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2013

## Saint John's Abbey Woodworking

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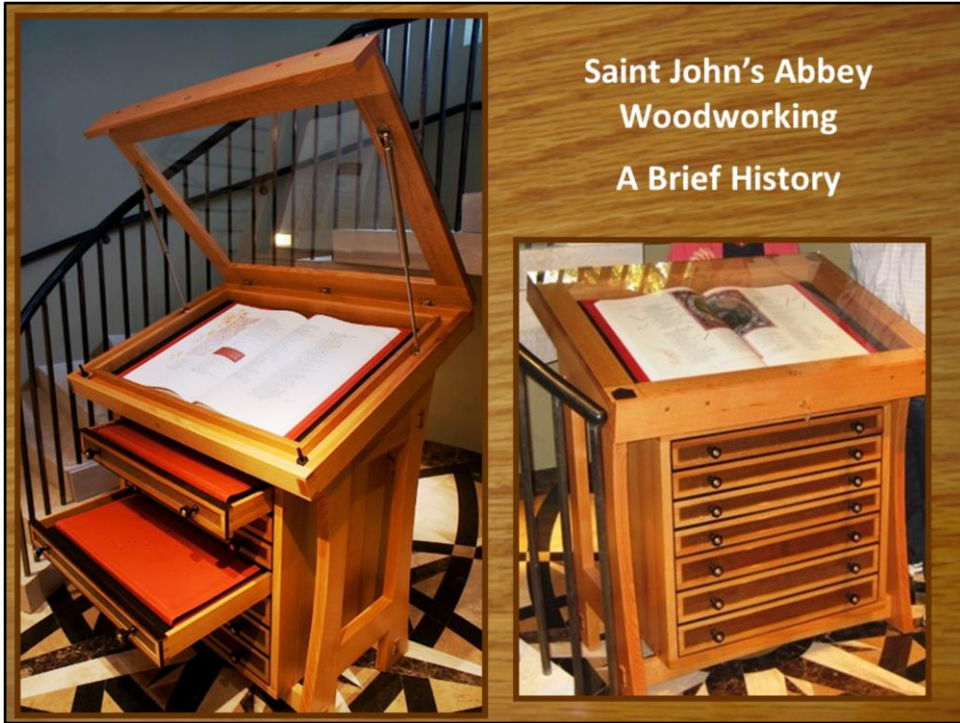
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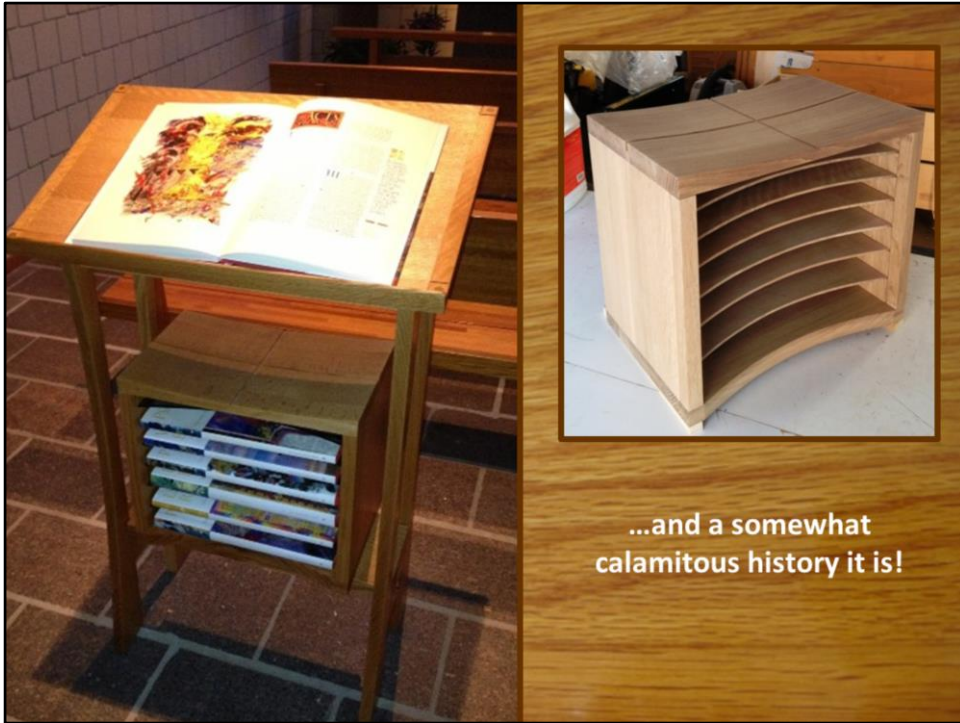
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Saint John's Abbey  
Woodworking  
A Brief History

Saint John's Abbey Woodworking – A Brief History  
Cases for the Heritage Edition of the Saint John's Bible. Photos by Bob Lillard



...and a somewhat calamitous history it is!

The somewhat calamitous history of woodworking at St. John's  
Photos and design by K. C. Marrin

First Benedictine building, St. Cloud - drawn by Henry Emmel



"Early German settlers included...Joseph Emmel, carpenter and church painter...and Wolfgang Eich, carpenter."

*Worship & Work, p. 35*

"...Articles the Benedictines purchased en route included two saddles..., carpenter tools, two clocks, and several books ..."

*Worship & Work, p. 524-525, footnote 15*

Abbot Wimmer described the Minnesota monastery as having "three cells, a refectory, a kitchen, a small chapel, a carpenter's work shop, and a guest room."

*Worship & Work, p. 525*

Early mentions of carpentry in St. John's historical sources  
Ascherman Sesquicentennial photos LP096.1857.sketch

And now let us return to the cradle of St. John's Abbey and University. As I have previously mentioned, a house, 12x72, had been erected during the spring. The priests and lay-brothers, assisted by Mr. Lodermeier did the carpenter work. P. Bruno had brought tools with him from St. Vincent Abbey. A small raft that could not pass on account of low water was purchased, I might say, at our door. There was no dressed lumber to be had; consequently we had to dress it with planes ourselves. The doors for our building were not finished until late in October, although by this time it is so cool in Minnesota that the mosquitoes creep into winter quarters. Without a stove and with only a bedsheet for a door, rooming was not a comfort during that season, nor did we seek for such luxury, for our hands were full of work and we had to hustle to finish all the

