

**"LA SALLE" MUSEUM
District of Bilbao**

Brother Juan José Larrea

The almost sixteen years (1) of existence of a "free time" activity - the "La Salle" Museum (2) - carried out by full-time people in the school, with no budget at all in the very difficult beginning years, demonstrates not only tremendous personal vision rooted in very solid values but also the general acceptance by the District of the purposes of the work's foundations.

There would be no better way to learn about the origins of this important work of data collection than to listen to the words of the museum's creator, Brother Juan Luis Villacorta (3) who, after the first year it was open, wrote a brief entry in La Salle-Intercom (4) in which he summarized his anxieties: *"The Museum will paint a very interesting picture of District and even Institute activities which will give to those in formation and to visitors in general a very positive view of our Lasallian apostolates"*.

In the beginning he began to collect data from his District and later he also collected data from the entire Institute.

"The first idea of forming or creating a Museum...came to me when I was in charge of the District Necrological Notices and I found myself in the midst of so many papers, brochures, documents, books and objects worthy of greater respect" (5).

And the materials that he dealt with, alive in a certain respect, and his great respect for people, made him change his plans about a museum that probably no one would ever visit and also about the showroom; even though sometimes a visitor was left with that kind of impression of the museum; in the beginning years he spent more time collecting materials than in the excellent way of displaying them.

"It bothered me greatly that such beloved and precious things should be forgotten when one would least expect it" (6).

The excellent acceptance of all aspects of this enterprise and the sly smile of Brother Juan Luis who had no idea where this all would go - would his extensive research be a success or would it be a failure?; he asked for items in such a way that it seemed as if he were giving you something and just as he was getting real good at it the initial plan was expanded to include the entire Institute.

As the project was expanding, he sought the superior's approval which was very much in character for Brother Juan Luis and his point of view - from the center of the District - to move items from one place to another. Those things like so many others in our Communities or personal possessions

were close to being lost due to a change in residence or because of the death of the owners; and there was the risk that no one would receive these valuable testimonials to past generations.

In order to preserve all these things it would be best to obtain the approval of the Provincial superiors. The opportunity presented itself at a funeral held in Pamplona for the sister of Brother Goldáraz (7).

What follows is probably accurate but it is real or at least it is how the protagonist told the story:

"Since we had to return to San Sebastián from Olaz-Chipi (8) Brothers Alberto and Martín Lasa offered me a place in their car. During the trip I told them about my idea of starting a museum that would contain any and all Lasallian items as well as items referring to the Brothers. I told them about my plan to put it in the parlor of the San Asensio Monastery which used to be a chapel for spiritual exercises and a place for small groups."

The approval was immediate. Brother Alberto gave me the first free gift which was the Bible that had been given to him as a remembrance of the Brothers in the Colegio de Los Angeles (San Sebastián).

The first step had been taken but one must continue..."

The dots do not hide text but they permit us to imagine the tremendous work of Brother Juan Luis, door to door and heart to heart; his strength lying in being interested in details of no interest for most; and saving what may have gone into the garbage or the incinerator.

The first idea of beginning a Museum - now an Exposition - began with a lot of material and information which could be here today and gone tomorrow (9). According to Brother Juan Luis himself, as has been stated, the idea came to him when he was put in charge of the District Necrologies and found himself with papers, writings, brochures, books and objects of value.

These specific items were of perhaps little importance in themselves but in the greater mosaic of the life of the Brother they were vital links that contributed to daily reality.

I really think that Brother Juan Luis took charge of that exposition of **"The Institute in the World"**, with panels of photographs, which covered a good portion of the District of the 1950's. The informative, Lasallian, vocational spirit of that "Exposition" along with specific objects, "property", needed a place for showing.

And there was no other place more appropriate for the opening of the Museum than the Monastery of Our Lady of the Star, the geographical center of the District with its rooms, and above all, with its personnel...Brother Juan Luis told it in this way:

"One fine day Brother Aquilino Antón (10), a servant and I went to San Asensio to see about the real possibilities of that place."

Brother Ignacio Segurola, Director general, was willing to help us in any way possible. He was very eager.

We shall never forget his pleasant manner which always shone forth.

The Master of Novices, Aingeru Castaños, received us well and cooperated in any way he could since this was also a dream of his" (11).

And at the jubilarians' festivities - an important District summer event - and with the pioneering contributing works (José Luis in painting, Gonzalo in lighting, Elena in drape making), the Museum opened its doors on July 23, 1978.

