



A topic of great demand: Ghost stories!

Graphic letters from *The Record* Oct. 28, 1999, p. 10-11

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/39947/rec/217>

Any child knows the ingredients to a good ghost story: old buildings, memorable characters, strange noises, and unexplained deaths.

If you add into the mix a setting comprised of churches, chapels and graveyards, as we have at SJU and CSB, the result can be downright scary.

As some may know, our two institutions of higher learning are not without their share of legends, tales and myths, some of which could be called ghost stories.



- from "Stella Maris chapel legend continues to spook and intrigue CSB/SJU students," *The Record*, September 2, 1999, p. 6.

In the words of the *Record* editors shown here: "Any child knows the ingredients to a good ghost story: old buildings, memorable characters, strange noises, and unexplained deaths. If you add into the mix a setting comprised of churches, chapels and graveyards, as we have here, the result can be downright scary. As some may know, our two institutions are not without their share of legends, tales and myths, some of which could be called ghost stories."

Adler, Erin. "Stella Maris chapel legend continues to spook and intrigue CSB/SJU students," *The Record*, September 2, 1999, p. 6.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/39807/rec/1>



Stearns County's Historic S

by Kevin Britz, Deputy Director

"The nature of folklore is in the telling and retelling of the tale," Helen Gilbert, former folklorist, once said, "but the listener must either believe it or disbelieve it in order to retell the tale. In the following article, we will explore a few of the tales of the Collegeville area and look at the have started the legends. Whether you believe them or not, just remember that a little fiction never if it's told in the stillness of a Halloween night..."

The Tale of the Bereaved Mother

This tale from St. John's University has many variations with common elements: the accidental death of a monk, the construction of the Abbey church, a bereaved mother, a pompous abbot, and mysterious wet footprints.

The best story goes that while the Abbey Church of St. John's (now the Great Hall) was being built in the 1880s, a young monk fell from a scaffold and died. The young monk's mother, deep in grief, immediately came to the Abbot and demanded an explanation. To her dismay, he refused to give her audience, but she

church. During the ceremony nothing happened, but later in the day, a crack was reported down the center aisle of the new building. Does the uneasy spirit of the mother still walk?

As in the case of most folktales, there is some basis in fact for this one. It is the embellishment that appears to be fictitious.

The truth is on October 9, 1880, a 31 year old monk, Brother Leo Martin, was killed during the construction of the new church. Brother Leo, a superintendent of carpenters, had been removing boards

mother in the years surrounding the death of the unfortunate monk.

This legend may have been intentionally started by a Benedictine Brother who taught English at St. John's. The monk once told a researcher that he concocted the tale in 1966 so that St. John's could have a good legend. This is further substantiated by the curious lack of witnesses. Since then, the story continues to be told and retold in the late night hours of dorm rooms on campus.

ST. CLOUD Times 3B
 Monday, Sept. 27, 1999

Today's history: Stella Maris Chapel

Island chapel survives fires

Legends include tales of Indian boy and drowned monk

If you have visited St. John's Abbey and University at Collegeville, you couldn't have missed Lake Sagatan.

On a small wooded point jutting into the lake on the north shore, you see the lovely little chapel, often reflected in the water below, called Stella Maris Chapel. The name means Star of the Sea, and the chapel was built to honor Mary, the Mother of God.

The Benedictine monks moved to this forested lake region from St. Cloud in 1865 to erect their monastic buildings and school. At first, the lake was called St. Louis Lake and the abbey, St. Louis by the Lake.

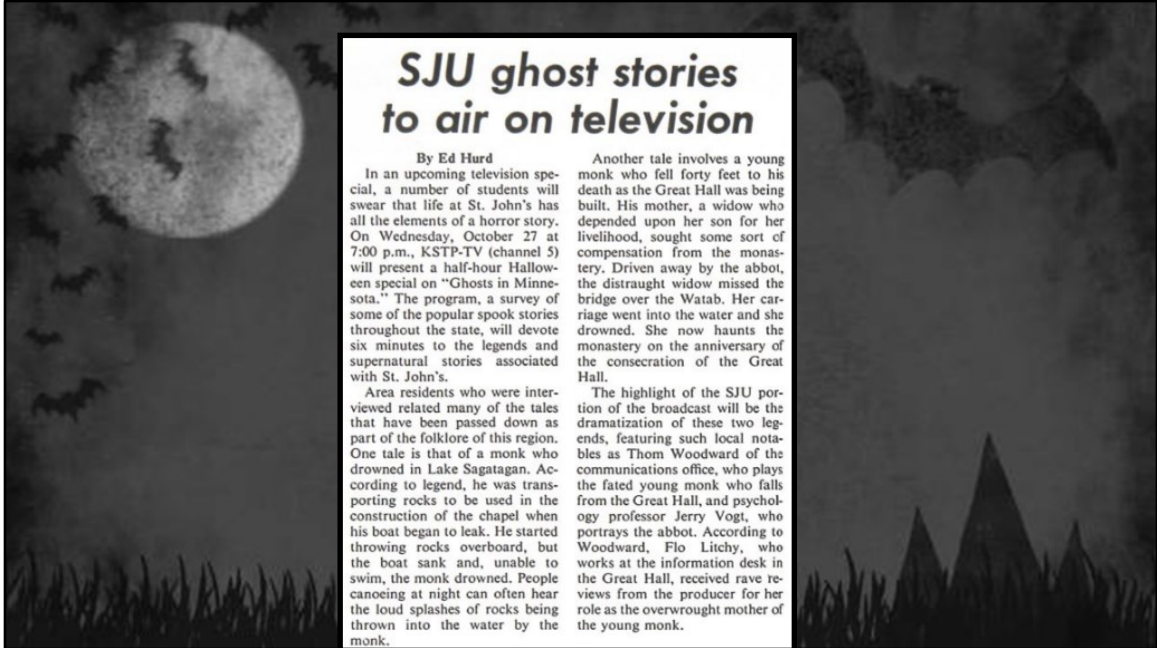
The monks were devoted to Mary from the beginning and lost no time creating shrines and special devotions to her. In fact, the first shrine in the St.



PHOTOS COURTESY ST. JOHN'S ABBEY ARCHIVES

Stella Maris Chapel on Lake Sagatan was rebuilt in 1915. Note the boats "moored" at the foot of the steps leading to the shore. Today, footpaths also lead walkers to the site in about 45 minutes.

Besides getting attention in the campus publications like *The Record*, and local publications like the *St. Cloud Times*, the *St. Joseph Newsleader* and the Stearns History Museum's magazine, news outlets in the Twin Cities have also taken an interest in the campus ghost stories.



One TV station even made a video: In 1976, a half-hour video, “Ghosts in Minnesota,” aired on Minnesota’s Channel 5, and included a couple of ghost stories set at Saint John’s.

Hurd, Ed. “SJU ghost stories to air on television,” *The Record*, October 22, 1976, p. 7.
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/35363/rec/126>



Some students have even done a group project about them.
2003



Historians and archivists like to place events into context, and a good way of doing that is to put things into chronological order. A few of the campus ghost stories can be associated with particular tragic moments in history. I'd call them The Bear, The Fall, and The Drowning. They all have roots in the 1800s.

Photo of the Abbey cemetery by the archivist, Oct. 2023.



First, The Bear



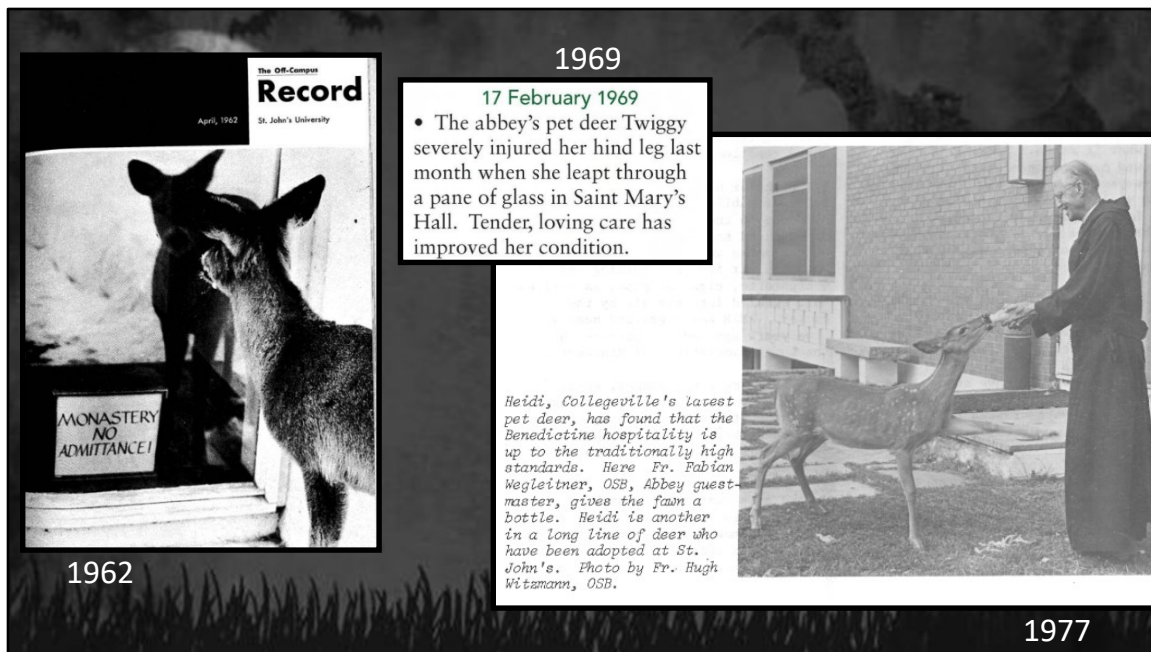
The Bear Story

The story goes like this: A Johnny walking along the lake sensed someone approaching him. Then, a bloody hand frantically grasped his shoulder and spun him about. He found himself face to face with another young man – one with a gaping wound in his throat. Then a wild thrashing was heard from the woods, as if a giant animal was approaching through the brush. The bleeding student turned and fled down the path toward the lake, followed by the sounds of the huge animal, which pursued the wounded stranger.