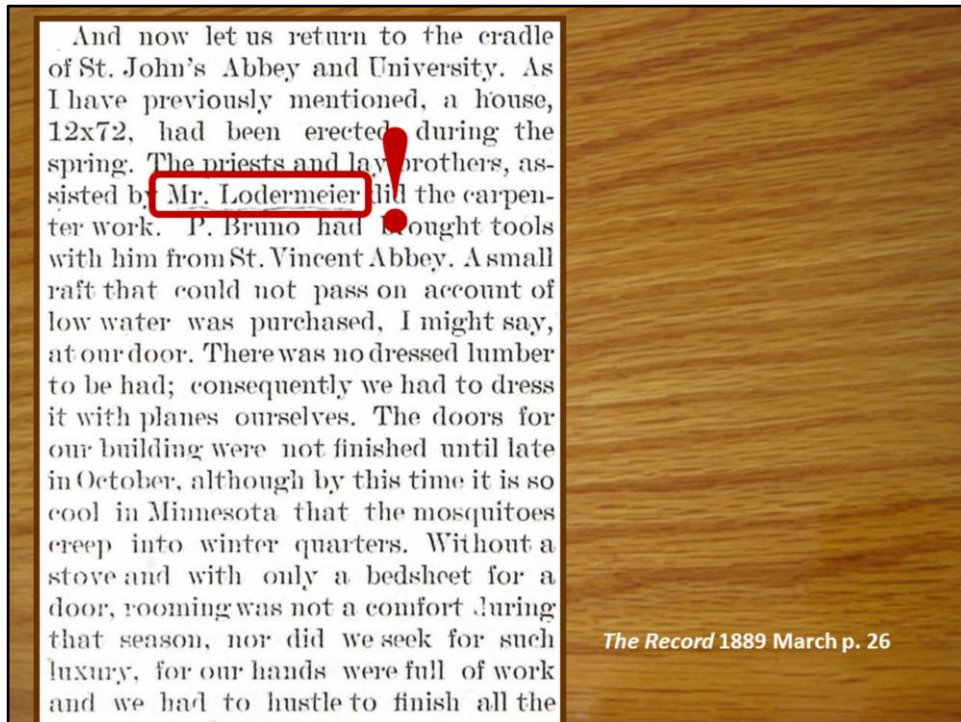
**From an account of the beginnings of St. John's in St. Cloud by pioneer monk Bruno Riess, OSB**

*The Record* 1889 March p. 26

Carpenter work to build the St. Cloud Priory of the Benedictines

*The Record* 1889 March p. 26 – P. Bruno = Father Bruno Riess.

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8045/show/8034>



Carpenters building the St. Cloud Priory were assisted by a Mr. Lodermeier!  
(ancestor to the archivist)

*The Record* 1889 March p. 26 – P. Bruno = Father Bruno Riess. This article was written by him.

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8045/show/8034>

## THE OLD FRAME HOUSE.

AMONG the numerous landmarks which in progress of time have been doomed to disappear few have been so keenly missed as the frame house which forms the subject of our frontispiece this month.

Its location was about 100 feet southwest of the south wing of the present buildings. The view here presented is taken from the east and shows to good advantage the surroundings of the building. It is worthy of memory that this was the first structure reared on the present site of the institution, and here dwelt the community while the stone house was building. These quarters were limited, but the community was as yet small. When the stone house was completed, it became the residence of the faculty and students, although some of the professors were still quartered in the frame structure.

The building was composed of two sections, one of two stories, running north and south, and containing shops and private rooms; the other, one story, extending eastward and containing the chapel which also extended through the larger building.

The chapel was an humble edifice. Its most costly furniture was the altar, which to this day adorns the chapel of the lay-brothers. The pews were slight and plain; in the rear of the chapel was a platform with a reed organ—which latter has long ago been dismembered and scattered in all directions. It was there our organists were schooled; Henry Van Beek among others. Services for

here until 1881, when the Chapel was transferred to the basement of the new church.

On the north side of the chapel was attached a small sacristy which, between 1881 and 1886 served as a photographic studio. The skylights may be dimly seen on the plate to the right of the chapel.

The rest of the buildings, we have seen, were used by shops—tailor shop, carpenter shop and shoemaker shop. Many of our pioneers domiciled for many years those old human landmarks, Fritz, Louis and, towards the end of his life, the Old General who spoke Greek and Latin and showed scars received in the Polish wars.

Around the building was a large vegetable garden and orchard and, at a later period, a small apiary. The garden was in charge of Mr. Schefer, the "old Gardener," who, although his garden has long ago disappeared, still lingers here and from the window of his room may fancy he sees the apple trees blossoming. The orchard had some fine apple and plum trees, a strong temptation for the boys during the fruit season; the picket fence was not high and the garrison not always awake. In one corner of the garden, on the lake side, was a bower generally covered with what is known as "mock oranges" and farther up the slope was a miniature vineyard which also caused the gardener some anxiety during the fall.

Some of the old timers delight in telling how they contrived to enter the vineyard without the gardener's knowl-

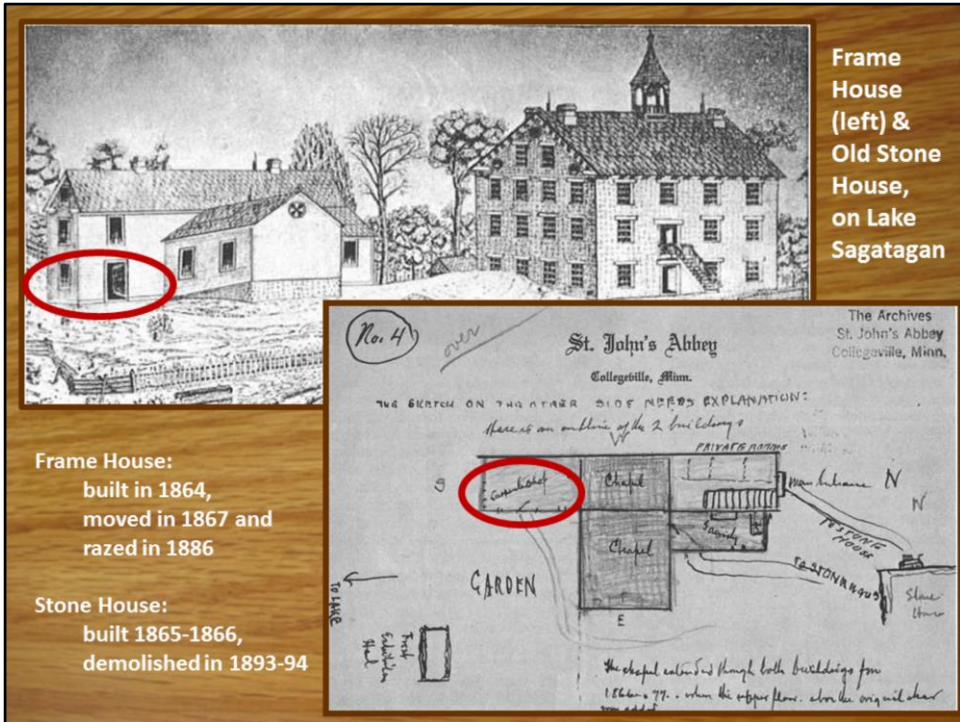


THE OLD FRAME HOUSE.

