

CHAPTER 1

# WE ARE CALVERT HALL

“To touch the hearts of your pupils and to inspire them with the Christian spirit is the greatest miracle you can perform, and the one which God expects of you.”

— *John Baptist de La Salle*



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A shipwreck in Japan brought Joseph Heco to Calvert Hall.

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photo by Harvey Marks

**MORE THAN 16,000 ALUMNI WAVE** their gold and cardinal colors, each with a unique path that brought them to Calvert Hall. But only one came via shipwreck off the coast of Japan.

Hikozo Hamada grew up in a small farming and fishing village in Japan. At age 13, a year after his mother died, Hikozo and his stepfather made two choices that would change the course of Hikozo's life. The first was for Hikozo to accompany his stepfather's crew on a merchant ship bound for Tokyo with a cargo of saké. The second was for Hikozo to transfer to a newer, faster freighter that would get him to Tokyo two weeks sooner, allowing more time for sightseeing and a faster return home. As it turned out, it took him nine years to get back home, and he never saw his stepfather again.

In the waters off Tokyo, a typhoon blew up in the Pacific. "I expected every wave would swallow us up," he wrote later, and prayed to his Shinto gods to spare his life. The typhoon destroyed the ship's sails and cast Hikozo and the crew adrift for 55 days.

The American freighter *Auckland* rescued Hikozo and the crew, then continued on the remainder of its 42-day journey to the next port of call—San Francisco. Hikozo quickly learned enough English to get a job as a dishwasher. When another shipwrecked

crew from Japan arrived in San Francisco a year later, Hikozo served as their interpreter for the local authorities. He so impressed the Chief of the Customs House, Mr. Beverly Sanders, that Sanders hired him.

The next summer, Sanders brought Hikozo with him to his vacation home in Baltimore and took him along on official government business in Washington, D.C., where Hikozo had the distinction of becoming the first nonofficial Japanese to shake hands with a U.S. president—the 14th president of the United States, Franklin Pierce.

That was in the summer of 1854. In the fall, Sanders found a school for Hikozo—he entered Brother Walter's class at St. Joseph's Classical and Commercial Academy at Calvert Hall, less than a decade after the school opened its doors in 1845. Hikozo's classmates welcomed him like a brother. "My fellow students were exceedingly kind: at each recess, they would come around me and teach me the language as well as help me with my lessons," he wrote.

Hikozo was baptized at the Cathedral of the Assumption in Baltimore, the first Japanese to be baptized by a Catholic priest in 200 years. He took Joseph as his Christian name and Americanized his surname to Heco.

## THE FIRST AMERICAN CHRISTIAN BROTHER

Joseph Heco's story personifies Calvert Hall's mission to *prepare a diverse community of young men to achieve their full potential utilizing their unique talents. Through excellent academic and extracurricular programs, led by innovative and dedicated educators, our students become confident men with the ethical foundation to think independently and lead responsibly. Inspired by the faith and zeal of St. John Baptist de LaSalle, our students develop a respect for others as part of an inclusive, lifelong Calvert Hall brotherhood as Men of Intellect, Men of Faith and Men of Integrity.*

September 15, 2020, marks the 175th anniversary of Calvert Hall, the first permanent Christian Brothers school in the United States. Calvert Hall was conceived in the mind of Archbishop Eccleston of Baltimore, who in 1837 heard about a new school that four Christian Brothers from France had started in Montreal. He asked them about opening a similar school for immigrant boys in Baltimore, but no English-speaking Brothers were available. Steadfast in the mission, the Archbishop recruited five young volunteers to begin their religious training with the Christian Brothers in Montreal, where they would also receive training as teachers, then return to Baltimore to open the school.

While waiting for the Brothers to return, Father White, pastor at the Cathedral of the Assumption, began construction of a two-story, 127-foot by 50-foot school building at 16 West Saratoga Street, at an estimated cost of \$10,200. It was the largest hall in the city of Baltimore and was christened "Calvert Hall" in honor of Maryland's founding Catholic family.

