

- 1849 Minnesota Territory established.
- 1856 Benedictines arrived in Minnesota. Free school opened in Stearns County.
- 1857 Bill No. 70 of Minnesota's Eighth Legislative Session incorporated the St. John's Seminary.
- 1867 Abbot Rupert Seidenbusch, OSB, St. John's first abbot, blessed on June 2.
- 1875 Pope Pius IX created Archbishop James Gibbons of Baltimore as first American cardinal.
- 1875 Vicariate Apostolic of Northern Minnesota established on February 12.
- 1875 Abbot Alexius Edelbrock, OSB, St. John's second abbot, blessed on October 24.
- 1875 St. John the Baptist Parish established on December 12.
- 1895 English began to replace German in parish announcements.

# 1

## BEGINNINGS

In 1875 the American Church — including its faithful in central Minnesota — was making headlines. Pope Pius IX had named Archbishop James Gibbons the first American cardinal and had established the Vicariate of Northern Minnesota from the then diocese of St. Paul. The apostolic vicar's jurisdiction stretched for 600 miles east to west and 250 miles north to south. That May, Most Rev. Rupert Seidenbusch, OSB, was consecrated the vicariate's bishop in St. Mary's Church in St. Cloud. Shortly after his consecration, Bishop Seidenbusch resigned as the first abbot of the then abbey of St. Louis on the Lake, "situated in the most healthy part of Minnesota,"<sup>1</sup> and moved to St. Cloud to administer the vicariate which numbered 14,000 immigrant settlers and 25,000 Indians, and a clergy of twenty-one Benedictine and eight diocesan priests. That December this bishop answered the request of twenty settlers who lived near the abbey to establish the St. John the Baptist Parish, one of forty-two churches in the vicariate at that time.

The monks of St. Louis on the Lake, who in 1866 moved their abbey from St. Cloud to the lake country twelve miles west, by 1875 served many Stearns County parishes and also conducted St. John's College, which in that year enrolled 138 students, thirteen of them in the seminary. By 1877 the

*Vicariate of  
Northern  
Minnesota*

*"Collegeville"*

term "Collegeville" appeared in the St. John's records. Two years later a post office and telegraph station was established at the Collegeville train depot near the trackage which marked the mightiest curve of the then St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. The railroad stopping at Collegeville not only brought more students to the college each semester but also brought more German homesteaders to the rocky hill country around the abbey.

Two German families had settled near Collegeville as early as 1856, perhaps in response to Fr. Francis Pierz who began his missionary activity in central Minnesota in 1852. Father Pierz wrote: "I informed the Germans that Minnesota is an ideal place for a settlement and that they can secure lands in a short time."<sup>2</sup> The first Collegeville parishioners were mainly Bavarians, Rhinelanders, and Westphalians who emigrated from Germany to seek a better livelihood, to gain more religious freedom, or to escape the draft. Some did not emigrate directly to this area but moved to Stearns County from other states — the Edelbrocks from Iowa, the Borgerdings from Indiana, etc. The impetus that led monks and farmers to worship together as Collegeville parishioners in 1875 began thirty years earlier.

*Benedictines  
establish  
abbey in  
Pennsylvania*

On September 16, 1846, the first Benedictines left Bavaria for America. Fr. Boniface Wimmer, OSB, led the monks to Latrobe, Pennsylvania. On July 23, 1848, during the reign of Pope Pius IX, the monks established the priory of St. Vincent. On August 24, 1855 the Holy See raised the priory to an abbey with Father Boniface as its abbot.

Regardless where the German Catholic went, his culture was supported by the German clergy. The Benedictine priests realized the needs of the German people and decided to follow the settlers to the woods of central Minnesota. As the historian of St. John's Abbey, Fr. Colman Barry, OSB, wrote in 1953:

The German immigrant to the United States has been brought up . . . on the tradition that "there is no better



or higher culture than German and the practice of religion by a German must be the best in the world."<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Joseph Cretin of St. Paul in January 1856 asked Abbot Boniface of St. Vincent's for a band of Benedictines to care for the spiritual needs of his people. Likewise that January five other American bishops petitioned the Benedictines to come to their dioceses. The abbot listened to each monk's opinion regarding these apostolates and then decided:

We will commit the whole affair to the hands of God — may he decide where we should have the beginning. I shall write to each of the bishops and tell him our needs; i.e., the conditions upon which we will be able to correspond with his request. All of these letters I will mail at the same time and the first bishop who will reply satisfactorily shall have our priests.