Black & white bear image: <https://svgsilh.com/image/42161.html>

Maher, Don. "The Ghosts of Collegeville," *The Record*, November 19, 1971, p. 1 & 4.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/34662/rec/11>



The monks have taken in many pet animals over the years. (Fr. Timo's dog Archie is one of the latest ones.) Frequently they have been motherless or injured deer, but they have also included a blue heron, a crow, and a horse. [Worship & Work p. 541]

On left: <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/1715/rec/1>

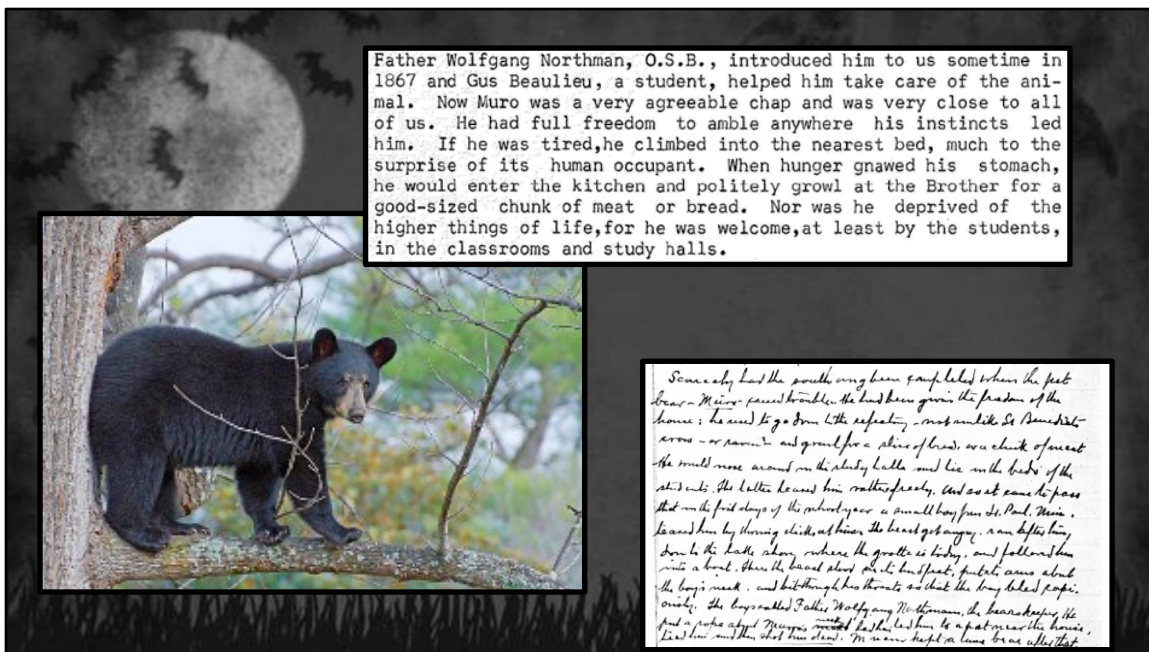
1962-04 SJU Alumni Magazine Volume 02 Number 02 April cover

1969 item: in 2019 Volume 19 Number 01 Abbey Banner Spring p.36

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/49231/rec/3>

1977: <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47425/rec/2>

[photo] pet deer 1977-09-28 *Community* p.2



And once, in the 1860s, not long after they started building St. John's by Lake Sagatagan, they had a pet bear named Muro. Accounts say that Muro was free to wander around the campus. If he was tired, he climbed into the nearest bed. If he was hungry, he would go to the kitchen and growl for a slice of bread or a chunk of meat. He was welcome by the students in the classrooms and study halls.

Top text from 1954 Dec. *Scriptorium*. 14 n.1 p. 29-30,

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/3438/rec/1>

Color photo: [https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/black-bear-high-up-on-a-tree-branch-gm1399961720-](https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/black-bear-high-up-on-a-tree-branch-gm1399961720-453682721?irgwc=1&cid=IS&utm_medium=affiliate_SP&utm_source=FreelImages&cl)

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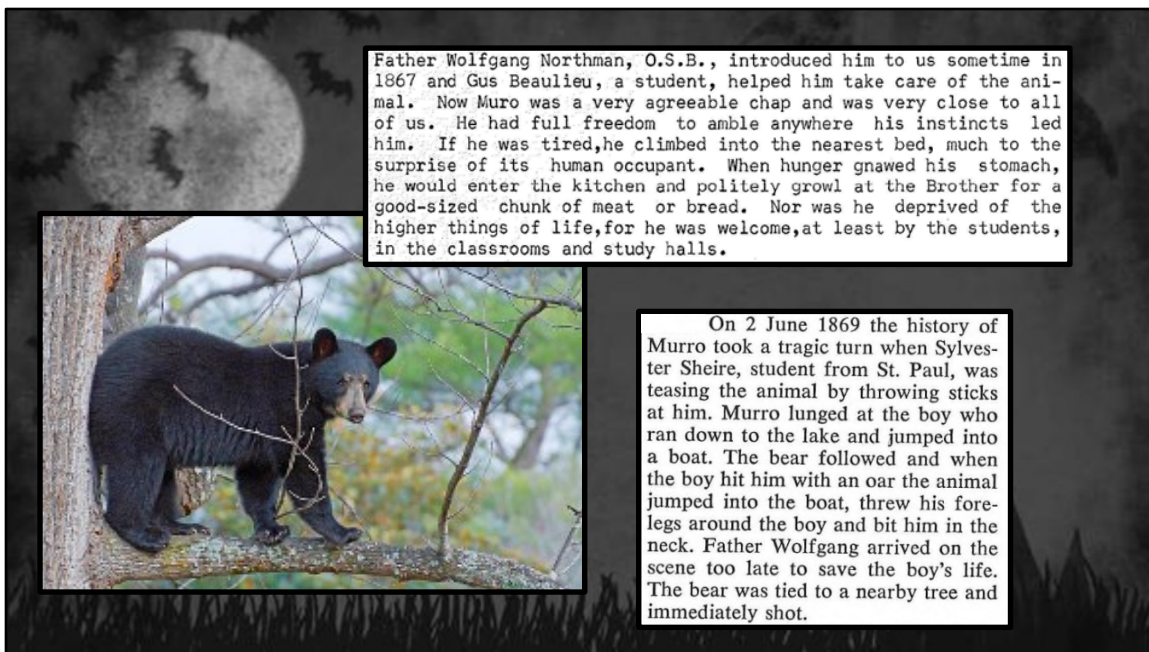
Hoffmann's version: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Hoffmann documents

\From Abbey Archives\ASLL Muro the Bear story by Alexius Hoffmann

(ASLL = Hoffmann's *Abbey of Saint Louis on the Lake*, in the Abbey Archives)

"Scarcely had the south wing been completed when the pet bear – Muro – caused trouble. He had been given the freedom of the house: he used to go from the refectory – not unlike St. Benedict's crow – or raven? – and growl for a slice of bread,

or a chunk of meat. He would nose around in the study halls and lie in the beds of the students. The latter ...?... him rather freely. And so it came to pass that in the first days of the school year a small boy from St. Paul, Minn, teased him by throwing sticks at him. The beast got angry, ran after him, down to the lake shore where the grotto is today, and followed him into a boat. There the beast stood on its hind feet, put its arms about the boy's neck, and bit through his throat so that the boy bled copiously. The boys called Father Wolfgang Northmann, the bear's keeper. He put a rope about Nuro's neck and led him to a post near the house, tied him and then shot him dead. We never kept a tame bear after that."



But one student started teasing him by throwing sticks at him. Muro lunged at the boy, who ran down to the lake and jumped in a boat. The bear followed, and when the boy hit him with an oar, the bear bit him in the neck, and the boy quickly bled to death. Muro was immediately shot.

Top text from 1954 Dec. *Scriptorium*. 14 n.1 p. 29-30,

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/3438/rec/1>

Bottom text from *Worship & Work*, p. 541, footnote 35

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11529/rec/2> [Note: there are various spellings of the student's name; see 1954-12 *Scriptorium* vol.14 n.1, page 30, footnote 26.

Color photo: [https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/black-bear-high-up-on-a-tree-branch-gm1399961720-453682721?](https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/black-bear-high-up-on-a-tree-branch-gm1399961720-453682721?irgwc=1&cid=IS&utm_medium=affiliate_SP&utm_source=FreelImages&cl)

[irgwc=1&cid=IS&utm_medium=affiliate_SP&utm_source=FreelImages&cl](https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/black-bear-high-up-on-a-tree-branch-gm1399961720-453682721?irgwc=1&cid=IS&utm_medium=affiliate_SP&utm_source=FreelImages&cl)
[ickid=0CDQaCyrOxyPUGfUoBxPySMDUKFQuK33Ew3u3s0&utm_term=black%2520be](https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/black-bear-high-up-on-a-tree-branch-gm1399961720-453682721?irgwc=1&cid=IS&utm_medium=affiliate_SP&utm_source=FreelImages&cl)
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So the bear story – or rather, the story of the ghosts of the bear and the boy he killed – has become part of campus lore. It was among the stories recounted in this article for *The Record* by Prep School’s own Steph Haeg, class of 2014. I would note two observations for those who repeat the story: unlike the ghost in any of the versions of the story I have seen, the boy who teased the bear was actually only nine years old, not a college student. And he is not buried here at Saint John’s; his parents came to take his body back to St. Paul.

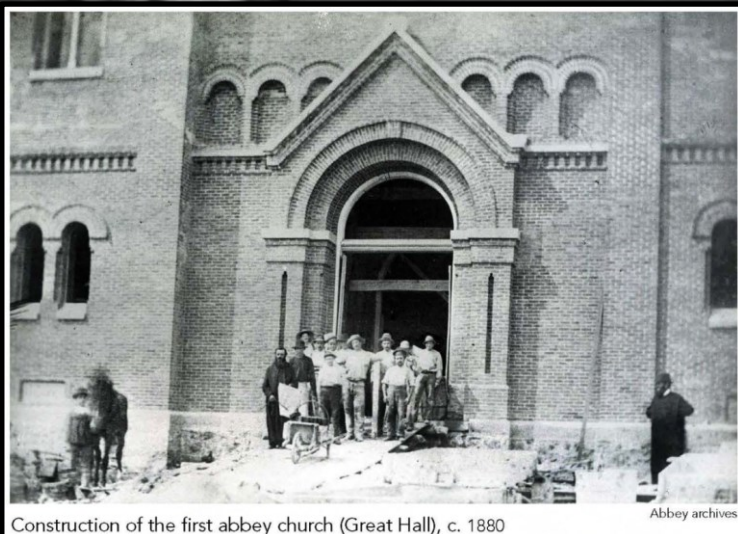
Bear photo: https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/black-bear-high-up-on-a-tree-branch-gm1399961720-453682721?irgwc=1&cid=IS&utm_medium=affiliate_SP&utm_source=Freelimages&clickid=0CDQaCyrOxyPUGfUoBxPySMDUKFQuK33Ew3u3s0&utm_term=black%2520bear&utm_campaign=srp_freephoto_null-inline-popup&utm_content=270498&irpid=246195

Haeg, Steph. “Hauntings of the Past: are the campus ghost stories true?” *The Record*, October 27, 2017, p. 6.



