

The Streets Where You Live.
Fifty years of Marist history at Toongabbie 1938-1988
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The Marist Fathers at Toongabbie

As Australia celebrates 200 years of European settlement the Marist Fathers mark their golden jubilee of presence at Toongabbie.

What is now known as the Marist Centre opened as the Marist Father's Seminary on May 29th, 1938. Celebrations on May 29th, 1988, marked 50 years of Marists at Toongabbie.

Two farms up for sale were purchased in 1936 and 1937 and the foundation stone of the seminary building was blessed by Sydney's Archbishop Michael Kelly on October 24th, 1937. The first students for the Marist priesthood arrived in March of 1938

The property then had an almost desert –like appearance. The only trees standing were three Iron Barks, still to be seen today. Apart from these, every one of the more than 500 trees which are now a feature of Marist Centre have been planted over the years by students and staff.

Sometimes the trees had to be replanted as various farm developments took place.

For some years the Marists ran an A.S.S. dairy herd, the cattle occasionally trampling the young trees.

In the 1940's and 50's cattle from Meadowstream Stud (the official name of the Marist Fathers' herd) were featured at the Parramatta and Castle Hill shows.

Not so many houses in those earlier years! A small number of homes, some with market gardens, were part of the rural scene of Toongabbie.

Occasionally a couple of pigs from the Seminary would get into a market garden and there would be a hue and cry.

Eventually farming came to be more and more uneconomical and there was also a need for the Seminary to be located elsewhere, closer to other tertiary educational centres.

And so farming was relinquished and parts of the property made available for a sub-division, providing finance for the establishment of the Seminary at Hunters Hill.

For a few years the Marist house at Toongabbie continued to play a part in helping young men prepare to become priests, but its role related only to the first year or so of that preparation called the "novitiate".

Since 1981 our house has been known as "Marist Centre", with staff and facilities providing opportunity for quiet reflection and prayer and programmes of personal and spiritual development.

Marist Street Names

Most of the streets in the near vicinity of Marist Centre bear the name of a Marist.

HURLEY STREET is named after Father Dan Hurley, a New Zealand Marist who first came to Australia in 1926. He was the one in overall charge of Marist undertakings in Australia during the late 1930's and 1940's.

Fr. Hurley had a long association with St. Patrick's church in the Rocks area of Sydney, Church Hill, both before and after his years of Marist leadership. He was primarily responsible for the Marists coming to Toongabbie in 1938 and he is buried in the tiny cemetery at Marist Centre, having died in 1974.

RAUSCH STREET recalls the memory of Fr. John Rausch (pronounced 'ow' as in 'how').

"Poppa Rausch" as he was affectionately known in his latter years, hailed from Luxembourg and became a missionary on the island of Bougainville at the turn of this century, establishing the station of Koromira in 1908.

Later he became involved with the training of students for the priesthood and was a founding member of the Toongabbie staff in 1938.

Fr. Rausch died in 1956 and is buried in the Villa Maria cemetery, Hunters Hill.

GORINSKI STREET has its name from Fr. John Gorinski, another New Zealand Marist and member of the first seminary staff at Toongabbie.

After doctoral studies in Rome, he was ordained at age 26 and was to have a long term at Toongabbie, until the mid-1950's – including a term as rector of the seminary.

AUSTIN WOODBURY PLACE is the most recently named street from Marist sources and provides access to the latest and final subdivision, occupying what had been the playing fields of Marist students for several generations.

Fr. Austin Woodbury was the first rector at Toongabbie. Australian-born and Hawkesbury-bred, "Doc" Woodbury was a magnificent philosopher and teacher, staying in New Zealand and Rome before teaching on the Greenmeadows Marist seminary staff in New Zealand.

His talents and interests extended to expert knowledge and care of Meadowstream's Australian Illawarra Shorthorn herd, a prowess recognized by the R.A.S. where Doc Woodbury became a show judge.

After his term as founding rector, he established the Aquinas Academy in the city.

Fr. Woodbury died in 1979 and is also buried in the Marist Centre cemetery, only yards away from the street which now bears his name.

BELL STREET derives its name from another New Zealand Marist, Fr. James Bell (For some years Marists in Australia were linked with those in New Zealand in the same province; hence the number of New Zealanders in Australia during those years.)