The voice of God came from the West, from St. Paul, the most distant point of the six petitions. The mail first reached Dubuque by rail and then continued by stage to St. Paul. From that city came the first call for Benedictine monks. The St. Vincent monks decided to open the mission by sending their prior, Fr. Demetrius di Marogna, and two seminarians, Frs. Bruno Riess and Cornelius Wittmann, OSB, and Brothers Benno Muckenthaler and Patrick Greil, OSB.

The diocese of St. Paul extended over what is now Minnesota and the Dakotas. The missionaries tried to decide in 1855 whether to locate on the Minnesota or Mississippi Rivers. The missionary Fr. Francis X. Pierz contacted the Benedictines and reminded them that in the early 1850's he suggested that the Benedictines come to Stearns County and work among the German immigrants. With this reminder, the group pushed on to the Mississippi River at St. Anthony where they settled to do God's work.

*Benedictines  
in Minnesota*

*Benedictines  
in St. Cloud,  
1856*

Father Bruno and his fellow missionaries made their way to St. Cloud from St. Anthony on May 19, 1856:

The craft was merely a boat for transportation of freight, had no conveniences whatsoever for passengers, furnished no meals, not a chair to sit upon — still fifty passengers entered at this place. For two days and one night we sought comfort among the trunks and other freight, and were exposed to ferocious attacks of mosquitoes and had nothing to eat. On the afternoon of the 20th the boat was moored about two miles below St. Cloud; orders were given to have freight unloaded at this point while passengers were to step out at St. Cloud. About half of the freight was unloaded. P. Bruno and one of the lay brothers were on shore attending to their baggage and the other lay brother remained on board keeping guard over our cask of Mass wine, for the little cask was an attraction to the deck hands. Before we who were on shore could realize our situation, the boat pushed off and made for Sauk Rapids. Now find a human habitation or even St. Cloud without roads or guides! The lay brother remained with the baggage and P. Bruno set out to explore. To find St. Cloud was then a rather more difficult task than it would be today, comprising as it did one house and four less dignified edifices and these far apart.<sup>4</sup>

If the Benedictines were to establish Catholicism in the area, they had to soon file a land claim. Father Bruno noted the problem:

Up to the date of our arrival St. Clouders had not dreamt of making land claims — all looked so hopeless. But our appearance turned the tables and that very night the inhabitants of St. Cloud claimed and staked out the entire prairie between St. Cloud and the crossing of the Sauk River, not leaving a single spot in the vicinity for us to locate upon.<sup>5</sup>



Fr. Alexius Hoffmann, OSB, writing in 1931, commented:

*Rothkopp  
settlement*

In the meantime, Father Bruno had gone to see two old farmers who some weeks previously had promised to turn over their "claims" to the Fathers to build the monastery on their land. Here two claim-holders were two brothers, William and Louis Rothkopp or Rolhkopf, both bachelors, who had a claim of 160 acres about two miles from the center of the present city of St. Cloud near the river. They had built two log cabins on the sections, which were contiguous. Their houses were only two feet apart, close to the line of their respective claims, and here the two brothers lived like hermits. Father Bruno was not aware the Rothkopps had not filed their claims in the land office; he believed them to be the real owners of the land. They were so willing to donate. Arrangements were speedily made and the fathers took possession (May 27, 1856).