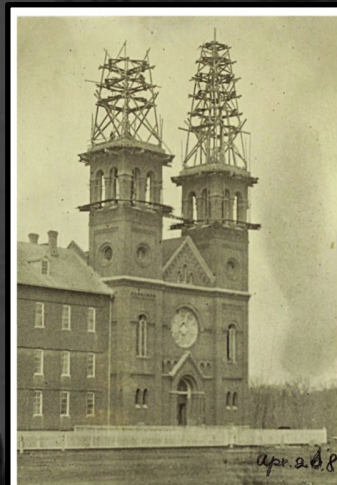
1880: The Fall

The next story: When the Great Hall, the first Abbey Church, was being built in the 1880s...



Construction of the first abbey church (Great Hall), c. 1880

Abbey archives



The twin towers on 26 April 1881

Abbey archives

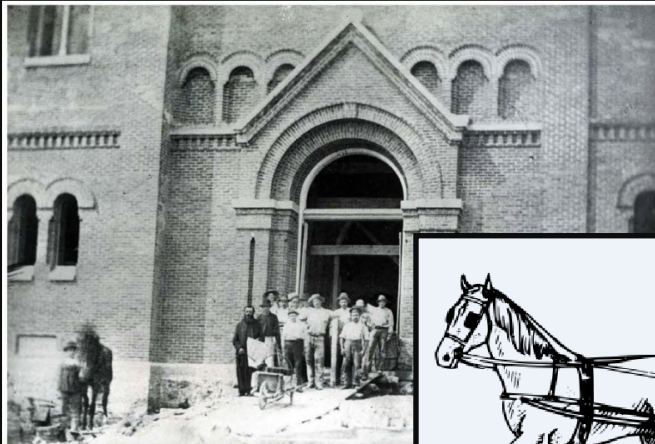
...a young monk fell from a scaffold and died. As the story goes, the monk's mother, deep in grief, immediately came to the Abbot and demanded an explanation. To her dismay, he refused to give her an audience, but she vowed to return. The new church finally reached completion, and at the dedication ceremony, the bereaved mother ran out of the congregation and confronted the Abbot. Startled, the Abbot had her ejected from the church. Amid loud curses, she vowed to return.

2013-14 Volume 13 Number 03 Abbey Banner Winter p. 6

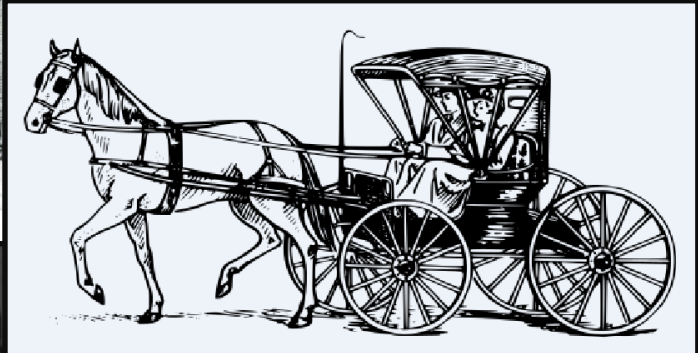
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/25087/rec/8>

Spires photo on right: 2019 Volume 19 Number 01 Abbey Banner Spring p. 17 <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/49221/rec/9>

“The construction project was not without its woes. The workweek was six ten-hour days. During operations, claims about defrauding workers’ wages surfaced, inciting some bad blood toward the contractor. There were stories of on-the-job injuries as well as tales of workers drinking beer, imbibing whiskey, and even getting drunk! Some sustained injuries after tumbling from defective scaffolding, notably Brother Leo Martin, O.S.B., who died from his fall. Masons were always in short supply, and, once hired, there was some trouble keeping them on task. On one occasion, masons got the abbey drayman to procure a keg of beer. “They had a drinking bout in the upper story of the wash house [the laundry building that also served as a workers’ dormitory] that ended in a row” (Scriptorium [May 1960], 17).



Construction of the first abbey church (Great Hall), c.



But as she drove her horse and buggy homeward, she lost control and the vehicle overturned into one of the lakes. The mother drowned.

2013-14 Volume 13 Number 03 Abbey Banner Winter p. 6

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/25087/rec/8>

Horse & buggy image: <https://svgsilh.com/image/2027141.html>

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Afterward, the church fell prey to strange happenings. Sometimes the wind would suddenly blast open the doors and wet footprints would appear down the center aisle. When the new church was dedicated, the footsteps didn't reappear, but (so the story goes) a crack appeared down the center aisle.

Sketch: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Great Hall\1889 Aug Record

Church interior: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Great Hall\01

LP208.1888.AbbeyChurch.jpg

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3c/Crack_in_the_floor_at_the_Tate_Modern_-_geograph.org.uk_-_932918.jpg



This ghost story also has a basis in fact. A young monk named Leo Martin *did* fall from the scaffold when the first Abbey Church, i.e. the Great Hall, was being built. Because he died at the age of 24 in 1880, no photo is known to exist, but he is buried in the Abbey cemetery.

Photos by the archivist in October 2023.

Brother Leo Martin

Martin, Brother Leo Peter, O.S.B.: B-25 Nov. 1849, in Viernheim, Hesse, Germany; Prof-29 Sept. 1877; D-9 Oct. 1880, was an expert carpenter before he came to SJ where he had ample opportunity to exercise his trade. In Apr. 1879 work was begun on the church and Brother Leo and Brother Andrew Unterberger, O.S.B., were placed in charge of the carpentering. When not needed at the building, Brother Leo helped redesign the wagons that were bringing the stone to the building site and made small repairs on the existing buildings.

The work on the church did not progress without some accidents. On 17 July 1880 one of the workmen got his hand caught in the elevator. Brother Leo cut the rope which raised the elevator, thereby freeing the one worker, but as the elevator fell it injured one of the masons who was also trying to free the man above him. The most serious accident occurred about 3:00 p.m. on 9 Oct. 1880, when Brother Leo himself was on the scaffolding and removing the boards on the tier above him. One of the planks slipped and knocked him off the scaffolding to the floor about 50 feet below. Immediately carried to the infirmary with multiple internal injuries, he received the last Sacraments from Abbot Alexius and died three hours later.

Brother Leo was a very diligent monk and punctual in performing his duties. On his deathbed he was somewhat depressed because his triennial vows had expired on 29 Sept., but he died a happy death after Abbot Alexius received his perpetual vows.

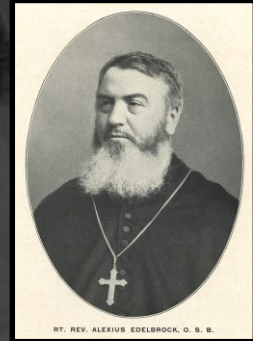


His obituary notes that he was an expert carpenter. His fall occurred when he was removing boards on the scaffolding, when a plank slipped and knocked him to the floor 50 feet below.

"Brother Leo Martin," *Scriptorium*, June 1956, p. 49-50.

Photo by the archivist in October 2023.

A scaffold fell & precipitated 3 men 25 feet to the floor. Luckily they are only bruised around the head & scratched. Planks, joist, brick, mortar, tools &c were piled up on the floor in confusion but men uppermost. F. G. told F. Prior that "every body had said the scaffold was not safe." The F. Pr. "went for him," wanted to know why it was not made safe, why he had not paid some attention to what every body said. The Prior wound up his injunctions by declaring that he wanted no men killed around here through carelessness or stupidity & that, if it were necessary to spend 200 or even 300 dollars more, he wanted the scaffolds made safe.



Preparing the forms for the second abbey church, 1959

Abbey archives

The story about his grieving mother confronting the Abbot, the wet footprints, and the crack in the floor all have no particular basis in fact. However, Abbot Alexius was ultimately in charge of the building, and there was stress reported among the workers and the prior after an earlier accident with the scaffold. And I can relate to the part about the bereaved mother...

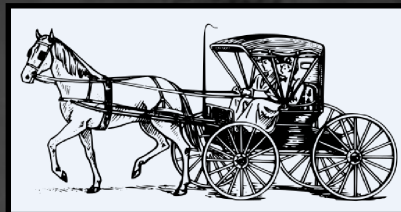
First Abbey Church Part 1 (*Scriptorium* vol 17-19, pg 1-40 and map) p.22

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/188/rec/10> – entry for May 22, 1880

Abbot's photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Edelbrocks\Alexius from Hoffmann bk p.72

Color photo: Abbey Banner, Winter 2013-2014, vol. 13 n. 3, Abbey Woodworking, p. 6

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/25087/rec/8>



The bereaved mother

New Year's Day 1870 was saddened by the death of Max Schmoeger, one of the most exemplary and popular students of the classical course. From a brief obituary written for the press by Frater Boniface Moll, it appears that Schmoeger was in the twenty-second year of his age when he died. He had left his parents and home in Europe in February 1869 with the intention of becoming a religious and a priest, but a short and severe illness cut him off in the flower of his youth. He rests in the common cemetery at St. John's. Many years later his aged mother begged that a flower or some dust from the grave be sent her, that she might have some remembrance of her child that slept in a far distant country.

...a part of the ghost story that I think is reflected in this true story about a student from about the same time, Max Schmoeger. Max had left his parents and home in Europe intending to become a priest, but died from a short and severe illness here at age 22. Many years later his aged mother begged that a flower or some dust from the grave be sent her, that she might have some remembrance of her child who "slept in a far distant country."

Hoffmann, Alexius. *Saint John's*, Chapter 2, in the section on 1869-1870..

[https://www.csbsju.edu/sju-](https://www.csbsju.edu/sju-archives/sjuhistory/booksaboutstjohns/hoffmannbook/hoffmannchapter2)

[archives/sjuhistory/booksaboutstjohns/hoffmannbook/hoffmannchapter2](https://www.csbsju.edu/sju-archives/sjuhistory/booksaboutstjohns/hoffmannbook/hoffmannchapter2)

Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota: A Sketch of Its History, by Alexius

Hoffmann, OSB

Max Schmoeger died on January 1, 1870, and is buried on the south side of the parish cemetery at Saint John's, row 1, lot 15.



