The Land, the Forest, and the Place of Agriculture at Saint John's

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Sunday at the Abbey

featuring Tom Kroll

February 26, 7:00 PM  Abbey Chapter House

The Land, the Forest, and the Place of Agriculture at Saint John’s

With generous assistance from:
Peggy Roske, CSB/SJU Archives
Br. David Klingeman, Abbey Archives
• Abbey Land Acquisition
• Abbey Land Managers
• Abbey Land Stewardship

Prepared by Thomas Kroll, February 2017
Abbey Land Manager and Outdoor U Director
• 2,600+ acres
8 miles west of downtown St. Cloud.

• Mostly forested with high quality oak.

• 400 acres of lakes.

• 20 miles of trails, 18km groomed for skiing.

• Tens of thousands of visitors annually.

• SJ Abbey and SJU Campus in the heart.
1856 - Benedictine monks in St. Cloud.

- 1857 - University founded in St. Cloud
- 1858 - Moved to city of St. Joseph
- 1859 - Moved back to St. Cloud
- 1864 - Moved to “Indianbush” (across I-94)
- 1866 - Moved to current site.
• Start with land.
  – No forestry and no agriculture without land.

• Benedictine monks are big on land.
  – Vow of stability & Christian stewardship.
At the same time the orders of F. Prior Demetrius directing me to take charge of Richmond, St. James and St. Joseph reached me, I was instructed by the Rt. Rev. Abbot of St. Vincent’s to select a suitable piece of land on which a monastery could be erected. The two claims held by the Rothkopps furnished little fuel and no pasture. In making a selection, therefore, I had to keep in view these two essentials, besides a third, water.
This task presented difficulties, which the present inhabitants would not imagine. 1), The government had but recently purchased the land from the Indians; it had been surveyed to some extent, that is, township divisions had been marked by notches cut into trees; 2), I was a stranger, had no idea as to where suitable land might be found; 3), I could devote but one day a week, Monday, to this task, and was expected home at St. Cloud in the evening. I made this distance on foot.
Abbot Boniface Wimmer
Abbey Land Visionary

In the fall of 1858, ex-King Ludwig of Bavaria sent 3,000 Florins for the Sisters in St. Joseph.

By Dec 1858, Abbot Wimmer had used that money to buy Military Land Warrants totaling 1,280 acres.
Military Warrants allowed a soldier or his widow to claim 160 acres of government land.

Military Warrants had a face value of $1.25 per acre and could be sold and were traded at market prices.

Abbot Wimmer spent $0.86 /acre to buy the warrants in New York.
Abbot Boniface Wimmer
Abbey Land Visionary

“Perhaps never was there better use made of a sum of money than in this instance. ... “ Abbot Boniface Wimmer in 1859 letter to ex-King Ludwig of Bavaria explaining why he used the Florins to buy Indianbush.

The Sisters were repaid when they built a home of their own. And more.
Like other settlers, the monks squatted on land surveyed, but not yet offered for sale.

Fr. Bruno put up signs to keep off other squatters.

Application for this land is made to Congress for St. John’s College.
Land Acquisition
1859-1900

• 1859 April 8 (6 months after getting land warrants.)

First Acquisition.
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1859 April 8
- 160 acres by Military Warrant
- To Benedict Haindl, OSB
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1859 April 8 (same day)
- 160 acres by Military Warrant
- To Patrick Greil, OSB
- Same year they moved back to St. Cloud.
  - Hedging their land bet?
Indianbush!

1864

5 years later.
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1865 Jan 20 (6 years after first land)
- Public Auction 143 acres.
- $6.85 or $0.05/acre

At 4% annual inflation, this is equal to $20/acre in 2017.
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1866 Oct 12 (+1½ years)
- Buy 641 acres from the St. Paul and Pacific railroad.
- $801 or $1.25 /acre
- Moved to current site earlier that year.
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1869 June 14 (+3 years)
- Buy 40 acres from neighbor. (Seifert)
- $200 or $5/acre
1869 June 15 (next day)

- Buy 51 acres from neighbor. (Lauermann)
- $300 or $5.88/ac
- At 4% annual inflation = $3,010/ac in 2017 value.

