

- 1879 Cornerstone of first abbey church.
- 1882 Abbey church consecrated by Bishop Rupert Seidenbusch, OSB, vicar apostolic of Northern Minnesota on October 24.
- 1883 Collegeville parishioners first invited to attend Vespers on Sunday afternoons with the monastic community.
- 1889 Bishop Otto Zardetti, first bishop of St. Cloud.
- 1890 Abbot Bernard Locnikar, OSB, St. John's third abbot, blessed on August 27.
- 1895 Abbot Peter Engel, OSB, St. John's fourth abbot, blessed on July 11.
- 1900 Pope Pius X decree on First Communion.
- 1902 First parish mission.
- 1926 Fr. Virgil Michel, OSB, began Liturgical Movement in United States.
- 1958 Cornerstone of present abbey, university and parish church.

2

LITURGY

The charter parishioners in December 1875 worshipped in a one-room frame chapel which was located next to the south-wing of the present monastery. The monks decided late in 1878 that the monastic community and the parishioners should pool their resources and talents and construct a permanent stone church. "A large church on the north wing of the college is just the thing wanted now," reported a *St. Cloud Daily Times* correspondent who had attended the first pontifical Mass celebrated by Fr. Abbot Alexius Edelbrock, OSB, on All Saints Day 1875 in the small chapel:

Were such a building erected, we doubt not that many in the vicinity of the college would avail themselves of the opportunity to witness the ceremonies of the great festivals in the college church, where every other facility to exhibit the splendor of the Catholic ritual is already available.

That stone church was begun in April 1879 and dedicated by Bishop Rupert Seidenbusch, OSB, three and a half years later. That church, now the Great Hall of St. John's University, served as the abbey-college-parish church until the present church was consecrated in 1960. Specifically the basement chapel of that stone church was the "parish church,"

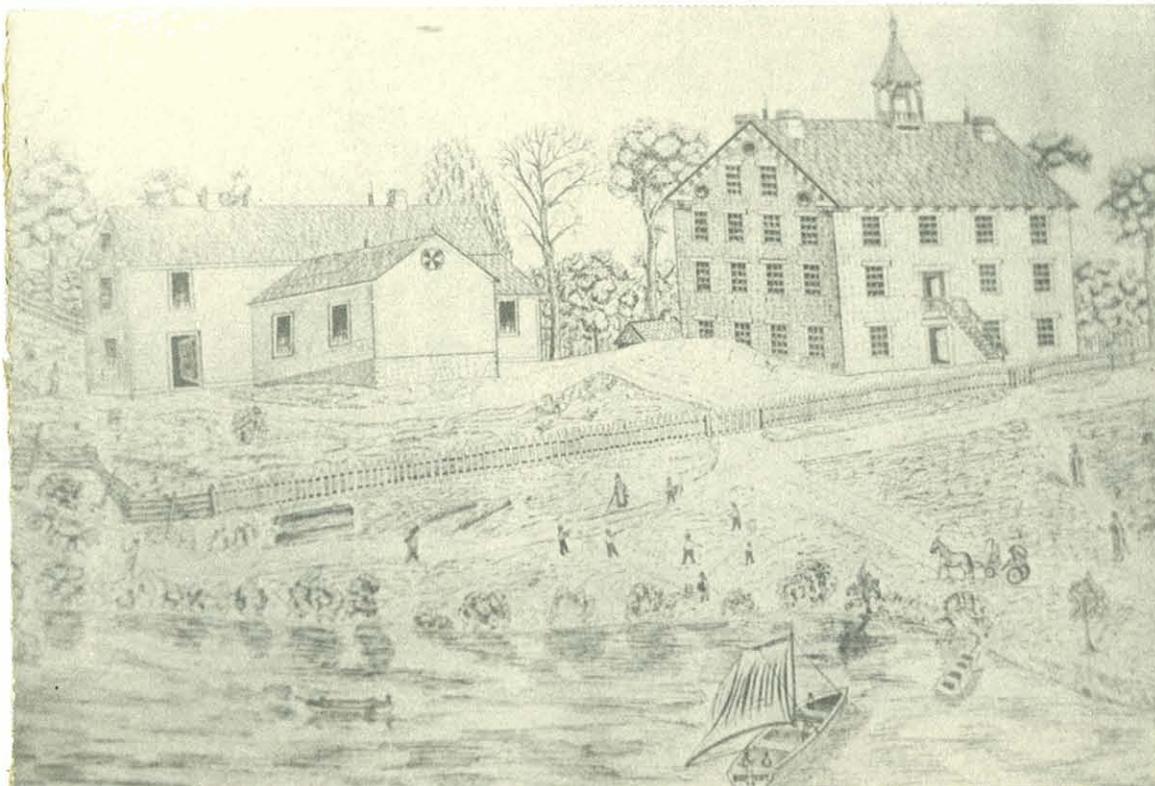
*Plans for first
abbey,
college,
parish,
church,
1875*

