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## Lost Saint John's, Part 1: Earliest Buildings

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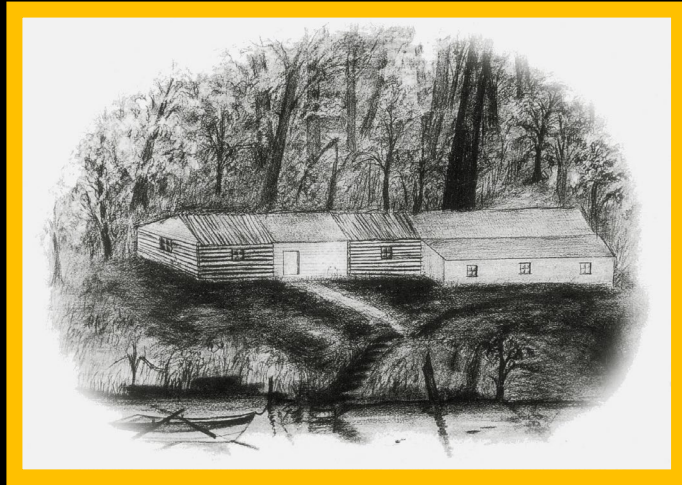
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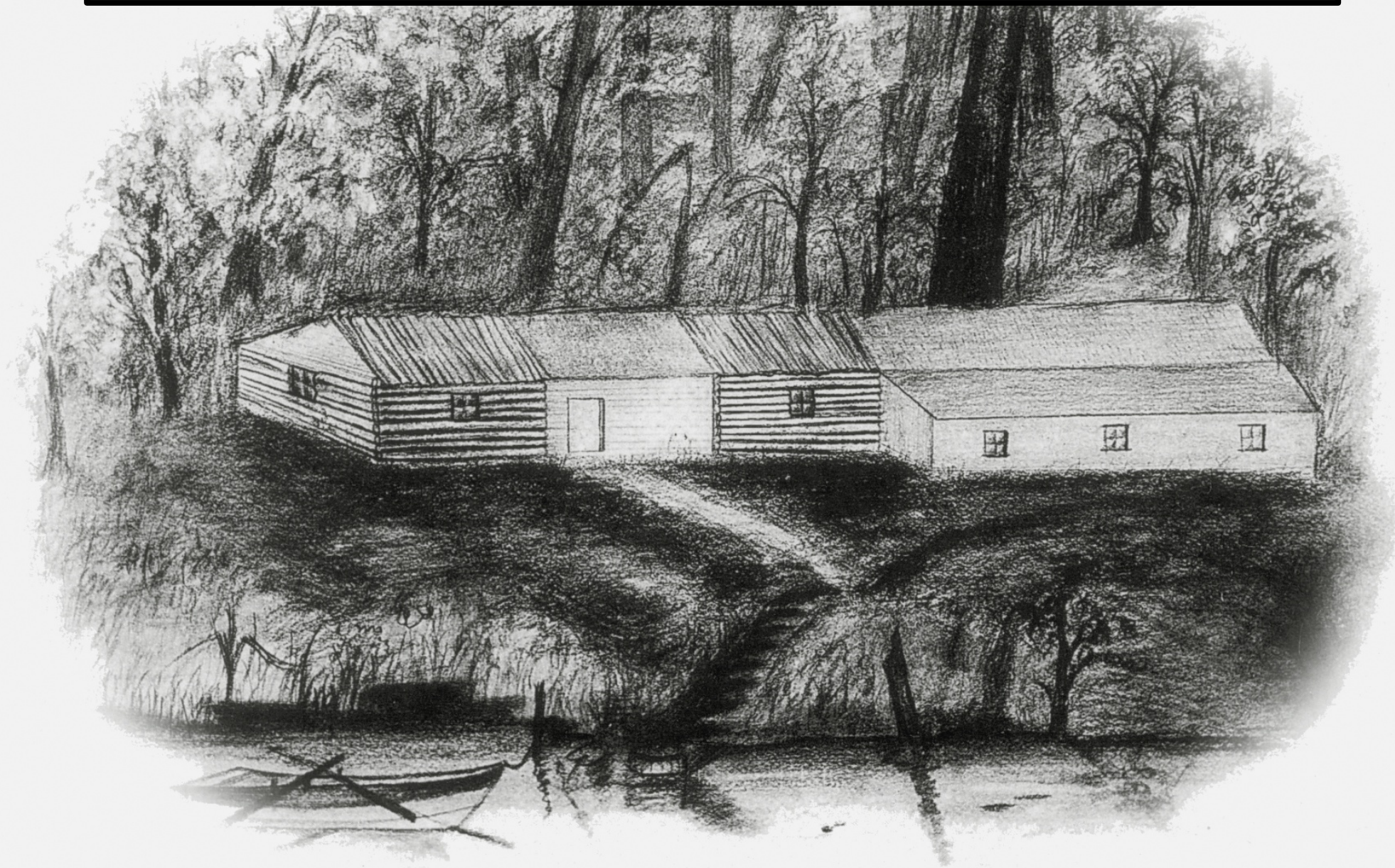
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# “Lost” Saint John’s

## *Part 1*



St. Cloud Priory, 1856, the first structure built by the monks on the Mississippi River,  
drawn by Henry Emmel, one of the first students.

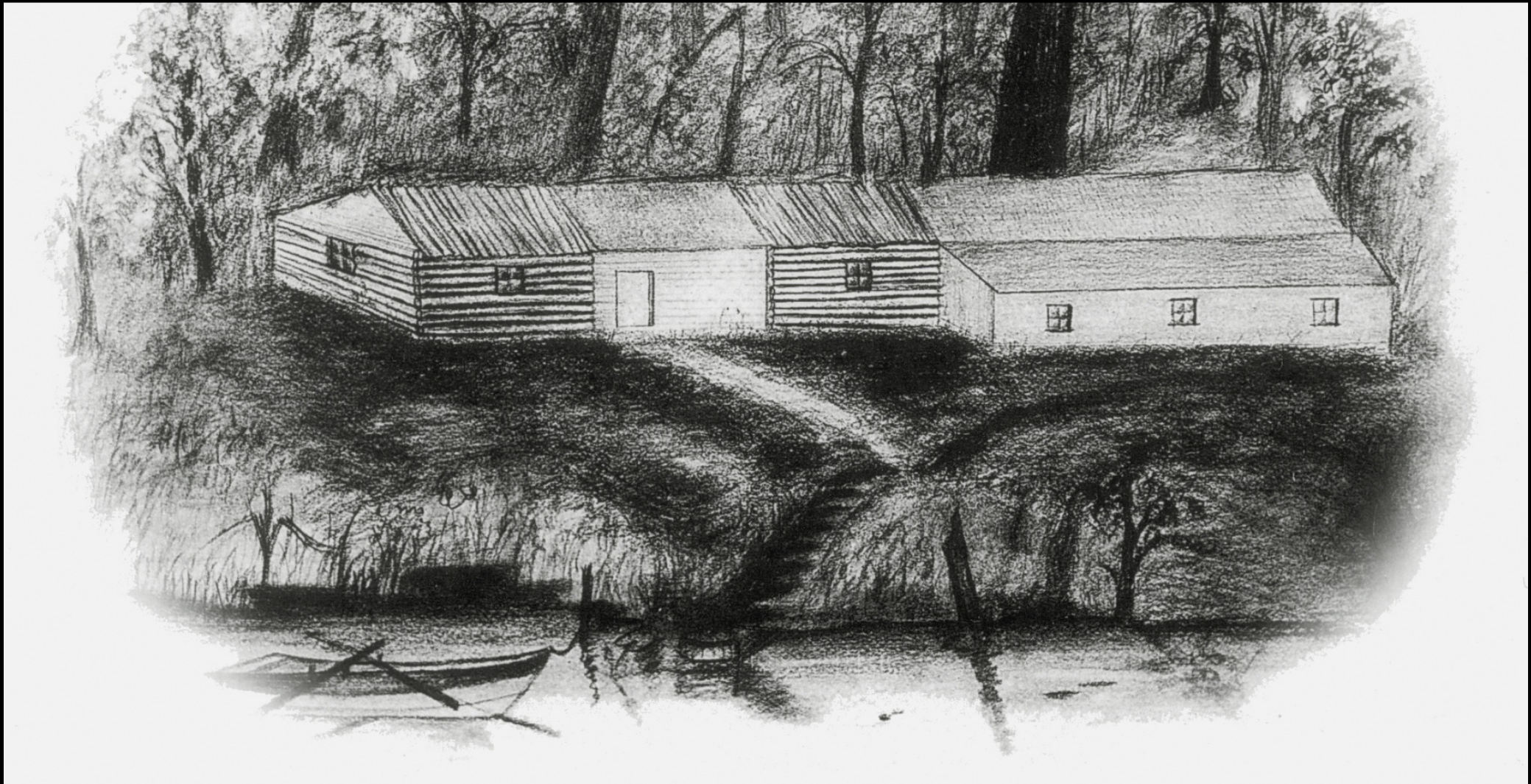


“At that time there lived on two claims near the river and south of St. Cloud two brothers,  
Louis & Wilhelm Rothkopp, both single and well advanced in years...

