and Anglophone groups. The choice of locale for each group has been a happy one: the former in the Gene-ralate, the latter in Nemi. Brother Roger Burke, a member of this group, sends us this account:

The five months that eighteen of us spent together at Nemi, a small town perched high up in the Alban Hills outside of Rome, overlooking a picturesque crater lake famed in the annals of Rome, were a time of special graces for all. In early January we had converged on Nemi from Australia (9), Catalonia (1), Ireland (1), Malawi (1), New Zealand (2), and the United States (4) to spend renewal time together.

Warmly welcomed by the team — Br. Brian Wanden from New Zealand, Br. John McDonnell from the United States, and our chaplain, Fr. Mark Coleridge from Austra-

On Mont Pilat.

lla —, we set off on this journey with high expectations, not quite sure where we may be taken, but strongly confident that God was close by in the strong brotherhood that existed in the group and in the care of the team who facilitated growth in ourselves at this significant stage in our li-

ves.

The relaxed life-style at Nemi was in stark contrast to the busyness of life from which we had all come. The combination of this relaxed atmosphere, of a new environment, of meeting Brothers from different parts of the Marist world, of input from some of the best lecturers from Rome, and of many opportunities for personal and community prayer, allowed the Spirit to work within us. We did appreciate the available time and space to relax in the goodness of God, and to move closer to Him during a daily Quiet Hour, fairly frequent Prayer Days, the eight days of Directed Retreat, in addition to our normal community prayer and Eucharist.

Undoubtedly one of the great highlights of our five months was the ten days’ pilgrimage to Champagnat country. We did far more than simply visit the places about which we have heard and read since our Novitiate days; we are able to capture more strongly the spirit of Champagnat and the first Brothers, and this was a great grace for all of us. At the same time we understood more clearly Mary’s role in the foundation of the Society of Mary of which we were an integral part in the beginning, how Champagnat relied on her for everything, and how she is our Ordinary Resource and First Superior. Our gratitude is extended to Brother Frederick Mc Mahon (Australia) who led us on pilgrimage to Champagnat country and helped us to grow in the knowledge and love of the Founder.

By the end of our journey at Nemi we were able to say with Peter on the mountain of the Transfiguration: “Lord, it is good for us to be here”.

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Photos show a typical “pilgrimage” prior to the renovations of the Hermitage.

The presenter in this case is Brother John McMahon of Melbourne, Australia.
Publication of Father Champagnat’s LETTERS an enormous boost to research, 1985, 1987, 1991

A most prodigious body of research was the publication in French in 1985 and 1987, and in English in 1991 of two volumes of Father Champagnat’s letters. The compilation and research was by Brother Paul Sester (pictured) and the English translation was by Brother Leonard Voegtle. The first volume contains the texts of all the letters known at the time, with detailed notes of explanation. The second volume (where Brother Paul Sester was assisted by Brother Raymond Borne) gives short biographical accounts of very many people mentioned in the letters or the authors or recipients of letters. The second volume also includes photographs or images of a number of people and a variety of buildings and sites.

The availability of these letters enormously facilitated research and knowledge of the “real” story related to the life and times of Marcellin Champagnat and the beginnings of the Little Brothers of Mary.
The accompanying article, “Marist Pilgrimage”, written by Australian pilgrims, Gail Coates and Marisa Bortolotto, would be typical of the reaction of many hundreds of similar pilgrims from all around the world at about this time.

To walk in the footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat is often the goal of Marist educators, both religious and lay. Having been given the chance to join twenty-six other members on a Pilgrimage to France, Rome, Johannesburg and Malawi was an opportunity that we both excitedly accepted.

Our time at Notre Dame L’Hermitage was most definitely the highlight of our time away. The Brothers Maurice and Joseph, who welcomed us so warmly to L’Hermitage, urged us to consider this our home while we were there and that is exactly what it was like - we genuinely felt that we were coming home. L’Hermitage, itself an impressive building, nestles neatly into the valley of the beautiful surrounding hills of St Chamon. Being there in spring, we were privileged enough to see the countryside ablaze with the wonderful colours of the tulips, pansies and blossoms which were to be found everywhere.

We were able to relive the Champagnat story as we travelled the Route Champagnat. As we went from La Valla to Les Masionettes then to Le Rosey and Marlines, we learned more and more about Champagnat’s life. A moment which stands out above all the rest is the praying of the Memorare besides the ruins of the Donnet farmhouse. As we stood there praying, with the icy winds rushing up from the valley below us, we were once again reminded of just how difficult it must have been for Marcellin to fulfil his dream.

Next it was off to Lyon and although the opulent Basilica de Fourviere is impressive it was actually our visit to the Shrine of the Black Virgin (the Chapel beside the Basilica) that was most significant.

Pictures of our trip to Le Puy evoke memories of the strange volcanic plugs which have sprung up in this area, the hundreds of steps from the town square up to the Basilica and the exquisite lace that was for sale. To reach the Basilica we really had to climb hundreds of steps but the view from the top was truly splendid. Some of us climbed up even higher to reach the huge (23 metres in height) pink, iron statue of Our Lady and a number of us even climbed up the spiral staircase inside the statue. What a vantage point!

We left Lyon and travelled by means of the impressive fast train - 600 kilometres in two hours - to Paris. Spring in Paris is a kaleidoscope of colours, people, famous places like the River Seine, the Eiffel Tower, the Champs-Elysees and the Arc de Triomphe, Sacre Coeur, Montmartre, Notre-Dame Cathedral, the Pompidou Centre, the Louvre, the sensational French Underground and so very much more.

