

History of the Mission School 'M'

Article by Katie Mooney (Class of 2007)

Special Thanks to

Carter Collins (Class of 2007), Mandi Collins (Class of 2005),

Steve Boyle (Class of 1966) and Joe Cook (Class of 1964)

The 'M' currently positioned on San Luis Mountain represents class unity that is still present today. The 'M' was conceived and constructed by members of the class of 1964. Larry Eckerman, Mike Benson, Ed Bradbeer, Bill Estrada, Pat Mahoney, Dave Barbica, John Correia, Ken Webber, and Joe Cook built wooden sections at the home of Mr. Eckerman, painted them at Mr. Benson's house, and carried, dragged, and lugged them up San Luis Mountain. Several times that first year, the M was rearranged or tampered with, and each time members of the class of 1964, titled 'The Argonauts' renewed the project. The 'M' was unstable and when the class of 1966 came along, they wanted to fix it up.

The class of 1966, often titled the 'Lively Ones,' recreated the M in its current form, with concrete and rebar. The 1966 class wanted to create a sturdy symbol to represent their beloved high school then, Mission Central Catholic High School. In order for the class of 1966 to make this project a reality, Steve Boyle obtained permission from the landowner at the time, Dr. Edison French. Ray Cattaneo did the design work and then they were ready for action. In order to surmount the obstacle of lifting that much concrete up to that height at that angle, Mr. Cattaneo designed a pulley system which enabled them to make a load of concrete down on the plateau and lift five gallons at a time by driving his jeep, with a rope connected to it, around a tree and down the road. Then they would naturally have to back up the vehicle to return the bucket. This took numerous weekends. There was not one person out of the entire class of 1966 who did not spend at least two entire days up there, poison oak and all. During this construction period, students of San Luis Obispo High School raided the work site and ruined all of the stored concrete sacks. Mission students, however, discovered the persons involved and received restitution. Some of those SLO High rebels are quite prominent citizens of San Luis Obispo today.

Some members of the Class of 1966 are still around. Jan Mello and her husband, Louis Mello, Ray Cattaneo (Cattaneo Jerky), and Steve Boyle, are some names you may recognize. One thing that the 'Lively Ones' learned from that experience was that classes need this type of cohesive function to enable a class to exist as one and build true class unity, spirit, and friendships that will last forever. Steve Boyle advises: "Get involved with your class and your school and stay involved and you will have a lifetime full of memories." Each year the freshman class of, now called, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School makes the trek up San Luis Mountain to repaint this school icon.

The 'M' encountered some dilemmas in its more recent history. During 2004-2005 there was a movement to remove the historic Mission Prep 'M' from the side of the

mountain. Over sixty-five students marched the steps of city hall. The students were there to save the “M,” a letter that could represent a number of things, Madonna (the man who had done so much for San Luis Obispo community,) Madonna (a major land contributor of the mountain that holds the “M,”) but that actually stands for Mission. One thing was for sure, as simply put by Mathew Richman, to the students of Mission College Prep the “M” stood for pride. That night members of the San Luis Obispo Cultural Heritage Committee experienced a meeting like never before. Not only did the numerous M.C.P. students show up but also three original builders of the “M,” as well as multiple M.C.P. staff and parents. The first to speak on the topic were committee members Jeff Hook the San Luis Obispo Senior Planner and Neil Havlick the Natural Resources Manager of San Luis Obispo. They explained both the environmental and economical pros and cons of the “M.” Then the microphone was opened up to public comment. First to speak was Steve Boyle who with the help of Louie Mello explained how the “M” got up there. At that meeting it became obvious the pride and class unity that the “M” had given to the class of 1964 and 1966 had continued in the classes to follow. A number of students stood up to share their memories of painting the “M” and the feelings of pride and class unity that the “M” had instilled in them. Additional points were also highlighted throughout the meeting. Patrick Goshke, the school A.S.B. president noted that it would cause more environmental damage to remove the “M” than it would to leave it there, as well as be very costly to complete the removal project. Other speakers included Mr. Krossa who explained the current path taken to paint the “M” every year and Mandi Collins, who explained that as the granddaughter of Dr. Vernon Maino one of the land contributors of the land reserve, she had grown up with the “M” meaning more than just Mission but a whole number of things including the sight meaning “I was home.” Many other students and parents shared their unforgettable experiences gained from the “M.” A surprising speaker was the man who had come to the meeting concerned with the next item on the agenda, but after hearing so many parents, students and teachers speak he too stood up to express his support for the “M.” The committee voted unanimously for the preservation of the “M.” By the end of the night it was clear, just as Sam Wilson stated, “the students of M.C.P. will do whatever it takes to see that the “M” stays there.”

Thankfully, the ‘M’ could remain with several provisions, one of which was to develop a new trail leading to it. Mission College Preparatory student Carter Collins, an Eagle Scout, felt developing a new trail would make a good Boy Scout Eagle project. In March of 2006, Carter began meeting with the city rangers to begin the planning and trail marking process that would eventually create the new trail leading to this symbol. Two and a half years after first attending the meetings with the City of San Luis Obispo to save the ‘M,’ in late February 2006 Carter completed his portion of the project. The project consisted of planning, marking and the roughing in of a specific section of the new trail. The incoming class of 2012 will have a new route to follow when painting the ‘M’ and the ‘M’ will remain on the mountain for future classes to carry on this tradition. The ‘M’ is still a vibrant symbol of class unity for students of Mission Prep and we hope that it continues to be an icon of class unity in the years to come.

This article was written by Mission Prep Student Katie Mooney in 2007.