...which brings us to The Drowning. This one contributes to the mystique of the Stella Maris Chapel across the lake.

Photo by Kurt Anderson

Many people consider the old chapel to be haunted.

Legends surround deserted chapel

By Julie Harrison

Spooky stories of the old chapel run rampant between the campuses of SJU and CSB. Ghosts, devil worshipers and dead monks immediately fill the minds of all who think of it, and possibly with good reason.

planned the site felt that walking or canoeing that distance would make one feel like he was making a pilgrimage," Tegeder said. "This would then make the veneration more special."

Students on both campuses, however, are rarely aware of this fact. They know little of its history.

Legends surround deserted chapel

By Julie Harrison

Spooky stories of the old chapel run rampant between the campuses of SJU and CSB. Ghosts, devil worshipers and dead monks immediately fill the minds of all who think of it, and possibly with good reason.

"The old chapel, sure it's haunted," said Otto Weber, OSB. "Haven't you heard the groans of the bells on foggy nights? I have, even though the chapel's bell tower has been empty for years."

Students also have their versions of the haunted chapel to tell.

"Last year, the biggest thing on campus was talking about the devil worshipers at the old haunted chapel. I guess all these black-robed people used to sit around that freaky looking six-pointed star on the floor and recite these

planned the site felt that walking or canoeing that distance would make one feel like he was making a pilgrimage," Tegeder said. "This would then make the veneration more special."

Students on both campuses, however, are rarely aware of this fact. They know little of its history.

"I don't really have a clue as to why the chapel is way out there," Steve Holm said. "I just know that some pretty weird stuff goes on there. I've heard tales of dead monks roaming the grounds and haunting the lake."

The dead monk tale is probably the most popular story, according to Weber.

And, it's also probably the only one that is built on more than rumor.

Beside student attention, the chapel has also drawn statewide publicity, Weber said. The area was shown in a television special called "Minnesota Ghosts" eight years ago.

"The sight of that chapel with a full glowing moon is really something," Weber said. "But I guess everybody believes what they want to believe."

Now it's your turn. What do you believe?

To quote from *The Record*: "Spooky stories of the old chapel run rampant on the campuses. Ghosts, devil worshipers and dead monks immediately fill the minds of all who think of it." The scary heart of this story: people walking to the Chapel hear moans and groans, or water splashing, or the tolling of a bell in the Chapel.

Harrison, Julie. "Legends surround deserted Chapel," *The Record*, September 18, 1986, p. 6-7. <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/36941/rec/1> Mentions "Minnesota Ghosts" video.



Abbey Archives

FEATURE



A monk wonders when the rebuilding of the Stella Maris Chapel, circa 1915, will be completed.

a steeple and a statue of the Blessed Mother. Abbot Peter Engel, OSB, blessed and laid the cornerstone for the chapel on June 13, 1915. The planned bell in the tower and a fountain with benches for rest and meditation were never completed.

Over the years the little meditation chapel suffered from neglect and vandalism. In 1943, under the direction of Cloud Meinberg, OSB, the stolen cornerstone was replaced and the walls were given new strength

the chapel and do some landscaping to further frame the finished project.

A tragic drowning evolves into a ghost story.

A story closely associated with the chapel concerns the tragic drowning of the twenty-three-year old monk, Anselm Bartholmy, OSB, on July 3, 1890. Frater Anselm and a student, John Salles, later ordained as Father Fel...



As the story goes, a young monk was enthusiastic about building the Chapel – complete with stained glass windows, oak pews, and a bell for its bell tower. With no road to the Chapel, all of the materials had to be transported across Lake Sagatan by boat.

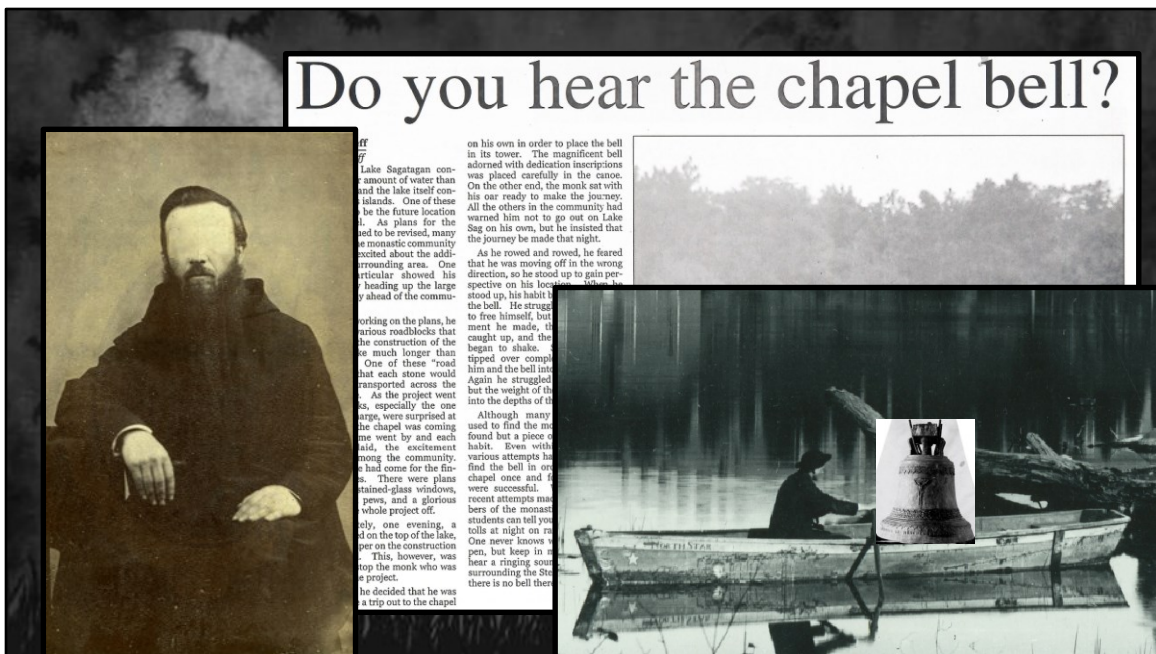
2006 Volume 06 Issue 03 *Abbey Banner* Winter p.15

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/24126/rec/7>

Boat image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascherman Coll.- historical photos \SJA Scanned photos 2005 from Reinhart disk\Et Labora\BoatViewQuad.tif

Bell icon: <https://depositphotos.com/vectors/bell.html>

Bell photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Quad\From SJAA\Bell - Original007 now in Puerto Rico



One foggy night, despite the warnings of his confreres, the young monk (*not* the ones pictured here) was determined to take the bell across the lake to the Chapel by himself. As he rowed, he feared he was off course and stood up for a better view. His cassock (his clothes) got caught on the bell, the canoe tipped over, and he and the bell sank into the lake, never to be seen again.

Streff, Amber. "Do you hear the chapel bell?," *The Record*, October 25, 2001, p. 4.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/34354/rec/968>

Monk image: O:\Archives\SJUAarchives\Images\Ascherman Coll.- historical photos\SJA

Scanned photos 2005 from Reinhart disk\Famous Monks\CorneliusWittman



Stella Maris chapel legend continues to spook and intrigue CSB/SJU students

Erin Adler
Editorial Staff Writer

Any child knows the ingredients to a good ghost story: old buildings, memorable characters, strange noises, and unexplained deaths. If you add into the mix a setting comprised of churches, chapels and graveyards, as we have at SJU and CSB, the result can be downright scary.

As some may know, our two institutions of higher learning are not without their share of legends, tales and myths, some of which could be called ghost stories.

In hopes of gathering end "ghost stories" and legends for a spooky Halloween feature story, The Record is offering this story as a sort of preview. If you know any other SJU or CSB tales, please contact us at 2540.

By the 1870's, St. John's had established an abbey and also a school at the present site. In order to further their commitment to God and the monastery, two younger monks went to the abbot with an idea. Their names, for our purposes, were Brother Douglas and Brother Benedict. They wanted to build a chapel as a sort of retreat on Lake Sagatagan. The abbot pledged his support on the project but said that he could not release the pair from their daily

to take all necessary supplies across the lake by a small boat, instead of walking all the way around on the path hikers take to the chapel today. They gathered supplies, and each night they worked for six or eight hours, slept briefly, and resumed their ordinary schedule the next day. The chapel began to take shape.

Several nights the Brothers experienced an unusually strong wind, but continued working. They decided to call the chapel "Stella Maris," or Star of the Sea. As the final night of the project

the last Douglas took taking thing was ability was l behind

To this day the chapel has never been completed, and no bell has ever been installed. But over the years, many a student trekking to the chapel by moonlight has heard the distinct sound of a bell ringing, and it is still heard today.

In 1999 a student wrote, "To this day, the chapel has never been completed, and no bell has ever been installed. But over the years, many a student trekking to the chapel by moonlight has heard the distinct sound of a bell ringing, and it is still heard today."

Adler, Erin. "Stella Maris chapel legend continues to spook and intrigue CSB/SJU students," *The Record*, September 2, 1999, p. 6.



The chapel now *has* been finished – in fact, it was renovated by an alum of the Prep School in 2007 – but it has never had a bell in its steeple. So where, in this ghost story, are the facts?



Abbey Archives

A monk wonders when the rebuilding of the Stalla Maris Chapel, circa 1915, will be completed.

FEATURE

A tragic drowning evolves into a ghost story.

A story closely associated with the chapel concerns the tragic drowning of the twenty-three-year old monk, **Anselm Bartholmy, OSB**, on July 3, 1890. Frater Anselm and a student, John Nelles (later ordained as **Father Felix, OSB**), were transporting sod across the lake to landscape the ground around the chapel.

The boat started to leak and soon sank under the weight of the wet sod about one hundred yards from the chapel shore. Both men could swim but Anselm was hampered by the weight of his monastic habit. Grabbing hold of Nelles, Anselm pulled him down. In the underwater struggle Nelles managed to free himself but could not rescue Anselm whose body was found after a twenty-four hour search.

Over the years the facts of this tragedy became a ghost story embellished by a monastic storyteller. The legend

a steeple and a statue of the Blessed Mother. **Abbot Peter Engel, OSB**, blessed and laid the cornerstone for the chapel on June 13, 1915. The planned bell in the tower and a fountain with benches for rest and meditation were never completed.