The worldwide headquarters of the Marist Brothers is the General House in Rome. This is indeed a magnificent building and it was good to meet the Brothers - many of whom were known to us by name only. The general Papal audience, with 50,000 plus other people, was a somewhat chaotic event. However, I am pleased to say that those who missed out on their seating actually ended up having a closer view of the Pope as he passed by in his ‘Pope Mobile’.

Our next stop was Johannesburg. For me (Gail), it was good being back on the African continent and having an opportunity to show the others a part of the country where I originally lived. Whilst in Johannesburg we visited several Marist schools ranging from those in the poorest areas with many needs to those in the wealthy suburbs who had more facilities than many Marist Colleges back here in Australia. The highlight of our trip to Soweto was our visit to the renowned Regina Mundi Church which was a key meeting place for those who opposed Apartheid which had been introduced by the previous South African Nationalist Government.

After only a few days in Johannesburg we boarded a South African plane and were on our way to Malawi. We were rather apprehensive about what we would find there but our fears were soon dispelled when we landed in luscious, picturesque Malawi and met the charming Malawian people. Malawi is a beautiful country with great potential. The people have the will to succeed, what they need are more resources and financial aid to help them to help themselves.

Our last stop was Johannesburg en route home. On our last night together we shared a meal in an African styled restaurant in Nelson Mandela Square. Although we were ready to come home we were all sad that our long anticipated Pilgrimage was coming to an end.

Our thanks to Mark Merry and all at Marcellin College for allowing us to be part of this Pilgrimage.

Mrs Gail Coates and Ms Marisa Bortolotto.
The long-awaited CANONISATION of Marcellin Champagnat, 18th April 1999

Many a prayer “for the canonisation of Marcellin Champagnat” would have been spoken and whispered in the Hermitage Chapel over many years. Such prayers, too, were repeated in many communities and schools throughout the world. And now the time had come! And no more fitting place to celebrate than at the Hermitage!

Two contingents from the Hermitage went to Rome to attend the ceremonies of canonisation, and at the exact time of Pope John-Paul II declaring Marcellin a Saint, 160 special guests had gathered in the Hermitage chapel with all seats facing Marcellin’s tomb reliquary for a special Mass. And fitting celebrations followed. The accompanying pages are taken from the booklet of the liturgy for the canonisation and include the actual words of canonisation.
Icon commissioned

The General Council of the time commissioned an icon to commemorate the canonisation.

The icon was commissioned to be created by the Sisters of the Carmel de la Theotokos de de l’Unite – Harissa, Lebanon. The purpose of the General Council, as explained in an introduction to a booklet explaining the icon by Brother Henri Vignau, was to provide a source of reflective meditation on the life and spirit of Saint Marcellin.

The Sisters studied the life of the founder and spent time in meditative prayer to arrive at the ten images surrounding the picture of Champagnat himself. We’re invited, through the icon, irrespective of our state of life, age, talents or limits, to follow Marcellin through the shining example of holiness he shows to us. We’re to be led, Brother Henri writes, to an attitude of contemplation.


In an effort to provide a photo of the artist, the reader is provided with a photo from the homepage of the Carmel responsible for the painting – and the reader is to imagine the Sister or Sisters, obscurely seen through the grille, who did this beautiful artwork.

The icon is displayed (2016) in Father Champagnat’s bedroom.

The commissioning of the official portrait, by Goyo, for the canonisation in 1999

[Text adapted from the Champagnat.org internet site, 2017] Towards the end of 1998, the preparatory commission for the canonization sent a portrait of Marcellin to a number of artists. They were asked to create a picture 50 by 70 cm (media undefined) of the upper body of the Founder, which would represent a man of about forty years of age, French, and that would show joy, enthusiasm and congeniality. Mention was also made of the rights of the artist and of other details such as the date due, etc. They were given a minimum of material, such as some written descriptions by people who had lived with Marcellin and the data on his passport. Five artists responded, four men and one woman. The submission chosen was by Gregorio Domínguez.
González, “Goyo”. It was executed in acrylic. He was asked to retouch the portrait a bit and to adjust it to the age that had been stated. The portrait was returned to him after some photographs were taken of it. Goyo made the finishing touches on the original, and the resulting work is what was enlarged and displayed on the façade of St. Peter’s Basilica the day of the canonization. Goyo is an artist from Burgos with close connections to the Marist Brothers. Readers will recall the reproduction of many of his paintings in the early part of this work, taken from illustrated stories of the life of Father Champagnat that he created for use by the Brothers.

Early 21st century at the Hermitage

Visits of different groups – from nearby, and from around the world -- continued as the Hermitage moved into the twenty-first century. Sometimes four different groups would visit in a day. Retreats, too, were a feature of these years. The size of the community hovered around 20. Happily, the annalist (or annalists) of this period of Hermitage history took an interest in writing up the events of the house in an engaging and literary style with touches of humour and historical references throughout. On the first Friday of each month there was a special Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament “for vocations”, with an observation that vocations had shrunk over time.

At one stage, when 120 were staying at the Hermitage, a call had to be made to ask for restraint in the use of water. Feastdays were fittingly celebrated and Brothers’ Jubilees of 50 or 60 years of profession also.