Of the five young men who ventured to Montreal to enter the Novitiate, only one, 16-year-old John McMullen, took the vows to join the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He received the name of Brother Francis. After teaching two years in Montreal, despite suffering from tuberculosis, Brother Francis returned to Baltimore in 1845 to teach the first class at Calvert Hall. Brother Edward and Brother Ambrose completed the faculty, and the new school opened with 100 students. "I had to refuse a good number in order not to overcrowd the classes," Brother Francis wrote.

The Brothers lived in what was once described as "a miserable little house near the school." A curtain divided the kitchen and living room on the first floor, and they slept in a small bedroom on the second floor. "Like so many of God's works," one observer noted, "the foundation of the Institute in the United States was laid in poverty and privation of every sort."

Tuberculosis cut short Brother Francis' tenure at Calvert Hall, and his life. In November of the school's second year, Brother Francis collapsed, and his physician ordered him to move to the warmer climate of Florida. He died on April 23, 1848, only twenty years old. Christian Brothers historian Brother Angelus Gabriel



Old Calvert Hall.

*It was the largest hall in the city of Baltimore and was christened "Calvert Hall" in honor of Maryland's founding Catholic family.*

wrote of him, “In His own designs, Almighty God had made use of this frail, pain-racked, generous youth, and his noble Celtic spirit to establish the Christian Brothers in the United States.”

For over a century everyone assumed that Brother Francis had died in Florida. In 1988, at the 50th reunion of the Class of 1938, Brother Rene Sterner, then president of Calvert Hall, asked alumnus and part-time sleuth Henry Wohlfert, “I wonder, do you think you could find Brother Francis’ grave in St. Augustine?”

Wohlfert searched for four years but found no record of his burial there. Curious that he might have returned to Baltimore before his death, Wohlfert searched the *Baltimore Sun* archives and found an obituary from April 24, 1848, for a John F. McMullen. Wohlfert and his son Robert (Class of 1978) searched the New Cathedral Cemetery and found Brother Francis’ tombstone hidden under the branches of a fallen tree.

Brother Kevin Strong, president of Calvert Hall, wanted to bring Brother Francis home to rest at Calvert Hall, “to put the boys in touch with the history of the school.” Brother Kevin asked Michael Ruck—Class of 1964 alumnus, a former Trustee, and prominent funeral director in the Baltimore area—for help. Brother Francis was re-interred on May 12, 2000, in the St. Francis Garden on Calvert Hall’s campus. “If he hadn’t said ‘yes’ and tried the vocation, the rest of us might not be here, and there might not be a Calvert Hall College High School,” Brother Kevin said of Brother Francis in his remarks at the new gravesite.

### THAT'S LASALLIAN

Nor would there be a Calvert Hall College High School unless a young priest in Reims, France, John Baptist de La Salle, had not said “yes” to a similar call 166 years earlier.

John Baptist de La Salle was born to a well-to-do French family in 1651. He was ordained a priest at age 26, earned a Doctorate in Theology, and served at the Cathedral in Reims, all accomplishments which elevated him to the upper echelon in French society at the time.

De La Salle’s ministry took a surprising turn in 1679 after he met Adrian Nyel at the house of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. He exposed him to children in poor parishes trapped in poverty, with little hope of ever obtaining the quality of education and the opportunities for social, economic, and spiritual advancement that were available to him. De La Salle observed untrained and ill-equipped teachers, some of whom were barely more literate than their students. He began helping Nyel establish free schools for boys in Reims and training the teachers.

At this time, however, De La Salle had no idea that education would become his life’s work. “I had imagined that the care which I assumed of the schools and the masters would amount only to a marginal involvement,” he wrote. But he grew to care deeply about the school and the teachers as God led him “in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee.”