just as today the Assumption Chapel in the basement of the abbey-university church is the parish church. On feast days the monks and the parishioners sometimes worshipped together in the main church, as still is true today for the Christmas midnight Mass and the Holy Thursday liturgy. Through most of the last century monks and lay people formed two distinct worshipping communities in Collegeville, with the university and prep school students forming still two more such groups.

Fr. Alexius Hoffmann, OSB, in the 1930's wrote extensively about the construction of the stone church which for seventy-eight years housed this diverse worshipping community at Collegeville:

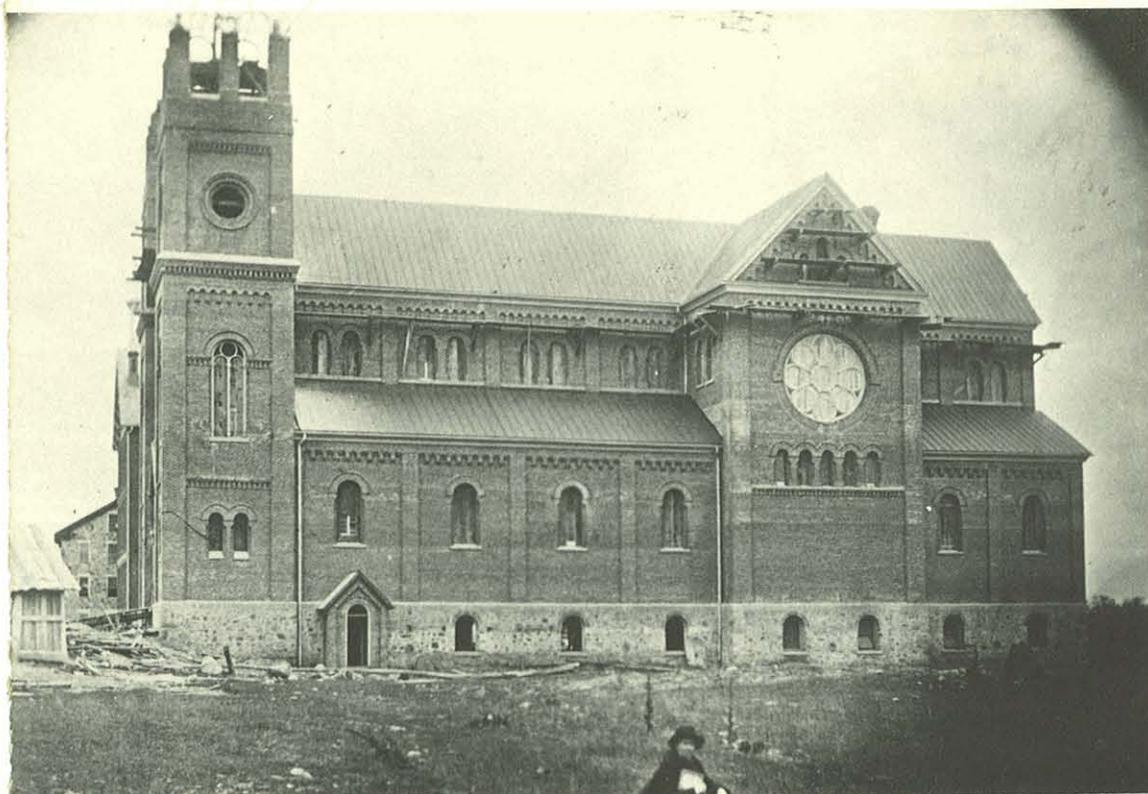
With the growth of settlement in the vicinity of the abbey and the increase in the number of the students, this locality no longer afforded sufficient room for all. After some deliberations regarding a plan, that of the cathedral at Green Bay was adopted, with modifications.