It became more common for groups of pilgrims to stay for several days, and for the groups to be a mixture of Brothers and Lay Marists. For example, in 2001 there were groups staying for 10 days or for 7 days. From 4-9th August there was a Retreat for the parents of Brothers from the Province of Catalogne consisting of 62 parents and 23 Brothers. And in the month of August 2001, 4 groups stayed for 5 days, one for 6 days; one for 7 days, one for 8 days and another for 13 days. (And that was just one month!) Then in 2002 one group of 20 stayed for 3 weeks, and a group from Spain, Lebanon and Betica stayed from 7-12 July, with the Annals remarking that: “Des groupes de Freres et educateurs laics...” (“Groups of Brothers and Lay”).

Great Jubilee celebration at the Hermitage, July 2000

Space does not allow a detailed account of the very many Jubilee celebrations held at the Hermitage over its long history, but the one held on 28th July 2000 was somewhat special and will be told here in full. The details are from an article by Brother Alain Delorme in Feuilles Maristes 20: “At the end of the annual retreat, on Friday 28th July 2000, the Brother Jubilarians were invited, during the Eucharist, to thank God for eight centuries of fidelity to God. Brother Damien Quercy (70 years professed); Brothers Pierre Badoil, Joseph Cokelz, Jean Portal, Jean Roche, Francois Terrier (60 years); Brothers Baptiste Anthouard, Marcel Arnaud, Marcel Chomerac, Alain Delorme, Aime Maillet, Aime Ollier, Louis Richard, Jean Rousson, Joseph Samuel (50 years). (Brothers Badiol, Cokelz, Anthouard, Ollier and Chomerac were not present, but celebrating with their communities.)

Singing ‘Jubilez tous les peoples’ each one placed a flower of his choice in front of the cross on the altar. They renewed their vows at the Offertory of the Mass and assisted with bringing up the gifts. After Communion, during the singing of the Magnificat, all gathered before altar of Father Champagnat, at which all present sang ‘Freres, d’une meme famille, autour du Pere Champagnat’ – ‘Brothers, all of the same family, around Father Champagnat’.

The community dinner that followed was accompanied by the many stories of each jubilarian by a confrere. Each account told of the great achievements of each jubilarian while revealing the humour of the teller. Such times nurture the family spirit and brotherhood that live on from our very beginnings. Many thanks to the Brothers responsible for the organisation and for the happy times together that all have enjoyed.”
A lively member of the Hermitage community at this time was Brother Guy Meynier. In an entry in the Annals during 2002 the following tribute is found: “For the Hermitage, Brother Guy Meynier is a very precious man. He’s constantly on the go and does everything. And when he’s not working here he helps the Sisters of Gethsemani every Thursday. He is also the Chaplain at the prison and regularly attends the Remand centre at La Talaudiere. He occasionally helps his brother on his farm. Brother Guy is a dab hand, also, at making a variety of jams and preserves while sharing in the care of the Hermitage property.”

And in another place, we read: “Where is Brother Guy Meynier?” In the garden with a hose, cooking, laughing. Ah, yes! When he is not visiting the prison or helping the Sisters of Gethsemani, he’s holding a hose, or on a roof, or taking apart a motor, or in the workshop, or …? The maintenance man for our grand old home, Guy is everywhere, with or without his box of tools, He is always there. He’s always been like this. For us pen-pushers and paper shufflers, it’s a delight to have him. Thanks, Guy!”

Community Meeting, 2002; an insight into such regular meetings
Those unfamiliar with life in a religious community should know that it was common to have regular “Community Meetings”. At these meetings, besides some prayer and reflection, there is time to share how things are going, how each Brother was experiencing community life, the distribution of community tasks, and some planning for the future. The same social dynamics occurred amongst the Brothers as in society generally. Some were diffident in speaking up, some had a tendency to dominate, etc. In December 2002, the Hermitage community gathered to consider a “Community Project”. After some negative comments about selfishness there was some consensus that good community living should involve an absence of debilitating restrictions, a willingness to put talents at the service of others, and there was special mention of belonging to the local Parish and an obligation to be more involved in parish life.

“The called to lay a foundation”, April 2003
A meeting of the Formators of Europe gathered between the 14th and 20th April, bringing stones from all the regions that they came from and building this column of stones with them in commemoration of their assembly and deliberations.

Formation of a “new” Province of the Hermitage, 2003
The 29th July 2003 saw the amalgamation of a number of Provinces into a new Province. The following were combined: Beaucamps-St-Genis-Laval, Catalogne, MCO-ND Hermitage, Algérie, Grèce, Hongrie et Suisse.
August 18th – 26th, 2003: By bicycle from the Hermitage to Rome!

Brother Jean Ronzon was a passionate cyclist with a special love for long rides. Over the years he had enjoyed taking boys on cycling camps. His election from the Hermitage community to the General Council as Secretary General at the General Chapter of 2003 presented him with the opportunity of a specially adventurous ride … from the Hermitage to the General House in Rome! On the 18th August, Brother Jean’s family visited the Hermitage to celebrate, with a picnic on the banks of the Gier, his elevation to this high office and to farewell him on this unusual adventure. Much preparation went into matching manageable distances with possible over-night lodgings. Along the way Brother Jean, over the several legs of the journey, stayed variously with the De La Salle Brothers, a Parish Priest, a hotel, a camping site and our own Brothers. The various legs were as follows: ND de l’Hermitage-Chambéry, Chambéry-Lanslebourg, Lanslebourg-Carmagnola, Carmagnola-Genova, after which he had a support vehicle driven by Brother Roger. Then Genova-Marina di Pisa, Marina di Pisa-Orbetello, and finally Orbetello-The General House, EUR. A total distance of 1150 kilometres. The journey has created a gem of an anecdote in the story of the Hermitage! And once his period as Secretary General had concluded, Brother Jean returned to the Hermitage on two wheels in a similar way.