Fr. Bell, too, was a rector of Toongabbie seminary, but only for a short period prior to his election as a member of the Rome-based general administration of the Society of Mary (the Marist Fathers).

Earlier he had succeeded Fr. Hurley as provincial superior of the Marists in Australia. Later he too spent many years at St. Patrick's Church in Sydney before his death in his eighties.

JAGO PLACE AND GUIREN PLACE are named after two recent provincial superiors of Marists in Australia, Fr John Jago, the immediate past provincial who succeeded Fr. Peter Guiren in 1979.

In 1985 Fr. Jago became the first Australian to be elected to the office of Superior-General of the Marist Fathers throughout the world. Both he and Fr. Guiren (pronounced as in "eye") were students at Toongabbie, Fr. Guiren having been taught by members of the first staff. He died suddenly in 1987 during his term as parish priest of St. Patrick's in the Rocks.

SIROIS STREET remembers Fr. Regis Sirois (pronounced "seer-wah") who was for many years a member of the administrative staff of the Marist generalate in Rome.

Fr. Sirois was involved in the steps leading Marists to come to Toongabbie.

CHANEL STREET carries the name of one of the first band of Marists to undertake missionary work in the Pacific Islands – Fr. Peter Chanel.

He and his small group left France in 1836. (The Marist Fathers originated in France and the first Marists to come to New Zealand and Australia were French.)

Fr. Chanel landed on the tiny island of Futuna in 1837 and lived there with great simplicity, poverty and endurance, coming to be called by some "the man with the great heart".

On April 28th, 1841, he was clubbed to death by a group of islanders who feared his influence.

Fr. Peter Chanel was declared a Saint by the church in 1954. He is the only Saint, to date, whose remains have ever been on Australian soil. A statue honouring him stands in the front grounds of Marist Centre today.

FUTURA STREET, not far from where Chanel Street meets Tucks Road, is really meant to be FUTUNA STREET. It is a mis-spelling of the name of the island where Peter Chanel toiled as a peace-maker among rival tribal groups and where he was martyred.

PIQUET PLACE is called after one of those early French Marists who labored long in Sydney Town.

Fr. Peter Piquet came to Australia and to St. Patrick's in 1881 and ministered in and from that church until his death in 1936. He had spent some time in Ireland before coming to Sydney where he became a legendary figure.

The Marist house at Toongabbie was built as a memorial to him and a fine portrait of Fr. Piquet hangs in the vestibule of the building.

VIANNEY CRESCENT bears the name of the French parish priest and saint, St. John Vianney, the "Cure of Ars".

Although not a Marist priest, John Vianney had been a fellow-student for a time of some of the first Marists and always gave them great support in France.

GREENMEADOWS CRESCENT recalls the district in New Zealand near the city of Napier where the Marists had their seminary. It was – and still is – commonly referred to simply as "Greenmeadows".

It was there that Australians studied to become priests of the Society of Mary until the opening in 1938 of the Marist house at Toongabbie.

Some of the first Toongabbie students had already begun their course at Greenmeadows and returned home for their final years.

WOODLAWN DRIVE is named after the first boarding college of the Marist Fathers, opened in Lismore, N.S.W., in 1931.

Woodlawn College has provided many priests from amongst its ex-students and is situated 3 miles outside of the city of Lismore.

These, then, are most of the streets near to the Marist Centre. Some others, near the squash and tennis courts, are called after great sporting personalities.

When the Marists came to Toongabbie entrance to the property was from already-existing Reynolds Street and Fitzwilliam Road. (Reynolds St., by the way, is **not** named after the present Australian Marist provincial, Fr. Garry Reynolds, or his priest-brother, Fr. Patrick Reynolds, one-time bursar of the seminary at Toongabbie. Any mistaken association can be easily forgiven!)

Today access is from the newly-constructed Austin Woodbury Place (leading off Reynolds St.) or from Rausch St., around the corner from Fitzwilliam Rd.

The house built as a seminary and now serving its more diverse purposes has always carried a kind of "personal" name as "St. Peter Chanel's", for a long time synonymous with the Marist Fathers' Seminary.

For most today we are simply the "Marist Centre".

Source: Fr. Tony King sm, *The Streets Where You Live. Fifty years of Marist history at Toongabbie 1938-1988*, leaflet, s.d. [1988].