Over the years the little meditation chapel suffered from neglect and vandalism. In 1943, under the direction of **Cloud Meinberg, OSB**, the

chapel. Don Hall, a 1955 alumnus of Saint John's Preparatory School, recently made a pilgrimage to Stella Maris. His observation was perhaps similar to that of many visitors: "I expected more." What appears as a jewel from afar fails to inspire the visitor upon arrival.

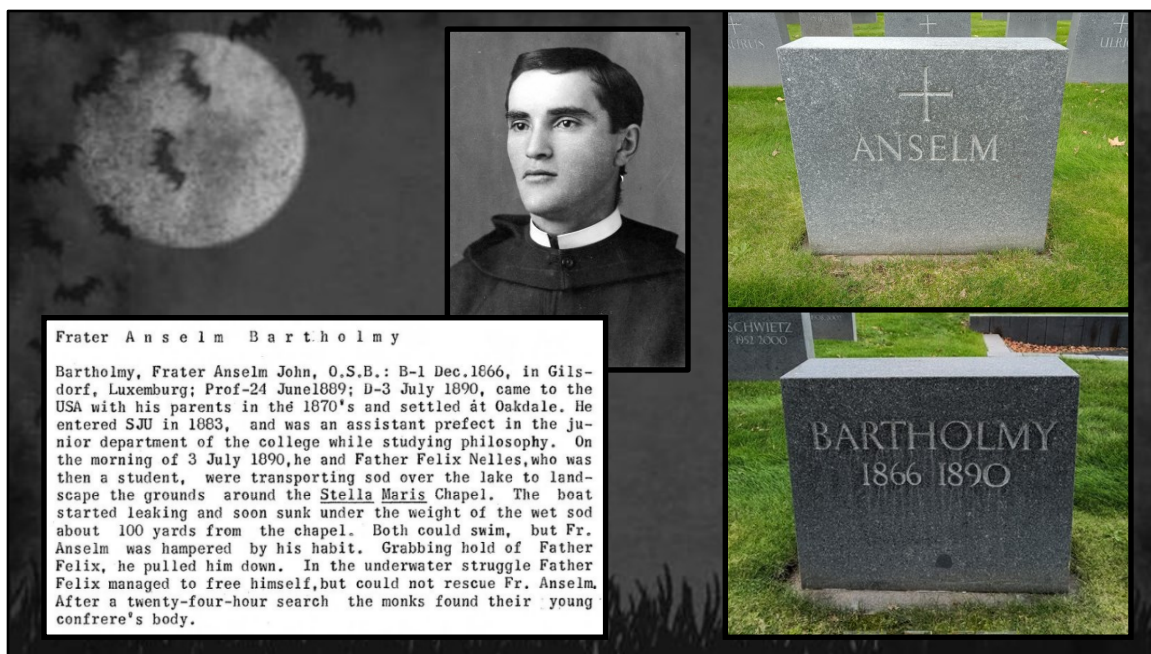
It became Don's vision to make a pilgrimage to the chapel as inspiring as the view of Stella Maris from the lake. Don Hall, a 1955 alumnus of Saint John's Preparatory School, recently made a pilgrimage to Stella Maris. His observation was perhaps similar to that of many visitors: "I expected more." What appears as a jewel from afar fails to inspire the visitor upon arrival.



The Abbey's archivist, Br. David Klingeman, related the facts in this article in the *Abbey Banner* in 2006. On July 3, 1890, a young monk, Fr. Anselm Bartholmy, and a student who later became a monk, Felix Nelles, were transporting sod across the lake to landscape the grounds around the chapel. The boat started to leak, and soon sank under the weight of the wet sod. Both men could swim, but Anselm was hampered by the weight of his monastic habit, and he drowned.

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<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/24126/rec/7>



So there *was* a drowning connected to the Chapel, involving a young monk and a cassock that contributed to his drowning – but he was delivering sod, not a bell. The story is borne out by Anselm’s obituary. He is buried in the Abbey cemetery. Portrait of Anselm from SJAA: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Bartolmy, Anselm OSB

Cemetery photos by the archivist in October 2023.

Text from 1956-06 *Scriptorium* vol. 15 n.1 p.78

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/26199/rec/28%20/>



Brother Felix Nelles is there, too, though he lived for another 55 years. Here are a couple of photos of him as a student, including his title role in the play, “Columbus” – in 1892.

PC07.0168 73/7 Box 8, #05b ca. 1890 Top Row John Traufler, McDonald, Joseph Dingmann, John Nelles, unknown

SJU Archives 103/2: 1-024 Theater & Drama v. 1 p. 24 1892 “Columbus” L to R: Rev. Meinrad; Rev. Hugo; Rev. Britscher; __; Rev. Felix Nelles; Rev. Edmund Basel; Rev. James Hansen

Cemetery photos by the archivist in October 2023.

Felix Nelles’ obituary is on p. 89-90, *Scriptorium* 1956,

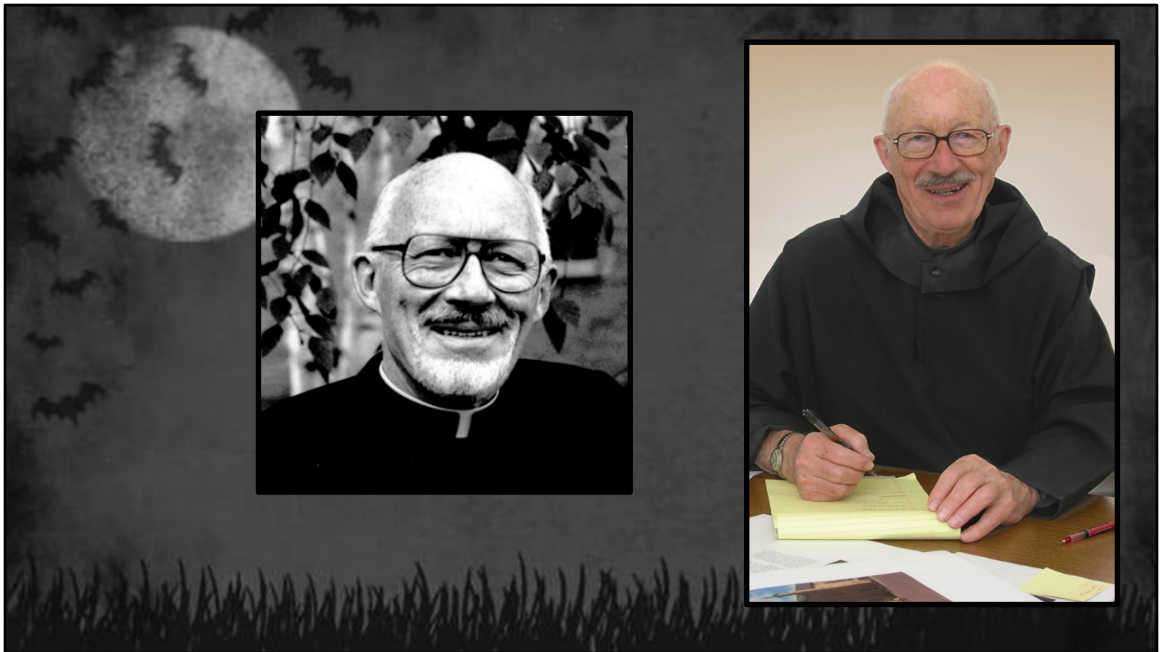
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/26210/rec/5>



Besides the fact that it was sod, not a bell, that sank the boat, and that there has never been a bell in the Chapel, the other fact to be mindful of is that, in 1890, when Anselm and Felix were headed to the Chapel, it was to this old, *first* Chapel – built in 1872, and which burned down in 1903. So the ghost story doesn't even involve the Chapel we visit today.

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Chapel\1872-1903 Chapel\Stella Maris 1890s [view with dock & lake]

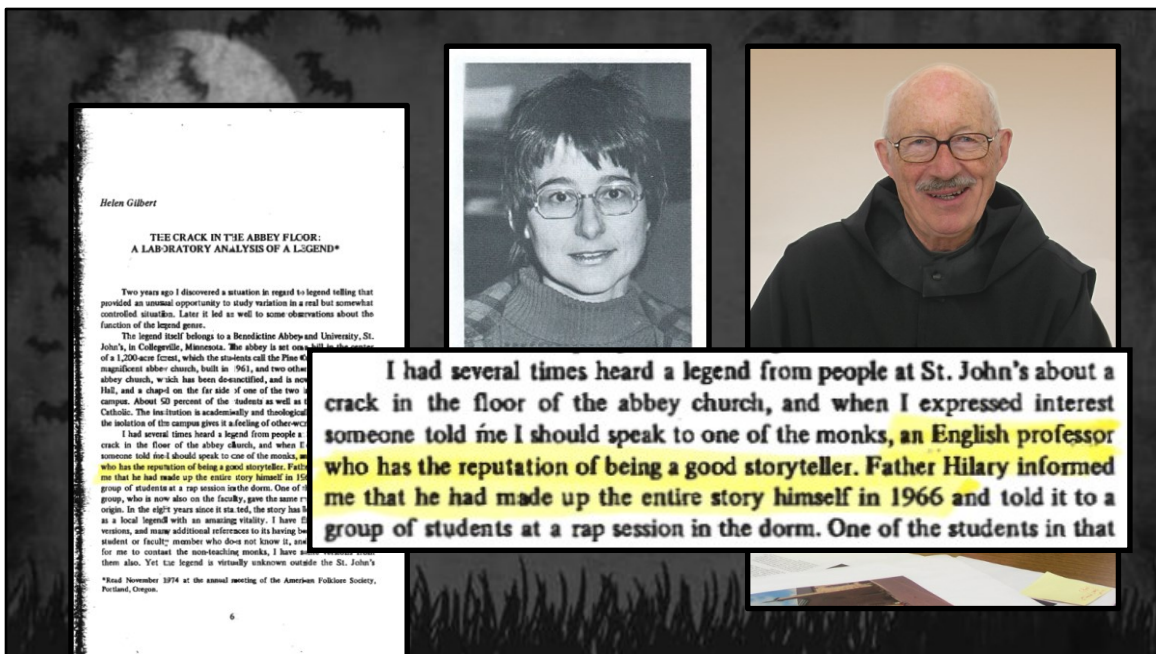
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Chapel\1872-1903 Chapel\LP092.1stChapel