The monastic chronicle, which dates the beginning of its career from March 1879, says: "On the feast of the patron saint of the Bishop of Green Bay (Dec. 3, 1878) the abbot visited Msgr. Krautbauer, and having seen the new cathedral of that city then being erected, thought it a building suitable to the wants of the monastery and sent Father Gregory and Brother Andrew, who in the world had been a building contractor, to see the Green Bay cathedral, that afterwards they might make plans and specifications for the new monastery church. Through the kindness of Msgr. Krautbauer, Father Gregory was put in possession of the cathedral plans, which he learned afterwards were an adaptation of the plans of the Benedictine Church of the Assumption in St. Paul, Minn. These plans Father Gregory remodeled until finally he succeeded in producing what, with slight modifications was afterwards adopted in chapter.



Building on left with cross is first chapel used by parish.

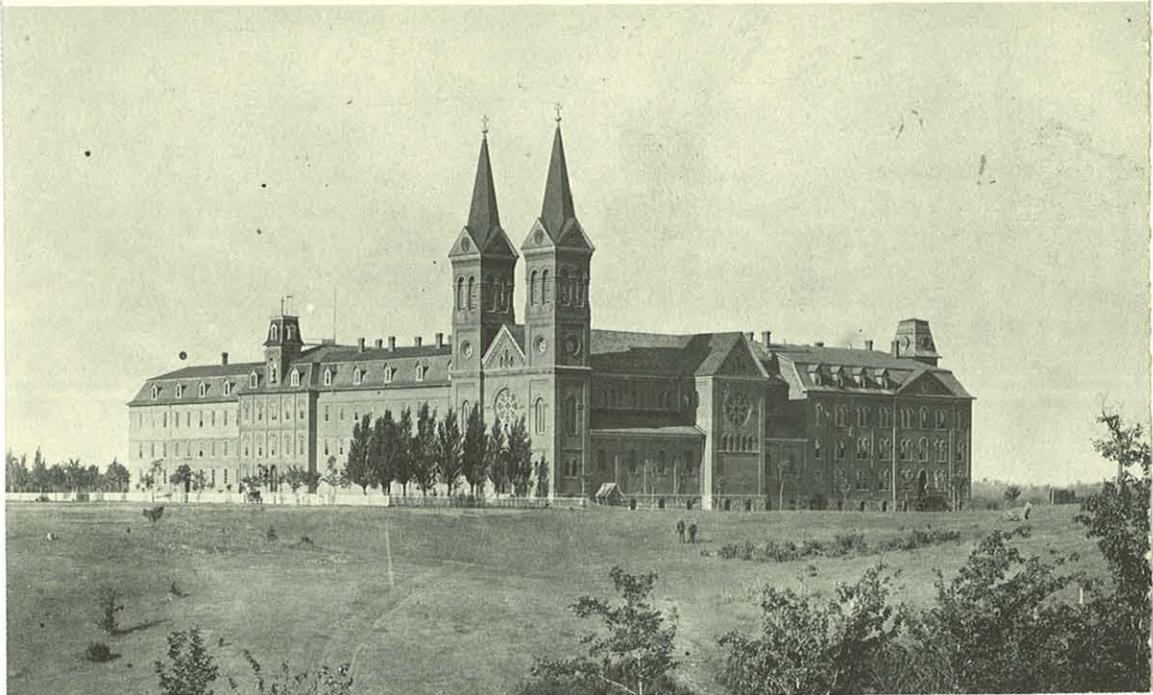
First church, about 1880





The bells of St. John's en route to twin towers.

St. John's in 1890's



The first contract for building was let March 14, 1879. Excavations were begun early in April and on the 19th of the same month the stone masons commenced work. It progressed slowly owing to the fact that materials could not be brought in as promptly as was desirable. The basement walls were built of large granite boulders found on the premises, and after the water table of St. Cloud granite was complete, Abbot Alexius placed the cornerstone at the base of the southern tower on September 24th, 1879. The monastic chronicle described the event in these terms:

Excavation

Father Abbot assisted by Prior Norbert as deacon and Pater Severin Gross as subdeacon, Pater Francis Merschman as master of ceremonies, in the presence of twenty-two fathers and twelve clerics, and of the brothers who were at home, laid the cornerstone on the feast of B.V.M. de Mercede. The public were not notified of the matter, hence few were present except our own. The cornerstone is the one in the south spire; in it is the well containing the following: Sadlier's *Almanac* of 1879; *Benedictine Catalogue* of 1879; *St. John's College Catalogue* 1879; Superintendent Burt's Report for 1879. The following newspapers: English: *Freeman's Journal*, *Cleveland Universe*, *N. W. Chronicle*, *N. Y. Tablet*, *Pioneer Press*, and *St. Cloud Times*. German: *Kreuz Zeitung*, *Der Wanderer*, *Wahrheitsfreund*, *Katholisches Wochenblatt*, *Die Amerika*, *Die Columbia*, *Der Nordstern*, *Katholisches Volksblatt*.