2003 commemoration of the dispersion of Brothers, c.1903

Erected outside the entrance to the old Scholasticate, “Le Rocher”, is a ceramic mural showing Jesus with disciples fishing, symbolic of the mission to preach the Word and become “fishers of people”. The words: “Thank you – Thank you – Thank you” in different languages are from the various Provinces throughout the world who benefited by the addition of French Brothers who had left France following the expulsions of 1903. An official explanation puts it this way: “The scene is meant to memorialize and honor the time when, all religious instruction having been forbidden in France, the Brothers set out to fulfill the desire of Jesus and establish their mission throughout the world. The sense of homage can be seen in the words of thanks that arch around the upper portion of the mural, without enclosing it entirely.” The mural was created by Francisco, a Marist Brother, and his brother Ignacio García and Ignacio’s wife Mercedes Molina-Niňirola Hernández who had worked on projects together for many years.

The two men have Fine Arts degrees, and Mercedes is an expert in the field of Fine Arts Education. The mural was formally dedicated by the Superior General, Brother Sean Sammon, on December 28th, 2003, during a Colloquium on the Marist Mission in Europe. Part of Brother Sean’s address on the occasion was the following:

“Thank you for the opportunity to be here during these days as we commemorate two important moments in the history of Marcellin’s Little Brothers of Mary. First of all, we recall the memory of a group of Brothers who transformed a change in human circumstance into an opportunity to respond with courage and creativity to God’s grace in time. We know the story well: in response to the rise of laws of secularization in France during the early years of the last century, 960 brothers departed this country during the course of a few years. They set out with courage, with conviction, and not without, I am sure, a measure of fear.

These men left their homeland lacking benefit of extensive preparation in language, and without wide knowledge of the peoples and cultures to which they had been sent. And yet, unprepared as they were, they brought God’s Word to a generation of poor young people in desperate need of hearing some Good News. As a result of their daring, the charism that came into our Church through a simple country priest and Marist Father took root and flourished in places where it had not yet had an opportunity to do so. In retrospect, we see the extraordinary results of the faith and hard work of those who set out a century ago. Let their witness be a source of challenge and hope today as we respond to the need for evangelization among a new generation of young men and women.”
Details of this Colloquium “On our Marist Mission in Europe” included reflecting on the future, considering the questions: “What can we Marists in Europe learn from situations in the past? What attitudes should we adopt in a clearly lay environment? What does the future hold for our Marist Mission on this Continent?”

Life at the Hermitage in the 1990s and into the 2000s
The Brothers who wrote the *Annals* of the Hermitage at this time clearly enjoyed doing so, showing a love of the Brothers, a sense of style in writing and a light touch of humour. All the comings and goings are recorded – appointments to positions; liturgies; celebrations; pilgrimages; retreats; outings, etc. There is the occasional historical reference, as in the recall of incidents from 1903 and the calling in of the Liquidator, a history of fires at the Hermitage or a review of the development of technology over the decades. Occasional references to world events, such as the Gulf War, are also found.

The accompanying cartoon found in the *Annals* – and photos and illustrations are rare to find -- refers to Brother Sylvester, who created a certain amount of chaos in the early days at the Hermitage, partly due to his very young age and also, to a lively and mischievous disposition. The cartoon springs from a retreat where the preacher was urging the acceptance of the light-hearted side of life. And so, the caption: “Put a Sylvester into your life!!”

2004 Hermitage community barbeque
CHAPTER 28  2007 Decision to radically refurbish the Hermitage to make it suitable for welcoming many international Marist visitors/pilgrims, Brothers and Lay; Formation of new community for this purpose

An important turning point in the history of the Hermitage was a decision of the General Council working with the Province of Notre Dame de L’Hermitage to undertake a thorough refurbishment of the entire Hermitage site and its preparation as a venue for better welcoming visitors and pilgrims. The project was announced to the Brothers of the Institute in a Circular by the then Superior General, Brother Sean Sammon, dated June 6th, 2007, entitled “Let us reclaim the spirit of the Hermitage.” The opening passages of Brother Sean’s Circular tell of this decision:

LET US RECLAIM THE SPIRIT OF THE HERMITAGE! ¹

6th June 2007

Dear brothers and friends,

From the days when he called the Hermitage “home” right up until the present, the house that Marcellin built has had a special place in the hearts of so many of us.2 Whether we have visited what is also affectionately referred to as the “Mother House,” read an account of its construction and subsequent history, or simply viewed pictures of it during one or other of its various metamorphoses, we could not help but sense something of ourselves in its solid stone construction, rich soil, and simple and pragmatic design.

In building the Hermitage, the founder showed signs of true leadership: he stepped out, took a risk, looked to the future. I write to ask all of us to do the same today.

This letter comes with three aims in mind. First of all, to explain the details and discuss the implications of a joint decision made late in 2006 by members of the General Council and the Council of the Province of L’Hermitage to refurbish some of the buildings that make up Notre Dame de l’Hermitage and to transform others.

Next, to encourage you to join us by taking up the spirit that drives this project and making your own the mind, heart, and vision of Marcellin Champagnat and his first followers.

Finally, to ask for your collaboration and support for what we have come to call the Hermitage Project.

To realize these aims, the letter is divided into five distinct

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¹ Seán Sammon, FMS. Closing address at the 7th General Conference, Negombo, Sri Lanka, 2005.
² A word of thanks to Brothers Luis Garcia Sobrado, FMS and Alain Delorme, FMS, who helped greatly with the research necessary to write this letter.
The passages from the Circular on the following pages tell of the hopes held out for the use of the refurbished Hermitage.

