

- 1870 First Vatican Council.
- 1879 Collegeville Post Office.
- 1889 St. Cloud Diocese established.
- 1895 Bishop Martin Marty, second bishop of St. Cloud.
- 1896 Diphtheria epidemic; civil authorities forbade services in the church for a time.
- 1897 Bishop James Trobec, third bishop of St. Cloud.
- 1900 St. Benedict Men's Society elected first officers.
- 1915 Bishop Joseph Busch, fourth bishop of St. Cloud.
- 1922 Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, OSB, St. John's fifth abbot, blessed on May 3.

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TRADITIONS

To the Collegeville parishioners the relationship with St. John's Abbey was like a marriage, shaky at times, but a marriage of two communities bound together for better or worse until death. The parishioners recognized the abbey as an institution established by men of God. The parishioners and the monks struggled to raise the abbey and parish to what it is today. Parish records cite the good times shared at a St. Benedict's Day celebration as well as the hard times of the 1898 tornado and the 1930 depression years.

In 1875, as in 1975, the parishioners formed part of the work crew which keeps the Collegeville scene running. A century ago Peter Eich, George Fruth, John Obermueller, and Andrew Fuchs were among the first St. John's lay employees. In the St. John's records, these names, especially Peter Eich, come up repeatedly. The books show that this founding father "fastened a thousand feet of lumber for the 'old stone house' at \$.02 per foot." Many parishioners worked with Peter Eich, some as land carriers, stone splitters and carpenters; their basic pay, \$1.25 a day.

*The work-scene
at St. John's*

Generations of parishioners have continued to earn their livelihood by working for St. John's:

I sold a load of wheat to St. John's. They said: "Oh, that's nice; we haven't got wheat like that in a long time." Thursday they said to bring another load, and I hauled it there. Well, they came out and said, "We can't use it." They felt sorry for me so they gave me a great big red apple.

I worked for St. John's. At first I worked in the garden, then in the laundry, then as a teamster. I hauled wood and coal. My father was also a teamster and hauled wood and coal.

George worked at St. John's. In 1946 they built the chimney to the power house. He had to pile all the bricks in the elevator. He painted all the step-irons on the chimney. He started on the top, and painted as he went down. He worked just with a safety belt.

Cutting wood St. John's needed wood and someone to cut it. The parishioners needed the money:

Everybody was poor, everybody cut wood for St. John's; that's how we lived in winter.

One year we cut 160 cords of wood for St. John's. You know there is a trick in cutting wood. The more knots you had the better it was. When you split the wood you put the knot down; that way it made the pile higher.

And sometimes it was necessary to try and make the cord take on a little more value because of payments, as another parishioner describes it:



Roman, Leander, and
Wilfred Klein

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Wood cutting at St. John's



*Roman, Leander, and
Wilfred Klein*





Boys who worked in the St. John's kitchen, about 1895

Renovating crew of St. John's Abbey Church and School, 1945



*Matthew
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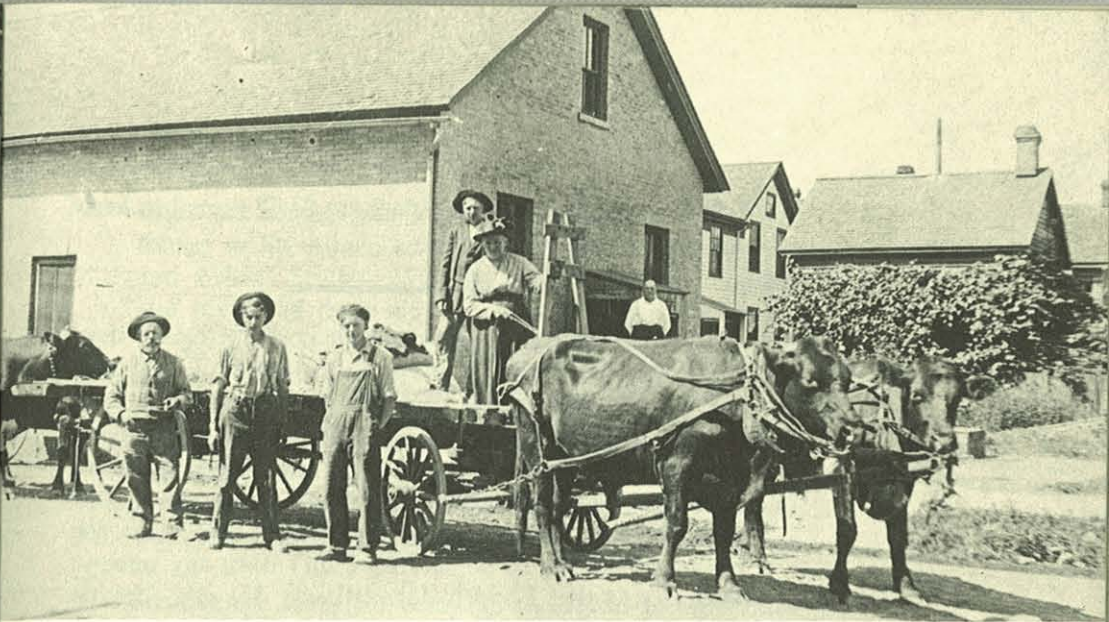