Cornerstone

The basement is 144 feet long and 64 feet wide in the transept; it is divided into three sections; one corresponding to the apse and designed for a sacristy; another, beneath the transept, and a third, beneath the body or nave of the church. The second and third divisions were to be chapels. In the spring of 1880 a brickyard was laid out on the grounds northeast of the

Brickyard

church and operated by lay-brothers and hired hands under supervision of one of the fathers. Clay and sand of excellent quality were found on the lands and in the woods around the institution and the hewn stone facings were from the granite quarries near St. Cloud. After the brickmakers had become skilled in turning out material, work went on more briskly, so much so that the building was under roof in October 1880.

*Brother
Martin
killed*

In spite of all the precautions taken to erect safe scaffolding for the workmen in the interior, a deplorable accident deprived the monastery of one of its ablest artisans and one who never failed against that article in the Rule of St. Benedict which would not have any of the artificers in the monastery be proud of his skill, but work in all humility. On October 9, Leo Martin, superintendent of the carpenters and himself a master in the carpenter's trade, while trying to remove some boards that lay upon a tier of scaffolding above his head, was struck by a falling plank and hurled down to the floor of the transept, a distance of about fifty feet. Scarcely any bruise was visible; he was at once carried to the infirmary, where he lay in agony for three hours. Medical aid proved useless; the internal injuries sustained in the fall caused his death before sunset of the same day.

During the next year (1881) the basement chapels were finished; in the afternoon of July 16th they were blessed and on the following day, feast of St. Alexius, the Rt. Rev. Abbot celebrated pontifical high Mass in the chapel beneath the transept. On this occasion Fr. John Katzner pronounced the solemn vows. This chapel was used by the brothers for a number of years. From this time the chapel in the frame house was deserted; the sacristy was turned into a photographic studio. The same year the two spires were also finished and both the church and spires were roofed with tin.

On October 24, 1882 the church was finally consecrated by Bishop Rupert Seidenbusch; Abbot Boniface Wimmer consecrated the altar of Our Lady and Abbot Innocent Wolf that of St. Benedict. Right Rev. John Ireland, then coadjutor bishop of St. Paul, preached the dedication discourse in English, and Dr. Otto Zardetti, subsequently to be the first bishop of St. Cloud, spoke in German. Bishops Thomas L. Grace of St. Paul and F. X. Krautbauer of Green Bay, together with a great number of secular and regular clergy, witnessed the ceremonies.

*Church
consecrated,
1882*

The abbey church of St. John the Baptist is built in the Romanesque style of architecture; it has the shape of a Latin Cross and is 144 feet long and 64 feet wide; at the end of the upper or shorter arm is a semi-circular apse in which originally stood the main altar.