When Wilhelm and Ludwig Rothkopp came to Minnesota in 1854, the Winnebago Indians owned the land they claimed. Provisions in the law allowed the Rothkopps to purchase it according to pre-emption claims as long as they improved the land or constructed buildings on it. Their claims were transferred on May 27, 1856, to the Benedictine community, a serious mistake as the Rothkopps could sell the improvements on their claim, but they could not transfer or sell their untitled claims. The Benedictines did not realize that they were buying the land as opposed to the actual improvements on it. As soon as the land transfer became public, the land grab was on. Abbot Boniface went to Washington to seek help from Minnesota's congressmen toward establishing the monks' claim to the Rothkopp land. Within the next decade the St. John's monks had established their monastery on the former Rothkopp land along the Mississippi in St. Cloud.

*Grasshopper  
plague,  
1856-57*

In 1856 central Minnesota fell victim to a grasshopper plague. Accounts of that time indicate the extent of that plague. On August 15, while a Jesuit, Father Weninger, was preaching a mission-sermon in St. Joseph, the congregation noted:

a heavy darkness suddenly set in, accompanied, as we thought, by a tremendous hail-storm, the clatter of which drowned the voice of the preacher. But it was something worse than hail stones. for when we left the church our eyes beheld nothing but greedy grasshoppers, which had darkened the sun and in their descent had struck so heavily upon the roof of the chapel . . . .

This small, voracious, yet invincible monster had in a short time devastated all that grows and blooms upon the face of the earth. Within about two or three days the fields presented the appearance of having been newly plowed. Then an indescribable misery entered the homes of the poor settlers of Stearns County. The entire harvest was a dead loss for those settlers who had taken their abodes in this region during the previous year; those, of course, who had settled during the year of the famine had no crop to lose, as they had not planted any.

The few victuals that remained were soon consumed, prices rose enormously because the nearest market was St. Paul, and it required a full week to make a trip with an ox-team. Still hope did not die. What would man be without hope? Spring came; seed wheat stood at \$2 per bushel, but it was bought and sowed. But the new brood of grasshoppers suffered nothing to grow, except peas. Everything else became their prey. They found their way into the houses and destroyed what clothing they could reach. In the church



not a shred of cloth could remain exposed, everything was locked up in presses. Even the priest at the altar was not secure against their attacks; before Mass the hoppers had to be swept off the altar. The priest had to vest hastily, place the altar clothes upon the altar and be very careful to keep the Sacred Host covered with the paten, and at the elevation had to leave the pall upon the chalice. During Mass the altar boys were kept busy driving away the insolent insects with whips from the vestments of the priest.

When the farmers were plowing their fields in the spring of 1857 they noticed that after the sun had shone for a few hours on the fresh furrows the soil had a whitish appearance as though a heavy frost had settled; still it was not frost, but grasshopper eggs which were hatched in the gentle sunlight. Every handful of soil was alive with young hoppers. They grew rapidly; wherever old land was replowed the same phenomena occurred. We concluded that they had been hidden in the old fields. The insects did not proceed to devour at pleasure but every stalk was occupied by as many as conveniently found place upon it. Hundreds gnawed at one stalk until it had disappeared; they fell together in a heap and rushed for the next victim. Not a particle of the grain remained.

When the dusk of evening was setting in I returned sadly to my house. On the following day you might have examined the field with a magnifying glass without finding a vestige of the grain, corn and potatoes. This is apparently incredible to the reader; in fact, I would scarcely believe it myself from mere reading if I had not been an eye witness. I saw the grasshoppers devastating this field twice, the second time when after a heavy rain sprouts again began to be visible. Truly God is admirable in his works.<sup>6</sup>





Rev. Fr. Paulsen - Schwester Adela - Rev. P. Ulrich  
 Religions-Lehrer. Lehrerinnen. Pfarrer.

SchulKinder der St. Johannes-Allee-Parre im Jahre 1886.