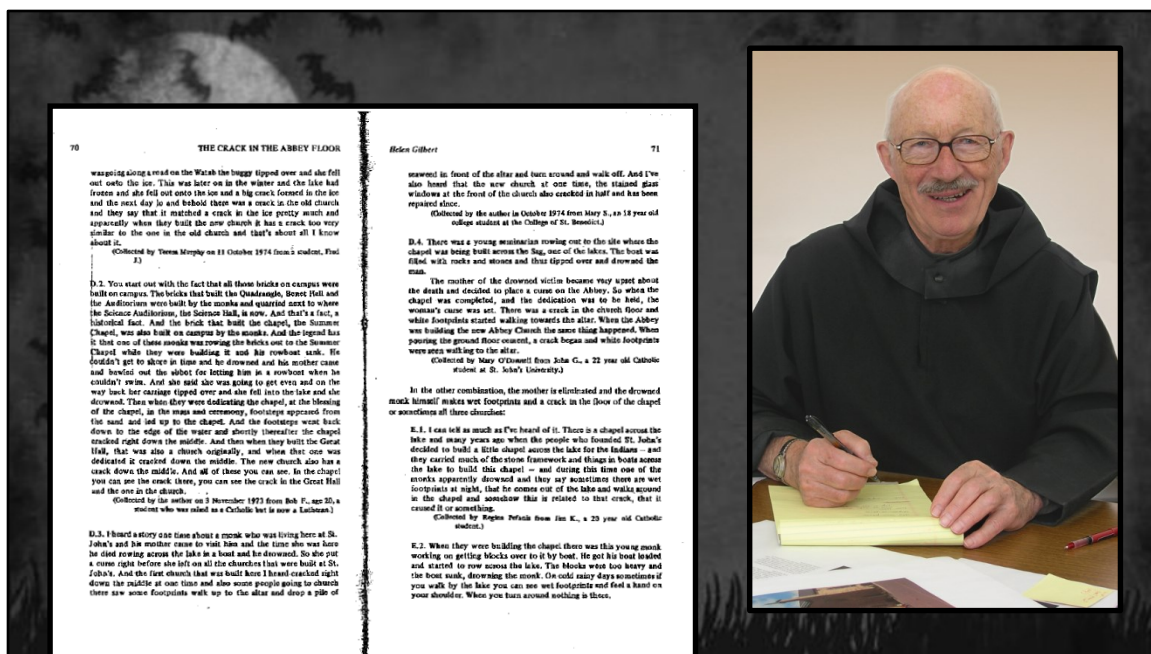
There are several more ghost stories I'll mention – ones which, unlike those first three, don't have much of a historical basis – but before I relate them, I want to mention that there is a monk who admitted to making up some of the ghost stories. Fr. Hilary Thimmesh, once chair of the English Department – once my Shakespeare professor - and SJU president, and long-time Faculty Resident in Tommie Hall, knew about the monk who died after falling from the scaffolding when the Great Hall was being built.

Thimmesh:

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Thimmesh, Hilary, OSB\Thimmesh, Hilary OSB photos in ARC folder\Thimmesh, Hilary OSB outdoors on bench 2.tif (B&W) O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Thimmesh, Hilary, OSB\From IA O drive \Thimmesh_Hilary_SJU 150_Jacket Photo.tif (color)



His story-telling actually became the basis for research by Helen Gilbert, a professor who briefly taught Folklore here. She published her results in the academic journal *Indiana Folklore* in 1975. She wrote that she had heard of a Saint John's legend, and was referred to "an English professor who has the reputation of being a good storyteller." Fr Hilary admitted that he made up the entire story in 1966 and told it to a group of students.



Gilbert relates many different versions of Fr. Hilary's ghost story, studying how it morphed to include not only a monk's tragic fall and the bereaved mother chastising the Abbot, but also to include the boat sinking taking bricks to the Chapel, and/or the wet (or white, or bloody) footprints in the church floor, or the crack in the floor, and the mysterious ringing of a Chapel bell.



TOMB IT MAY CONCERN HALLOWEEN

IS HERE

Spook-tacular ghost stories

the mother had been arguing with the abbot. dent had provoked him by teasing him with a heat car. The bear was shot and

Are you scared yet?

here's a few frightful facts that will make you think twice before venturing out this halloween.

What would halloween be without a ghost story to tell?

the mother had been arguing with the abbot. dent had provoked him by teasing him with a heat car. The bear was shot and

PAGE 7 • THE RECORD

VARIETY

csbjurecord.com • OCT. 26, 2018

THE HAUNTINGS OF CSB/SJU

Editors note: Other than the haunting student details and accounts, there is no further evidence that these stories have actually occurred. The purpose of this story is purely for entertainment during the Halloween season. Read on if you dare.

A Bear, a Brother, a Mother and a Monk

The Ghosts of Collegeville

By Don Maher

Case 1

It was a peaceful evening on Lake Sagatagan. A student and a monk quietly fished from a boat a considerable distance out from shore. Suddenly from the sky fell a storm of

Although the approaching animal was still unrecognizable through the brush, he changed direction and continued his pursuit of the stranger.

Different encounters of this type have been reported since the early years at St. John's when a pet bear

pus, but how many have heard of the poltergeist which inhabits the house along with the farm girls?

He (or she) supposedly made its presence known last year to Dan Boyarski, Mark Goldbach, and Tom Williams, who then lived there.

The Ghosts of Collegeville

(Reprinted from the Nov. 22, 1968 issue of the Record.)

By Don Maher

Case 1

It was a peaceful evening on Lake Sagatagan. A student and a monk quietly fished from a boat a considerable distance out from shore. Suddenly from the sky fell a storm of stones and rocks. No rocks hit the men or the boat, but the rough waves caused by the stone-storm rocked the craft.

What was this phenomenon? Was it an explainable occurrence of natural or human conception. Or was it perhaps a manifestation of the supernatural? Many have attributed this event, if indeed it did happen, to the wrath of a long deceased brother who lost his life in the Sagatagan.

Carrying sod (or rocks, for the tales vary) across the lake to the site of the chapel, his boat became swamped. Despite his efforts to unburden his craft, he drowned. Since that time he is supposed to haunt the area where he perished.

Case 2

A Sunday morning at Collegeville and the Community has gathered for Mass in the recently constructed

Offertory a strange procession begins down the center aisle.

Before the eyes of the entire congregation wet footprints began a march toward the main altar. Proceeding past the communion rail they halted before the altar; at that instant the stone altar split.

Supposedly this incident has led to repeated exorcisms of the old and new churches. The crack which extends down the center aisle of the new church has also been credited to the same mysterious force which acted upon the altar in the Great Hall.

The footprints were attributed to a grieving mother whose son, a cleric, was mortally injured in an accident during the construction of the old church. She came to Collegeville upon her son's death and berated the abbot for not seeing that proper medical treatment was administered after the accident.

Returning home on a Saturday evening her carriage crashed off the road into a lake and she drowned. The next morning the watery trail crossed the church.

Case 3

This event occurred within the

black-robed body was seen walking down a hall and into one of the cells. Nothing unusual except that a wet footprint remained as evidence of each step.

As an observing monk followed the figure into the room and found—no one—nothing! Was this perhaps another visit by the brother who drowned in the treacherous waters of the Sag?

Case 4

This case history is a conglomerate of several tales told throughout the years at St. John's.

A Johnny walking along the lake front sensed someone approaching him from the rear. Before he could turn, a bloodied hand frantically grasped his shoulder and spun him about. He found himself face to face with another young man of his own age.

But what a sight! Where the collar of the stranger stopped and the neck began there was no throat but only a gaping wound which constantly squirted blood despite the injured person's efforts to cease its flow. The youth's face was that of one in a desperate panic as he tried to communicate with his paralyzed captive.



gurglings were emitted from the wound.

Suddenly a wild thrashing was heard from the depths of the woods. It was as if a giant animal was approaching through the thicket. The bleeding student looked toward the noise and then promptly turned and fled down the path toward the lake.

Although the approaching animal

brush, he changed direction and continued his pursuit of the stranger.

Different encounters of this type have been reported since the early years at St. John's when a pet bear turned on a student and killed him near the lake shore. The fatal wound was a bite in the throat.

Cases 5 and 6

At members of the St. John's case

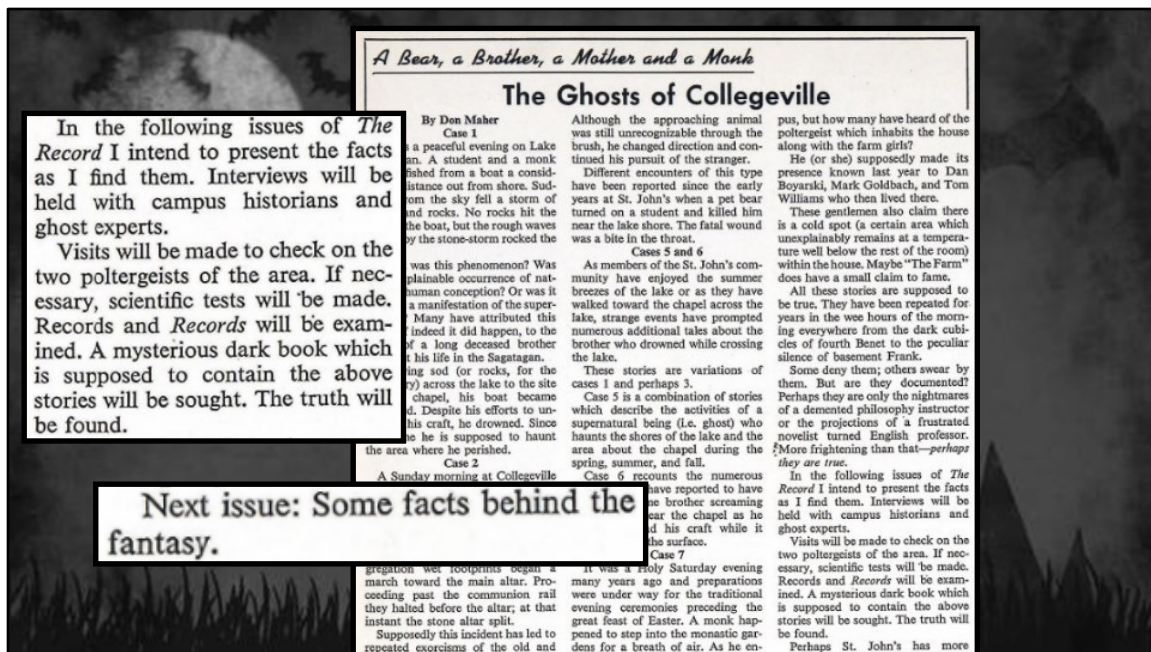
This 1968 Halloween article on the Ghosts of Collegeville was even reprinted in 1971. But the last three sentences of the original story were left out.

