Indianbush: Where Was It? (St. John's first location in Collegeville)

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150 years ago
the monks left “Indianbush”…
but where was it??

Saint John’s in the Indian Bush, 1864-1867 – drawing by Alexius Hoffmann in the SJAA
Chronology

170 years ago:
- 1846: Monks leave Metten, Germany

160 years ago:
- 1856: Monks arrive in St. Cloud
- 1864: Monks move to “Indianbush”

150 years ago:
- 1866: Monks move to “Lake St. Louis”

Image 1: Saint Cloud Priory, 1856, drawn by one of the first students, Henry Emmel - SJU & SJA Archives, Ascheman Sesquicentennial photos LP096.1857.sketch

Image 2: 1896 Plat Book of Stearns County, Collegeville Township, p. 7
http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/stearns/id/389/rec/1
(sharper image on p. 43
http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/stearns/id/389/rec/1)
1864: Monks move to “Indianbush”

Text from a 1923 St. Cloud Times article by Alexius Hoffmann OSB

Box 2566:2  SJU and Abbey Article for the Saint Cloud Times in Sept. 1923 by Alexius Hoffman
Most of the land in the immediate vicinity of St. Cloud had been claimed, but there were still some large tracts available because of the dense forests that would have to be cleared before beginning cultivation. So it was that the monks were able to claim 1280 acres of land in an area two miles north of St. Joseph, fourteen miles west of St. Cloud. This whole region was—and much remains today—covered by beautiful forest and dense underbrush, all of which had earned it the name of "The Indianbush."

"The Fathers had secured land at and near the present site of Collegeville, twelve miles west of St. Cloud."

"Several lay brothers were set to work clearing the land and a small monastery was built about one quarter of a mile west of Collegeville station."
“Prior Benedict had himself chosen the site on which the monastery stood ... – section 31 of the township of St. Wendel (also called St. Wendall on maps)...”

1874 Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota – Stearns County, p. 155

Saint John’s University, Collegeville, Minnesota: A Sketch of Its History, 1857-1907 by Alexius Hoffmann, OSB, Chapter 1 http://www.csbsju.edu/sju-archives/sjuhistory/booksaboutstjohns/hoffmannbook/hoffmannchapter1

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Map pieced together from township maps in 1896 Plat Book of Stearns County, Minnesota

p. 27, Avon http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/stearns/id/321
p. 43, Collegeville http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/stearns/id/337
p. 44, Saint Joseph http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/stearns/id/338
Text: Alexius Hoffmann's Annotations and Corrections to Moosmueller p. 1-2, from Abbey Archives D35 folder 2

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p. 44, Saint Joseph http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/stearns/id/338
Text: *Worship & Work*, footnotes to Chapter 3, footnote 7
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/11518

Map pieced together from township maps in 1896 *Plat Book of Stearns County, Minnesota*

p. 27, Avon  http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/stearns/id/321
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p. 44, Saint Joseph  http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/stearns/id/338
“[In 1864] the third transfer was made and operations were resumed in the heart of the Indian Bush, a **short distance from the present Collegeville station**. There was no railway line west of the Mississippi at the time.”

“Here Father Benedict Haindl had caused a house to be built five years before. It was too small for the community, and a more pretentious frame building, also a neat little chapel had been built.”

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Text: Alexius Hoffmann’s *Annotations and Corrections to Moosmueller* p. 1-2, 1939, from Abbey Archives D35 folder 2

“A furlong is a measure...equal to one-eighth of a mile, equivalent to 660 feet, 220 yards...” [Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Furlong]

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Saint John's in the Indian Bush, 1864-1867 – drawing by Alexius Hoffmann in the SJAA

Upper right text: Worship & Work p. 530 footnote 7
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/11518

Lower text: Worship & Work, p.78
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/11004
During the month of January Prior Benedict began clearing away the forest on the site of the present monastery buildings. He had selected this location some time in 1865 (although Father Bruno also claims to have selected it much earlier). The site was preferred to the farm in the Indian Bush, chiefly on account of the Lake.
Saint John’s in the Indian Bush, 1864-1867 – drawing by Alexius Hoffmann in the SJAA
Text from Worship & Work, p. 82.
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/11008
Photo 19 from Worship & Work, where it is mis-identified as the present Collegeville station. http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/10956

During the winter of 1865–66 a primitive road was cut through the maple forest from the old farm to the new building site. In April, as soon as the spring thaws set in, the Benedictines, with a few hired laborers, began cutting down trees where the monastery, school and stables were to stand. The frame house was moved up from the Collegeville farm to serve as lodging for the laborers.
In January, 1883, the old college buildings on the farm near Collegeville station were destroyed by fire. This was no appreciable material loss, yet it was a matter for regret that the venerable landmark disappeared, leaving not a trace of buildings of any kind.
Fr. Roman Homar was professed in 1886, ordained in 1890, and died in 1959 (according to SJA list of *Monks of SJA*).
So...where was Indianbush??

- “About half a mile west of what is now Collegeville Station” (Hoffmann, 1923, *St. Cloud Times*)

- “About one quarter of a mile west of Collegeville Station” (Hoffmann, 1907, pencil notes)

- “One furlong [1/8 mile, 660 feet] south west from Collegeville RR station” (Hoffmann to Moosmueller, 1939)

- “1000 feet SW of the Diekmann house and about 350 feet West of the Collegeville road” (Whitacker, 1954)
Image from Google Maps, with markings by GIS student Maria Friedges, April 2016
Drawing from the Abbey Archives
Top text from Worship & Work, p. 82.
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/11008

Text in quotes from Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota: A Sketch of Its History, 1857-1907 by Alexius Hoffmann, OSB, p. 16 http://www.csbsju.edu/sju-archives/sjuhistory/booksaboutstjohns/hoffmannbook/hoffmannchapter1

Bottom text from Scriptorium Dec. 1954 v.14 n.1. “The Brothers of Saint John’s Abbey, the Building Era, Part II” article by Br. Thomas Whitaker, p. 43:
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3538/show/3452
We have artefactual evidence!

This area was for years the gardens of the Bill & Lorraine Cofell and Stewart & Marianne Hansen families.

Bill Cofell and Ginny Hansen (Stew & Marianne’s daughter) have both given very old, handmade nails unearthed while gardening there to the Archives.

Image from Google Maps.

Photo by SJU Archivist. Old nails found in Cofells’ garden on Saint John’s land.
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