The Record 1898 February p. 30

Early home to carpentry, the Old Frame House  
1898 Feb. Record p. 30

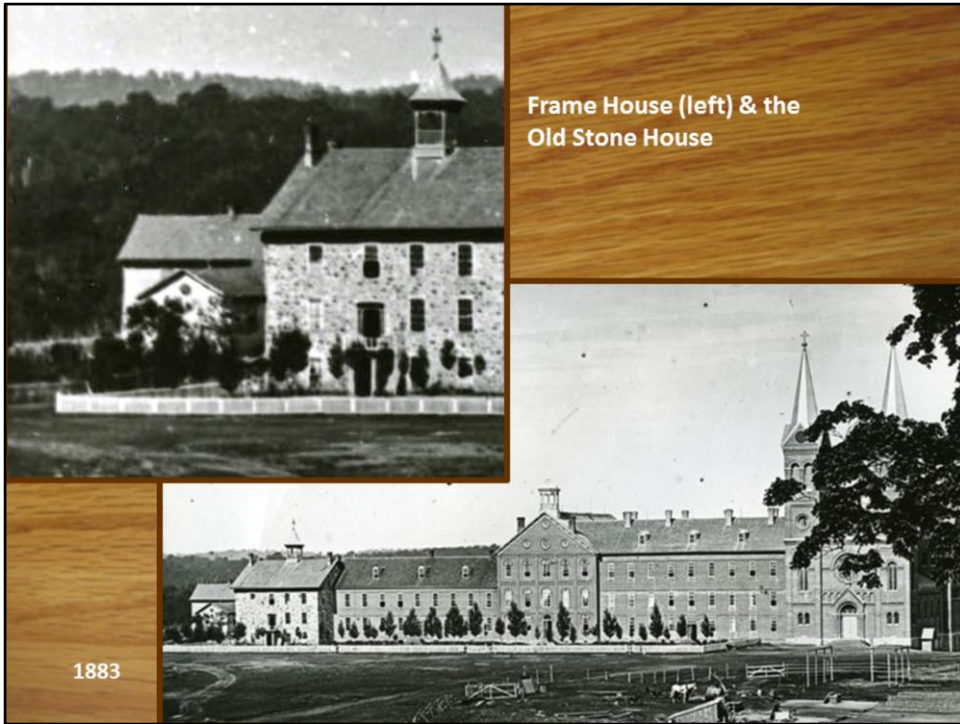
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& frontispiece <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/9825>



Location of the carpenter shop in the Old Frame House

Floor plan by Alexius Hoffmann, OSB, from *Saint John's Furniture 1874-1974*, p.9





Location of the Old Frame House  
Ascherman Sesquicentennial photos LP068.1883.Quad.StoneHouse

## A HISTORY OF THE ST. JOHN'S CARPENTRY SHOP



The practice of carpentry within the St. John's community is as old as the community itself.

When the monks arrived in 1859, they immediately began to create the first carpentry shop. Initially they had no place for the hand of the monks (1859-1867), the chapel was made into an enclosure with hay and straw, doing mission affairs of the Benno build and frame the first mon-

near the monks "Indianbush," the present proper had to build bins of tamarind and sod, were of St. John's the same spirit a environment seek God to clear part of rocky soil and primitive frame of a common tributions of an memory.

A little more information has survived from the time when the community moved south from the Indianbush and settled permanently on the northern shore of Lake Sagatagan. The Old Stone House was constructed in 1865-66, in what is now the monastic gardens. Brother

Placid Brixius (1831-1871) worked on the structure. Peter Eich (1834-1920), long a craftsman in the carpenter shop, was among them, earning a hefty \$ .025 for each foot of lumber he

The old frame house from the Indianbush was moved to the new location in 1867. The chapel and housing for the monks occupied most of this modest structure, but significantly one room was set aside for the use of the carpenters. It was a "dingy apartment," as



Peter Eich

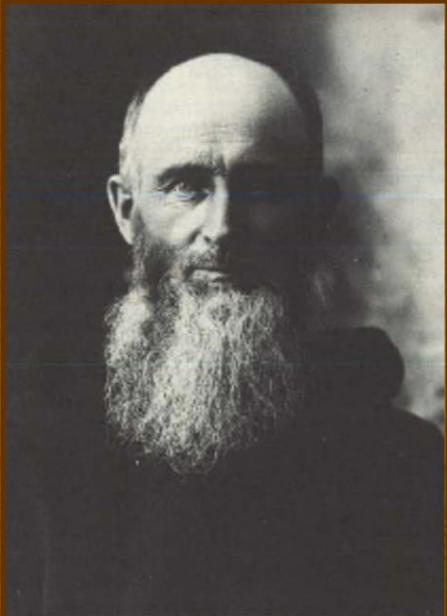
A history of St. John's carpentry was included in a booklet for an exhibit on *Saint John's Furniture 1874-1974*

Abbot Alexis plans improvements.  
“The carpenters were housed in dingy quarters in the frame house” (*Worship & Work*, p. 135)

1878: A new carpenter shop is built, a “two-story brick building that also housed the blacksmith shop” - where the science hall (now Simons Hall) was later built, with a lumber shed nearby

At the same time, Br. Leo Martin and Br. Andrew Unterberger arrive. They start building the church (now the Great Hall).

During its construction, Br. Leo fell and died Oct. 9 1880  
(No photo of Br. Leo exists.)



Bro. Andrew Unterberger, OSB

New shop built in 1878; Br. Andrew and Br. Leo Martin are carpenters

Text from *Saint John's Furniture 1874-1974*; photo on p.10

From *Worship & Work*, p. 228, re: plans for a new science building: “The site of the old carpenter shop was chosen, and a three-story brick building to accommodate all the sciences was erected.”



THE CROQUET GROUND IN 1883

ONCE upon a time, some fifteen years ago, croquet was a popular game here. The more enlightened generation which will live to tell the next century how things were in olden times, will describe how easily the old timers were pleased, how idyllic and primitive their tastes were, that they could find any exhilaration in the simple game of croquet, in which you required no mask, no glove, no harness, no hardware to protect every part of your body, no long hair,—only a mallet, some balls, a good eye and a little judgment. That is all that is required, yet it furnished many a pleasant hour's amusement.

The scene above reproduced is a view

of the croquet ground, which was situated in a grove west of the present carpenter shop, which may be dimly seen in the background. The tooth of time, in more than one instance, has destroyed the grove and the grounds were abandoned forever. No trace of them remains. In later years new grounds were laid out in another place: they too have since been overgrown with grass. The all-time champion of the great national croquet amid the grove. Our photographer served this old reconnection and to him we are indebted for the plate above printed.

The 1870s/1880s-era carpenter shop is mentioned in *The Record* Nov. 1898, p. 191

...and in *The Record* March 1890, p. 31

— Busy preparations are making for the erection of extensive stabling near the grove beyond the carpenter shop.

