

La Martiniere College, Lucknow – An Update
By Kaplesh Kumar, Sc.D.,J.D.
Martin House, 1958-64
Old Martinians Association of New England

This October 2013 I visited the Mart (La Martiniere College, Lucknow) after a gap of about two years in the wake of reports that the school had been ranked among the top ten (10) day schools in India. Indeed, each of the four La Martiniere boys and girls schools at Lucknow and Kolkata had been ranked as a top ten school, with the Kolkata schools ranking higher than the Lucknow schools.

Several months before my last visit to the school in 2011, a new principal, Mr. Carlyle McFarland, had taken charge. The school's academic reputation at the time had hit serious lows and its facilities and infrastructure were badly in need of repair, work on which was progressing. My brief meeting then with Mr. McFarland had left me hopeful that under his leadership the fortunes of the Lucknow school would be turned around for the better, and its former image as one of India's premier schools restored.

The current visit did not disappoint. As I approached the school campus, the early welcome signs included across-the-road sign boards signaling the private nature of the access road to the Mart; a tennis facility emblazoned with the coats of arms of the four school houses (Martin, Hudson, Lyons and Cornwallis) gracing the initial access to the school and its grounds near the Lucknow Golf club, alongside the school's access road; and yellow school buses for transporting students parked on the grounds nearby.

Further up the road, as I walked within the school's gated environs to the main building from the manned gate beyond which vehicular traffic is prohibited, a couple of outdoor basketball courts became visible on the school side of the road, opposite the faculty residences on the other side. The fenced-in playing fields were well maintained. A guest house near Spence Hall dedicated to the memory of Mr. Frank DeSouza (“Douze”), the favorite chemistry teacher and Vice Principal of many a Martinian including me, whose Housemaster he also was, stood out in the distance.

While the school structure seemed to be in reasonably good condition, the faculty residences opposite the basketball courts looked less so. The sloping barrier (aptly referred to as a “monstrosity” by some) erected some years ago between the Laa and the school for preventing flooding from the Gomti river and providing an easement to the public across the college grounds was covered with grass; the grass-covered slopes terminated at their high ends into aesthetically acceptable fencing.

The steps leading up to the Constantia in front of the main building continue to display the many name engravings of students from yesteryears. More names have been added

recently as well, so the tradition continues. Upon reaching the landing in front of the chapel at the top of the steps, I was struck by the sight of the two short barrel length cannons, each supported on a concrete base surrounded by green grass lawns, separated by a concrete pathway on which are mounted the Founder's long barrel length gun and bell. The lawn segments were accented with movable planters.

The chapel's outer chamber houses the college library. The hallway outside the chapel has its usual postings of school activities. The school, however, has also begun to recognize the achievements of its distinguished alumni by posting their photographs with brief write-ups on the exterior of the chapel wall. The photographs of a few eminent journalist and author Old boys presently grace this wall. Plans are afoot to similarly honor some heroes of India's wars.

This appears to be part of a larger effort by the school to reach out to its alumni. An Alumni Office has been established in the administrative wing of the school, below the Principal's Office. Lounge and conference facilities are available for alumni use. The Office is managed by an efficient Lucknow Old Boy, Mr. Subroto Banerjee, who is ably assisted by a Non Commissioned Officer retiree of the Indian Army. They have begun to compile a database of Old Martinians dating back to the early 1900s. The Alumni Office can be reached via e-mail at <lamartinierealumni@gmail.com>.

The formalities are nearing completion for the school to be able to accept cash contributions from foreign contributors. Other desirable ways, however, in which foreign based alumni and well-wishers can support the school is by helping procure needed equipment. The school has agreed to provide a list of its equipment needs for targeted contributions and initiatives that meet specific school and student needs. I plan to propose to the Old Martinians Association of New England (OMANE) that it examine the viability of a program responsive to such needs, possibly in cooperation with alumni and other OMA chapters worldwide.

The school appears to have turned the corner, and seems to be well-positioned to build upon the initiatives that have been started. Mr. McFarland deserves our collective gratitude for the way he has taken charge of steering the ship that is La Martiniere College, Lucknow. Although any excitement about the school's future must be tempered with the reality of the considerable task that remains, I am increasingly hopeful of the school's future under Mr. McFarland's stewardship. The door has been opened to alumni participation in the school's successes. One hopes that the alumni will not permit this opportunity to remain unexplored or unexploited.

Vive LaMartiniere!