**Let us reclaim the spirit of the Hermitage!**

*A Center to welcome and to accompany Marist pilgrims*

For more than 30 years now, Notre Dame de l’Hermitage has served both as a center to welcome and accompany Marist pilgrims and visitors and as a Provincial and retirement house. During the last decade and a half, however, more and more lay Marists, groups of brothers and others, not associated with our Midlife and Third-age sessions, have swelled the ranks of those coming to the Hermitage seeking to deepen their knowledge and appreciation of the sources of our Institute and its mission. Indications are that this steady stream of pilgrims will only increase during the years ahead.

To ensure that the place would have the wherewithal to continue its ministry of welcome and to accommodate the needs of an increasing varied group of pilgrims (children, couples and families, as well as brothers), a study needed to be undertaken to assess the facilities and programs at Notre Dame de l’Hermitage. With this purpose in mind, the General Council and the Council of the new Province of L’Hermitage set up in 2004 an International Commission for Marist Places. Its mission was quite straightforward: to help both councils develop an overall plan for Notre Dame de l’Hermitage. That plan was to be called “The Hermitage Project”.

An initial “International Commission of Marist Places” was set up in 2004 consisting of Brothers Jean-Pierre Destombes, Maurice Goutagny, Alain Delorme, Michel Morel and Josep Maria Soteras of the Province of L’Hermitage and Brothers Onorino Rota (Mediterranea), Javier Espinosa (America central), George Fontana (USA), Jose Perez (Compostela) and Albert Andre (West Central Europe). Discussions were held, and it was decided to entrust the design of the project to architect from Barcelona, **Joan Puig-Pey**.
For two years -- March 2008 to March 2010 -- the Hermitage was closed for renovations. The following chapter shows the progress of the renovations.

Plan to establish an International Community of Welcome, and its formation

At the same time that the builders were very busy in their program of renovation, an international community of Brothers and Lay Marists was being formed. The following, taken from Brother Sean’s Circular on Reclaiming the Spirit of the Hermitage, tells of his hopes for this community:

Let us reclaim the spirit of the Hermitage!

simply, to long as Marcellin did to tell children just how much Jesus Christ loves them.

The specifics

We are planning to appoint a community to Notre Dame de l’Hermitage that is made up of twelve members: eight Brothers and four laymen and women. Fifty percent of the community will come from the Province of L’Hermitage while the other half will have their origin in other parts of our Institute and will bring an international and multicultural dimension to the community.

These Brothers who belong to this initial community will commit themselves in principle for a period of no less than six years. The laymen and women in the community will pledge a minimum period of two years.

A community finds its life only through the day to day struggle to truly be a community. And that involves falling down and getting up again and doing so more than once! To truly be in communion with one another takes the commitment of time and honest exchange among the members of the group.

If the new community at Notre Dame de l’Hermitage truly wants to become what Marcellin had in mind – people united in heart and mind – its members will need to take up the methods he proposed for achieving that end: mutual respect, prayer, forgiveness and reconciliation, simplicity of life.

They will also need to take up for themselves some of the itineraries that will be used with visitors and pilgrims. In this way they can foster their own encounter with the founder and the first community at La Vall and later the Hermitage. Quite possibly, the overall effectiveness of the Hermitage Project will depend eventually upon the ability of this new community to live Marist spirit and life fully and their ability to communicate to others exactly what this means.

The scheme below summarizes the vision we have for the soon to be appointed community at Notre Dame de l’Hermitage.

A final word about the community we plan for the Hermitage. Throughout the history of the place, from the time of Marcellin and up to the present, we have had one community after another that excelled at meeting the challenges of their time in history and in the history of our Institute and its mission. Perhaps what is new at the present time is the appointment of a group whose sole task will be to welcome and accompany those who arrive as visitors and pilgrims.

As in the past, we see the community as developing their important apostolate in communion and coordination with the communities at La Vall and Le Rosey. It is my hope, as well, that this new community will open its hearts and its door to small groups of young people seeking to deepen their experi-

The call was put out for suitable Brothers and Lay who might make up this first community. When the personnel were finally decided it was announced that the first International, Brothers and Lay, community would consist of the following:

Brother Benito Arbites, Spain

Brother Benito grew up in the Zaragoza area of Spain and on joining the Brothers his first teaching role was in 1962 with six-year-olds at Colegio Champagnat in Badalona. Following various appointments of responsibility Brother Benito was elected Superior General in 1993. Returning to Spain from Rome at the end of his term he had a time of ongoing formation and prior to his appointment to the Hermitage community was in a community of three Brothers in Lleida in “retirement”, which allowed him to choose his areas of ministry.

Maria Elida Quinones Pena – Mexico

Maria Elida was born in Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico in 1948, the fifth of nine children. She came to know the Marist Brothers through putting her five sons through Marist Colleges and watching her grandsons attend the Brothers’ College in Guadalajara. In 1996 Maria Elida took up a position in the Provincial House in Guadalajara in the catering department, later gaining the catering concession of the Marist University, just before taking up the position in the Hermitage Community. In 2006 she had followed the Marist Patrimony Course conducted by Brother Aureliano Brambila de la Mora.
Brother Miro Leopoldo Reckziegel -- Brazil
Brother Miro’s professional life was predominantly that of a psychologist. Born in Santa Rosa/RS, Brasil, in 1946, his studies range over Literature, Religious Studies and Psychology, studying both in Rome and in Brasil. His skills led him to teaching Portuguese, English, Brasilian Literature, Psychology and Religious Education. He was psychologist/accompianier to Brothers at all stages of formation and made considerable input to the Third Age Courses for Portugese and Spanish speakers.