Maher, Don. "The Ghosts of Collegeville," *The Record*, November 22, 1968, p. 6.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/33806/rec/14>

Maher, Don. "The Ghosts of Collegeville," *The Record*, November 19, 1971, p. 1 & 4.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/34662/rec/11>



The author said, "In the following issues of *The Record* I intend to present the facts...Interviews will be held with campus historians and ghost experts; "if necessary, scientific tests will be made." ... "The truth will be found." And... "Next issue: Some facts behind the fantasy." Guess what? The next issue (that December) did **NOT** provide the "facts behind the fantasy."

Maher, Don. "The Ghosts of Collegeville," *The Record*, November 22, 1968, p. 6.
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/33806/rec/14>

From bears to vindictive mothers, spectres roam campus

By Terri McCargar
Staff Writer

Certain it is, the place still continues under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of the good people...They are given to all kinds of marvelous beliefs; are subject to trances and visions; and frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air.—from The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

Washington Irving would have loved St. John's. Even the ghosts here can't find adequate housing and end up roaming around the woods or the buildings around campus. The legends of St. John's are so many, so varied, and so fictional that it would be impossible to detail each one in a simple feature. Instead, I will share a few of my favorites:

The Stella Maris Chapel is haunted, of course. Witnesses near it sometimes hear a person splashing around in Lake Sagatagan. No one ever sees the victim because he is a ghost—a monk who drowned when his boat capsized near the chapel in the late 19th century. He was bringing bricks across the lake for the reconstruction of Stella Maris. (Some people say he was hauling the bells over for installation. In this case, it is not splashing that they hear, but the ringing of phantom bells.)

As usual, the truth is far less interesting. There was a monk, Br. Anselm Bartolome, who drowned

near the chapel in 1893. But he wasn't hauling bricks, or even bells—his boat was weighted down with sod. Regardless of the less than glamorous facts, Br. Bartolome died, cassock over his head, and it is his prerogative to haunt the chapel in whichever way he chooses.

Another tale that involves the lake is the story of a killer bear. (I found no similar lore about lions or tigers.) The next time you go for that peaceful walk around the Sag, be wary of the sound of tree branches breaking. You might encounter a frightful student with a blood-streaked face. If you see him, step aside. He is running for refuge in the lake, pursued by a spectral bear.

Surprisingly, this story is grounded in truth. In 1867, St. John's had many institutional pets, including a bear named Murro. Murro was docile enough to eat scraps from



"The Stella Maris Chapel is haunted, of course. Witnesses near it sometimes hear a person splashing around in Lake Sagatagan. No one ever sees the victim because he's a ghost..." Many ghosts are in our midst here at SJU. From wet footprints in what now is the Great Hall to running water in the

Ghosts / from page 9

Instead of wet footprints, however, a crack appeared in the floor up to the altar of the new church.

As KSTP reported in 1976, although the death of the monk is true, this detailed story was completely fabricated by Hillary Timmish, OSB, in the fall of 1965.

Still another tale concerns the construction of the Stella Maris Chapel on Lake Sagatagan in the summer of 1890.

*24-year-old Brother Anselm Bartolome and a student were conversing and to

by Elaine Garbe
Independent staff writer

Beware...Halloween is just around the corner, and you know what that means—spooky ghosts, creepy goblins, meddling witches and lecherous vampires. But of course there aren't any ghosts and goblins on the campuses of the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University.

Think again. These institutions are filled with ghosts, from the Benedicta Arts Center to Mangretta Hall to the Abbey Church and Lake Sagatagan, according to stories, rumors and embellished tales that have been passed down over the years.

One of the stories is of a student who walked through the CSB cemetery for some quiet time. After she walked passed a sister and noticed a greeting, she

"When the student searched around, she found no evidence that the sister had

ever been there," said Justin Lombardo, OSB, a former member of the theater department.

More recently, strange and spooky events have occurred in Margretta Hall. About three years ago a student living in the basement of Margretta Hall died unexpectedly in her room.

Since then, especially last year, the occupants of that room have been experiencing strange occurrences like eerie noises and lights going on and off for

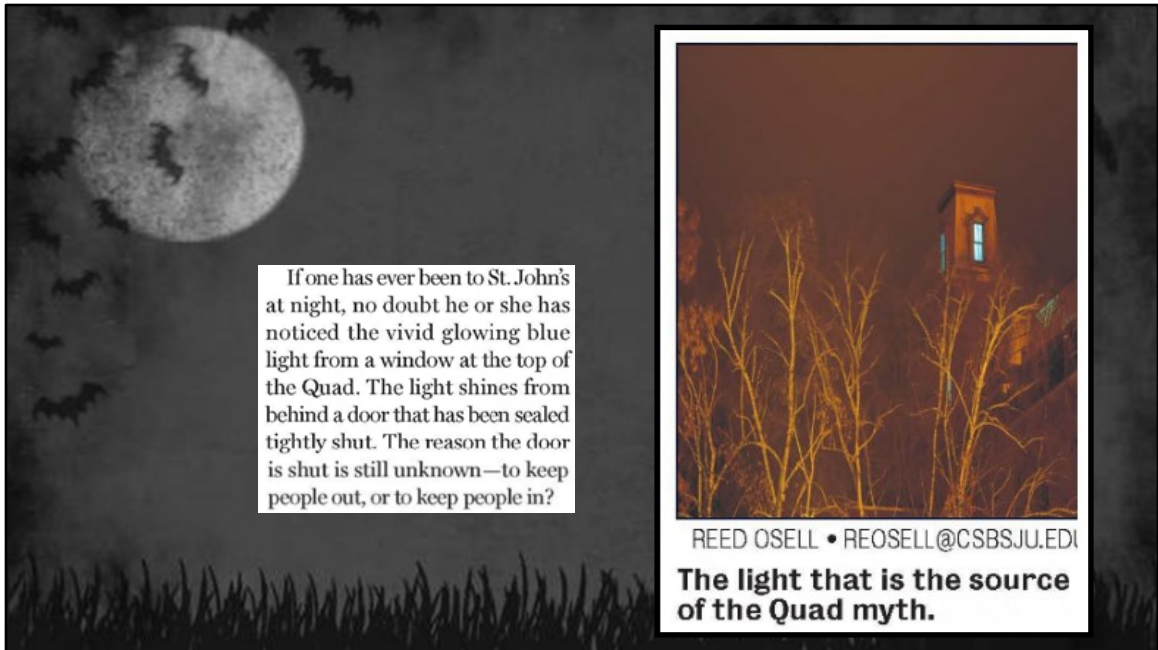
One of the students who lived in the room last year, CSB junior Shannon Begins, described one night when her and her roommate junior Laura Thurston were in their beds.

"The lights were out and Laura and I were talking. Suddenly, the legs from Laura's loft shook and rumbled," Beggs said. "We had no idea what made the legs shake like that."

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/37549/rec/6>



I'll mention a few, briefly. One is the Blue Light in the Tower...



If one has ever been to St. John's at night, no doubt he or she has noticed the vivid glowing blue light from a window at the top of the Quad. The light shines from behind a door that has been sealed tightly shut. The reason the door is shut is still unknown—to keep people out, or to keep people in?

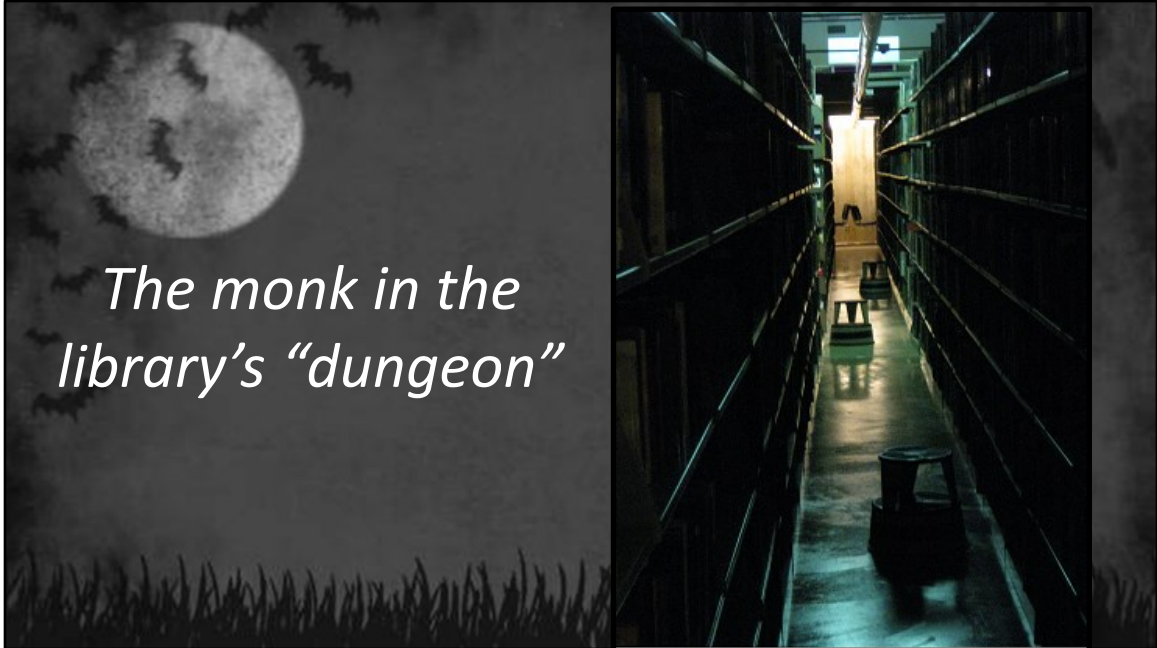


REED OSELL • REOSELL@CSBSJU.EDU

The light that is the source of the Quad myth.

...which, it seems, is not a crazy monk imprisoned and wailing in that tower in the Quad – the one that faces toward the Abbey Church - nor a room sealed up after a failed exorcism there; but rather light emanating from equipment used in the weather station, which was once atop that tower.

Seeb, Hannah. "Campus Myth Halloween Stories," *The Record*, October 26, 2012, p. 5.



The monk in the library's "dungeon"

Then there's the monk who supposedly haunts – or haunted – the Alcuin Library "dungeon," that is, the basement book stacks. As the story goes, an anxious student encounters a monk who helps him find resources for his term paper late one night...but "when the student turns to thank him, he disappears."