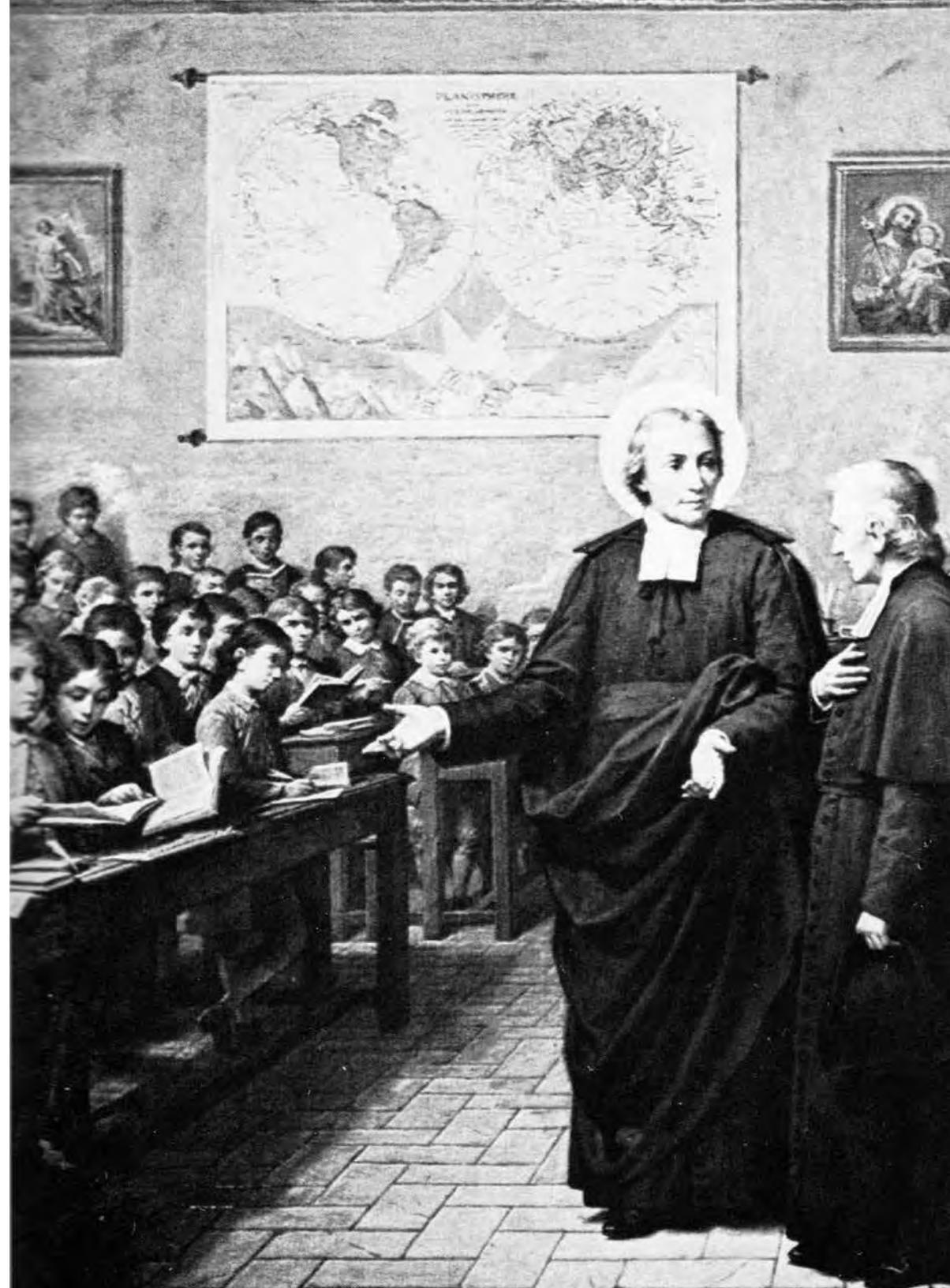


*John Baptist de La Salle*

De La Salle rented a house where the teachers could live, provided their meals, and continued training them. Two years later, he invited the group to move into his own home, where they all lived for a year until De La Salle sold his share of his family's properties to buy a modest house in a poor section of Reims. He and the teachers lived together and began calling each other "Brother." Biographer Brother Edwin Bannon characterizes this as the point at which De La Salle, "made himself poor with the poor, for the sake of the poor." In 1683 he stepped down from his position at the Cathedral, gave up his income and social status, and in the midst of a famine in France, gave away all his wealth to buy food for the poor students in Reims.

By 1691 the Brothers had adopted distinctive black clothing and the name "Brothers of the Christian Schools" to symbolize their shared identity and community. They set out to "bring the gospel to the educational world" and vowed to establish free schools "together and by association," even if they "should have to beg and live on bread alone."