Brother Neville Solomon – Australia
Born in central Queensland, Australia, in 1951, Brother Neville taught at Marist College in Brisbane before getting the call to become a Marist Brother. His first profession was in 1978. Since then he has been a teacher of English, History, Religious Studies and Liturgy. In the 15 years prior to joining the Hermitage Community Brother Neville held the position of Head of School in schools in the Australian states of New South Wales and Queensland.

Brother Diogene Musine -- Rwanda
Rwanda is Brother Diogene’s birthplace and the field of most of his teaching and ministry. The Marist Brothers’ School in the city of Save is where Diogene met his first Brothers and completed his studies. He taught briefly in Musanze in the north of the country and entered the Brothers’ community there to undertake his studies in Marist formation. Diogene obtained diplomas in both catechetics and pastoral ministry and also obtained diplomas in Educational Sciences. After two years in Ivory Coast he joined the community in Byimana (Rwanda) after 8 years in Save, and it was from there he received the invitation to be part of the Hermitage community.

Norma and Ernesto Spagnoli – Argentina
Norma and Ernesto have five adult children and (in 2009) four grandsons and a granddaughter. They belong to the Federacion Marista de Padres (FEMAP) of Argentina, and at the beginning of 1999, of a fraternity ‘A heart without borders’ of the College Manuel Belgrano of Buenos Aires. They had also been working as part of a group of animators of the Marist Fraternities of the Cruz del Sur Province. Norma became a volunteer with a group for the relief of street people while Ernesto’s career was related to the military, leading to the position of Professor at the Argentinian University.

The Community
The community has been at all times the soul of the Hermitage. In the time of Champagnat, this community of young brothers, with the founder at their head, constructed the house, to which they gave the name, the Hermitage of Our Lady. Around the table, united in labour, congregating around the altar dominated by a statue of Mary, they were building stone by stone this construction, which we Marists have inherited as part of our patrimony. At the same time as he was building a material house, Champagnat was founding a spiritual family which would know no frontiers. Today, Marist brothers and lay people from all over the world feel themselves welcomed and protected in this house, and linked to the spiritual family which has developed there.

This group of people has already had several meetings to begin defining the community project. Currently, a good number of them are struggling with the languages so as to be able to master this communication resource and become more efficient in the service of hospitality and animation.

Brother Jean Pierre – France
Born in Roncq in the North of France in 1944, Brother Jean came through his Marist formation from an early age, making his first profession in 1964. He followed catechetical and theological studies in Strasbourg and Paris and from 1968 to 1981 was College Chaplain in the State College at Thionville (Moselle). There followed vocations work and accompaniment to the fraternities of the Champagnat Movement.

Annie Girka -- France
While born in France at Vichy Annie is of Polish origin and is unmarried. With a background in Modern Literature Annie taught at a Sisters’ College and for some time with the Brothers at Notre Dame des Victories. Annie has been a member of various Marist Commissions and the Champagnat Movement in France and was part of the International Assembly at Mendes. She also contributed to the document on the Lay Vocation. Prior to joining the Hermitage community Annie worked as a volunteer with very needy children in Ecuador.

Brother Michel Morel – France
Brother Michel began his Marist life as a Junior at the age of 13, making his first profession in 1968. His university studies led to a licentiate in Modern Literature and his teaching encompassed French and History-Geography, some of which he did in Madagascar as part of his National Service. Since then Brother Michel has been most active in the training of novices and the preparation of Marist formators. He was the “last” superior of the “old” Hermitage.

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Brother Allan J. de Castro -- Philippines
Brother Allan’s birth and early Marist associations are in General Santos City in the southern Philippines where he did his schooling and pre-novitiate training. After his Novitiate in Cotabato City he made his profession of first vows in 1999. From there he attended the scholasticate program at MAPAC (Marist Asia Pacific Centre) in Manila. In his apostolate Allan worked as houseparent at Marcellin Homes in General Santos City, as a classroom teacher and prefect of discipline in other situations before joining the Hermitage community.

Brother George Palandre -- France
Brother George is no stranger to the Hermitage and places nearby, being born only about 30 kilometres away near Saint Symphorien sur Coise and doing most of his Marist training from an early age at nearby Saint Genis-Laval, where he made his first profession in 1961. He had appointments to various communities in the province of Saint Genis-Laval before spending some time in Africa as part of National Service. He returned to Africa in 1973 and only returned in January 2007, before joining the Hermitage community.

Father John Craddock sm – New Zealand (Chaplain) was professed as a Marist in 1964, ordained a priest in 1968 and was appointed to secondary school teaching in NZ. In 1987 -1996, he was appointed as co-chaplain and taught at St Joseph’s School, Tenaru, Solomon Islands, with daily contact with most branches of the Marist Family. Back in NZ, he was then appointed director of Marist Laity. He felt honoured to be asked to join the International Community at l’Hermitage from its beginning on 8th December 2009 until May 2012, as “un Frere avec les Freres et un Pere pour les Freres”. He maintains constant contact with the Marist Family.

They gathered briefly at the end of 2007 in their first orientation to initially get to know one another. Then they met again at the end of 2008 for a couple of weeks. But from Easter, 2009, they gathered at St Paul Trois Chateau for four months of intensive French, the language-to-be of the new community. One member recalls, “We all lived with the Brothers in the community there and a teacher from the local language school arrived each day for a full day of lessons. We did have a couple of breaks to visit the great Roman cities of the south of France, but basically it was an intense workshop experience.” After that some returned to their homes while others stayed on near to the Hermitage, but unable, as yet, to occupy it.