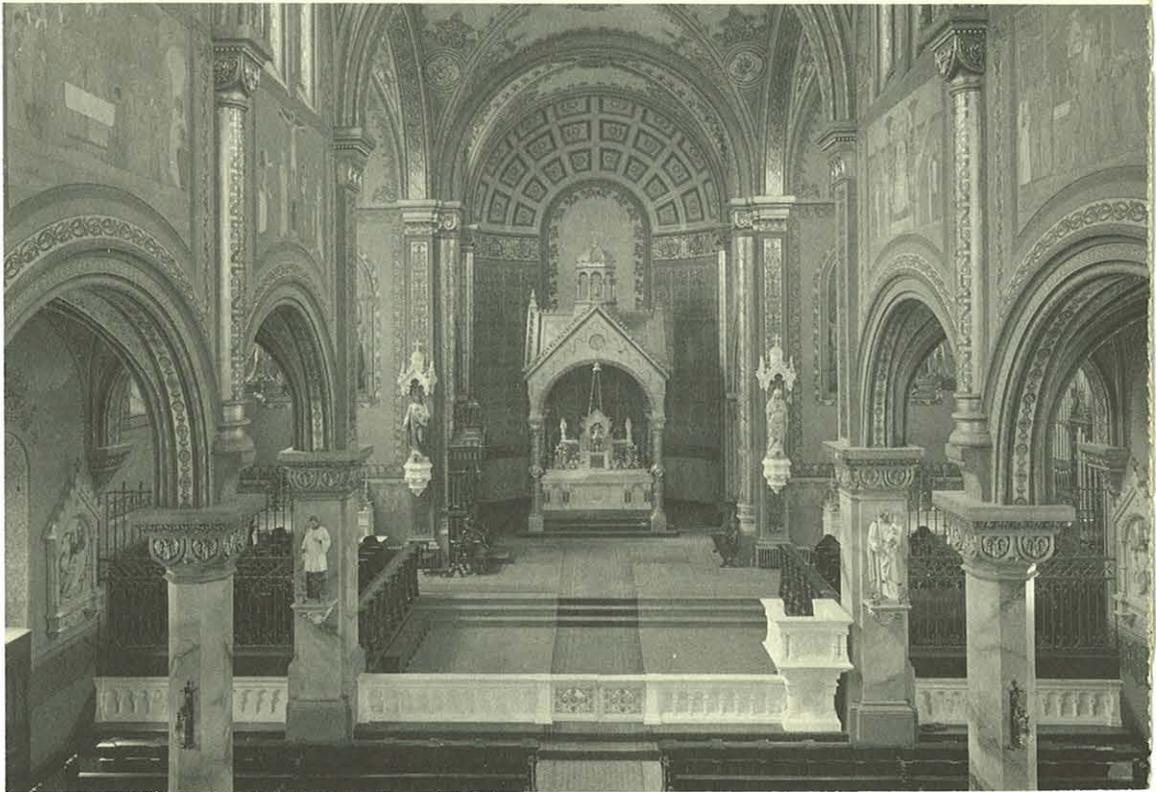
The floor of the transept lies four feet higher than that of the nave. The three altars, which are of white marble with wooden superstructures, such as were in vogue at that time, stood against the west wall of the transept and apse respectively. Above the high altar was a large canvas from the studio of Mr. Lamprecht in New York, representing St. Benedict in heavenly glory, and surrounded by eminent Saints of his Order. (In the course of renovations this painting was taken out and sent to the Benedictine abbey at Seoul in Korea.)

The statuary above the two lateral altars was from the Art Institute of Mayer & Co., Munich. The group representing the death of St. Benedict is very impressive and has been deservedly admired. St. Gregory the Great thus describes the death of St. Benedict: "Six days before his death he ordered his tomb to be opened and was immediately seized with a burning fever which tormented him with extreme violence. During the five days following his illness grew more serious and on