*Stone school, 1906*

*Ruins of same school, 1975*





For the farmers of Stearns County, poverty and misery were real. No food, no money to buy food, cattle died from starvation and blood-poisoning caused by grasshopper bites. Storekeepers who extended credit found themselves without credit. "Want stared in the face of the much afflicted settlers. More than one half of them would have emigrated from Minnesota had they possessed the means." Father Bruno gives one example of one family which lacked the means to move:

One winter day Father Clement and myself strolled off into the woods to look up a family which we had missed at church services for several Sundays. Finally we struck a clearing, where a man was cutting wood. Some of his children had noticed us coming and hurried into the house. The man at work wore no shoes, but rags wrapped about his feet, which were frostbitten. His wife was but scantily clothed with apparel made from rags and a potato sack, while the children had about as little clothing as the children of the aborigines. They crept into their beds when we entered the house. They nourished themselves with herbs dug out from beneath the snow. Such food also made up my meals when I visited the impoverished districts. When I arrived at my lodging place after a hard day's work and did not find the husband at home, I would inquire for him. "He has gone out looking for something and has not yet returned." This was sufficient for me. I knew what would constitute supper and meals for the following day — roots, herbs, rinds of various trees and leaves boiled and eaten without condiment of any kind.<sup>7</sup>

*First school  
in  
Stearns  
County*

Despite such events the Benedictines worked diligently to administer the sacraments to the immigrant settlers as well as instructing them in reading, writing, and arithmetic. In the fall 1856, in the home of Joseph Edelbrock, the task of education first began in Stearns County. This was the

first formal school and Fr. Cornelius Wittmann, OSB, was the staff. "It was thus a free school in the fullest sense of the word, for no tuition was asked, and the teacher received no pay."<sup>8</sup> There were ten pupils, seven boys and three girls.

The early Benedictines knew that if they were going to survive in this new settlement they should establish a more permanent school to educate young men who would want to follow the Benedictine rule. From 1850 to 1857 the population increased 2,485% in the county. With the increase of population there was also an increase in the missionary work for the monks. If the tasks were to be met, they would need men. Thus the monks decided in March 1857 to send a bill to the Minnesota Territorial Legislature to incorporate the "St. John's Seminary." This move was the catalyst which secured permanency to the order for years to come.

Honorable John L. Wilson of St. Cloud presented the bill to a legislature controlled by Republicans, which caused it to be tossed from house to house. The last sentence of the original bill read: "That also good talented boys of the poorer classes may enjoy the benefit of said institution." The legislature altered it to: "No student shall be required to attend the religious worship of any particular denomination except as specified by the student, his parent, or guardian."<sup>9</sup> After a long struggle the bill was passed in the original form on February 27, 1857, and signed by Territorial Governor Willis A. Gorman on March 6, 1857.

The seminary opened on November 10, 1857, but as the community was losing money Prior Demetrius began to sell lots of the Rothkopp claim. With the bills mounting, he sold lots for \$100 to \$200. This helped ease the debts, but each time a lot was sold the city moved closer and began to infringe on the solitude of the monastery.

The monks decided to look for another claim and asked Father Bruno, who was already stationed in St. Joseph, Min-

*St. John's  
Seminary  
opens*



nesota, to survey future claims for the abbey. Father Bruno wrote:

A relative of Mr. J. H. Linnemann led me through the thickets along the banks of the Watab, and here it was that I struck upon the splendid pastures of Section 31, irrigated by the northern branch of the Watab. The bush lying toward the south had been burnt by the Indians in the previous year. The land thus cleared might be turned into pasture. To the west; as far as my eye could reach, I could see nothing but dense forest. I concluded to make a detailed exploration of the country. On the Monday following I made a start. Providing myself with a tin-cup, a loaf of bread, a sharp hatchet, a double-barreled shotgun and a small compass, I turned my face westward in *nomine Domini*.

Where should I find the line of the government survey? Everywhere I struck upon trees recently notched, but this had been done by settlers from the prairie, who had taken timber claims in hopes of realizing therefrom maple sugar, fuel, and timber for building fences. I was at a loss to find the right marks; however, it was a task imposed upon me by obedience and my perseverance was speedily rewarded by my discovery of the township line and section pole on that same day. Now I proceeded to inspect, mounting hills and climbing trees, to get a view of the surrounding country, and frequently consulting the compass and counting my steps lest I should not find my way back to St. Joseph. Despite its scorched hills, Section 31 pleased me, because it furnished water and meadows with fine grass.