Article about 1883 croquet ground mentions the carpenter shop  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/9893>  
 Grove mentioned in 1890 March *Record* p. 31  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8420>



Possible location of the 1870s-1880s era carpenter shop  
Ascherman Sesquicentennial photo LP012.WoodCords  
Photo ca. 1890 (had to be after 1886 and before 1893)

## 1890: Another Br. Leo, also a carpenter, meets an untimely death

### BRO. LEO GRAJ, O. S. B.

An unfortunate accident robbed the community of a useful member, on the 10th inst. Late in the evening of the 8th, Bro. Leo, who was a skilled carpenter, was busy about the carpenter shop. Returning, he crossed over the fence by way of the small stile at the south side of the shop. He happened to

make a misstep while crossing, and fell to the ground. He felt that he had injured himself but did not seem to regard the accident as anything serious. On the following day he took to bed and rose no more. There was an internal rupture or lesion of some kind. After suffering patiently that day and the day following, he was at last released by a merciful death, being strengthened and sustained in his final struggle by the holy sacraments and the prayer of his brethren. He passed away at 4:15 P. M. of the 10th inst.

Bro. Leo was born in Wilhelmshof, Prussia, on Feb. 7. 1859 and became a member of the Order in 1883 at St. John's. He was a quiet, earnest monk, and faithful in the performance of his duties as a carpenter. The present University buildings and all the new structures erected since witnessed his labors. May God grant him rest and plentiful reward for what he did during his brief life.



Br. Leo Graj  
1859-1890

*The Record* September 1890, p. 100-101

Another carpenter named Br. Leo dies early

1890 Sept. Record p. 100-101

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8307>

## THE CYCLONE OF JUNE 27TH, 1894.

For the first time in its history St. John's has gone through the distressing ordeal of a cyclone. Storms in previous years effected some damage, as, for instance, that

fic work of the storm. They felt the buildings quiver beneath the stress of the storm and heard the tremendous roaring of the wind. No one thought of a cyclone until the trees in the groves were broken away like so many matches and the roof of the carpenter shop was lifted up like a sheet of paper. In

current of air from the northwest met that from the southeast at some point south from here, and a heavy funnel-shaped cloud was observed by a few moving towards us. Suddenly — at 8:30 — it grew dark, the winds began to howl and the fatal whirlwind was upon us. Few realized what was actually going on. A few moments sufficed to make a desolation of the town. I saw of

The bakery roof was lifted off and the tall iron smoke-stack was thrown over. The roof of the carpenter shop and part of its west wall, the wood shed and lime house were carried off. Roof and walls of

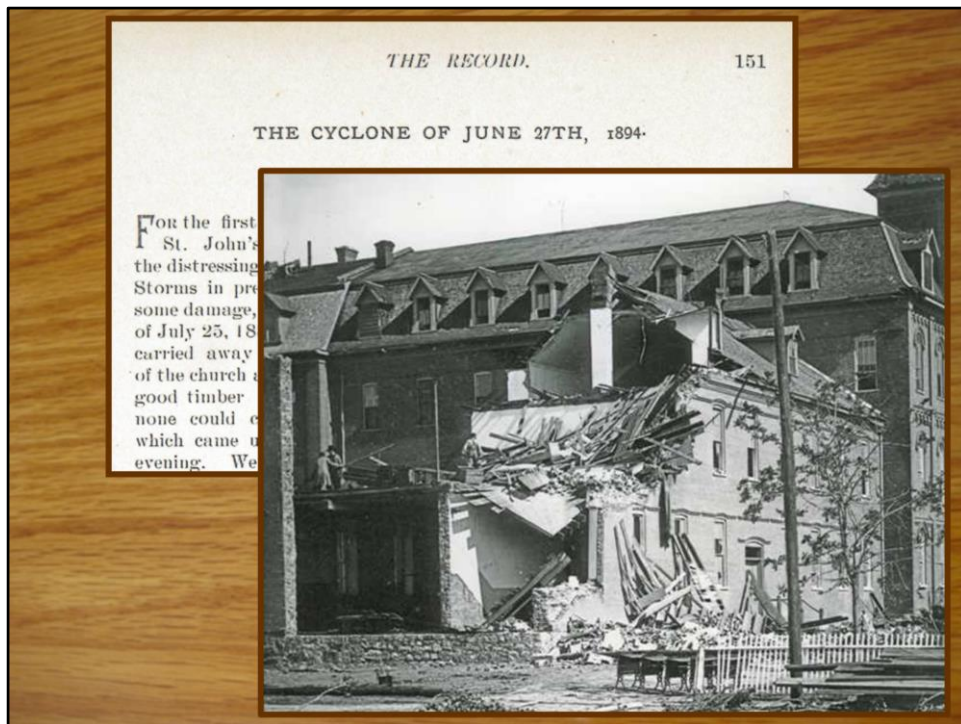
Afterwards, the "...power-house, hen coop, pig pen, slaughter house, shoeshop and **carpenter shop** were entirely restored."

The 1894 tornado damages the carpenter shop

1894-07-01 *The Record* p. 151-152, 156

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8210/show/8192>

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8210/show/8193>

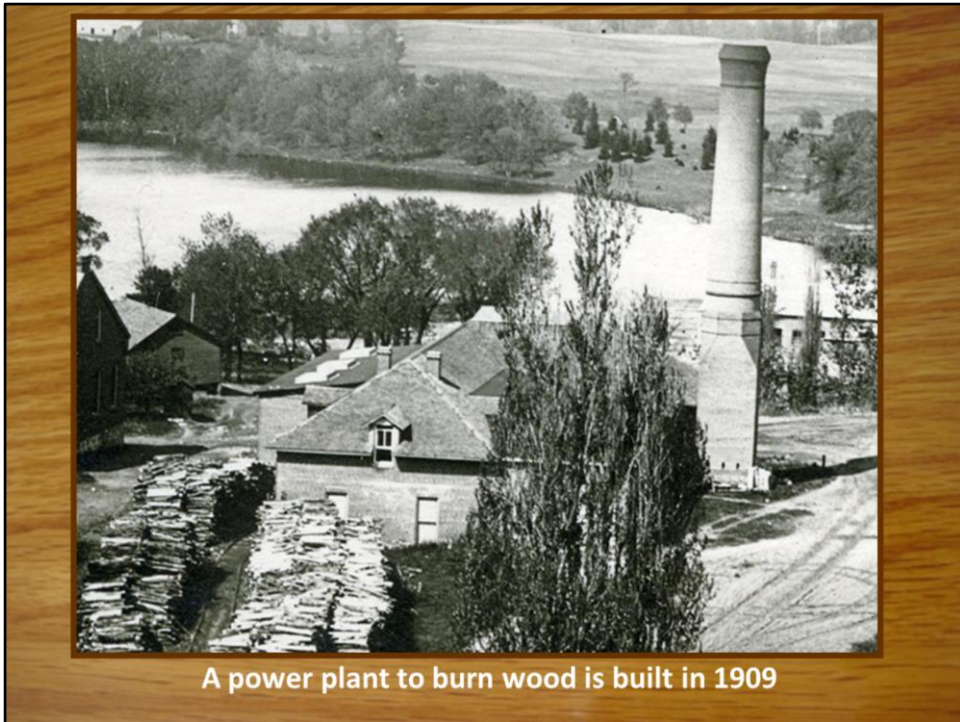


Tornado damage photo of what is now the Abbey Health & Retirement Center  
1894-07-01 *The Record* p. 151-152, 156  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8210/show/8192>  
Ascheman Sesquicentennial photos LP082.1894.Cyclone – June 1894, one month  
after the demolition of the Old Stone House was completed