*Sawing lumber
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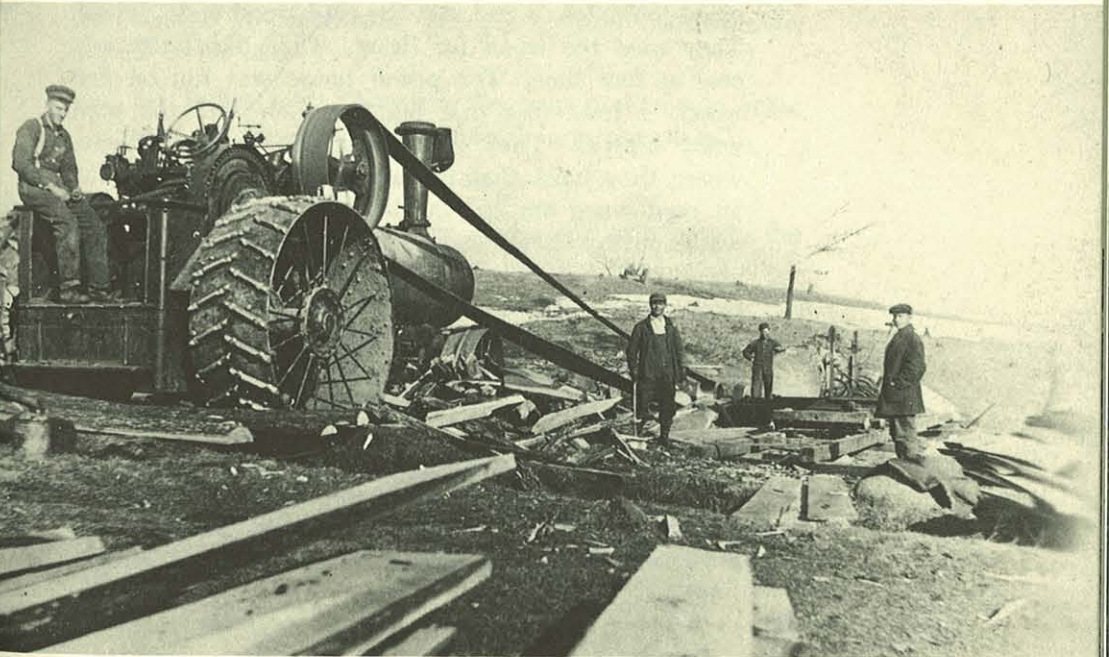


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Matthew Reisinger taking team of oxen to St. Joseph. Left to right: Matthew, John, Conrad-on wagon, Rupert and Mary Reisinger, Peter Winter in back.



Sawing lumber on the George Klein farm about 1915. Left to right on the steamer: Barney Meyer, Lawrence Wilverding, Joseph Schwegel.

I used to cut wood at St. John's for \$1.50 a cord to keep up our church payments.

If the university did not take your cords of wood, then there was the chance you could go into St. Cloud and sell it. Sometimes you could do well, and sometimes not so well. You had to be careful when someone bought wood from you. Once in St. Cloud this man bought a load of wood from me, and I brought it over and put it all in the basement. When it came time for me to collect for it, he said he didn't have any money. Well, I said that I had to take it back. He said, "Leave the wood alone." I went to a lawyer and he said there was nothing to do because I took it all off my trailer. I should have left one piece on for evidence he told me.

My father made cord wood, and then he hauled cord wood to St. John's and sold the cord wood to St. John's. They used the wood for firing. They didn't use any coal at that time. The power house was run on just wood. I remember that big fire there and the cord wood burned. They had about 900 cords in there, where they have that fence around now. There was all cord wood stacked in there. Everybody from the whole territory came and helped put it out. They probably had half-carts years ago. They didn't lose all the cord wood. They had a big crew to haul the wood. All winter long, every day, the horses had to haul the wood to St. John's. They must have had 8 or 10 teams of horses. The cord wood was about two feet square at least.