Claiming  
land

One major problem faced the monks — the law required at least four men to lay claim on each section of land, but the first St. John's community had but five monks. Abbot Boniface of St. Vincent Abbey then travelled to Minnesota

along with Fr. Alexius Roatzer, OSB, Frater Paul Stenger, OSB (a seminarian), and Brothers Wolfgang Beck, Vincent Hoermann, Roman Veitl, and Veremund Erlard, OSB. The claims now could be secured and the land worked.

Father Bruno told this story:

Our financial resources were represented by the previous Sunday collection at St. Joseph — \$.35 — really a royal capital for four men to begin with in the wilderness. For the sake of greater security we kept close to the township line and began cutting tamaracks for a small hut 16 x 20. Nearby we had cleared a small space for a building. [This clearing was just south of the present Collegeville station, precisely in what is now the Stewart Hansen family garden.] None of us ever imagined a railroad would be built in that vicinity so soon.

We were interrupted in our building by a heavy snow-fall. We had no teams to bring the logs to the building site, but had to carry them. We proceeded to build, but as we had neither shingles nor boards for the roof, we made one side of the building higher than the other, laid tamarack poles across and covered these with brush and sod. Over this we spread a layer of ground to add weight to the roof. The house was finished in two days. The larger spaces between the logs were filled out with wood and the whole structure rendered weather-proof by a coating of clay. A pane of glass in the door and one in the wall admitted light very sparingly.

We returned to St. Joseph on the evening of the first day. On the next morning we brought with us a small stove, a board to serve as a door, and our bedding. All these materials we lugged on our shoulders, as there were no roads. Grass gathered from beneath the snow was the filling for our ticks. The brisk fire in the middle of the room dried the damp grass of the roof



and bedding and the moist clay on the walls. The hut was occupied by the three lay brothers, and thus was laid the foundation of the future abbey.<sup>10</sup>

Claim jumpers caused another problem. The land had to be measured and some system set up to let the people know that the Benedictines would work it. First, however, the land had to be set apart from other land in the area. Father Bruno continued:

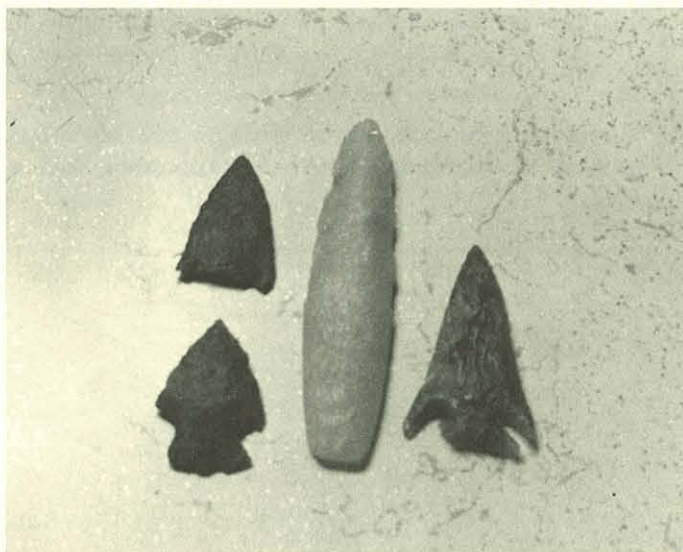
I went ahead with my compass and sighted some distant tree that stood in the direction pointed out by the compass. Then I made for that tree, reckless of shrubs, thorns and marshes. I could not mind my feet for fear of losing sight of the tree. In this way I sacrificed several pair of trousers. I had to mark off quarter sections. With my short legs I could make only 1000 steps to each quarter-mile. To avoid danger of losing track of my count I picked up ten chips and threw away one of them after every one hundred steps. When the chips were exhausted, I had arrived at the end of the quarter section. The brother, who followed me with an ax, marked the trees along the line.

In the course of this survey, we one day arrived on the shores of the beautiful lake, near where the University now stands. I was bound to acquire this sheet of water for the monastery. But how? Of course I must claim it. There were not enough of us to establish a legal claim besides those we held already. Eight men were required and we were but six. All, however, insisted that the lake must be ours. I might easily have sacrificed the two quarter sections of Section 31, because most of the woods had been badly scorched, but in that case the section would have been broken, we would have lost an approach to the meadows and probably some undesirable neighbor might have been wedged between our possessions.