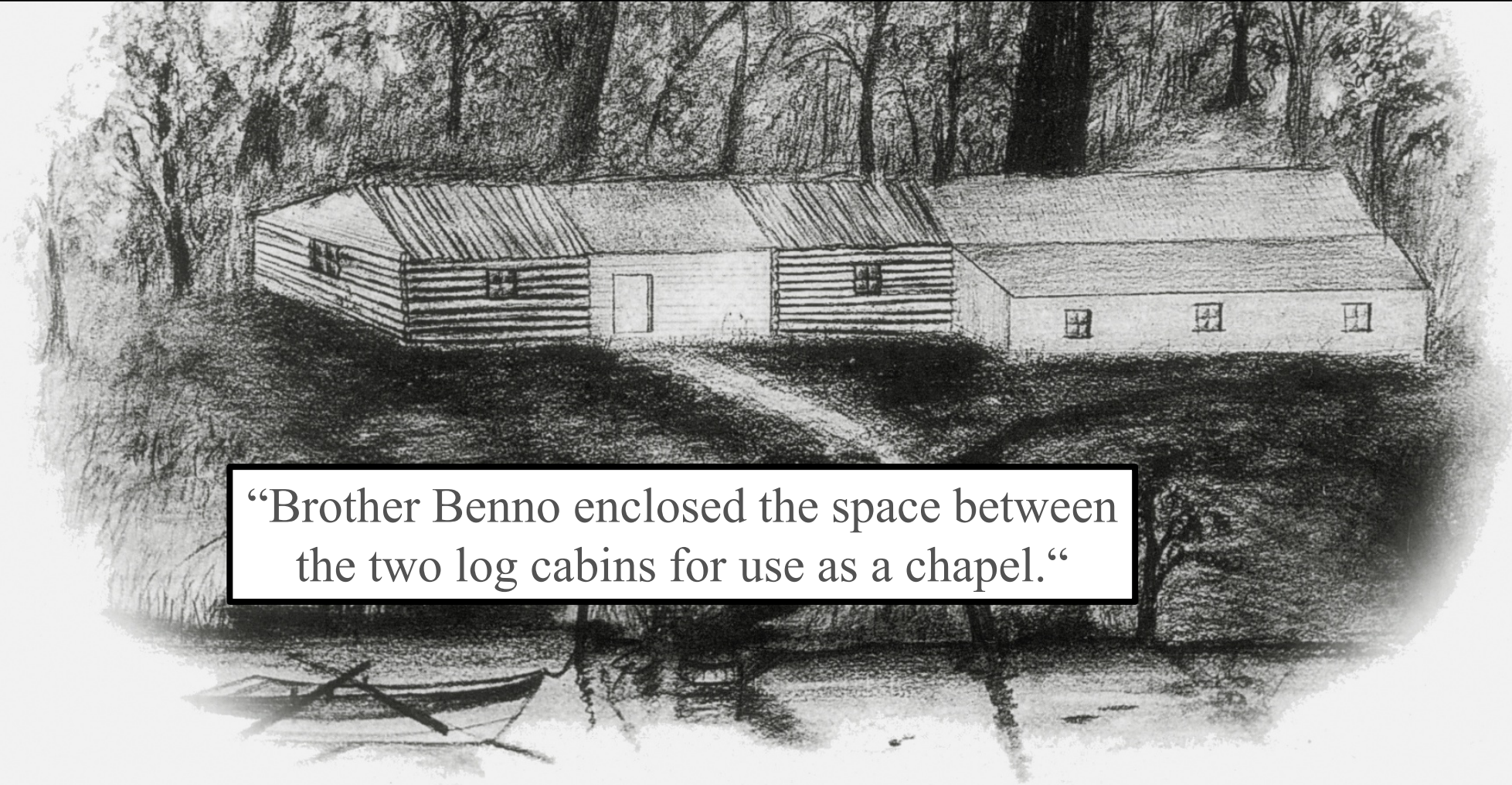
They had made an offer of their claims (320 acres) to the Fathers, who, ...in turn, were  
required to support the brothers for the rest of their days.”



“Without delay the Fathers proceeded to establish a monastery on one of the claims: a humble makeshift of a monastery [which] consisted of a log hut, destitute of comfort and furniture; a small frame addition, to serve as a kitchen; [and] a small stable for the two horses and the cow, which constituted the entire livestock of the community.”

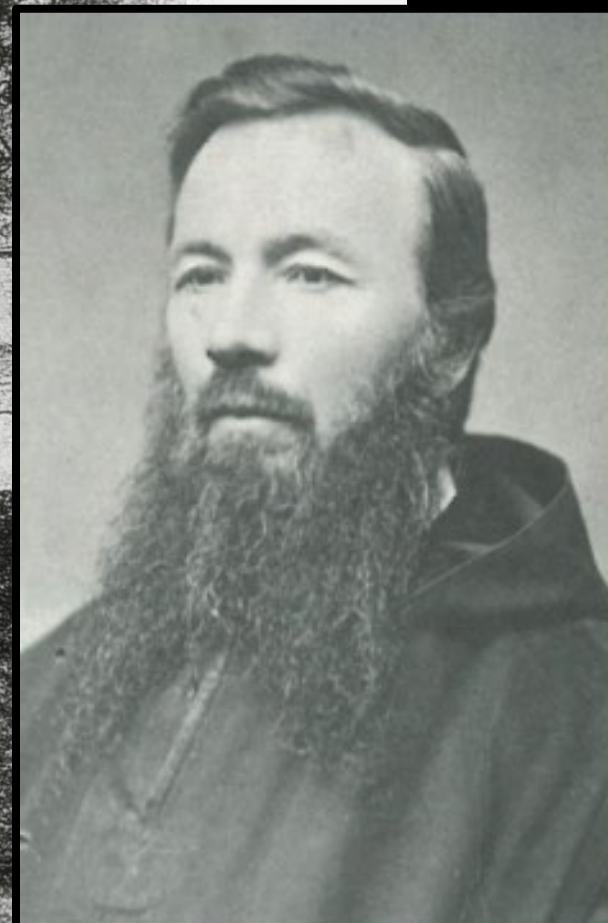
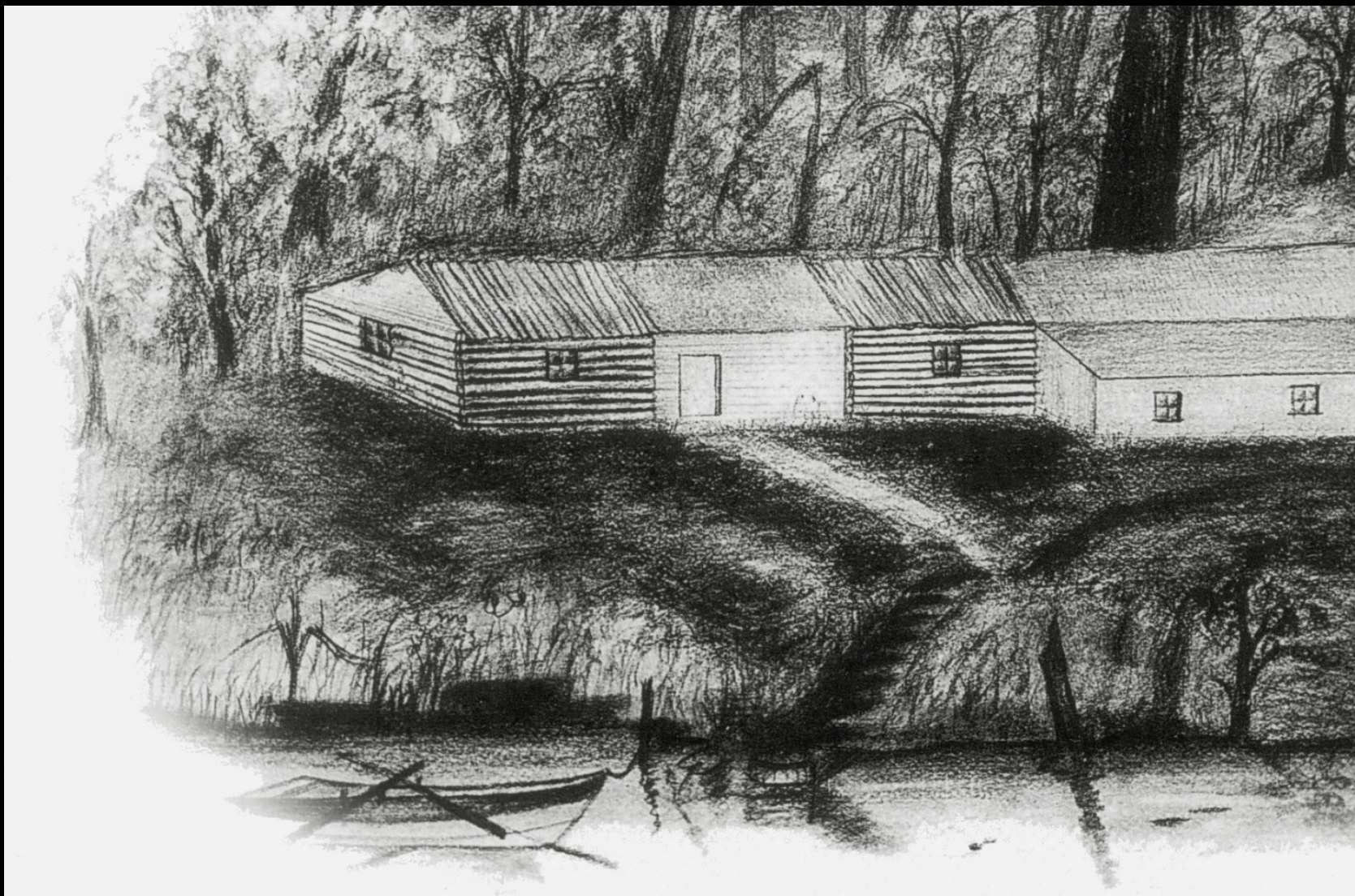


“Think of the primitive log building about 12x20, then to this an additional structure about 14x20, in height one story and an attic... The whole building contained, besides kitchen and studio, three small rooms, one for the Prior, one for the professor and the third for an occasional guest...”

