Saint John's Lands & Wetlands: Historical Highlights

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Ca. 1855 Minnesota Map
1855 Minnesota Map (zoomed in)
St. John’s first location was on the banks of the Mississippi in St. Cloud (near the present-day Children’s Home and the Beaver Island Trailhead near SCSU) in 1856.

St. Cloud Priory on the banks of the Mississippi
Top: Henry Emmel sketch; Photo from *Worship & Work* p. 38f
The main reason why Wimmer had personally come to Minnesota was to look at the claims Father Bruno wanted to establish on land four miles out of St. Joseph. Father Bruno had never been convinced that their St. Cloud site was suitable for a monastery because it lacked both wood and pasture land. He felt the seminary and college should be started there, but that the monastery should be near St. Joseph, along the Watab river where a thousand newly surveyed acres could be claimed. Prior Demetrius would allow Father Bruno only one day a week to explore these prairie and wooded lands, and the latter spent each Monday tramping through the territory with a parishioner as companion.

---from Worship & Work
While Wimmer was awaiting the return of Prior Demetrius from St. Paul he went with Fathers Bruno and Cornelius to St. Joseph and thence into the Watab lands. This area was called the ‘Indianbush’ because it had but recently been the hunting grounds of Sioux and Chippewa Indians, who still made occasional forays through it. They walked Indian fashion through the area, badly scratching themselves on the dense underbrush, but becoming more excited each hour over the excellent timber and beautiful meadow of wild hay which grew higher than their heads. Wimmer, practical and far-seeing as always, determined then and there that this land must be obtained.

--from Worship & Work

Scouting the “Indianbush” with Wimmer
Text from Worship & Work, p. 44
Photos http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/11595/show/10953
It is to the foresight and shrewdness of Bruno Riess primarily that St. John’s owes its permanent location. He was who first saw the possibilities of the ‘Indianbush,’ who pressed for permission to obtain it, and who directed the work of erecting claim shacks on each 360 acres.

When the Rothkopp claims were contested and the monks were in danger of losing everything, it was the ‘Indianbush’ claims along the Watab, Bruno Riess’ claims, which saved the community.
Early Chronology: back and forth between St. Cloud and Indianbush

1856: Monks arrive in St. Cloud
1858: Monks move to St. Joseph because of St. Cloud land litigation
1859: Prior Benedict "did not consider the move expedient" and moves monks back to St. Cloud
1861: Civil War breaks out
1862: Indian uprising
1864: St. Cloud land litigation goes against St. John's; Monks move to Indianbush
1874 Atlas: St. John's College is on the map; Lake Sagatagan is sketchy
1874 Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota – Stearns County, p. 155
http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/ref/collection/mhs/id/1020
Farming and St. Joseph townships are split to form Collegeville Township from *Natural History of Collegeville, Minnesota*, p. 4 of the pdf by Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B. (originally written in 1926, finished in 1934).
The railroad comes through in 1872, but the Collegeville station isn’t in place until the late 1870’s.

From the 1874 Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota.
1896 plat book maps, with OSB land holdings noted
1896 Plat maps\Collegeville Township NE 1896 cropped; 1896 Plat maps\St Joseph Township NW 1896
http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/stearns/id/389/rec/1
p. 27, Avon Township; p. 43, Collegeville Township
Close-up of features noted in the 1896 Plat book
1896 Plat Book of Stearns County, Minnesota by C.M. Foste – p. 43, Collegeville Township, Saint John’s College
http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/stearns/id/389/rec/1
p. 27, Avon Township; p. 43, Collegeville Township
By 1925, the southwest plot has been sold.
1925 Plat Book Stearns County, Minnesota
Alcuin Library G 1428.S6 F27
1938 aerial photos: crops and pasture
1963 Plat book: wetlands?
1965: Indistinct wetlands appear, but no Gemini Lakes yet
1965 USGS 1965 C02 01
Fr. Paul Schwietz spearheaded the prairie and wetland restoration project
Text from *The Record* Sept. 28, 2000
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/34456/show/34445
Photo from O:\Institutional Advancement SJU\Advancement Photo Archive\Advancement Photo Archive_Main Folder\Arboretum

In 1985, Fr. Paul Schweitz was named land manager of the school's 2,400 acres. Before his untimely early death, he spearheaded the prairie and wetland restoration project, which reintroduced many species of wild flowers, prairie grasses and over 45 species of wildlife.
2012 Google Map of Collegeville: Gemini Lakes, Wetlands, and lots of forest
https://www.google.com/mapmaker?ll=45.579505,-94.385347&spn=0.0322,0.065918&t=k&z=14&q=Collegeville,+MN&utm_source=map seditbutton_normal&gw=30&lyt=large_map
2011 Arboretum Trails map: the wetlands and lakes are distinct and named
2011 Trails map and 1965 Topographical map compared
Compiled in November 2012
from resources in the archives of
Saint John’s University and
Saint John’s Abbey
and elsewhere as noted
by Peggy Landwehr Roske,
CSB/SJU Archivist
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