Interior of church, about 1910

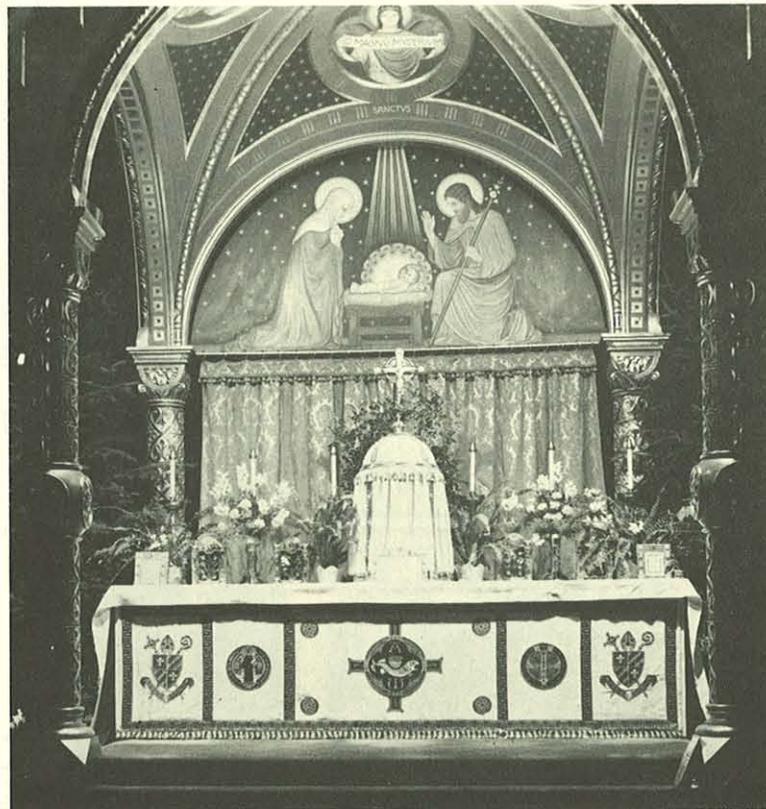
Interior of church, 1888

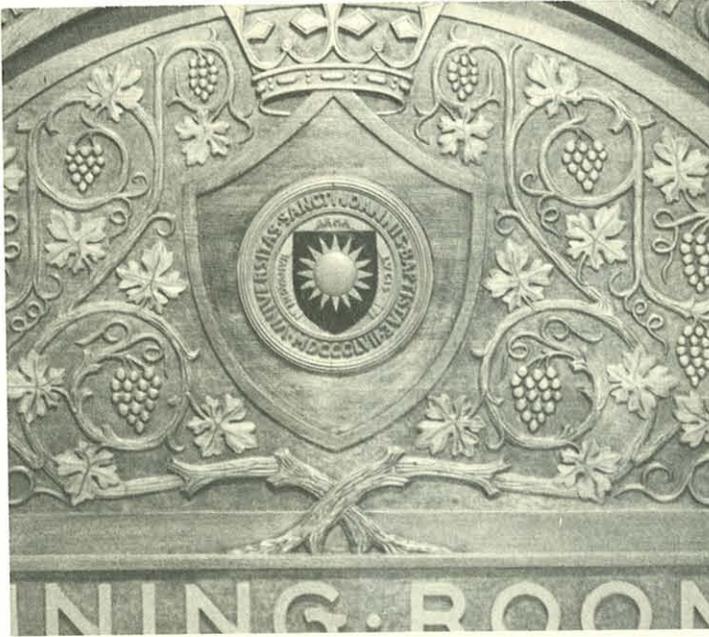




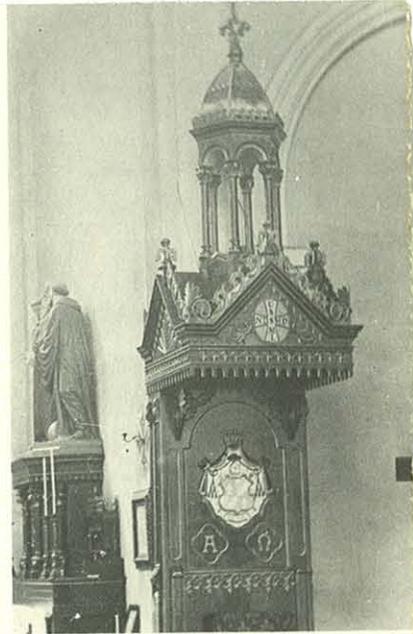
Baptismal font

High altar at Christmas





Wood carving by Carl Schmoll



Abbot's throne by Peter Eich

Stone carving by Carlos Cotton



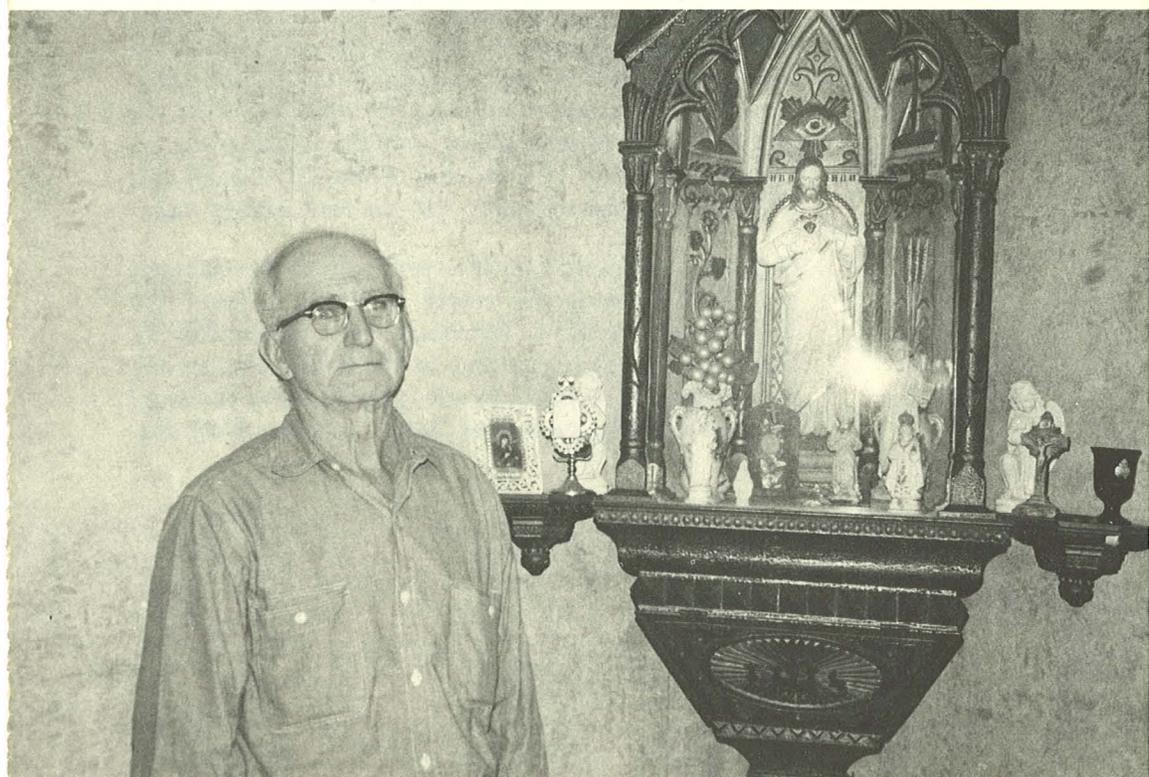
Wooden angel by Carl Schmoll





*Sacred Heart shrine of the Huschle's
by Peter Eich*

Joseph Knoblach with shrine by Peter Eich



the sixth he bade his disciples carry him into the oratory and prepared himself for death by receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Then standing upright and resting his weak frame on the arms of his disciples, he raised his hands up to heaven and, while in that attitude of prayer, gave up his soul to God" (Chapter 37). It is this sublime moment to which the artist had endeavored to give expression in mood and color. (This statue, or rather group, was removed from the altar at the Gospel side in the course of the changes in the church during 1929 and set up on a pedestal in the basement chapel.)

*Twin
towers*

Two towers with spires reaching the height of 150 feet and surmounted by gilt crosses flank the main portal. The windows throughout are filled with stained glass from the studio of G. Misch in Chicago. Three great Catherine-wheels, or rose windows, two in the transept and one above the main entrance — contain an interesting series of symbols in circular fields. In the center of the rose window in the facade is placed a figure of St. Benedict, patriarch and lawgiver of monks; he is surrounded by eight symbols and mottoes taken from his Ruel. The center picture in the north transept wall represents Moses, the lawgiver of the Old Testament, surrounded by eight symbols from the Old Law; namely: (1) the brazen serpent, (2) the tower of Babel, (3) the loaves of proposition, (4) the jewelled breast-plate of judgment, (5) the tree of life, (6) Noah's ark, (7) the ark of the covenant, (8) the rock issuing water.

