History of a Memory

by Mike Williams

Shortly after the ground breaking ceremony for the new Prep School last September, a crane eased the top from the old observatory, preserving it for a future one. Then the crane’s wrecking ball and cats’ blades demolished the building to make room for the new Prep School. Nearly sixty-seven years had elapsed between the raising and the razing of the St. John’s Observatory.

Back in the 1880’s Father Subprior Peter Engel, O.S.B., was deeply interested not only in what lay beyond the stars but in the stars themselves. But he didn’t possess the instruments necessary to indulge in his hobby and there were no instruments available to him in this area. His desire to study the stars eventually prompted him to seek some means of obtaining at least a telescope and whatever other equipment was needed to further his astronomical pursuits. He did not have the ready cash to purchase the instruments and as Father Abbot had repeatedly explained, buying them with community funds would divert money from possible community good to a non-essential. The Abbot’s edict settled the matter as far as everyone was concerned—everyone, that is, except the subprior. Father Peter persisted in his desire.

He reasoned and reiterated, discussed and debated, projected and proposed until years had elapsed between the raising and the razing of the St. John’s Observatory. The site chosen was 200 yards east of the campus proper, close enough so that it could be reached from anywhere on campus in ten minutes, yet remote enough that campus lights would not impair the telescope’s effectiveness. The location overlooking Lake Sagatagan was sufficiently elevated to assure a commanding view of the horizon.

In November, 1894, the telescope was removed from the water tower and, along with the other instruments, placed in the near-completed observatory. Abbot Bernard elevated to assure a commanding view of the horizon.

At the Top of the Stairs

by Mike Faas

Designed as an attempt to encourage sound and wholesome reading and to remove Alfred Hitchcock, Superman, and Flash Gordon from teen-age hands, a Prep bookstore was recently opened for those Johnnies who are constantly booked for the night study hall.

In charge of this experiment in better reading is Greg Hall Senior Dan O’Connor. Dan became a part of the Prep bookstore idea during speech class. Last April, following an oration on books, speech teacher Father Cuthbert asked him if he would consider managing a Prep bookstore. Having accepted the assignment, Dan nosed around during the summer and came up with some useful information, the results of which are clearly seen and read.

During the first few days following the store’s grand opening, sales were tops. Replenishing the reading supply as fast as it disappeared, the bookstore backed up the boast that it could obtain any paperback asked for.

Literally crammed with nothing but paperbacks, the shop’s success is partly due to its great variety of subject matter. The assortment ranges from the first major novel ever written, Don Quixote, to such modern classics as Main Street, the Ox-Bow Incident, and Return of the Native. There are numerous self-help books of writing, reading, and language, and selections by