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Alcuin Library\Alcuin Bldg Comm 2012 1001plr

Stubblefield, Amy. "[Spook-tacular](#) ghost stories," *The Record*, October 30, 2009, p. 5.: <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/40428/rec/4>



Before Alcuin was renovated, the motion-detector lighting, crowded spaces and few people in Alcuin's basement certainly made it a scary place, any time of day or night. But that's where the Archives are now...

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Alcuin Library\Alcuin Bldg Comm 2012 1001plr



...and I've spent years down there, many times all by myself, and never encountered anything scary. (Come visit me sometime!)

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Alcuin Library\Alcuin Bldg Comm 2012 1001plr

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Alcuin Library\Archives\IMG_20180419_151116

Suicide in Frank

Frank house may have an unexpected resident. Luke Andrews was one of four students who lived on the top floor of Frank house. His suicidal tendencies were known to his floormates who did their best to keep a watchful eye on him and ensure his safety. One night while they were all at a dance, Andrews snuck away and returned to his room where he shot and killed himself.

Approximately three years later, Andrews' ghost made its first appearance. One Saturday

Frank House Ghost

Approximately three years later, Andrews' ghost made its first appearance. One Saturday night, three students and the resident director of Frank house were on the first floor of the building when they heard moaning and cries for help. After further investigation, they determined that the sounds were coming from the top floor, but when they went to check they were surprised to find no one there. Since the first haunting there have been other reports of the vocalized disturbances, usually on Saturday evenings. However, the ghost has never taken a physical shape.



Then there's supposed to be a ghost haunting Frank House (one of the brick houses between the Quad and the Power House) – the ghost of a depressed SJU student named Luke Andrews who supposedly committed suicide there. But not only is there no record of a student doing so, there are no records of a student with that name ever having attended Saint John's – I checked.

Acham, Serah. "CSB/SJU haunted," *The Record*, October 31, 2008, p. 4.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/33940/rec/22> 2008

Photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Frank House



This one's on the edge of campus, in "Lower Collegeville," in the vicinity of Indianbush, the monks' first settlement after they left Saint Cloud.



It involves a ghost or poltergeist and this old house, which may once have been the location of a wake for someone who froze to death? ... or maybe it is haunted by someone once living there who died in a 1930 car accident at the intersection by the Saint John's entrance road (where the freeway footbridge is now). There are rumors of an apparition making appearances in the house, noises in the night, and so on.

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Collegeville neighborhood Lower N. of I94\O'Connell Joe & Jody house

Once had a wake there? "Someone was laid out here, someone who froze to death." Dillenburgs' son disappeared? Mrs. Dillenburg died in a car accident just up the road



This photo of the house was published in a book, and it's been suggested that there is an eerie face in the window – a face of someone too tall to have been one of the people living there at the time. (What do you think?)

Sipe, Mike & Sipe, Michael. *Collegeville: a photo essay*



But some of you – especially those who have taken anthropology from Mr. Nydeen! – have learned that there can be perfectly logical, historical explanations for things on this campus that may otherwise seem quite spooky, like these old steps leading to nowhere just down the hill from the Prep School dorm. One just has to look hard enough...and long enough...to explain them.

Sipe, Mike & Sipe, Michael. *Collegeville: a photo essay*

Saint Gregory Hall, aka the Infirmary



If you ask me, there are other scary things around here that maybe *should* have ghost stories attached to them. Maybe I should invoke Father Hilary and make up some of my own. Like something about Greg House. It used to be the Infirmary (or hospital) for the campus, so there would have been pain, suffering and death there.

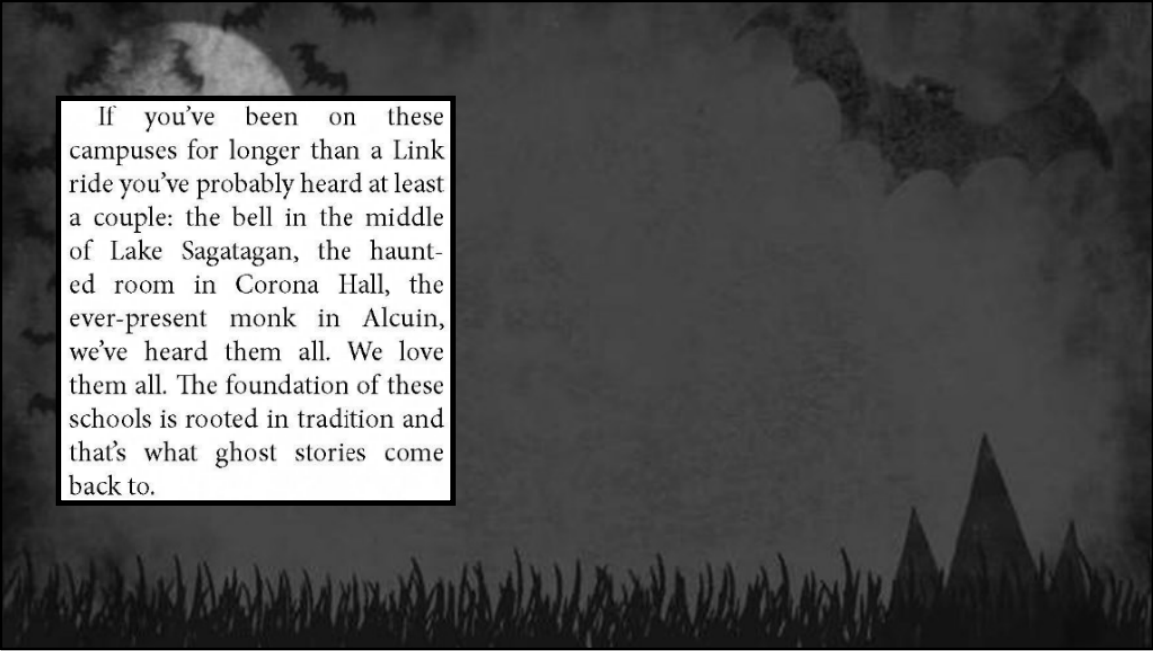
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Saint Peregrin?



**Or how about that skeleton in the basement of the Abbey Church, Saint Peregrin?
Seeing that on a grade school field trip in my childhood was enough to produce
nightmares!**

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Abbey Church\Peregrin shrine from
SJAA 2014\St. Peregrin (6).jpg

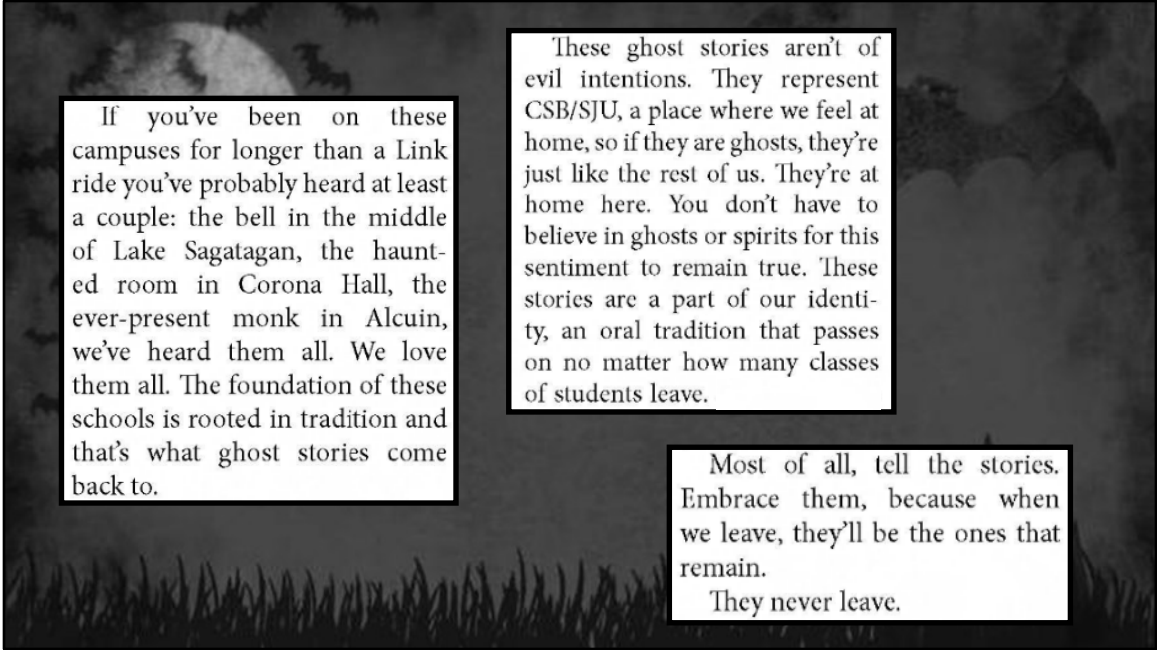


If you've been on these campuses for longer than a Link ride you've probably heard at least a couple: the bell in the middle of Lake Sagatagan, the haunted room in Corona Hall, the ever-present monk in Alcuin, we've heard them all. We love them all. The foundation of these schools is rooted in tradition and that's what ghost stories come back to.

I'll close with these somewhat philosophical reflections by *The Record* editors back in 2015. "We've heard all the ghost stories. We love them all. The foundation of these schools is rooted in tradition, and that's what ghost stories come back to."

Schultz, Jake, Fretchen Brown, Michael Swearingen, and Nicole Koonce. "A ghostly tradition," *The Record*, October 30, 2015, p. 10.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/42889/rec/4>



If you've been on these campuses for longer than a Link ride you've probably heard at least a couple: the bell in the middle of Lake Sagatagan, the haunted room in Corona Hall, the ever-present monk in Alcuin, we've heard them all. We love them all. The foundation of these schools is rooted in tradition and that's what ghost stories come back to.

These ghost stories aren't of evil intentions. They represent CSB/SJU, a place where we feel at home, so if they are ghosts, they're just like the rest of us. They're at home here. You don't have to believe in ghosts or spirits for this sentiment to remain true. These stories are a part of our identity, an oral tradition that passes on no matter how many classes of students leave.

Most of all, tell the stories. Embrace them, because when we leave, they'll be the ones that remain.
They never leave.

"They aren't of evil intentions. They represent a place where we feel at home, so if there are ghosts, they're just like us. ... These stories are part of our identity, an oral tradition that passes on. Embrace the stories, because when we leave, they'll remain. They never leave." (I find that rather scary, actually!)

Schultz, Jake, Gretchen Brown, Michael Swearingen, and Nicole Koonce. "A ghostly tradition," *The Record*, October 30, 2015, p. 10.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/42889/rec/4>



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