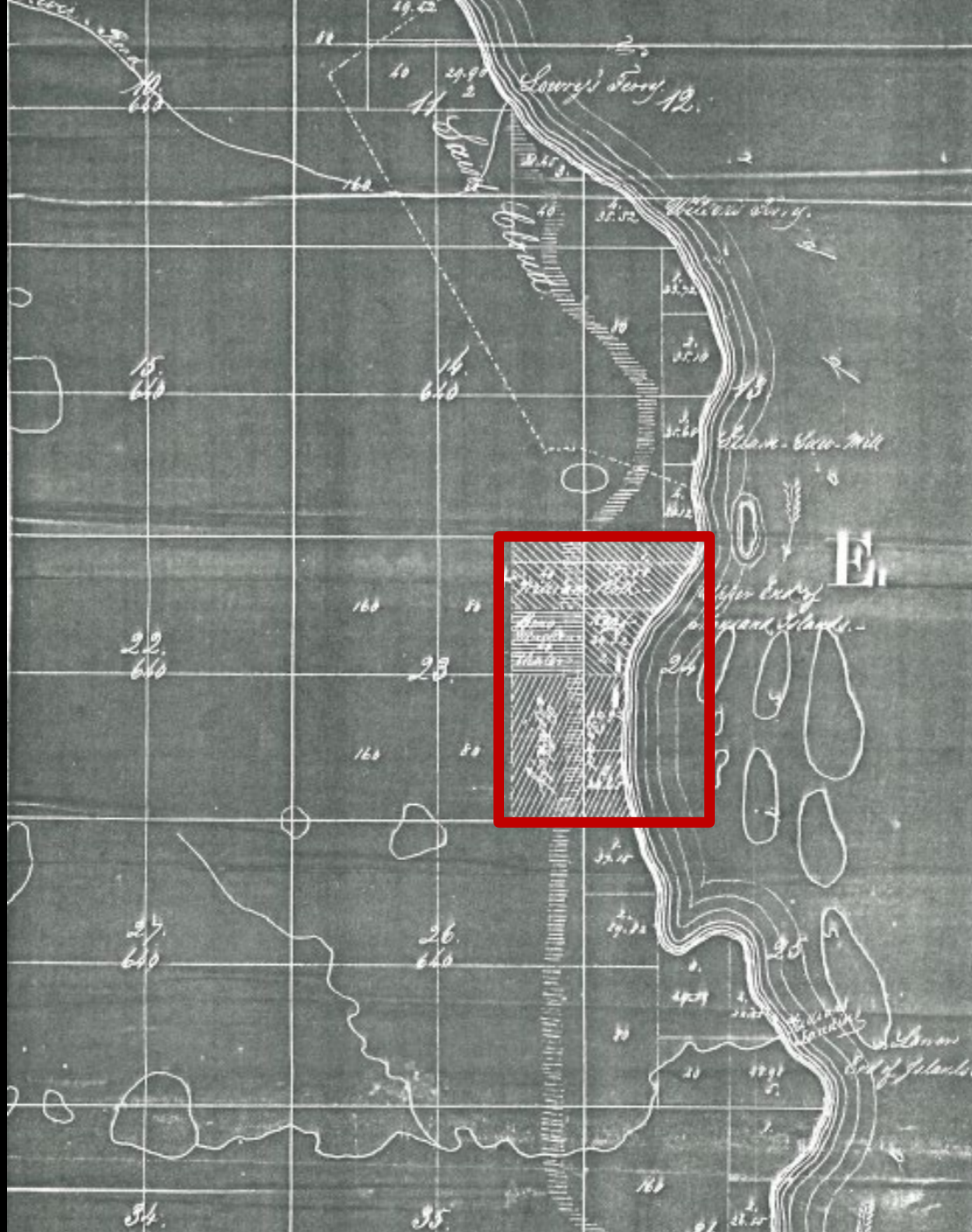


“Brother Benno enclosed the space between the two log cabins for use as a chapel.”

“Fr. Cornelius Wittmann was the first [and only] professor. He was still in the twenties, nimble of foot, bright in mind, pleasant in company; the children and the young folks were especially fond of him: he was a zealous and amiable gentleman.”



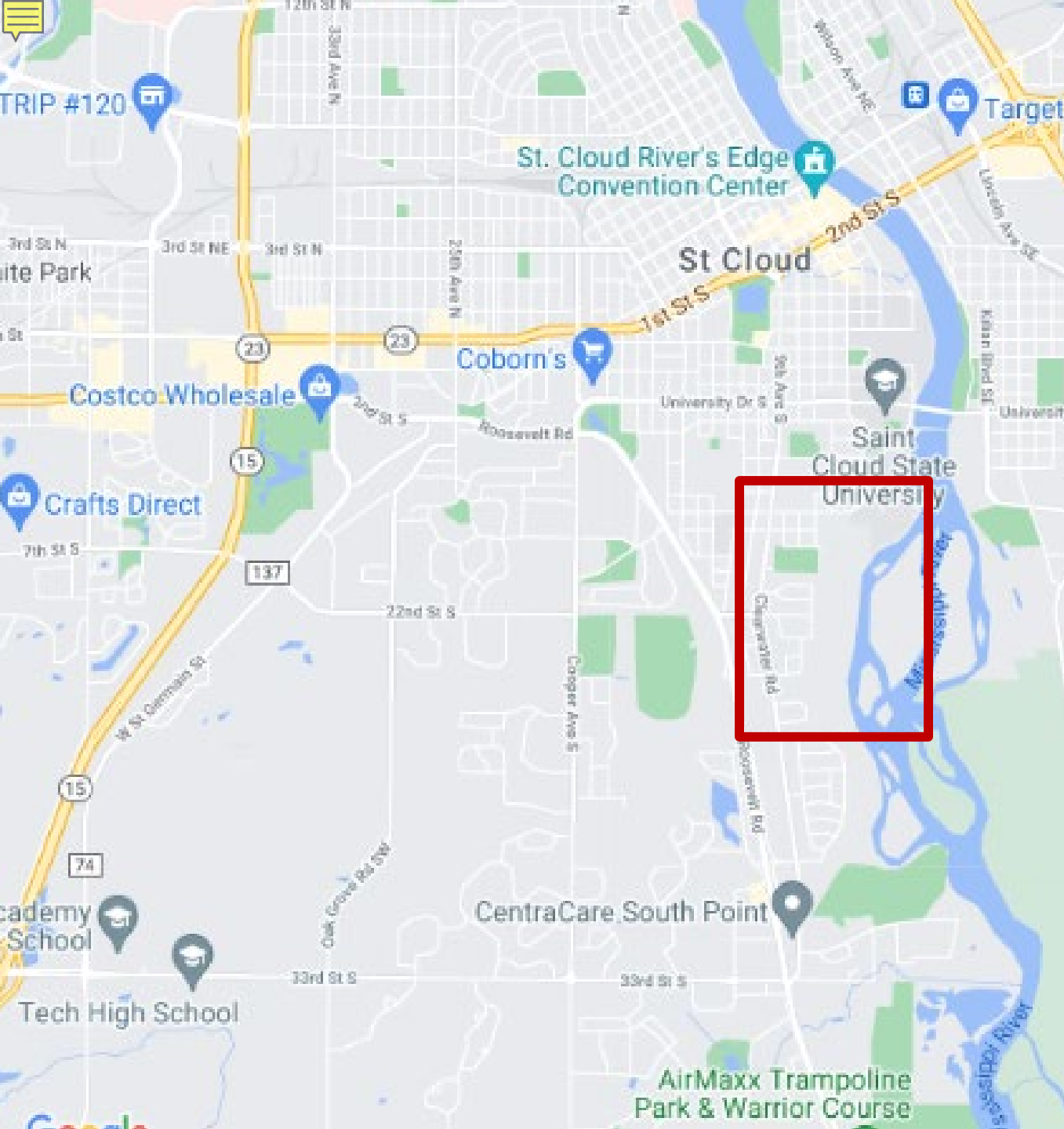
Cornelius Wittmann  
1828–1921



The Rothkopf claims were in sections 23 and 24 of the township, as seen on this plat map from the Land Office.

Rothkopf claims





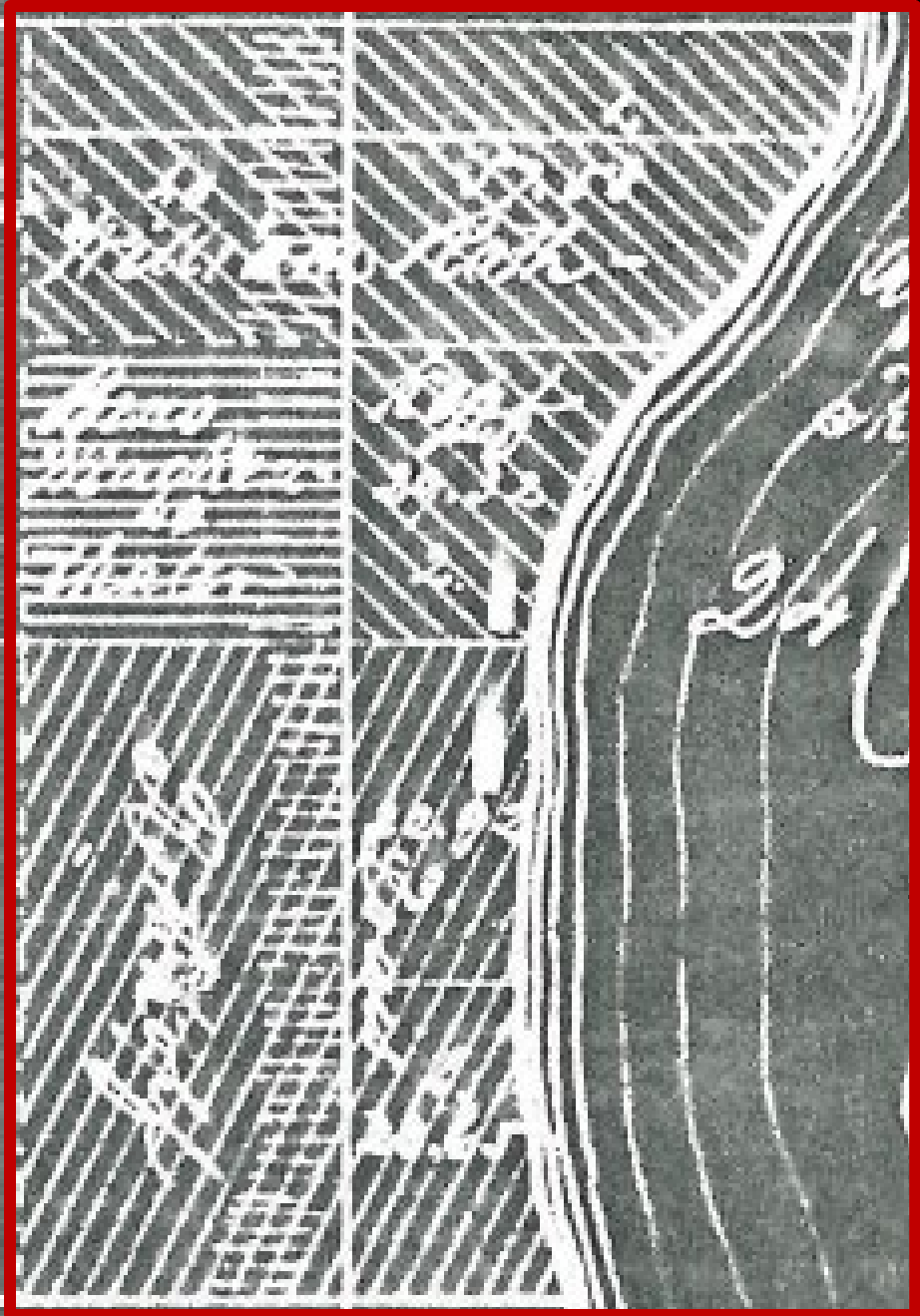
With the help of Google Maps, over 160 years later, we can place it on the south end of St. Cloud State University, from the Mississippi River over to Clearwater Road in south St. Cloud.