By this time the material was abundant, there was good collaboration and visitors were on the rise. The idea was clearly expressed not so much in articles but more in the "District newsletter" and in the "Museum."

For Brother Juan Luis, the principal aim of the museum was knowledge about the Founder, about his work, about the educational ministry of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and about their publications...and that everything would serve as a springboard for the school apostolate.

This theoretical formulation is seen reflected in the three large rooms of the Novitiate dedicated to the Museum:

- for the Founder, the **La Salle Room**, with biographies, iconography, bibliography, statistics, murals, paintings, and an extremely varied bazaar shop;
- for the Brothers, the **Brother Adolfo Room**, with the general Institute history and history of the Districts, stories of outstanding Brothers and their works, statistics, maps, photographs and publications...;
- and the large **Huellas Fecundas** room about the canonized and beatified Brothers, the Superiors, the Missions, the stamp collections, etc..., and other materials pertaining more specifically to the District of Bilbao.

For the school apostolate almost any item will do; but let's take one example: the gold register book (12). From this book we'll take an especially significant date because the exposition became alive.

It was December 29, 1979. As the engraved lines in the gold register book tell us on that date a new Museum was born which would be established in the District of Barcelona in the St. Joseph of Cambrils house.

This is our major joy (13)...from the only Museum we became the first-born Museum. From the possessive singular "my Museum" we became the possessive plural "our Museum".

And from the Museum of the "crazies" it also became the much loved authentic "District Place".

The list of donors and donations is regularly published in bulletins which continue to be published (14). However, today the inventory is extensive which invites research and study of so much richness in one place. Modern technology has dramatically changed the way we can inventory these goods; it was quite a challenge doing it the old way.

We should not forget to point out some singularities such as the newest item, the most curious, the rarest...; things that make one want to excel in something.

- The first thing: a hand signal that was used in the classroom;

- the oldest: a copy of the first edition of the Biography of Monsieur de La Salle, written by Blain;
- the most valuable: a hand enameled monstrance;
- the most curious: 335 biographies of the Founder from various countries, languages, cultures...,etc.,etc.

The whole collection is as varied and extensive as the Institute itself. And contributors include missionaries, those making CEL, CIL and others; and also items are collected from canonizations, trips, jobs, friendships...

One should clarify the fact that the items in the Museum are at the service of all and are often shared with Communities, Schools...

We close this article about the "La Salle" Museum with some words from its Founder, written when he was very busy and which today seem like a testament: "*May we never cease to dream and those that we have turn into reality.*"

May the leisurely or short visit to the MUSEUM animate us in our LASALLIAN vocation, be a stimulus for our educational mission and at the same time push us toward progress and perfection". ●

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1. Official opening of the "La Salle" Museum, July 23, 1978.
 2. Museum site: Santa María de La Estrella / 26340 SAN ASENSIO (La Rioja) / telephone 941-45-70-05/ FAX 941-47-73-74
 3. Biographical note from the Necrological Notice of Brother Juan Luis Villacorta (died January 31, 1987), pp. 49-55.
 4. La Salle-Intercom, number 15, November, 1979.
 5. "Unánimes" magazine, number 93, March, 1980, p. 33: "Un amigo del Museo".
 6. "Unánimes" magazine, op. cit.
 7. Brother Juan Goldáraz died April 3, 1978.
 8. Today "Instituto de Formación Profesional", Olatz Highway, 31620 - HUARTE (Navarra)
 9. "Unánimes" magazine, number 93, March, 1980, p. 33.
 10. His partner since the beginning and who came assimilated my ideas on the subject and who refined them with his own personal and artistic style (Brother Juan Luis).
 11. Brother Aingeru Castaños along with Brother José Luis Cayuela are continuing the work of Brother Juan Luis Villacorta. The former living at Gordexola (Vizcaya), Sandamendi 3, 2, C. P. 48192, telephone 91-679-80-29; Brother José Luis living at "Escuela Municipal Profesional", c. Carmen 17, 01400 - Llodio (Alava), telephone 94-672-05-05.
 12. In the first volume of the Gold Book beautifully illustrated by Juan Gutiérrez.
 13. Signed by: Brother Pedro Miego, Director of the new Museum; Brother Dalmacio Marimón, Director general of Cambrils; and Brother Jaime Palom, District Treasurer.
 14. "Boletín Informativo", edited, principally by Brother Fernando Marquín.