Then, at about Christmas, 2009, all regrouped, but this time at La Neyliere, the residence of the Marist Fathers, about an hour from the Hermitage. And because it was the coldest Christmas ever and there were huge falls of snow, it meant they were engrossed in the formation program and community building – all in French. “We studied psychology, personality, community styles. We prayed, received first class lectures on French and Marist history, took meals together – all considered essential to opening up the story we were about to live. Travel was difficult because of the weather, so to say it was an intense formation is probably an understatement. It was very intense.”

“It was during this phase that the group was joined by Father John Craddock SM as chaplain, and he became part of the “new community”. At Easter, 2010, it was possible to move in, though the buildings were still somewhat incomplete, necessitating some temporary arrangements. But, finally everything was in place to be able to receive the first group of pilgrims, an English-speaking, Australian group. The project had begun!
Photos show the ceremonies of inauguration of the new community
CHAPTER 29  Early 2008: A last look at the “old” Hermitage

The first months of 2008 were the final months of the Hermitage before its closure for the thorough renovations that lasted till 2010. These pages of photos recall some of the features of the “old” Hermitage. Notice, to begin with, the “old” entrance near where the bus is parked. And see, too, beyond the statue of Our Lady, some of the buildings replaced by the new Reception and Dining buildings.
The Sacristy, pre-2008

The Relics display, pre-2008
From the Mission display, pre-2008

Various unwanted items were stored in the “attic”; a peep into the attic, 2008
CHAPTER 30  The building of the renovations, 2008-2010

The main architect Joan Puig-Pey
CHAPTER 31: 2010, Opening of the refurbished Hermitage with an international Community of welcome, and its becoming a centre for pilgrimages and short courses in Marist history and spirituality

On Wednesday, September 22, 2010, after two years of work (March 2008-March 2010) and a few months of operation (early April 2009), the official opening of the buildings could be held. More than 250 people invited by the Brother Provincial and Superior General participated in this memorable day. Civil and religious authorities, architects and business representatives who worked on the project, the Brothers of France, the General Council of Rome and the Marist Provinces of Europe, members of educational teams of the Marist schools, friends and benefactors of the Brothers; all were able to discover and appreciate the immense work; each emphasizing the great success of this project both architecturally and functionally and symbolically.

“By late morning, a Mass of Thanksgiving, celebrated in the chapel (which has undergone little change during this work), brought together the Brothers and friends present in the house. ’Construction is complete; the site is now
open,’ declared Brother Jean-Pierre Destombes, reminding all that a new stage in the history of Notre Dame de L’Hermitage had begun.

“Around 3 O’clock in the afternoon, everyone gathered in the courtyard of St Joseph (the former inner courtyard) where Brother Jean-Pierre, as superior of the community, welcomed the guests.

“There followed talks by the Brother Provincial, the Mayor of Saint Chamond and Mr. Rochebloine, Member of Parliament and former student of the school of La Valla en Gier.

“Then, guided by members of the new community of welcome, guests were taken in groups of about thirty to explore the different spaces, both inside and out, while enjoying a beautiful sunny day in the Hermitage valley.

“All met again in the courtyard of St Joseph with Bishop Dominique Lebrun, Bishop of St Etienne, for the blessing of the courtyard.

“All then repaired to the chapel where Brother Joe McKee, Vicar General, delivered a long speech, prepared by Brother Emili, Superior General who, indisposed, was unable to attend this opening ceremony.

“At almost 7 O’clock in the evening all gathered in the large dining room where they enjoyed “an appetising buffet supper”, beautifully prepared by the staff of the Coralis company in charge of catering and cleaning the newly re-established hostel. There was opportunity for conviviality where everyone could greet friends, get to know one another, and meet members of the community.

Everyone left happy to find that the house Marcellin built continues to live after 186 years, ready to accommodate all those who want to take a pause, whether seekers of God or not. May all visitors find, with Mary and Marcellin, light and comfort.
Murals and mosaic, 2010

The mosaic in the reception area (2017) is the work of Spanish artist, Brother Jose Santamarta. His signature is high on the left side of the mosaic.

The wooden carving of “Marie Educatrice” by Roger Chazalet has been relocated in the new reception area.

The accompanying photo of Father Champagnat’s room after 2010 shows how it has been stripped of excrescences that had accumulated at different times over the decades. The original of the Canonisation icon can be seen on an easel at the end of the bed.
The murals are the work of local artist Anne-Marie Telley

The inscription on this artistic display of Arabic script found near the entrance to the interior courtyard translates as:

“We cannot veil the rays of the sun nor blow out the light of truth.” (Arabic proverb).

It is a tribute by the renovations architect, Joan Puig Pei, to the work of the team of three painters, all of whom came originally from the same village in Tunisia.

The catering and cleaning firm engaged by the "new" Hermitage is Newrest-Coralys Catering Unlimited, a French company operating in many countries.
Visitors to the Hermitage since 2010

In the first seven years following the opening of the refurbished Hermitage in 2010 there have been roughly 8,500 overnight stays each year with approximately an additional 3,000 per year adding to the number who visited for the day but not overnight.

These photos of the seasons around the Hermitage c.2016 are taken from the very extensive collection of historical and beautiful contemporary photos by Brother Giorgio Diamanti.
Following the renovations of 2008-2010 the signage of what had been called “Route Champagnat” was much modernised, and brochures, both in-house and in the local geographical community became very sophisticated and attractive affairs.
A very modern display greets the 2016 visitor to the Hermitage. There is a combination of illustrative timelines, portraits of Marist founders, models of the Hermitage buildings at various stages through the decades, and snippets of information on miscellaneous topics.