Rothkopf claims

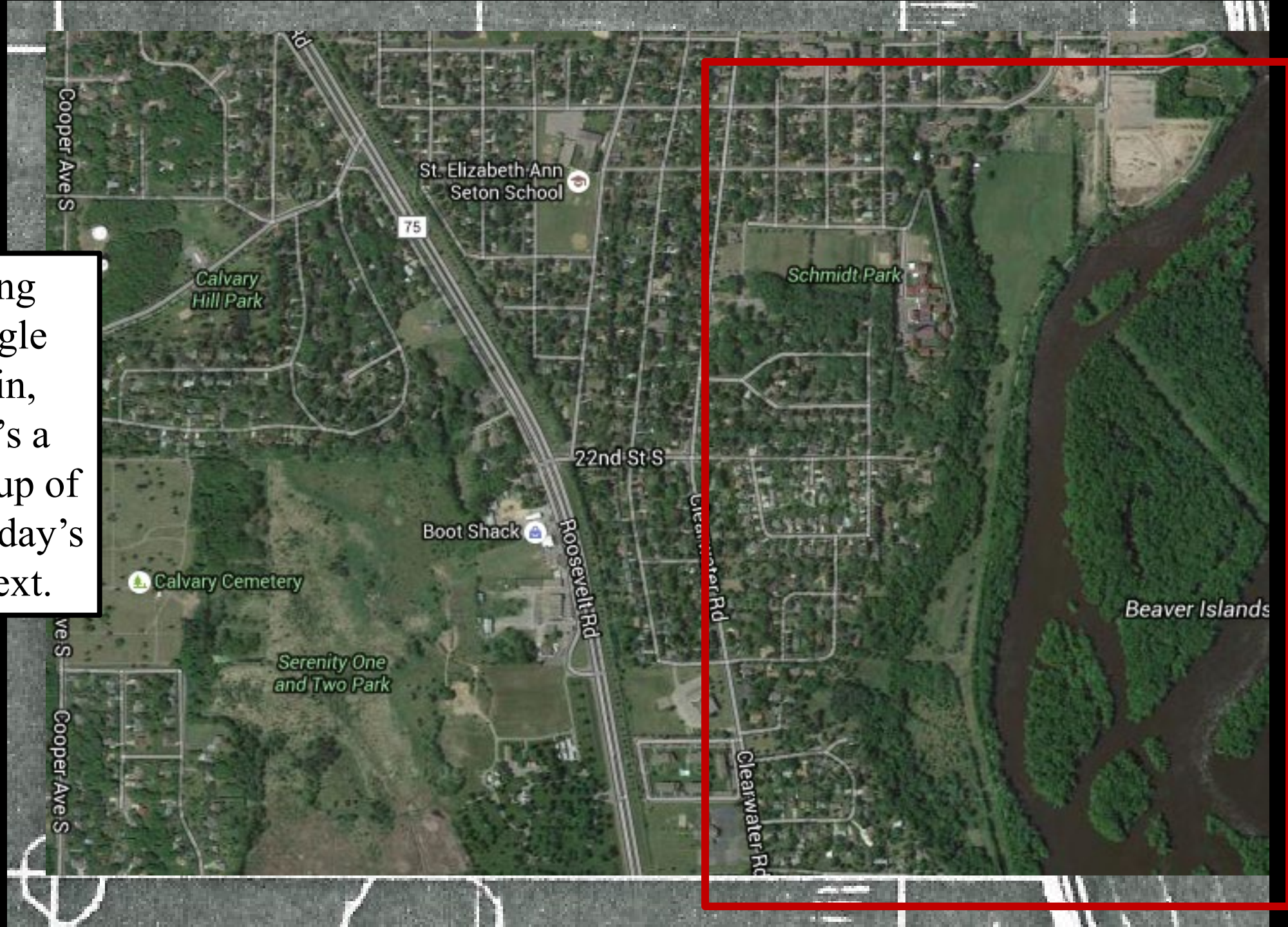
Zooming in on the plat map, you can see the handwritten names of the claimants, Wilhelm (aka William) and Louis Rothkopf.

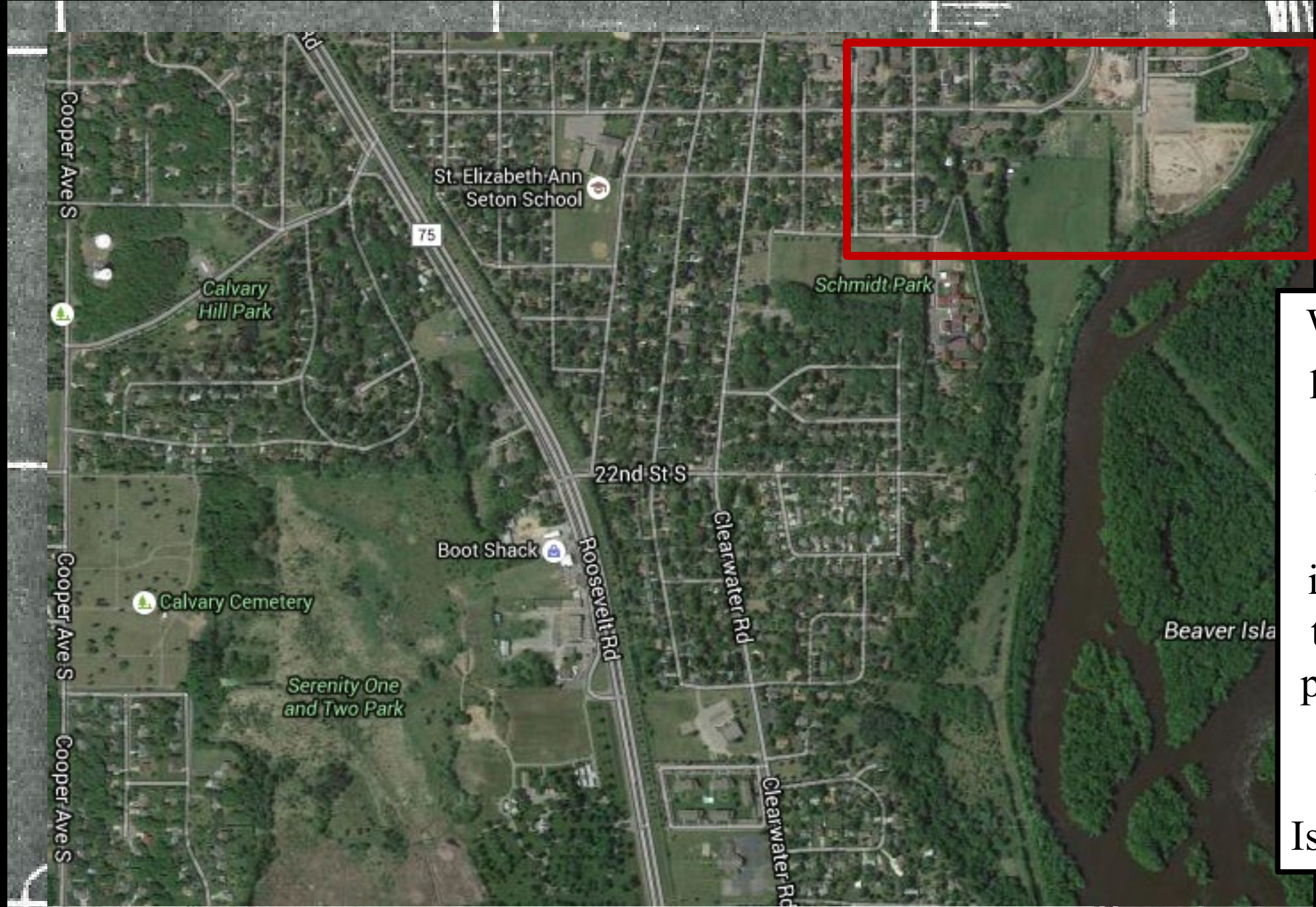
*Wilhelm Rothkopf*

*Rothkopf*  
*Louis*



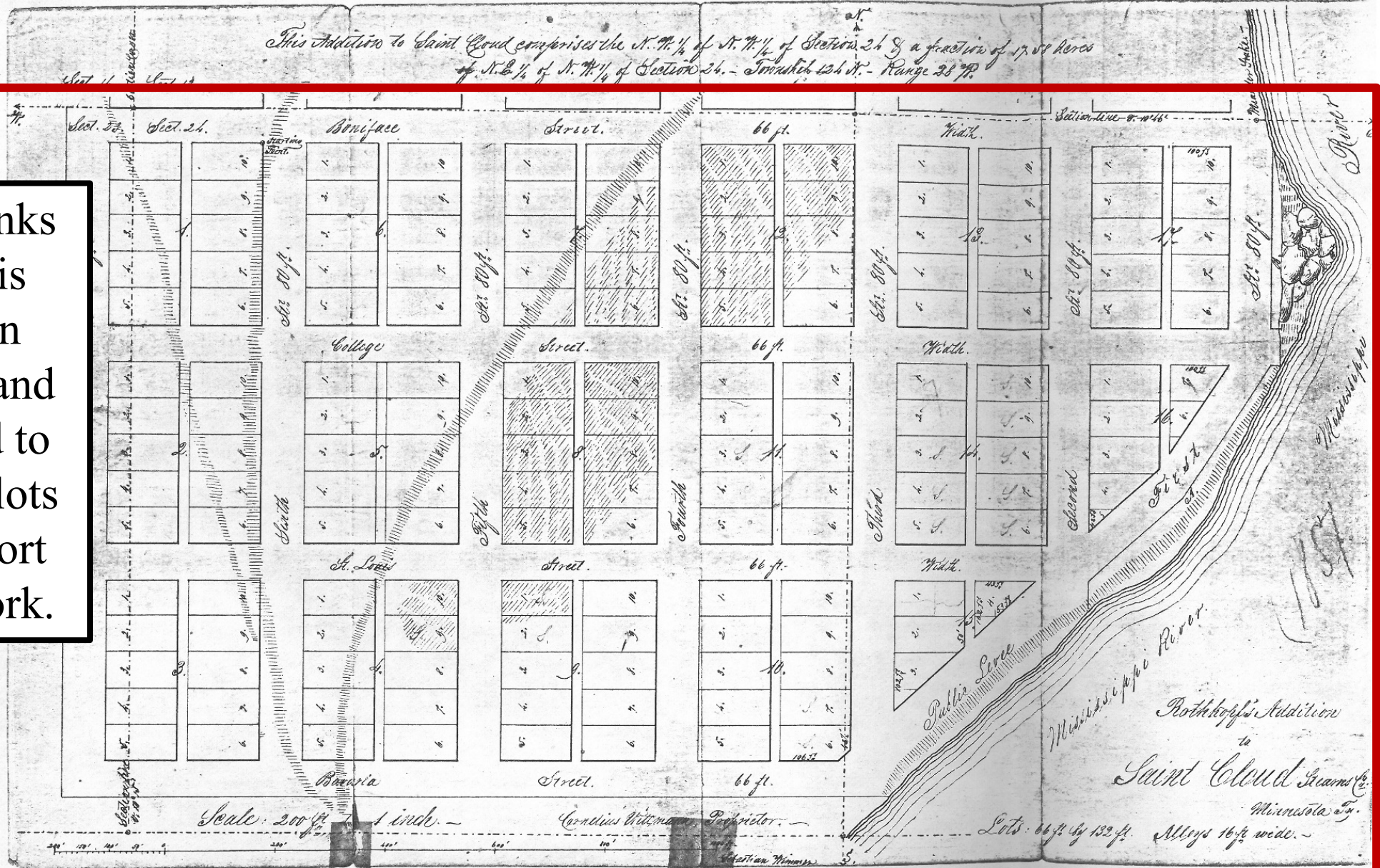
Using Google again, here's a close-up of it in today's context.



