THE FASCINATING HISTORY OF OUR SCHOOL : SOME MILESTONES, HIGHLIGHTS & TRIVIA

1840's - The first batch of MSFS Priests arrived at Vizagapatam in 1846. Rev. Fr. Jean-Marie Tissot, MSFS, acquired a small house near the beach and started the school in 1847. It was the first Catholic institution of the place. The pupils of the school were children of the British Indian Army. The school was co-ed and had 36 boys and 47 girls in the first year. Rev Fr. J. Decompoix served as the first Principal of the school from 1847 to 1864.

1850's - Following the Government of India Act in 1858, the administration was passed from the East India Company to the British Government. New laws encouraged churches and missionaries to start schools and spread education with government funding. Grants for educating soldiers' children were paid. The first Sisters from the Congregation of St Joseph of Annecy in France arrived in Vizagapatam in 1852 and stayed at the school.

1860's - The school was recognized in 1860. It was named after our Patron Saint, St. Aloysius Gonzaga (1568-1591) and called College de Saint Louis Gonzague by the French. The locals referred to it as St Aloysius' European School. With 127 children crowded in a single hall, there was a need for a new building. The school bell was a gift from Pope Leo XIII to Rev. Jean-Marie Tissot on his nomination as Vicar-Apostolic on 6th August 1863. The bell was first installed in the old Sacred Heart Chapel of the school. This bell rang out the Angelus at 6.00 AM, 12 noon and 6.00 PM everyday in an era when the local population had no watches and relied on the sound of the bell to tell the time. Government building grants were approved for larger buildings, including the upper floor rooms. Of the 120-plus children, 80 were military orphans for whom the government paid a monthly allowance of Rs 7 per head. Dormitories were built for providing boarding facility as about 80 of the children came from other areas of the Vizagapatam District.

1870's - The school premises were progressively expanded. As per the School Report of 1875, there were 140 pupils of whom 83 were boarders (63 of them being orphans). Telegraphy was taught to a class of 8 boys. Music was taught to 70 boys. Telugu was introduced as a subject and taught to 50 boys. Gymnastics was practiced by 130 children. Sports were always an integral part of the annual school calendar. The first cricket match in Vizag was played on the *maidan* of the school in 1874 and many a school boy played his first cricket game on this ground.

1880's - The school had grown to 180 pupils who were comprised of about 90 boarders and 90 day scholars. They were mostly European or Eurasian (Anglo-Indian). Rev. Jean-Marie Tissot, the School Founder, was nominated as the first Bishop of Vizagapatam on 25 November 1886. Bro. Anselm Chelvum and Bro. Patrick Wall, both of whom were teaching in St Aloysius' School, became the first MSFS Indian priests. They were ordained in Vizag on December 20, 1873. Rev Anselm Chelvum was the first Indian Principal of the school from 1882 to 1893.

1890's - Reading and writing, English grammar and analysis, composition, Indian history, geography, algebra and arithmetic were taught in the school. Music, drawing, Telugu, book-binding, shorthand and commercial correspondence were also taught. The Fort Convent was started in 1893 and the girls of the school were moved there. An Industrial School was started in 1890 in the area at the western side of the school premises to help the poor boys who were not suited to academic subjects. Selected boys were given 3 years of non-formal training. These students found ready work in the East Coast Railways. A school band was started and the entire school practiced music drill. The French priests got an imported "grandfather clock" in the school parlour. These clocks were known as either 'Comptoise' or 'Morbier' clocks because of the area in France that they were made in. St Aloysius' School had a reputation for good music with a chapel choir and school band that attended most festivals and celebrations in old Vizag. In the late 1800's, visiting Governors, Maharajahs and Archbishops would arrive in Vizag by steamer and be greeted on the foreshore by the band playing anthems and the firing of welcome salutes by the gun batteries at the flagstaff. The school band would then lead processions of dignitaries in 'horse and carriage' with flag waving onlookers down the Main Road towards Waltair.

1900's - In 1901, Hindi was introduced as a subject in compliance with directions for the language to be taught in all schools in the Madras Presidency. The school was recognized as a High School. The iconic structure Old Vizag Lighthouse was first built in 1903 very close the school. Its Flagstaff had been an aid to navigators since the mid 1700's when it was called the Fort Flagstaff. A new curriculum was introduced in compliance with the latest Govt. regulations for European Schools and the School was named St. Aloysius' European School in 1906. The old buildings were renovated and new buildings were constructed to include additional class rooms, a dining hall and a dormitory. The first electric lights in Vizag were switched on at the school on 13 May 1908. Brother Emile of the Industrial School demonstrated electric lighting when he lit the new school building for its opening by Maharani Lady Gajapathi Rao. The two-level building was designed by Rev Fr. Cyril Ailloud. The Collector, RH Campbell approved half the funding and the Maharani with her two daughters, namely, the Rani of Wadhwan and the Rani of Kurupam contributed funds generously. In 1907, the school had 180 pupils, practically all of them being Europeans, Eurasians, or Indian Christians. The staff consisted of seven European priests, four Brothers and two lay teachers. The industrial and technical classes were a special feature, and the institution boasted a cadet corps 60 strong. Students were taught telegraphy, shorthand, typewriting and freehand drawing. The High School grew in numbers as more qualified local teachers joined the High School staff. Mathematics, Science and English Literature became feature subjects with the Senior Cambridge Certificate a qualification.