And in glass cabinets in the room adjacent to Father Champagnat’s bedroom are found many of the objects that have been displayed on and off for more than a century. They are personal items belonging to Father Champagnat and Brother Francois.
CHAPTER 33  Notre Dame de L’Hermitage following the renovations of 2008-2010; pilgrimages, visits, meetings, retreats

Immediate resumption of pilgrimages

And so began more numerous visits, stays, pilgrimages, visitations, school groups, conferences, renewal programmes etc. The following photos give an idea of the variety of visitors in the years immediately following:
MANIZANA - Renewal Program at ND Hermitage
Pilgrimage of Gratitude and Enlightenment
5th – 15th November 2014

Bienvenue chez vous à ND Hermitage!
Fr. Michael Sexton,
Fr. Longinus Dimgba,
Fr. Brian Etherington,
Fr. Ted Fernandez,
Fr. Michael Henry,
Fr. Gabriel Ignacimuthu,
Fr. Barry Lamb,
Fr. Chris Poppinwell,
Fr. Ted Clisby,
Pope John Paul II,
Fr. Stephen Smyth,
Fr. Pat Thompson,
Fr. Wayne Theatre,
Fr. Don Neary &
Fr. Patrick McManus
Wednesday 5th November  Arrival at NDH
Preparing our hearts
06.30 am Departure from Maristas
10.30 am Departure from Finmarino
12.00 am Arrival at Lourdes
02.35 pm Arrival at NDH
Lunch
06.15 pm Mass with the community at NDH (NDH)
07.00 pm Evening meal

Thursday 6th November  Day at NDH
Finding the treasure
08.00 am Breakfast
09.30 am Prayer in the main chapel (Melancoe)
11.00 am Finding the treasure - Tour of the house, Historical, Oratories, Laundry, Computer room, New building, The Rock (Melancoe, NDH, Hermitage)
Personal time
12.15 pm Meal with NDH community (NDH)
12.30 pm Lunch
03.00 pm Visit Brother Community Room and Prayer in Champagne's Room (Tod)
06.15 pm Mass in the main chapel (Maristas)
07.00 pm Evening meal

Friday 7th November  Rosey-Marilhes
Listening to God’s Calls
08.00 am Breakfast
09.00 am Departure from NDH
10.00 am Visit of the church of Maristas
Visit Champagne Room
Visit at La Rosey Chapel (Alpha-Test La Rosey Community)
10.40 am Prayer in Champagne’s room (Maristas)
Personal time
11.45 am Eucharist at the chapel of Rosey (Maristas)
2011, 6th June: Feast of Saint Marcellin - L’Hermitage

September 2012: L’Hermitage - European meeting of the Marist Youth Ministry

February 2013: Meeting of the educational works of the Province of the Hermitage

August 2013: Encuentro europeo de Hnos jovenes menores de 45 años en El Hermitage
February 2014: Meeting of Educational houses of the Province of l'Hermitage

February 2014: Meeting of Educational Houses of the Province of l’Hermitage

2014, May Provincial Assembly of Mission (MIMA Nairobi) – Province of l'Hermitage

2015, April: Second Marist European Assembly on Mission
July, 2016: International gathering of Marist Youth, “Dare to Dream”

“Last day of activities; Trip by cars to Our Lady of l’Hermitage; Warm welcome by the members of the community.

“After José-Antonio and his team set the dynamic conditions, the participants who as always were divided into communities were challenged around the extract of the Gospel of Emmaus, regarding their sentiments concerning this encounter. They expressed their experience in one word while they shared the bread, like the disciples had done with Christ.

Then followed a picnic outside in the country and the weather forecast had the good thought to spare us a little. The afternoon dynamic, a change of groups around 4 places of l’Hermitage and the 4 axes: Mary, the Church, the Mission. In each place, the groups exchanged ideas and, at the end of their discussions concretized their exchanges by different supports or symbols.”
The embrace of all Marists in the mission of Saint Marcellin

In 2012, following the completion of the renovations of the Hermitage the famed and ever faithful painter/illustrator Goyo (Gregorio Dominguez) was commissioned to create yet another illustrated life of Father Champagnat, but to bring the story of what Champagnat started up to the present, particularly including the inclusion of all Marists, Brothers and Lay, in the great enterprise. He offers an invitation, in the bottom left corner, for all to be involved!

Which brings us to the next chapter …
As we continue to move into the twenty-first century, Champagnat’s hopes and dreams of bringing the knowledge and love of Jesus to as many as possible throughout the world is to be carried on by many Marists, not just Brothers.

Through formal or informal relationships with the Little Brothers of Mary that Saint Marcellin founded, many tens of thousands in scores of countries are continuing under his banner the work he began.

Champagnat nourished and consolidated his foundation in this very house, the Hermitage, just outside the town of St. Chamond, Loire.

And, maybe, you, dear reader, will be one of the latest to follow in Marcellin’s footsteps in your country and in your setting. You are part of the continuing story.

May you take from the Hermitage the spirit of generosity, vision, love of Jesus and Mary, family spirit and zeal, along with the memories and inspirations gained by your stay in this holy place.

Imagine, when you leave, that you see the cheery wave of well-wishing of Marcellin himself – such as he gave to many early Brothers as they headed off from the Hermitage – to go out to people; to bring Jesus to them, as Mary did.

Best of blessings!