The people living near St. John's sold much of their produce to St. John's, like a lot of wood, also butter,

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eggs, and berries, etc. When the children brought those things to St. John's kitchen there was the chief cook and baker, Brother William, who loved the children and rewarded them with a piece of pie, some cookies or any other goodies he happened to have.

If you needed meat real bad St. John's would sell you some. For two bits you could have enough meat for a couple of meals. They were not really in the business, but if they knew you, also if you were a parish member.

Farming the land had been the livelihood of most families in the parish during the past century. Several sections of land within the parish boundaries have been farmed by the original settlers' sons, sons-in-law, and nephews. The Raus, Gretsches, Brokers, Eisenschenks, Reisingers, Eichs, Brinkmans, Himsels, Dullingers, Knobblachs, Sauerers, Meyers, and Maiers — to name a few families — have farmed the land for decades. A parishioner reflected on how his farm was passed on to him:

*Farming
the land*

My father said: "You are the only one who is home here, so we thought you should have the place."

My father did not give in, so I went with him to the bank and he signed it over to me. So I was stuck with it.

Dad said: "I am getting old and I cannot work the farm anymore."

That's how I was hooked with it; I couldn't say no and leave them sit there. I could have gotten a job somewhere, gone away. But I couldn't do that to my parents.

*Stones:
a mixed
blessing*

Land was frequently traded parcel for parcel. Sometimes cash was involved, and sometimes it was as simple as "You take this section of land and I will take that one of yours." The older parishioners remember who lived on what land for decades. Each section has its own history.

For most Collegeville farmers, stones were a mixed blessing. Lawrence Eisenschenk, a son of one of the first settlers, said: "At one time they did not worry about rocks, they used them for building material." Buildings or not, if farming was to be successful, the stones had to be moved. It was no easy task:

Our dad used to dig a big hole, then slowly dig under the stone so it would roll in the hole. One day we were working and we said: "What happened to Dad?" We dropped everything and looked for him. Sure enough, he was under that stone, his leg was crushed.

Matthew Zwilling commented:

Oh, those stones. The hills wouldn't be so bad where our fields are, but them stones. You'll never get rid of them. You can pick as many as you want to, and they always come back. It's that way all over.

Neighbors frequently worked together on major projects. George Klein recalled:

At one time the neighbors used to visit each other a lot. Well, everything was done together, cutting wood, moving snow, and anything in the line of harvesting. Visit and have a party.

When a barn needed building, frequently the parishioners of a given neighborhood put it up. When the fields were in mud, all gathered to help reap the crops. The parishioners realized that their neighbors' needs were much like theirs.

Sugar cane was sometimes a local crop. Mrs. Andrew Merdan recalled this experience:

Sugar cane

The sugar press was right below the apple orchard. We used to raise a lot of sugar cane. The cane was real tall, and it had black seeds on the top. We put it through the press, had a horse hitched on to it and the horse had to go around in circles to make the press go, and somebody was in the middle sticking the sugar cane in. There was a container to catch the sap, and a little further down the hill, towards the spring, they had a stove, a kind of a shack, with a stove in it, and they cooked the sap in there. Rupert, my brother, used to do that. And people would come and buy it by the ten gallon cans full. Other people would bring cane to put it through. We had three acres of it. The cane is corn syrup after it's cooked. Before you harvested, you had to go and strip the leaves off and cut the tassels off the top. They call it maize, corn with the black tassels. Sometimes field corn gets like that. The press had rollers in the middle where they put the cane in. I don't know if there are more than two rollers or not. The people bought the remaining tassels and fed it to their cattle.

Butchering a pig, a common enough chore to a farm family, sometimes brought the unexpected. Frank Merdan told this story:

Butchering

Once my dad had a pig stuck in a barrel. He was all alone, because we were too small to help. He got the darn thing into the barrel, but he couldn't get it out. It was a fifty-gallon barrel. You put the water into the barrel, and push the pig in and out of it, and he got the pig into it but he couldn't get it out. So he had to hook up a horse quick to pull the pig back out of the barrel.



Steve Salzer



Butcher at Avon Store



Meyer's Bay, so named after Joe Meyer, charter parishioner who lived on a little hill southeast of Robert Pflueger's home.

Hunting and fishing



Frank and Julia Merdan in the 1930's with their catch





*The Michael Reisinger family bringing in their first harvest, August 1890.
Left to right: Anna, Gertrude, Matthew, Walburga, Theresia, Michael, and Mary*

Brother Julius and George and Ralph Meyer harvesting the tobacco crop in 1939