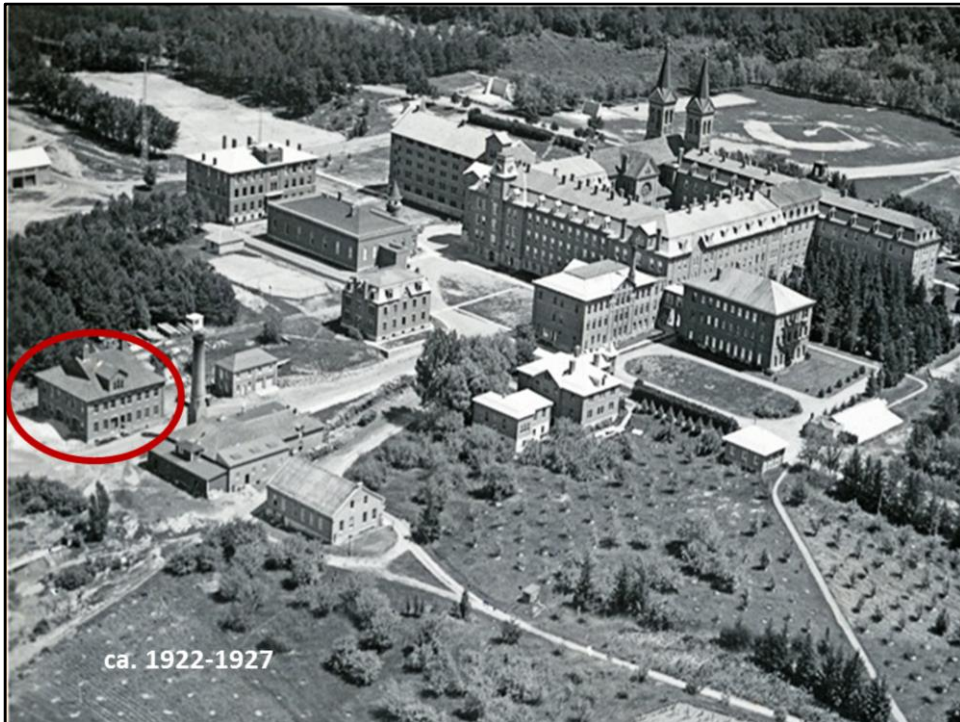
A new carpenter shop/blacksmith shop is built in 1903



A power plant to burn wood is built in 1909

A power plant to burn wood is built in 1909

Ascherman Sesquicentennial photos LP118.1stPowerPlant [built 1909]; it is replaced by a new one in 1945



The Woodshop in relation to the rest of the campus, ca. 1920s  
LP186.1920.AerialView photo ca. 1922 (when Benet Hall was built) to 1927 (when construction on the Auditorium began)

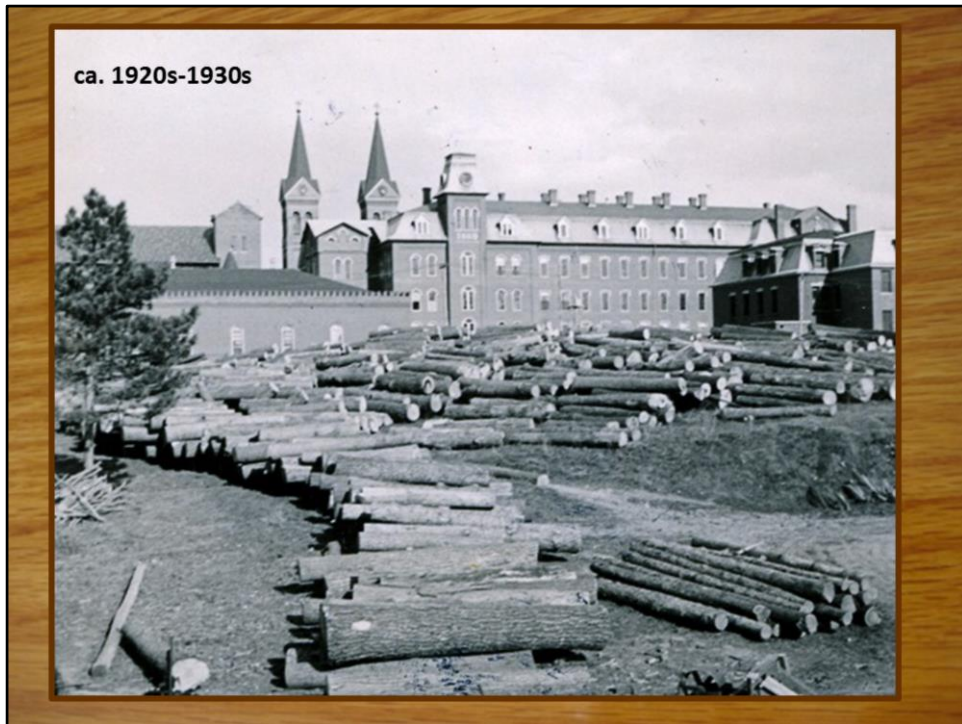


The Woodshop in relation to the rest of the campus; note the grove of trees  
LP186.1920.AerialView photo ca. 1922 (when Benet Hall was built) to 1927 (when  
construction on the Auditorium began)



1868 – first sawmill built along the Watab; it burned down twice and was moved to NE woods

1870s – an improved sawmill was added at abbot Alexius' direction. *W & W*, p. 135  
Ascheman Sesquicentennial photos LP198.LumberingCrew

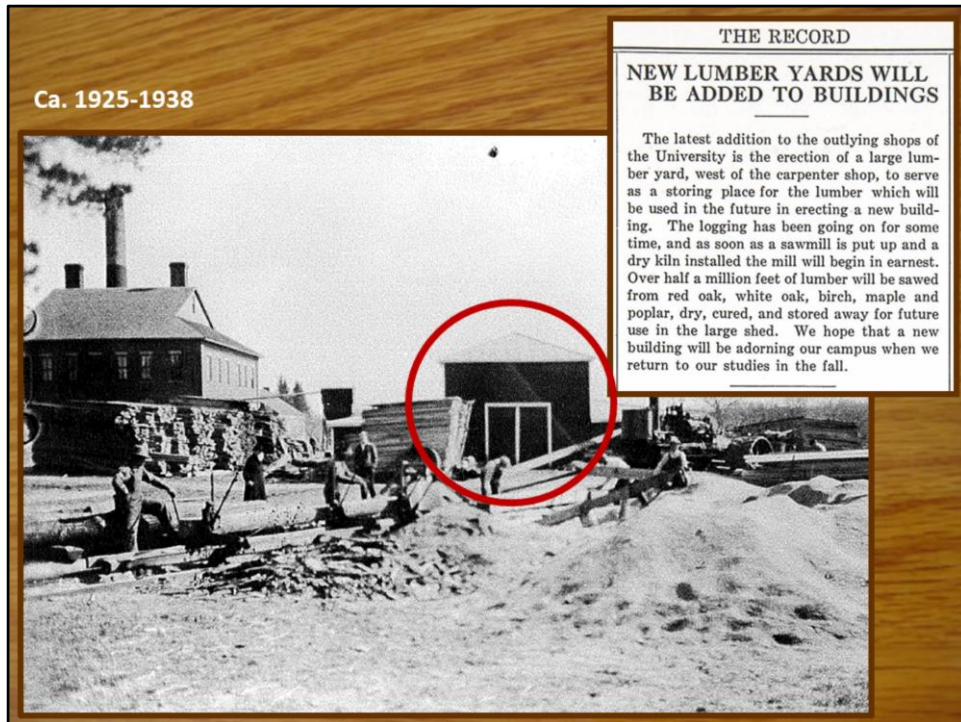


The grove of trees is no longer standing!  
Ascherman Sesquicentennial photos LP013b.1913.Logs ca. 1920s-1930s [photo includes Benet Hall (1922), with Old Gym before it was moved west (1937)]