1910's - French missionary priests and men lay teachers from the community were mainly used for teaching. In 1912, the first lady teachers were introduced for the lower classes. Expansion of the St. Aloysius' Industrial School and installation of machine tools from Europe under Bro. Emile's supervision, were part of the school building expansion. The first movies in Vizag were screened across the St Aloysius *maidan* from the Light House Talkies. This was a favourite for the school boys, especially in the cheapest 4 anna seats. The shows were mainly after dark, and the building was of palmyra tree columns with a tin roof. It was therefore commonly called the Tin Roof Talkies.

1920's - The original school buildings, that also included the Sacred Heart Chapel, were destroyed in the cyclone that hit Vizag on 18 Nov, 1923. The school then had 300 pupils and was also the residence of the Bishop. The school became the support workshop for the Vizag Port construction. During the early industrial development of Vizag, the priests were able to repair the cars of the local Maharajas and show lantern slides and silent movies in tents on the parade ground,

1930's - The building we see today was opened in 1933 and Rt Rev Rossillon, the 3rd Bishop of Vizagapatam (1926-1947), led the school-rebuilding program supported by the then Principal Fr J Leo Contat (1899-1927) and MSFS Mission architect Fr. Cyril Ailloud. The replacement structure was rebuilt with funds mainly from donors in the USA. On 19 Dec 1933, the new Vizag Harbour was opened by the Viceroy of India, at the bow of the tug 'Sir Guthrie Russell' who cut the ribbon between the two dredgers 'Vizagapatam' and 'Waltair' in a ceremony and 'Water Fantasia' orchestrated by St Aloysius Head of Music, Rev. Fr. De Geneve. Boys from the school lined its balconies to watch the first steamer, Jala Durga, enter the harbour.

1940's - There were unwelcome visitors to Vizag on 6th April 1942. Vizag was in the headlines around the world as it was the scene of the first Japanese air raid on India. The Japanese carrier group led by carrier IJN Ryujo in the Bay of Bengal launched the Vizag raid. The planes flew directly over St Aloysius' School to drop their bombs on the new port. An unexploded bomb was recovered, disarmed and kept on display in the Parlour of the school until it was re-located to the Visakha Museum in the 1970's. Admission of non Anglo-Indians was increased gradually till 1947 when the school started catering for all communities irrespective of their caste or creed. Following India's Independence, the Anglo-Indian High School examination defined the completion of Year XI.

1950's - Post Independence, the school quadrangle was the centre for many social events for the local population. Fetes and Fancy Dress competitions and boxing matches for the school boys were held. There were also competitions between Navy recruits and locals. Rock n' Roll was the music that boomed through the school loudspeakers for X'mas and New Years celebrations and

dancing. The sight of Dolphin's Nose and the coming and going of shipping enthralled the school students. A common sight was the dredger 'Vizagapatam' keeping the shipping channel clear.

1960's – The Indo Pakistan war of 1965 gripped the local population. Nightly black-outs and firing of anti-aircraft ack-ack firing lit the sky. The Coastal Battery boomed with gunnery practice rounds of fire and the St Aloysius boys lined its sea-facing balconies to gaze at the distant splash of the fired rounds. 'Jag Sevak' of the Eastern Shipping Co. Ltd. of Bombay (A.H.Bhiwandiwalla & Co, Bombay) ran aground directly opposite the school on 15 July 1965. Class picnics to Lova Thota, Scandal Point, Simachalam Temple, Ross Hill Chapel and Lawsons Bay were annual events. A new three-storeyed wing was constructed on the Western side.

1970's - The school witnessed from up close the construction of the outer harbour through the decade. It was a daily sight for the Aloysians to see the cranes-barges 'Hanuman' and 'Bhima' making their way slowly from the channel to drop off huge concrete blocks - just one per each trip - to pile up the break-waters for the outer harbour. School picnics to Mudasarlova water works, Seethammadhara, Gambheeram Gedda, Madhavadhara, Yarada and other places were an annual feature. Impromptu picnics were not rare The Anglo-Indian and I.S.C. course curricula / syllabi were discontinued in 1976. The same year, the first batch of ICSE students also passed out. The iron ore conveyor became functional and huge bulk carrier ships of tonnage hitherto unseen in Vizag, berthed in the outer harbour to carry away iron ore to Japan and other far away shores. The academic year was changed from the calender year to mid-year (June onwards) in 1980.

1980's - The Nuns, who were taking care of the catering, infirmary and Nursery classes (Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy and later Sisters of St. Anne of Luzeru) discontinued their stay and retreated from the school. Commerce was introduced as a subject for the first time in the school in 1980. New accommodation for the boarders was constructed. A new building for the Primary section was also constructed after demolishing the old Infirmary and erstwhile residence of the Nuns.

1990's - The rights of ownership of the age-old playground were secured and a boundary wall was constructed. The school celebrated its Sesqui Centenary and a permanent stage was constructed at the Northern side of the quadrangle. By then, the outer harbour had grown enormously with separate berths for crude oil and coal.

With the turn of the millennium and amidst sweeping changes in the socio-economic and educational milieu of a fast growing Visakhapatnam, the school continues to stand tall and majestic as ever as an institutional epitome of value-based education as well as a paragon of service to the society.

The school celebrated its landmark milestone 175 years (Dodransbicentennial) in 2022.

Acknowledgements:

With gratitude for inputs provided by **John Castellas** from Australia and **Sohan Hatangadi,** both being very accomplished Aloysians who are avid aficionados of the Heritage of Vizag and our school.