*Stained
glass
windows*

Opposite this window, in the south wall of the transept, is a similar one in the center of which is Jesus, the lawgiver of the New Testament, also surrounded by eight symbols corresponding to those just enumerated and in the order named, to wit: (1) Christ on the cross (2) the Church, symbol of unity, (3) the Holy Eu-

charist, (4) a tiara and two keys, (5) the instruments of the Passion, (6) the bark of Peter, (7) a monstrance, (8) the bleeding Heart of Jesus.

Beneath the rose window in the north wall is a row of five narrow windows with full-length pictures of Pope St. Gregory I, and SS. Maurus, Benedict, Placidus and Boniface; in the opposite wall is a similar row with images of holy nuns, SS. Mechtilde, Walburga, Scholastica, Gertrude, and Ediltrude. The five large windows in the outer wall of the nave contain full size figures of the great Doctors of the Western Church, SS. Augustine, Ambrose, and Thomas Aquinas, and of St. Alexius – the latter being in the south wall which, as on that side the church adjoined the monastery, had but one window. In the light above the main entrance is a bust figure of St. John the Baptist, titular of the church and abbey.

The great feasts of the Church year, which drew monks, parishioners, and students together in worship, describe the spirit of this community.

Fr. Ulric Northmann, OSB, urged his parishioners to attend the midnight Mass of Christmas 1884:

Mass begins at twelve midnight to which you are all invited. At nine o'clock there will be a high Mass with sermon. On this day all priests are obliged to say three Masses of the birth of Christ, and you are welcome to attend these Masses, too. Two Masses will be said immediately prior to the high Mass, beginning, therefore, at approximately 8:00 a.m. I really don't have to tell you – you know by yourself – that you should receive the sacraments for the holy day.