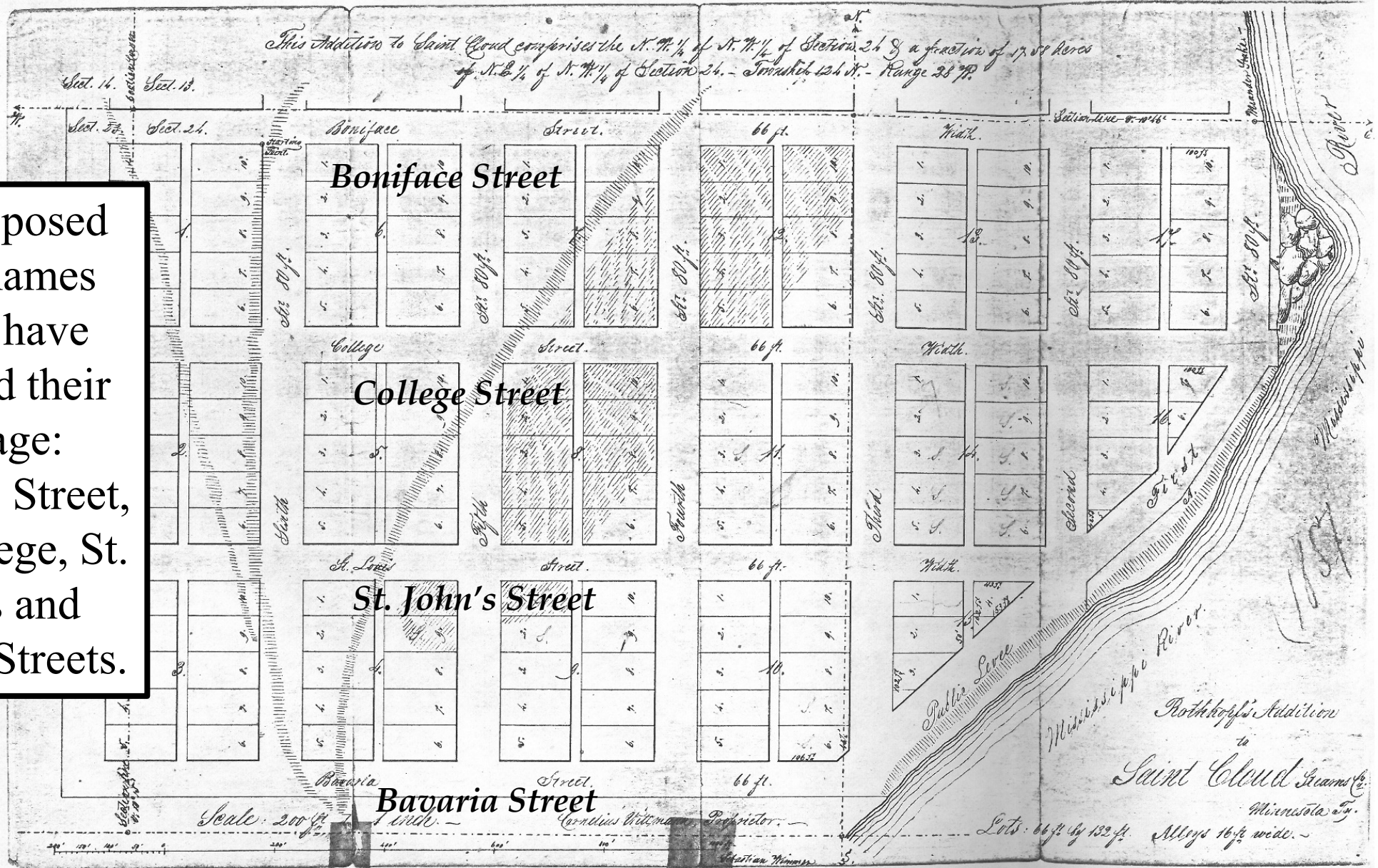


Wilhelm's piece was the northerly one, including, today, the parking lot for the Beaver Island Trail.

The monks had this portion platted and planned to sell the lots to support their work.

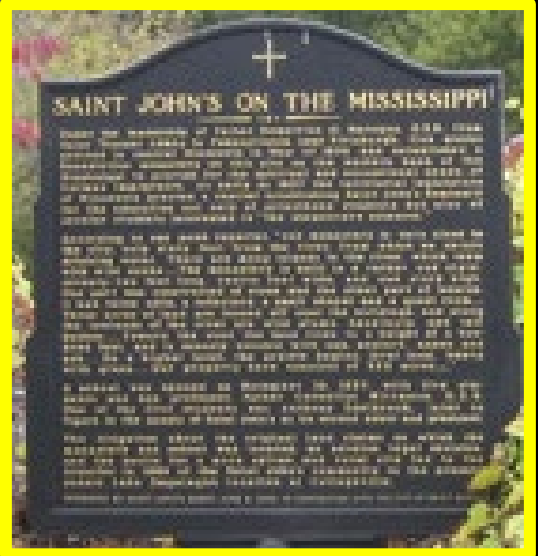
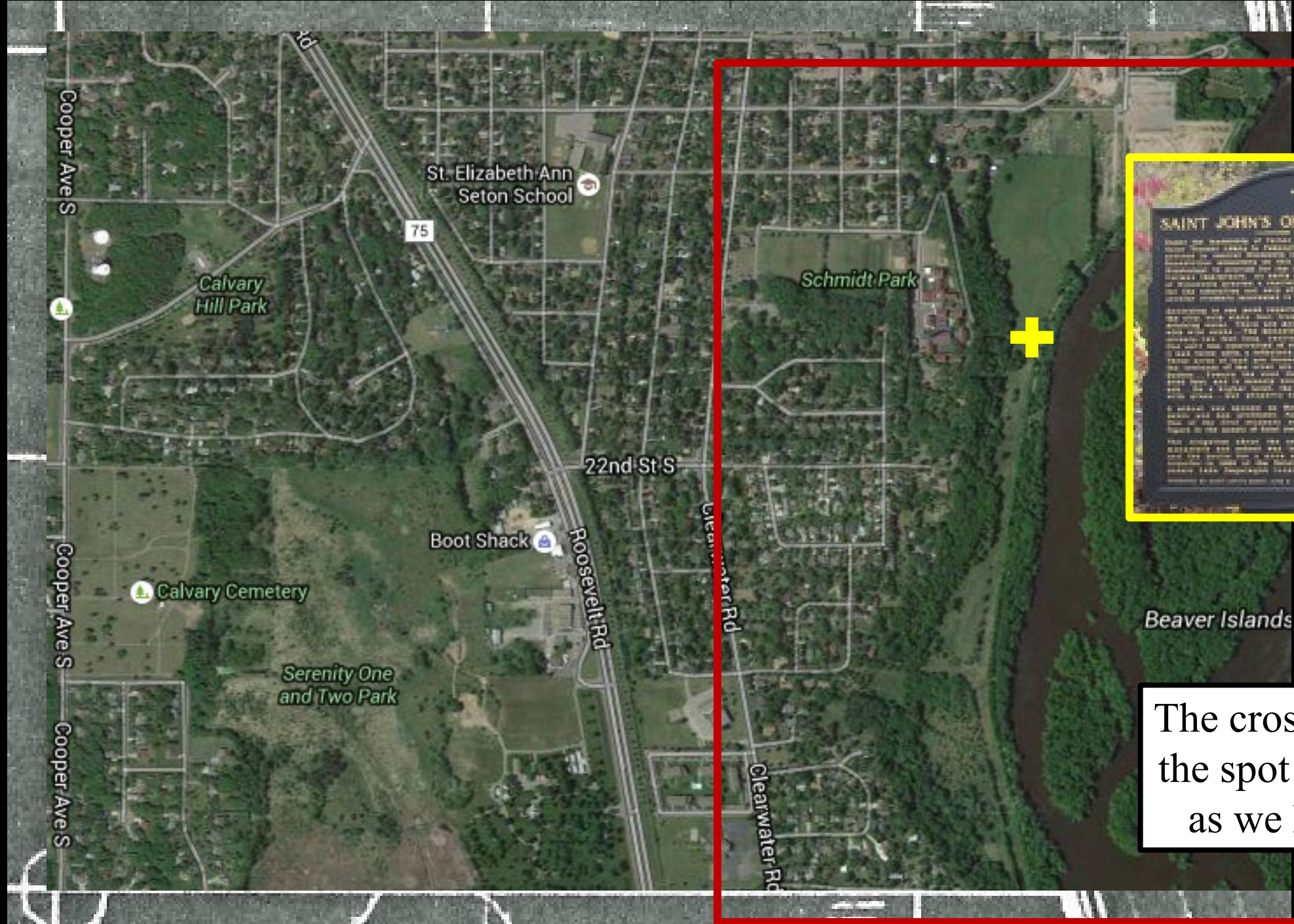


The proposed street names would have reflected their heritage: Boniface Street, and College, St. John's and Bavaria Streets.



Today's  
Beaver  
Island Trail  
features an  
historical  
plaque  
relating this  
history, and  
the land's  
connection  
to St. John's.