### The portable sawmill

Undated photo of sawmill, ca. 1920s-1930s, from the Woodworking website, <http://www.sjawood.org/main/1/history.php>. Photo includes Benet Hall (1922), with Old Gym before it was moved west (1937). "[After] a flourmill and sawmill...were consumed by fire, the sawmill became a portable unit pulled by horses to wherever the trees were felled and logs were being stored."



Woodshop, powerhouse stack, and lumber shed

Undated photo of Sawmill, from the Woodworking website,  
<http://www.sjawood.org/main/1/history.php>.

After 1909 [first powerhouse smokestack is visible behind 1903 Woodshop], and probably also after 1925 [when new lumber shed was built (*The Record* April 30, 1925 p. 11 <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/24902>), but before Carpenter shop fire in 1939.]



## MONASTERY REFECTORY IS BEING REFURNISHED

### Will Be An Additional Monastic Feature

Work has begun on making new chairs and tables for the monastery refectory. The virgin white oak used in their structure is finely grained. All the work of cutting, planing, and assembling is done at the institution's carpenter shop, under the experienced hand of Mr. Dillenberg. One hundred and ten chairs are being made. They are thirty-two inches high and of beautiful design and workmanship. The style and designs of the tables are very artistic. The ends of the tables are exquisitely carved by the efficient hand of Father

(Continued on Page 2)

*The Record* May 28, 1925

Raphael. The finishing is to be in golden oak. The assembling, perhaps the hardest task, will be finished some time in June. The tables will be arranged around the room with the chairs against the wall facing the center, in historic monastic style. The Abbot's table is to occupy the end or head of the room. This arrangement will be superior to that of the present one. In the future, if necessary, additional tables may be placed in the middle. When finished, the refectory arrangement will make an additional monastic feature to St. John's Abbey.

The carpenters refurnish the Monastery's refectory

*The Record* May 28, 1925, p. 1

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/24812>

Lay people employed as carpenters included:

Peter Eich (1834-1920),

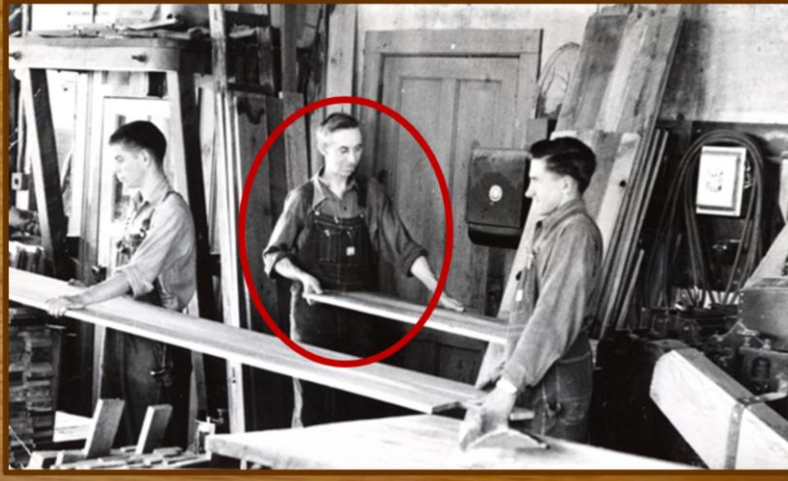
Theodore Dillenburg (1868-1943),

John Pflipsen (1892-1971)

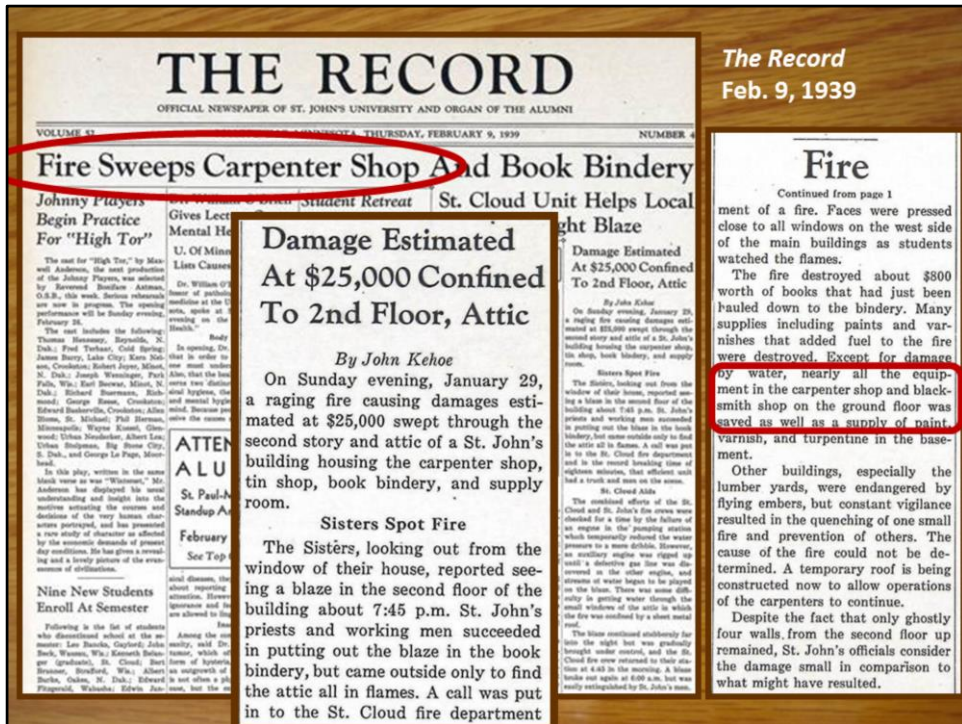
Karl Schmoll (Austrian carver)

Maximilian Schmoeller (1869-1959; in charge of lumber shed)

Br. Hubert  
Schneider  
joins the  
Monastery  
and the crew  
in 1929, and  
takes over as  
head of the  
shop in the  
late 1930s