Father Alexius wrote about another midnight Mass, as well as other feast day liturgies:

*Midnight Mass,
Christmas,
1884*

We have mentioned early services. From the records of the master of ceremonies we learn that on November 1, All Saints 1882, there was pontifical high Mass with a sermon for the students at six o'clock, and a solemn high Mass at nine for the "farmers," as the members of the lay congregation were styled. On All Souls Day the monks chanted the Office of the Dead at 6:30 a.m. (after previously chanting the Office of the day) and then chanted a requiem Mass. On November 28 a solemn Mass of requiem for the repose of the soul of Fr. Meinrad Leuthard, who had died of varioloid [smallpox] at Melrose the previous year, was chanted at 4:30 a.m.

On Christmas night, Fr. Abbot officiated at midnight Mass. Regarding this celebration the chronicler has recorded the following details: "Office commenced at 11:30 p.m. Christmas Eve in the house chapel, the brothers at the same time said their rosary in church. Just after midnight solemn pontifical Mass was celebrated. After Mass Lauds were said. The pontifical Mass was in the church, the weather being mild; so, too, all the other Masses, but choir was always in the house chapel. The brothers had Mass at 5:00 a.m., the boys at 6:00, and the people at 9:00." But, two months later the chronicler says: "On February 10th Fr. Placidus Wingerter celebrated his first Mass; in the church it was cold, yet all the students endured the hardship of a solemn Mass and two sermons." Later, however, when the largest chapel in the basement was completed, services were held there during the cold months until steam heat was introduced in the fall 1888.

Family Christmas traditions in the 1930's to the 1970's have not changed measurably. Father Alexius wrote:

A tree, tamarack, was prepared for the children and hung with festoons of pop corn and adorned with small

tapers of various colors, apples, filled walnuts, toys, etc. It was prepared in a room to which the children did not have access before Christmas morning. For years they had midnight Mass, although Bishop Grace of St. Paul had denounced the practice already early in the 30's (for St. Cloud) because of scandal. The people attended at least two of the three Masses and received Holy Communion. Every home was a picnic ground for a day. Folks went from house to house to see the tree. The priest, lonesome man and very tired that day, had no tree, but the people sent him meats, scarfs, handkerchiefs, gloves, and the like. There were no trees in the churches or schools, but in the former, little "cribs" were set up and remained till Epiphany.

Corpus Christi was a feast day of processions and outdoor Masses:

Next Thursday – Corpus Christi – Mass at 9:30, then procession, girls dressed in white and carrying flowers. Order of procession is like always. Girls after band, parish members after Blessed Sacrament. (May 22, 1932)*

*Corpus
Christi*

On Corpus Christi in early June there was Mass and procession with the Blessed Sacrament to two outdoor altars and then a procession to the church. First was the crossbearer and two acolytes; then the St. John's brothers and priests, then the university band with the instruments gleaming in the sunlight and playing beautiful Blessed Sacrament hymns. Next were little girls in white with baskets of flowers which they strewed along the way. Then came six or eight brothers in cassocks and surplices carrying colored lanterns. Then came the abbot who carried the monstrance under the baldachino. Then came the societies with banners and badges and

the rest of the parish. One felt as close to heaven as is possible here on earth, with everyone praising the Lord.

The order of the procession for Corpus Christi will be as follows. Acolytes with candles, small children, young men and women, students of the industrial school (Indians), students of the university, the brothers, the priests, young girls with flowers, the singers, the priest, the unmarried women, and women.

Corpus Christi (*Frohnleichnam*) was universally observed as a holy day of obligation on Thursday — later on Sunday. After Mass a procession with the Blessed Sacrament, a band, and banners was held and a Gospel read at each of four altars. While the benediction was given, noisy “catheads” rent the sylvan solitude. In St. Cloud and St. Joseph, the procession moved through the streets of the city for many years. Not any more.

St. Magnus Day A procession on the feast of St. Magnus in September was a regular event to ask God’s blessing for a bountiful harvest:

Several parishes would turn out *processionaliter* and walk to some place equally distant from both, as for instance, the Sauk River between St. Joseph and St. Cloud. A rude altar was set up, a Mass was celebrated, sermon, etc. During the procession the people recited the Rosary over and over again. Those that could not walk — old folks (there were few) and children came along in wagons. After Mass they rested and took a lunch. Then they returned to their respective homes as they had come. That was quite an effort, as St. Joseph and St. Cloud are eight miles apart. The country