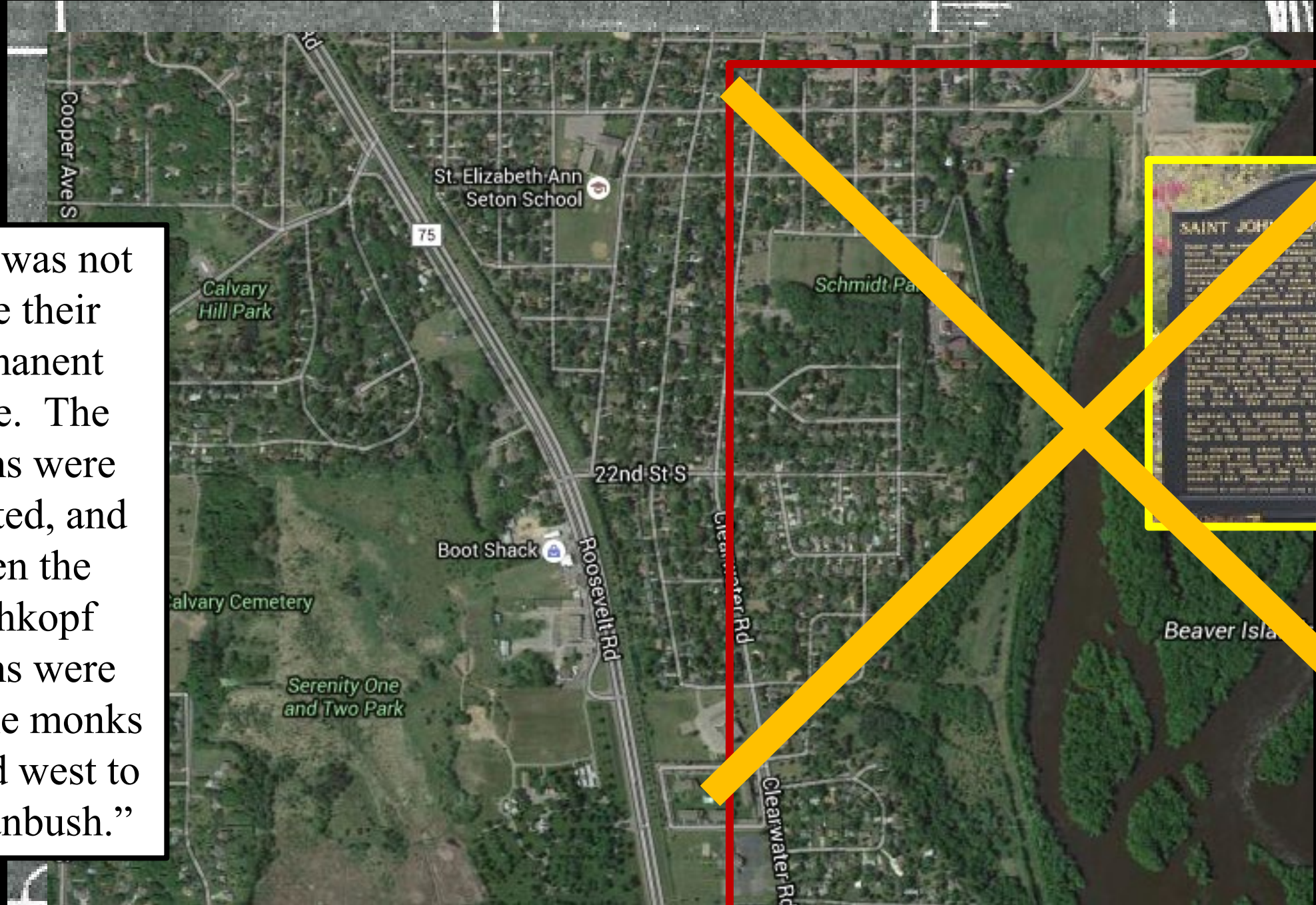




The cross marks the spot...as far as we know.



But it was not to be their permanent home. The claims were disputed, and when the Rothkopf claims were lost, the monks headed west to “Indianbush.”





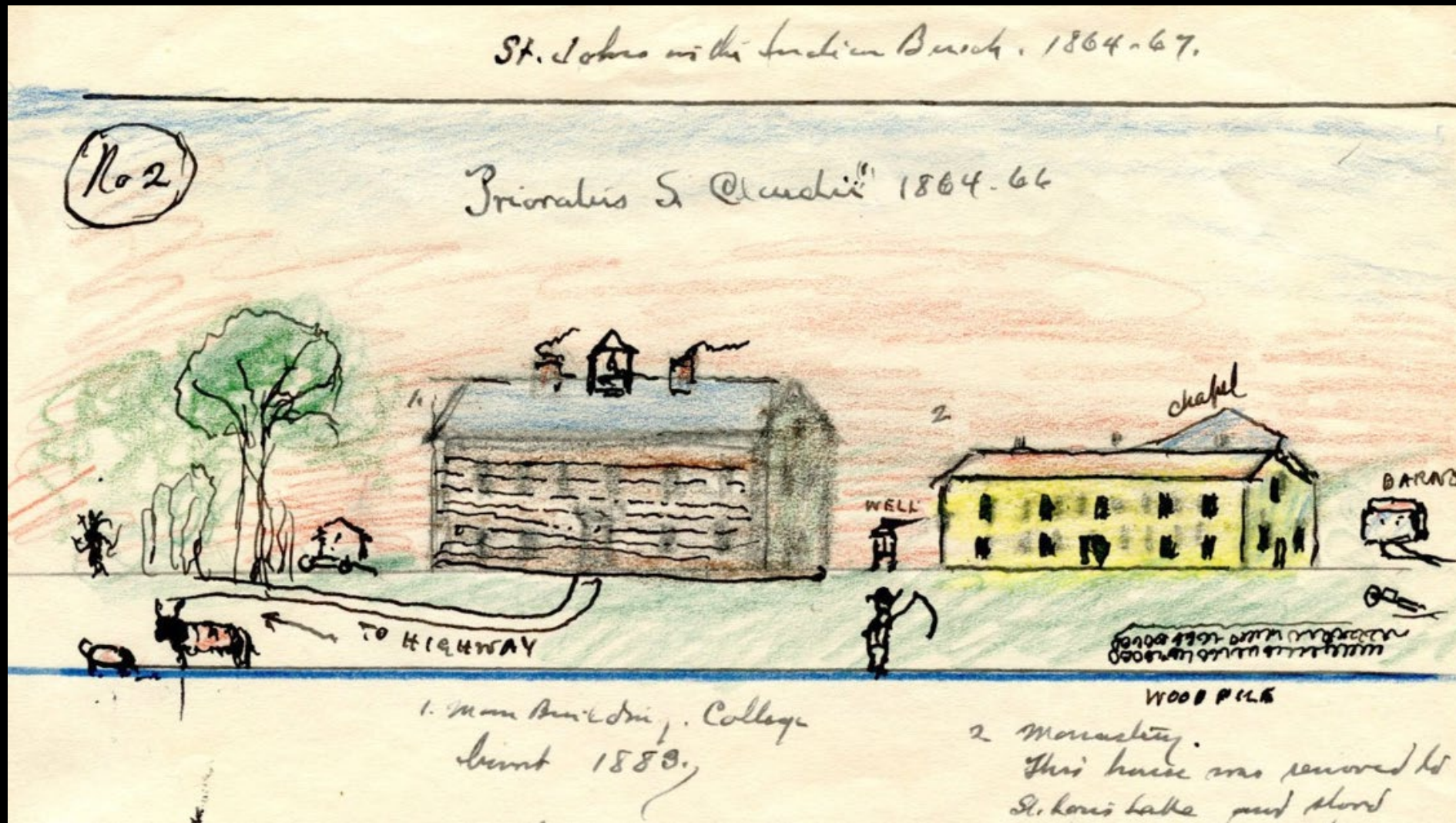
Luckily, back in 1856-57, Bruno Riess had already begun to hunt for another place, and monks were laying claim to 160-acre parcels west of Saint Cloud in the so-called “Indianbush”:

Bruno took up residence in his parish at St. Joseph. Under his direction Brothers Vincent, Wolfgang, and Roman began during that first winter to erect their claim cabins and to take up residence in them. With the coming of spring Father Bruno and the three Brothers continued their exploration of the ‘Indianbush’ and the north Watab basin which Brother Wolfgang christened ‘Schoenthal’ or beautiful valley.

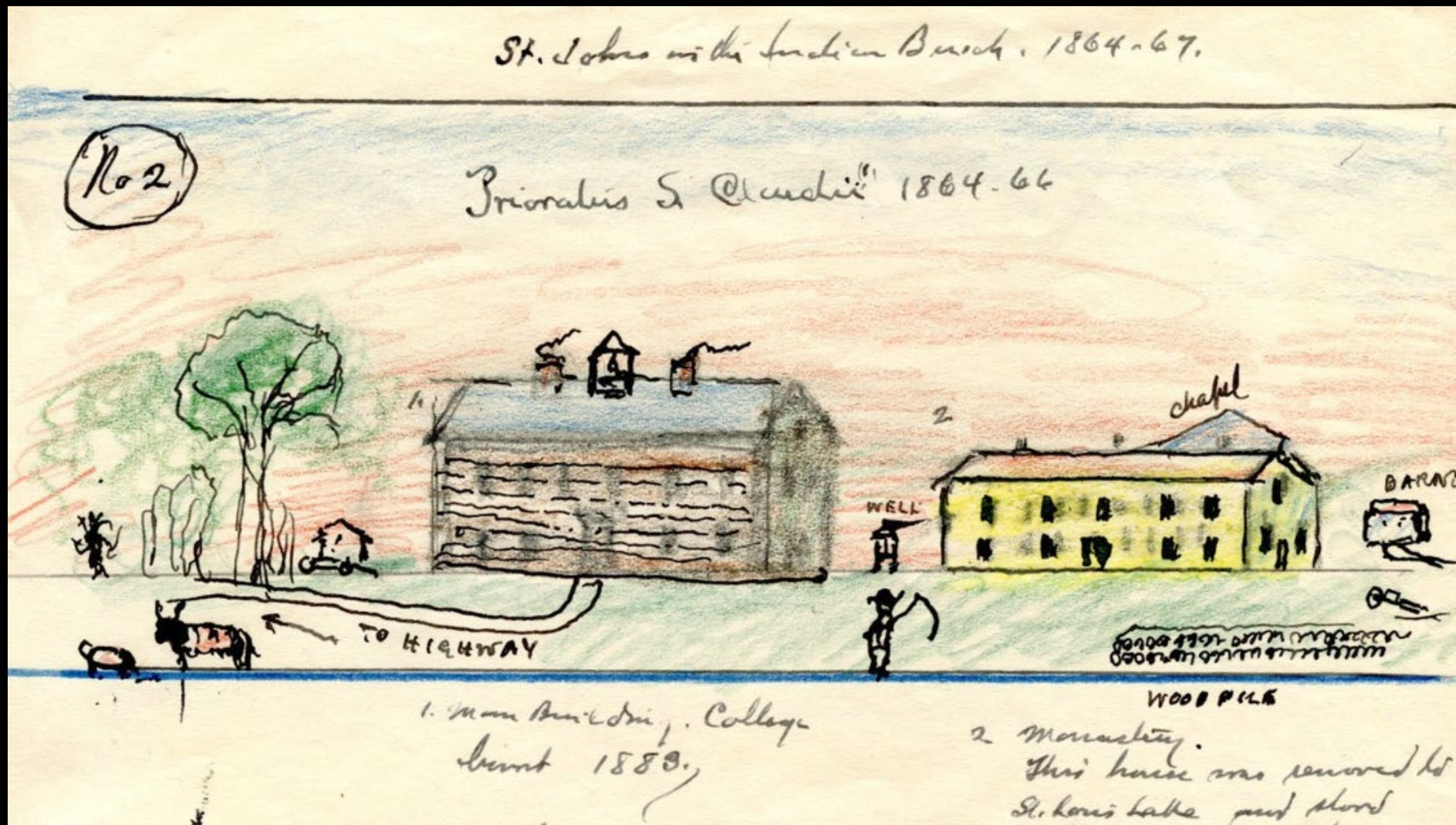
Like Benedictines everywhere, seeking to live sustainably, they sought three things:

- Water
- Trees for fuel and building
- Farm land

So when the Rothkopf claims were lost, "...operations were resumed in the heart of the Indian Bush, a short distance from [the future site of] the Collegeville train station."  
[That is, by today's Wobegon Trail, north of I-94].