Working and living with poor children shaped De La Salle's educational philosophy. He believed that quality education should be available to everyone, including the poor and the delinquent, regardless of their family's ability to pay. He believed that education should be practical and prepare students for "real life." He integrated principles of Christian living into the classroom instruction of all subjects.





John Baptist de La Salle considered teaching a calling and a mission. “To touch the hearts of your pupils and inspire them with the Christian spirit,” he wrote to the Brothers, “is the greatest miracle you can perform, and the one which God expects of you.” He spoke of teachers as “ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ.”

“You are Brothers to one another,” De La Salle taught his teachers, “and you are also older brothers to your students.” As an older brother, De La Salle wanted teachers to see their role as a “guardian angel” and a “good shepherd” to their students. He trained the Brothers to come alongside their students and give each one individual attention and respect, according to the student’s gifts and abilities. “You have to start by knowing their spirit, their naturalness, and their inclinations,” he taught. “The good shepherd knows his sheep.”

Out of De La Salle’s innovative philosophy came innovative teaching methods, including teaching in the students’ mother language instead of unfamiliar Latin or Greek. While the common practice in schools at that time was to teach one student at a time while the others waited, the Brothers taught small groups divided according to their ability and progress. The Brothers also assigned tasks and responsibilities that involved the students and their parents in the life and operation of the school.

De La Salle’s teacher training expanded well beyond his original group of Brothers. He founded training colleges for teachers, which offered classes on Sunday for those who worked other jobs during the week. He wrote books on educational philosophy, school administration, the spiritual formation of the Brothers, as well as many of the textbooks used in the schools.

Over the next 40 years, De La Salle founded schools in 22 cities with 100 Brothers throughout France. He died at age 67 on Good Friday in 1719, was canonized as Saint in 1900, and was named the Patron Saint of All Teachers in 1950.

#### **175 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP, ACHIEVEMENT, AND SERVICE**

Today, Lasallian schools around the world continue to adhere to five core principles in teaching young men and women: concern for the poor and social justice; faith in the presence of God; quality education; respect for all persons; and inclusive community.

The foundation laid by Brother Francis McMullen testifies to Calvert Hall’s commitment to Saint De La Salle’s core principles since its founding 175 years ago, and Joseph Heco’s experience demonstrates how following those principles fulfills Calvert Hall’s mission to promote leadership, achievement, and service within the church and community.



**Brother Francis McMullen  
brought the mission of  
John Baptist de La Salle  
to Calvert Hall.**

*Original painting by Steve Krach,  
Class of 1981*

In 1857, not long after Heco left Calvert Hall, California Senator William M. Gwin invited him to join his staff in Washington, D.C. While working in Washington, Heco met President James Buchanan, which made him the only Japanese to have shaken hands with two presidents. A year later he became the first Japanese naturalized American citizen.

Heco moved back to Japan to work as an interpreter for an American merchant and diplomat, and when his job brought him back to the United States during the Civil War, he earned yet another distinction as the only Japanese to shake the hand of President Abraham Lincoln. Heco wrote that Lincoln “stretched out a huge hand, saying he was glad to meet one coming from such a far-off place as Japan. He shook hands with me very cordially, and then he made a great many inquiries about the position of affairs in Japan.”

Heco’s professional career continued its ascent from there. He established a trading firm in Japan and wrote a two-volume memoir on his experiences in America. His appreciation for the freedom of the press in America moved him to publish the first modern Japanese-language newspaper, the *Kaigai Shinbun* (Foreign News). Heco is considered the “father of Japanese journalism,” and the Joseph Heco Memorial Society continues to honor his accomplishments and contributions.

Stories like Brother Francis’ and Joseph Heco’s fill Calvert Hall’s renowned history as the oldest Lasallian school in the country. The 175 years overflow with examples of Brothers and teachers, principals and presidents who said “yes” to God’s call to the Lasallian ministry, and of students who developed into men of intellect, men of integrity, and men of faith.

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Joseph Heco,  
“The father of  
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photo by Harvey Marks*