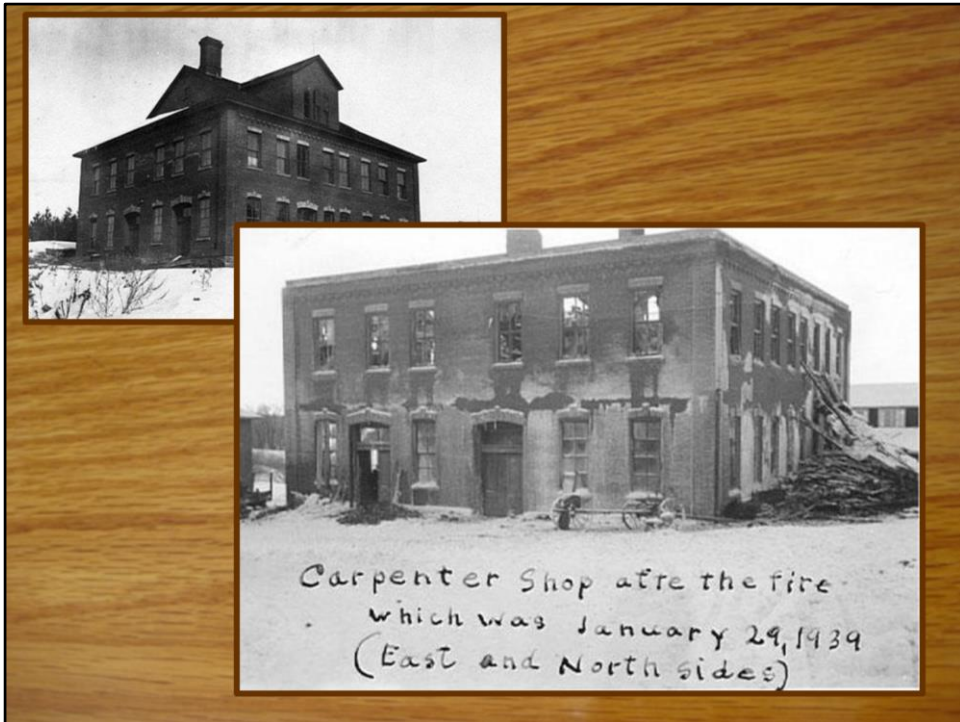
Lay people employed as carpenters; Br. Hubert Schneider takes over in the late 1930s  
Photo from IA



Shortly after Br. Hubert takes over, the shop has a fire  
Feb. 9, 1939 *Record* p. 1 Fire  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/28946>  
and <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/28946>



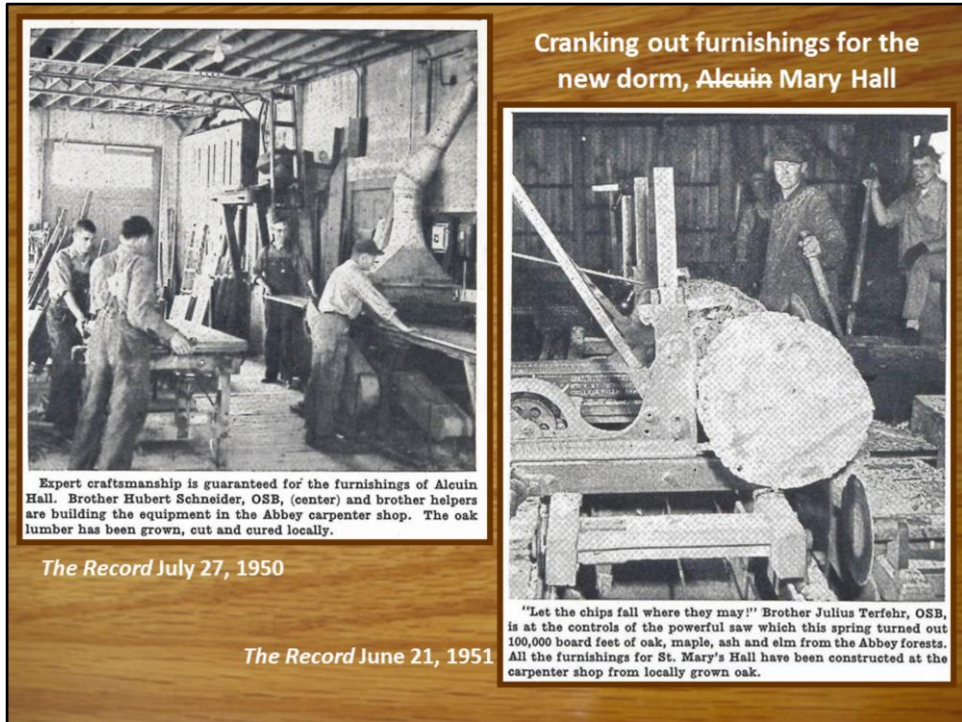
January 1929 fire photos  
Photos from Abbey Woodworking/Abbey Archives



Fire damage  
Photos from Abbey Woodworking/Abbey Archives



Fire damage in 1939, compared to 2013  
Fire photo from Abbey Woodworking/Abbey Archives  
Inset photo by the archivist



1950s: busy years for the Woodshop

1950 July 27 p. 2 *The Record*

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/30399>

1951 June 21 p.2 *The Record*

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/30511>

"Alcuin Hall" was intended to be the name for the dorm that became Mary Hall. It was originally going to be named in honor of the long-reigning Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, OSB (1921-1950), but Abbot Alcuin changed it to Saint Mary Hall to commemorate the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin in 1950.

Ascherman Sesquicentennial photo LP011.Sawmill 1949 Br. Julius Terfer, OSB *St. John's Furniture*, p. 19



Br. Hubert was highly regarded  
LP194.HubSchneider; 2<sup>nd</sup> photo from Institutional Advancement collection





**Br. Hubert Schneider, Marlin Eich, Br. David Manahan, and Marlin's father, John Eich**

*— John and Marlin: descendants of Peter, and the aforementioned early settler Wolfgang Eich?*



Br. Hubert with Br. David Manahan, his successor, and the Eichs  
Photos from Institutional Advancement collection

Abbey Woodworking: excellence and environmental stewardship

Named in exhibit  
catalog:

Peter Eich  
Raphael Knapp  
Cloud Meinberg, OSB  
David Manahan, OSB \*  
Marcel Breuer  
Hubert Schneider, OSB \*  
Kurt Kaiser  
Michael Keegan  
Theodore Dillenburg  
Clement Frischauf, OSB  
Ray Hermanson, OSB  
Frank Kacmarcik  
Placid Stuckenschneider,  
OSB

\* managers of the shop



A 1974 exhibit in the Great Hall honored Abbey Woodworking's excellence and environmental stewardship  
*Saint John's Furniture 1874-1974*

# Abbey Woodworking: Excellence and Environmental Stewardship

## From Acorn to Chair—A Life Cycle of Saint John's Abbey Wood

Elmer Gray



If you think of fresh cut logs when you think of the word "wood," then you're seeing a moment in the life cycle of a tree from the perspective of Saint John's Abbey forest technician Dan Vogel. For nearly twenty years, Dan has been involved in the forest management and logging operations at Saint John's Abbey. You might see him atop the grapple skidder or as he fondly calls it, "the beast of our operation." Getting the logs out of the forest has changed over time in the past, chains were used behind horses or more recently, tractors, to haul logs from salvage sites. But now the grapple skidder and its mechanical claw make for easier work. And thanks to Dan's operating skills, the beast can make surprisingly neat piles.