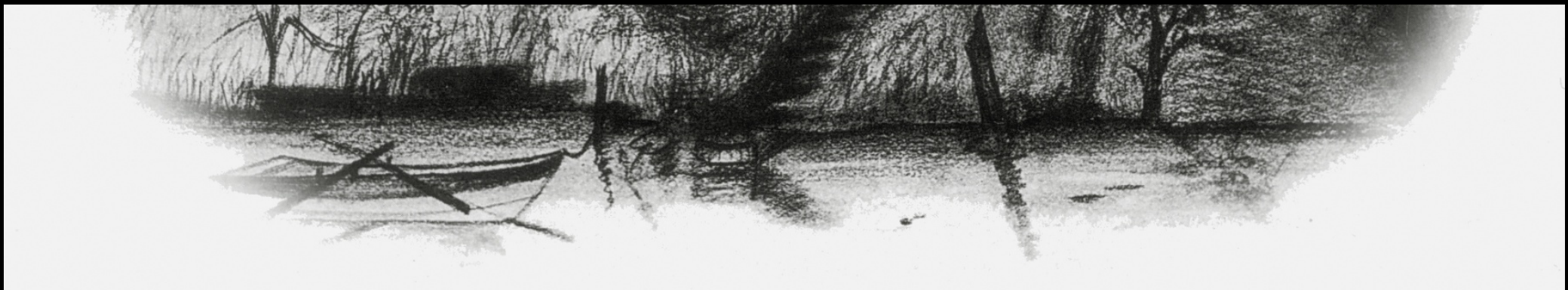
A claim house had been built there five years before. Alexius Hoffmann – Abbey Chronicler and artist of this sketch – described it as too small for the community. So “a more pretentious frame building, [with] a neat little chapel had been built. A fair piece of land had been placed under cultivation [and] there was water and fuel nearby...” This was the new home of the community.



Feb. 20. The frame buildings on the Rothkopp farm at St. Cloud were burnt to the ground. Part of them had been occupied by an organ-builder (Stoeckling?), and the fire is said to have started in a defective chimney in his shop. The buildings were not insured. Thus the last temptation to return to the farm was removed.




(Hopefully, Abbey Woodworking's upcoming establishment of an organ-building shop will not involve defective chimneys!)



It wasn't long before the monks realized the "worth and advantage" of moving to the shore of the beautiful lake to the south.





... they were so convinced of the worth and advantage of their cherished holdings, that they came upon and claimed the present site of St. John's. In St. John's literary lore its beauties have been the object of tributes in prose, verse and song. The qualities of this location for monastic and educational life have been acclaimed with undiminished enthusiasm for one hundred years.

*Worship & Work p.45*



St. Johns on the Indian Brook, 1864-67.

No 2

Trinitatis & Quercus 1864-66

So, for the first time, and certainly not the last, they moved a building.



1. Main Building, College  
burnt 1889.

2. Monastery.  
This house was removed to  
St. Louis Lake and stored



The Frame House was taken apart and reassembled overlooking the lake. The chapel... [was] used for public services until the erection of the new Abbey Church" which we know as The Great Hall.

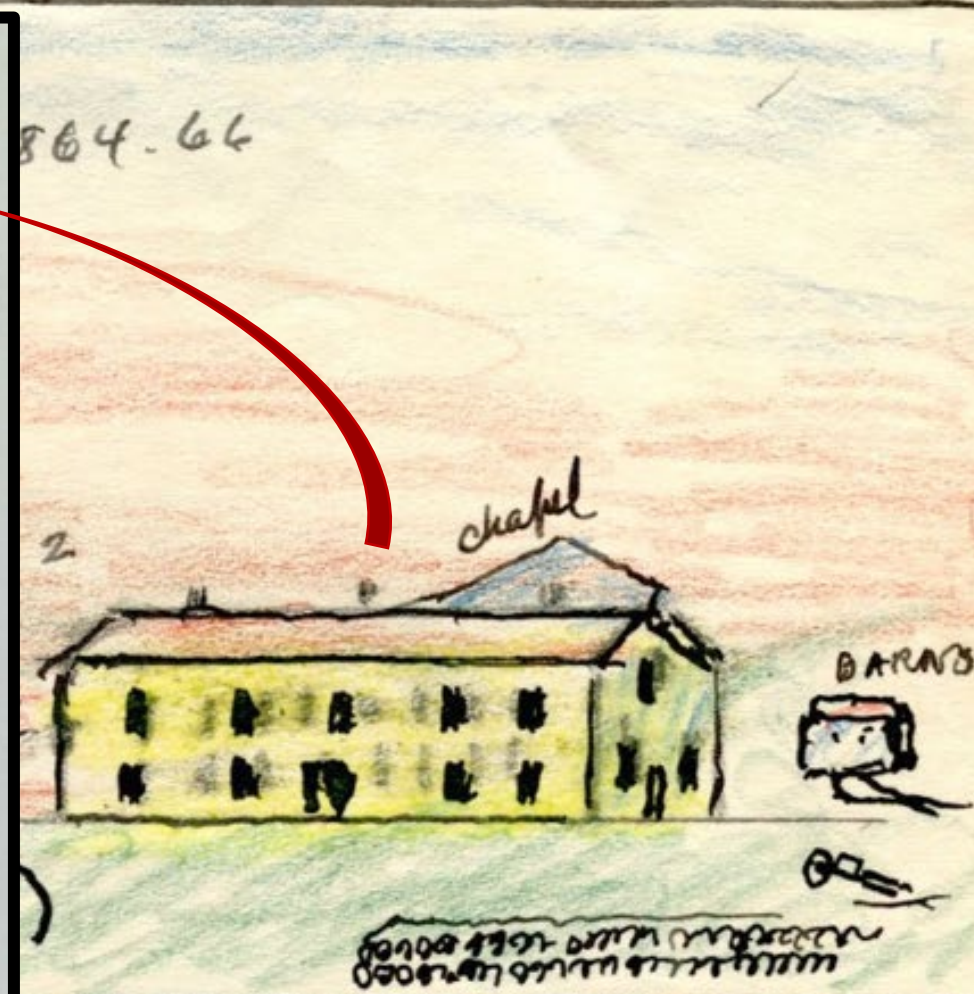


**"FRAME HOUSE" 1867-1886**

**WEST FRONT.**

This building, I was told, originally stood at Callegonville but was taken over to the new site when the 'stone house'