Notarized by Michael Walz – Justice of the Peace

Site of current Chapel.
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1871 Dec 20 (+2½ years)
- 862 acres using Military Warrants.
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1871 Dec 28 (8 days later)
- 160 acres by Military Warrants.
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1871 Dec 28 (same day)
- Buy 433 acres from the St. Paul and Pacific railroad.
- $1,041 or $2.40/acre
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1872 Jan. 8 (+1 year)
- 30 acres for $100. ($3.33/ac)
- 1872 Jan. 8
- Also bought all land from same owner where Gold-N-Plump sits today in Cold Spring.
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1895 Oct. 18 (+23 years)
- Foreclosure auction.
- ~75 acres
- $411
- $5.48 /acre
Land Acquisition 1859-1900

- 1900 (+4 years)
- 40 acres to “clean up mistake from 1874.”
- No cost.
1881-1901 The West Union priory and farm

40 miles NW of Saint John’s.
Abbot Alexius Edelbrock’s dream.

By 1884 had 1,000 acres, 125+ cattle, & produced 5,000 bushels of grain.
Farming in 1800’s
An early barn

Building the new barn 1890. Near where Sexton is today.
Agricultural Advice

Some priests visiting parishioners would offer guidance on crop rotation, new seed varieties, fertilizers, etc.

The Abbey sent priests to Canada to get rust resistant seed.
Forests in 1800’s
Fuel was first on Fr. Bruno’s list

Renewable energy. ~3 cords per load.
500 loads per winter.

Picture from 1870’s
1,000-3,000 cords burned a year.
(= 100-200 acres clearcut each year.)
Does not count sawtimber.

Picture circa 1880
1888 – First Powerhouse

- Burns wood
Most of Saint John’s woods were cut by 1900

But the monks were either well-guided or lucky in their timber harvests. Mostly well-guided.
Most of Saint John’s woods were cut by 1900.

Today, nearly all of the Abbey Arboretum forest is rated as “Outstanding Quality Native Plant Community” by MN DNR.
Fr. John Katzner  1850-1930
Abbey Forest & Land Manager 1880? -1930

Was professor already in 1872 and a great musician.

Researcher and plant breeder.

Worked on 35 varieties of grapes, 60 plums, 10 cherries, and 200 apple varieties.

Also interested in forestry.
Fr. Adrian Schmitt  1864-1940
Abbey Forest & Land Manager 1884-1896

Devoted energies to forestry from 1890-1896.

Relatives were foresters in Schwartzwald, Germany

Had nursery at site of today’s seminary with 15 species of evergreens.
Fr. Adrian Schmitt 1864-1940
Abbey Forest & Land Manager 1884-1896

Was concerned by loss of forest due to harvest.

Planted thousands of trees.
1896 – First Reforestation Planting in MN

• Following 1894 tornado.

• Using Norway spruce and Scots pine seeds sent by ship from Germany and White pine from MN.

• 4 Years before Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot begin US Forest Service.
Planting called Adrianople by his colleagues.
Land Acquisition
1896 Platbook Data
Land Acquisition
1912 Platbook Data
Land Acquisition
1925 Platbook Data
Land Acquisition 1930-1958?

- Abbey acquires 120 acres for the “hog farm.”
  - Today is “mushroom farm.”
This land was given us by Father Francis Rooney, an alumnus of ours, on condition that we pay 200 pesos for his assistance, which was done.


Sullivan failed to make good and contract was cancelled.

Oct. 27, 1931, warranty. This property was sold.
Aug 1927 Barn Fire & Effect on Forest

- Urbanizing attitudes see problems in sights & smells of barns on campus.

- Rebuild it off campus!

City monks
Aug 1927 Barn Fire & Effect on Forest

- It is too far from campus!
- We would spend all day walking to prayers!

Farmer monks.

- Rebuild it off campus!
Aug 1927 Barn Fire & Effect on Forest

- 60 acres is clear-cut.
- Then abandoned and sprouts.
- Then sprouts are cut with scythes.
- Then allowed to grow again. Per John Pflueger
Saint John’s State Game Refuge

Established by DNR in 1933

Why?
Fr. Angelo Zankel 1901-2007
Abbey Game Warden 1933-

1933 Saint John’s first Game Warden.
1930’s Conservation Movement

- Civilian Conservation Corps
- Aldo Leopold publishes *Game Management* 1933
- Sportsman’s clubs are popular.
- 1930- MN DNR Forester Larry Ritter is invited to campus to provide advice and conducts a pine growth study.
1920-1930’s Worldwide Influence of Marxism

Why do churches own more land than a building, much less tax free?