From a management perspective, logging in the Abbey Admontium is geared toward encouraging oak regeneration. And, according to Dan, proper logging will "keep that oak forest here." In 2005, Saint John's Admontium was (and continues to be) Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified, which is essentially a public testament to the Benedictine values guiding both historical and present forest management.

After being harvested, the wood is sent down one of two paths based on quality: high-grade wood is sent to the abbey woodshop and lower grade logs to off-campus markets or to be used as firewood. For the high grade wood, getting to the next stage—the abbey woodshop—isn't quite so simple. First, the wood must take a curvilinear tangent to the earth (190s), the wood went straight to sawyer Tony Baertling who, with the help of University-employed Italian workers, stripped the bark and cut each log into lumber. Now, the logs travel to a local Amish farm to be sawn into usable lumber.

After the metamorphosis from log to board, the wood is transferred back to Saint John's, but it still is not quite ready for use. The wood is stacked outside to air-dry slowly, resting until it next moves into the fire-mat moist moshouse, which is now the drying kiln.

If you've sat in the Saint John's refectory, at the desks in the Quadrangle, or on the custom made chair in your living room, you're interacting with the Saint John's wood after it's been through yet another stage of development—transformation at the hands of the Abbey woodworkers.

"Abbey Woodworking is as old as the Abbey itself," says a woodshop manager Fr. John Mowka. "When the founding monks arrived in 1054 they began wood-working to build their buildings and furnishings under the direction of St. Remo, their first abbot."

After years without a formal workshop, in 1891, wood for carpentry was sent to "The Old Stone House" on the north shore of Lake Sagadahoc. That shop was destroyed by a tornado in 1894, then built in its current location nine years later.

After 130 years, the traditions inside the woodshop still resemble those of the past, reflecting the Benedictine values of stability, hospitality, and stewardship. Even though, as Fr. Mowka explained, only four monks are regular in the woodshop, young monks like Fr. Lew Giebo are eager to carry on the legacy.

"Woodworking has become a tradition at Saint John's and something the monastery will continue to stand behind," says Fr. Giebo, who has been in the monastery for three years. "Plus, as the monastic community continues to put a larger and larger emphasis on sustainability, what could be a better example of sustainability than using local materials, skill, and resources for a need of the community?"

Fr. Giebo not only sees wood in the life cycle from the perspective of a woodworker, but also as a member of a spiritual community: "When I am at the woodshop I gain a tangible sense of contribution to the monastic life and it reenergizes my prayer life." The connection between work and prayer remains an important tradition in the Abbey.

Fr. Giebo also connects his work in the woodshop back to the trees, as "to know that the wood you are using comes predominantly from your own forest creates a strong connection to the land, the community, and the furniture."

That closed loop is the central characteristic of the life cycle of wood at Saint John's. Recognizing where the wood comes from directly connects people to the Saint John's community, from the land laborers, to the monks, to the people buying the furniture. The wood may change hands as it transforms from log, to board, and finally, to chair or cabinet, but in the end the life cycle of wood at Saint John's is one defined by movement that never strays too far from home.

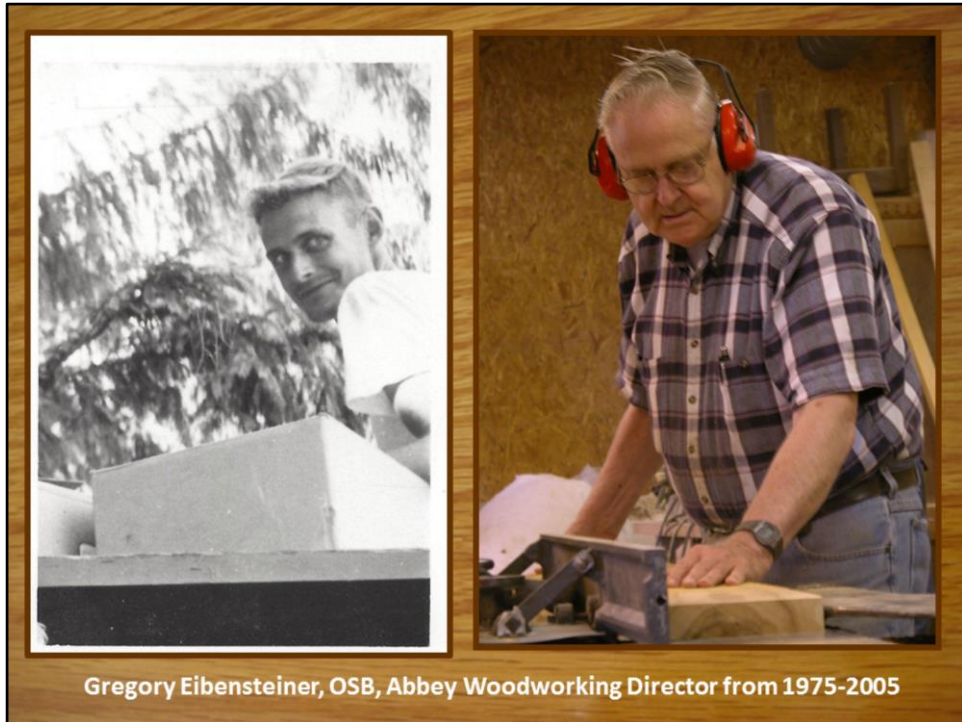
Elmer Gray is a senior English major at the College of Saint Benedict and is the Admontium student officer assistant, always eager to learn and share stories from Saint John's.

Top: Chair designed by Harold Brown, built at Saint John's Abbey, Middle: Wood is sent down a path, either to the woodshop or to off-campus markets, Bottom: Elmer Gray poses with log ready for their next destination.



Sagatagan Seasons Winter 2013

...as do other publications over the years  
Sagatagan Seasons Winter 2013 p. 4-5



Gregory Eibensteiner, OSB (b. 1934, d. 2013), young and old  
Early photo from John Meoska, OSB; color photo from IA



Woodshop characters/caricatures by Drew Madsen, SJU 2009



Master Craftsmen Michael Roske and Bob Lillard with John Meoska, OSB  
Photo by Eric Hollas.

Jennifer Viaene (CSB 2010), the first female to work in Abbey Woodworking



Dreams for the Future: A Woodworking Shop/Furniture Design School/Abbey Artisan Center  
Design by K. C. Marrin



Dreams for the Future: floor plan  
Design by K. C. Marrin





Woodworking staff, ca. 2008-09. Photo Simon-Hoa Phan OSB  
Left to right: Fr. Jim Tingerthal, Br. Christopher Fair, Br. Isidore Glycer, K. C. Marrin, Bob Lillard, Michael Roske