*Sebastian Meyer and granddaughter,  
Mary Schwegel Murphy*

*Arrowheads found on the Walter Goerger farm*





*St. John's  
College*

I was unwilling to lose hold of Section 6 on account of the timber on it. This put me in a quandary. Moreover, how was all this land to be paid for? We had no money on hand, debts enough on account of our provisions, and could expect nothing of the grasshopper-stricken congregations. In later years I was frequently reproached for not claiming more land west of the lake. Nowadays the eggs are always smarter than the hen. At this juncture a solution of this puzzle occurred to me. I had a personal friend in Washington, whom I requested to submit to Congress a petition for land for a monastery and college for the foundation of which P. Demetrius had already acquired a charter. At the same time I put up about twenty signs in different parts of the land I intended to claim, with the inscription: "Application for this land is made to Congress for St. John's College." These signs effectually kept off intruders. My application to Congress was unsuccessful, but we were no longer disturbed by land-sharks.<sup>11</sup>

*Indians  
assist  
settlers*

Father Alexius commented on how the Indians helped the first St. John's monks:

One day while one of the brothers was driving with a wagon-load of provisions from the village of St. Joseph to the farm (Collegeville) three miles distant, he was stopped in the middle of the forest by ten Indians who proceeded to open one of the sacks and took out three loaves of bread. The brother stood rooted to the spot with fear, but was suddenly taken by surprise when one of the Indians gravely stepped up to him and gave him \$.25; whereupon both parties went away.

Joseph Knoblach, whose grandparents homesteaded just north of St. John's in St. Wendel Township, told a similar story:

Dad and his brothers and sisters used to play with the Indian children. One day the Indian chief came. He couldn't talk German, and he wanted grandpa to go along, and grandpa didn't know what to do. They never had a feud with the Indians; they always got along. Grandma said: "Why don't you go along and see what the Indian wants." I think he had a bow and arrow. He took grandpa and was gone a couple of hours. It was getting late, and everybody wondered what the Indian did to grandpa. Grandma and her family got worried and started to pray, but just before dark, here comes grandpa. The Indian had taken him way out southwest of Roman Sauerer's place and shot a big deer. He knew that grandpa and grandma didn't have much to eat, so he parted the deer with grandpa. Then grandpa came home with half a deer. St. John's cemetery has some graves with cement markers where the Indians are buried.

Between 1858 and 1865 St. John's Seminary moved from St. Cloud to St. Joseph and back to St. Cloud. Then the monks and students put their possessions in carts and made their final move to the Collegeville train station site in January 1866. Fr. Valentine Stimmler, OSB, wrote:

In April we began cutting down trees where the house and stables were to stand; then the excavations were made for the foundation walls. On May 28, Brother Thaddaeus arrived on the spot with the first wagon load of boards. As the wagon drove in sight, Fathers Prior, Meinulph, Joseph, Wolfgang, and I sang the *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. The building, the dimensions of which were 46 by 50, was erected of native boulders, which lent an air of great strength and massiveness to the edifice.

On December 12, 1865, twelve monks met in person or through proxy at the old farm to elect their first abbot.



*Abbey of  
St. Louis  
on the Lake*

Abbot Boniface Wimmer, OSB, of St. Vincent Abbey presided. On the first ballot, the St. John's monks elected the St. Vincent prior, Fr. Rupert Seidenbusch, OSB, as their abbot.

Then on March 17, 1867, the Holy See granted permission for the former Priory of St. Cloud to be called the Abbey of St. Louis on the Lake in a token of gratitude to the late King Louis of Bavaria. The abbey, with a new name and government, was ready to build. This abbey effected the flow of German immigrants to central Minnesota. Benedictine pastors advertised by mail, and their parishioners wrote to friends telling them of the Catholic community.