Abbey felt pressure. Fr. Angelo to Kroll 2004

1931 Communist rally at MN State Capitol
Saint John’s State Game Refuge

Established by DNR in 1933

Provides a public benefit.
As a novice monk, Fr. Angelo pushed the wheelchair of Cornelius Wittman, OSB.

Fr. Cornelius one of the monks from 1856.
Br. Ansgar Niess 1891-1981
Abbey Forest & Land Manager 1917-1960?

Last of the German-born brothers.

• He would have known German forestry before he left at age 21.
Br. Ansgar Niess 1891-1981
Abbey Forest & Land Manager 1917-1960?

Once had 150,000 seedlings in his nursery.

Planted the pine curtain.
Pine Curtain

- Cut for pasture in 1929-1930
Pine Curtain

Planted to pines by Br. Ansgar - 1933

Foot bridge over I-94
Br. Ansgar Niess 1891-1981
Abbey Forest & Land Manager 1917-1960?

Abbey has always put a priority on caring for its forest and lands.

“Always somebody in robes out in front”

John Pflueger describing the Abbey designating the wood cutting that he remembered from his youth.
Br. Julius Terfer 1910-1977
Abbey Forest & Land worker 1936-1960

In charge of wood supply for power plant.

Br. Julius Terfer, OSB, and the first truck at St. John's
Powerhouse burned wood from 1888-1943

By 1925:
• used 24 cords on a cold day in winter.
• used 12 cords a day in summer.

Br. Julius Terfehr

1,000-5,000 cords per year.
1951 - Joined Tree Farm Program
1957 – End of the trail for farming
Land Acquisition 1959

Donation from Oscar & Elizabeth Bruggman
Br. Walter Kieffer 1946 - ?
Arrives in 1964. Land Steward.

Hand-thinned the pine curtain in winter 1964-65.

Maple syruping for 55 years.
1970’s – I-94 Constructed

- ~ 80 acres lost
Fr. Paul Schwietz 1952-2000

Abbey Forester 1985-2000. First land manager with degree in forestry.

- First property wide forest inventory.
- Deer exclosure study.
- Reforestation projects.
Fr. Paul Schwietz 1952-2000

Saint John's Abbey Arboretum Lands
and the campus of Saint John's University

1988 Wetland restoration.
60 acres.
1998 Prairie restoration. 53 acres.
Oak Savanna

- 9 acres

- Developed from an unused cow pasture.
Fr. Paul initiated prescribed burning.
Fr. Paul Schwietz 1952-2000

- Promoted Environmental Education.

- Started Saint John’s Arboretum (now Saint John’s Outdoor University.)
Tom Kroll – 1951-?


Worked closely with boss Benedict Leuthner, OSB on lands issues.
SJU President, Br. Dietrich, told Kroll on his first week on the job that: “Saint John’s does not want to be an island of green surrounded by houses and golf courses in 50 years.”
Neighbors with same last name on same property in 2005
Monastery of the Holy Spirit
Founded in 1944 in “wilderness”
40 miles outside of Atlanta, GA
Land Acquisition 2000-2017

• 2003
• Buy 100 acres from Philippi
• Solar farm
Land Acquisition
2000-2017

• 2011
• 70 acres from Grooters
Shelterwood Harvests for Oak Regeneration
Deer Fence
Also preparing for Gypsy moth in 5-20 years
Saint John's Land Management

- Timber
- 50 MBF + 150 cords /yr.

Since 1951
Since 2002
Saint John’s Land Management

- Lumber for Woodshop
Prescribed burns
Stickworks 2
Archery Deer Hunt
• One thing we did not do.
Land Acquisition 2000-2017

• 2017 Feb 13

• Buy 136 acres from Walz Family

• Provides development buffer all the way to I-94.

• Provides fields for St. John’s bio-solids application.
The Place: Saint John’s Abbey Arboretum

• 2,600+ acres of forest, lakeshore, prairie, and oak savannah owned and loved by Saint John’s Abbey.
• Miles of trails.
• Private land, open to the public.
The Abbey deserves the land and the land deserves the Abbey.
This is a beautiful place and we are privileged to be a part of it.
Here are the significant dates (as best I could assemble them relatively quickly), in chronological order:

- 1864: The first move of the priory from St. Cloud to Indianbush. The frame house was built in 1864.
- (This is mentioned in a few places by Alexius Hoffmann without his naming a specific date or month.)