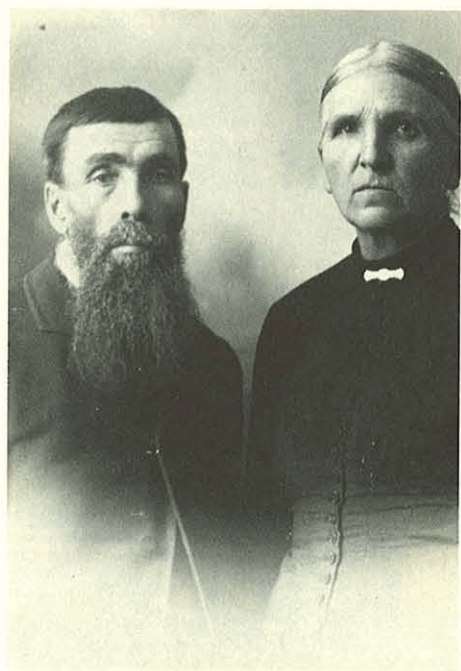
Fr. Joseph Kundek, OSB, wrote to the Leopoldine Society of Bavaria describing the Germans settlements in Minnesota:

I believe that settlements are the most apt means to safeguard and to spread our holy religion in America, because in this manner the members of the same faith unite as it were into one family, live together, mutually share their religious sentiments and impressions, as one body attend the divine service, receive from their pastor all the comforts of religion as they desire, have the opportunity of having the necessary instruction imparted to their children in school, mutually support one another in commerce and occupations, and thus form a society that meets all their interests. Such colonies and settlements are according to my conviction the best means to protect the Catholic immigrants against the loss of their faith, to safeguard them against the inducements and the seductions of our adversaries, and to enable them to preserve incorrupt the sacred treasure of religion and to transmit it to their children.

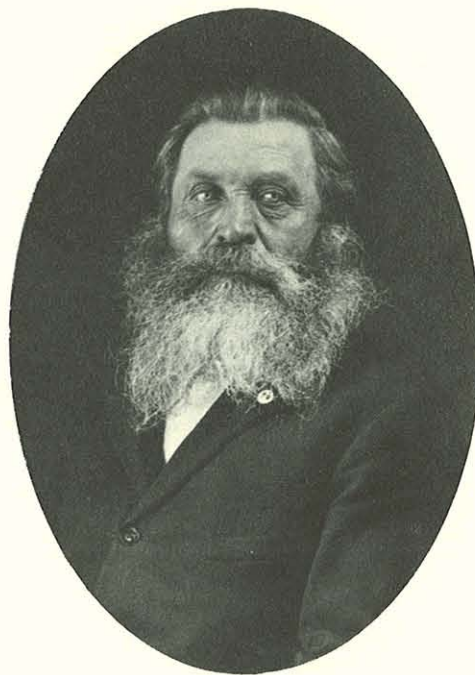
Peter Eich, John Obermueller, and George Fichl farmed on Section 2, just west of the monastery. Settlement in 1866



*Mr. and Mrs. Peter Rau*



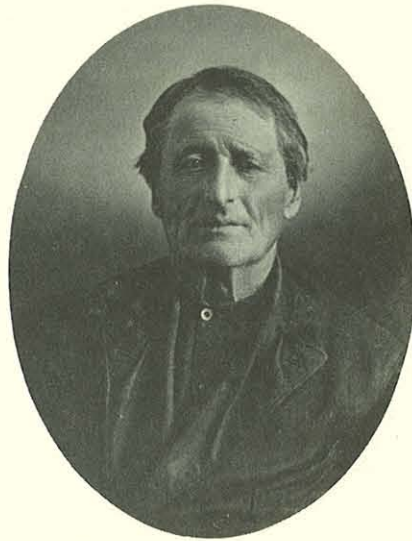
*Mr. and Mrs. Peter Eich*







*Steve Salzer, Sr., 1918*



*Michael Reisinger,  
father of Matthew Reisinger*



*John and Josepha Janker*



*John Tschida, 1898*

was difficult, the land was slow to clear and only leisurely gave fruit. Father Alexius noted:

Mr. (Peter) Eich settled on the rising ground west of our "Watab" (Stump Lake) in 1866 and was employed as a carpenter in the building of the old stone school house here. Obermueller had a farm on the other side of the Watab near the hamlet known as Flynnville. Since 1866 many other farmers came in, still one can scarcely see one house from the other.

By 1872, Minnesota's population was 14,206. The railroad saw a need to have a train stop in St. Joseph to serve the immigrants. With the coming of the train, more settlers moved in. The farmers clustered around the abbey, knowing the Benedictine fathers would care for their spiritual needs. Already in the townships of St. Joseph and St. Wendel, from which Collegeville was soon to be created, the population rose to 1,224.

*Collegeville  
Township  
established*

Father Alexius wrote about Collegeville's beginning:

Thus in 1880 the eighteen western sections of St. Joseph and the eighteen sections of Farming were welded together to form a normal thirty-six sections and this new unit was called Collegeville, a name selected by Abbot Alexius Edelbrock of St. John's Abbey. It was not a new name, as there is a Collegeville in Pennsylvania and another in Indiana and possibly elsewhere. The name appears in our books as early as 1877. It is one of the most hilled townships in the county, originally covered with woods, lakes, and timber.

The farmers around the abbey wanted their own parish. Mr. Peter Eich petitioned to have the parish established. He gathered twenty-one men and women to make up the core of the parish. The sixteen parishioners who signed the charter were: Peter Eich, John Obermueller, Peter Rau, Jacob

*Charter  
parishioners,  
1875*



Mathys, John Deisenreider, Clement Maier, John Blach, Thomas Kalla, Joseph Pohl, George Fruth, George Knoblach, John Groetsch, Nicholas Theisen, Joseph Maier, Mrs. Magdalen Sollinger, and Peter Thielman. The five other charter parishioners were: Michael Koroll, Peter Goedert, Sebastian Meyer, Andrew Achmann, and Mrs. Catherine Rau.

*First  
pastor*

Thus, Peter Eich and the other charter members requested Bishop Seidenbusch, who the previous May had been consecrated the vicar apostolic of Northern Minnesota, to establish a parish at Collegeville. The bishop, who had now resigned as the St. John's abbot, granted their request on December 12, 1875. Abbot Alexius Edelbrock, OSB, St. John's second abbot, appointed Fr. Clement Staub, OSB, as the first pastor of the Collegeville parish. About sixty years later Father Alexius wrote:

Since 1870 several new settlers had selected homes in the vicinity of the abbey. The new abbot directed Prior Clement to assemble them on December 12th, 1875 for the purpose of organizing a distinct congregation privileged to attend services in the abbey church. Prior Clement acted as the first rector of this congregation known as that of St. John the Baptist, assuming charge in the beginning of January 1876. During that winter (1875-6) a hill lying about a quarter of a mile south of the monastery was cleared of timber and a cemetery was laid out on its eastern slope. It was to replace the narrow plot in which hitherto the members of the community had found a resting place, and was also to be the burial ground for the members of the lay congregation, whose graves, however, occupied a distinct section.

Mrs. Mary Brinkman, a parishioner since 1888, and in 1975 the parish's oldest member, recalled that her father Herman Gretsche worked in a Krupp factory in Germany. "He came over in 1888, went to Minnesota, and there the

whole family decided to work on a farm." Government land sold at \$1.25 per acre.

<sup>1</sup> *St. Cloud Visitor*, July 25, 1867.

<sup>2</sup> *Wahrheitsfreund*, Cincinnati Newspaper, March 11, 1854.

<sup>3</sup> Barry, Fr. Colman, OSB, *The Catholic Church and German Americans*, Wash. D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *The Record*, May 1889.

<sup>5</sup> *The Record*, May 1889.

<sup>6</sup> *The Record*, May 1889.

<sup>7</sup> *The Record*, January 1890.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, William B. *History of Stearns County, Minnesota*, Vol. II, Chicago: H. C. Cooper and Co., 1915, p. 1343.

<sup>9</sup> *The Record*, April 1889.

<sup>10</sup> *The Record*, April 1889.

<sup>11</sup> *The Record*, April 1889.