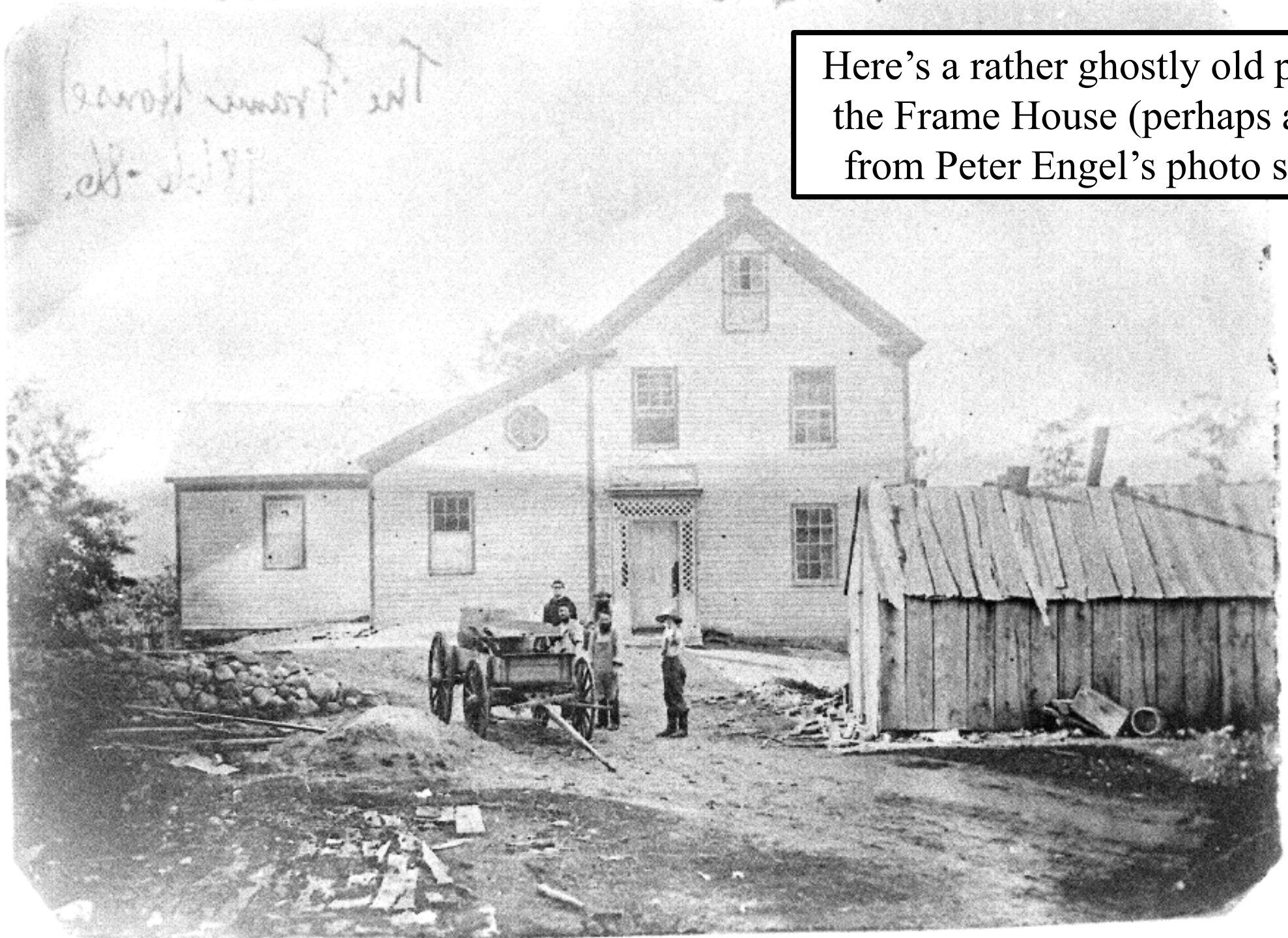
*The Junction Brook, 1864-67.*



*1864-66*

*WOOD PILES*

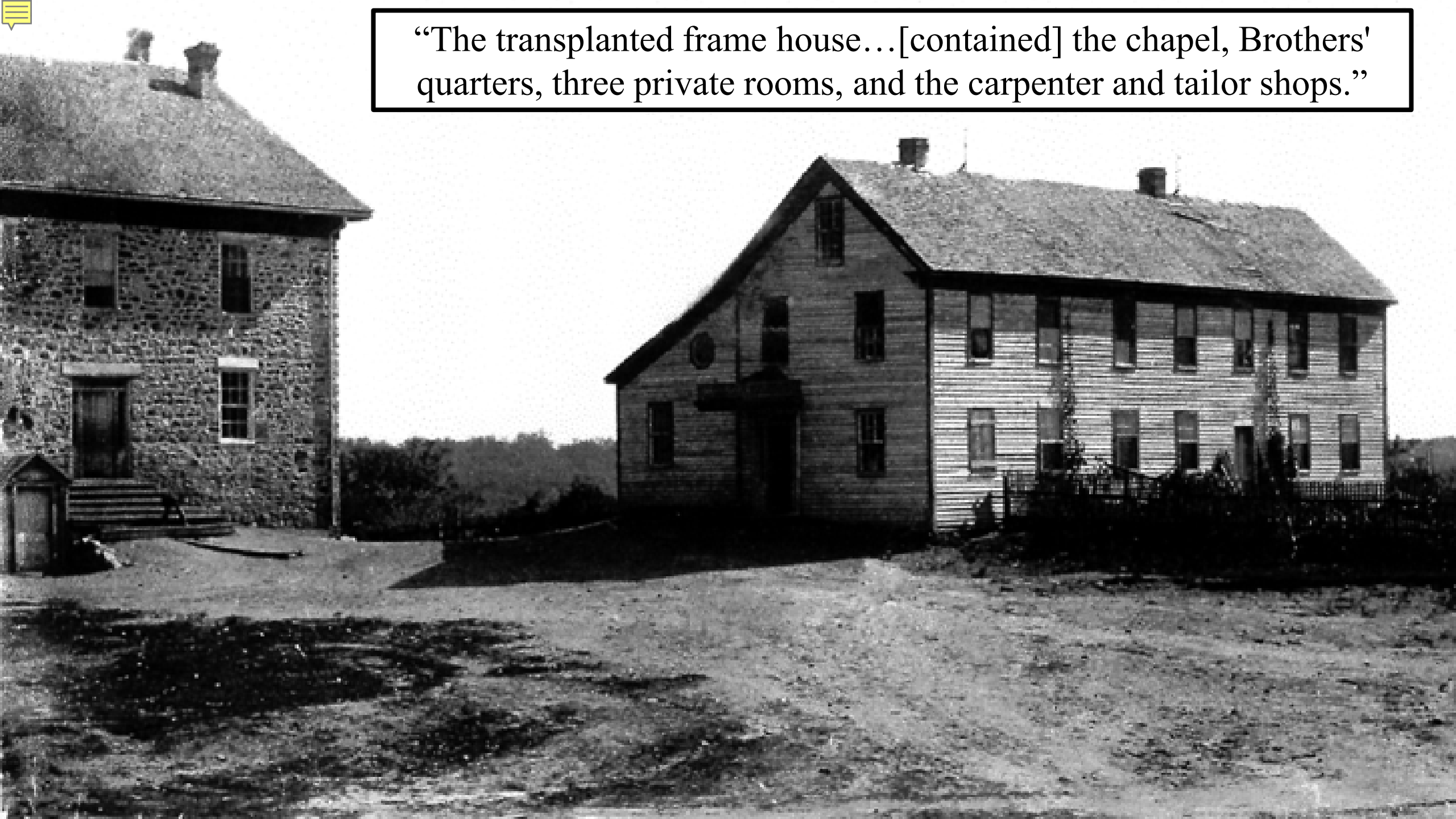
*2 Monastery.  
This house was removed to  
St. Louis Lake and stood*



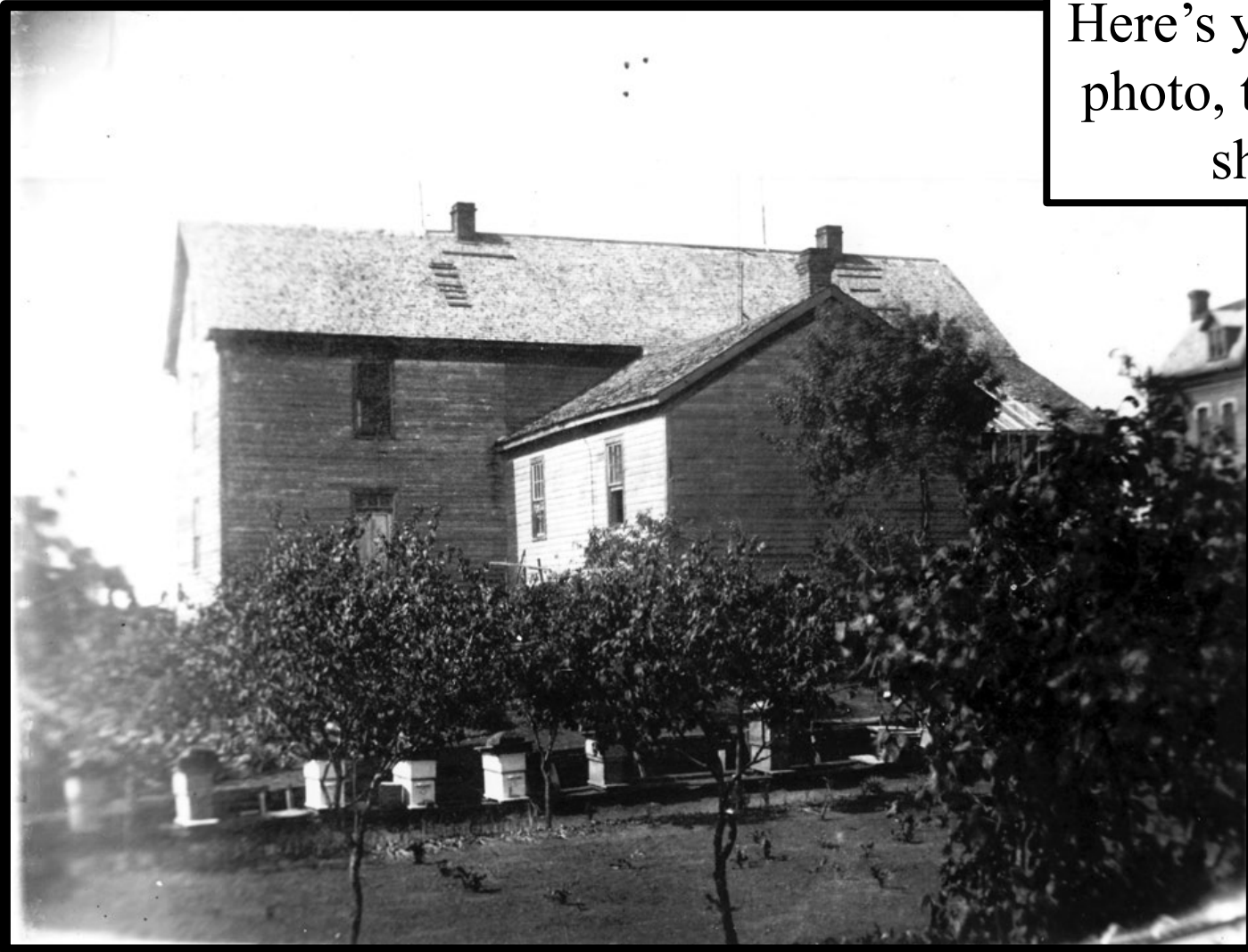
The Frame House  
18-1887

Here's a rather ghostly old photo of the Frame House (perhaps a reject from Peter Engel's photo studio?)

“The transplanted frame house...[contained] the chapel, Brothers' quarters, three private rooms, and the carpenter and tailor shops.”



Here's yet another wonderful old photo, this time of the east side, showing the Chapel.



## ANTIQUES

### THE FRAME HOUSE

About 60 feet southwest of the present group, on the spot now occupied by a tennis court stood a frame building, that had previous to 1890 been a part of the buildings at the Old Farm near Collegeville. A few excellent photographs of the structure have been preserved. The building was two stories high, about 60 feet long and 20 wide, with a gaseous number of windows. At right angles to it was an addition that served as the chapel for the students, and a small sacristy, flanked the chapel. The latter was extremely plain, had but one altar and absolutely no ornaments except a set of black-pine Stations of the Cross. The pews were mere skeletons, long and slender, in fact with a movable bench. In the rear of the chapel was a platform about 12 ft. square, for the singers, and in a corner was a long, squawking reed organ, made in Paris, and pitifully unreliable, when wanted for service. Yet it did serve, and even stood in the organ loft of the new church for some years.

In the angle formed by the chapel and the main structure was a small sacristy. The other space in the building was taken up by private rooms, shops and quarters for the lay brothers. The last services were held in the chapel on July 16, 1881, on which day the middle chapel of the church basement was blessed. The old chapel was empty for a while, then was converted into a lumber room. In the sacristy Father Peter Krpel (4-1821) installed the first photograph gallery. After the church and the new college buildings stood completed (1886), the gallery, or studio, was removed to the attic of the main building and remained there until 1902. In 1886 the frame house was taken down—a playground and pavilion occupy the space.

## Sacred Concert Wed. D

Given by the Seminar  
St. Anselm Hall C

The music lovers of St. John to the Sacred Concert to-day, December 17, by the and the St. Anselm Hall Seminars and twenty-eve- later are under the direction bert. No pains have been spent of this program, and j year's program, the coming success. The program is d lovens of Sacred Music.

### PROGRAM:

#### PART I.

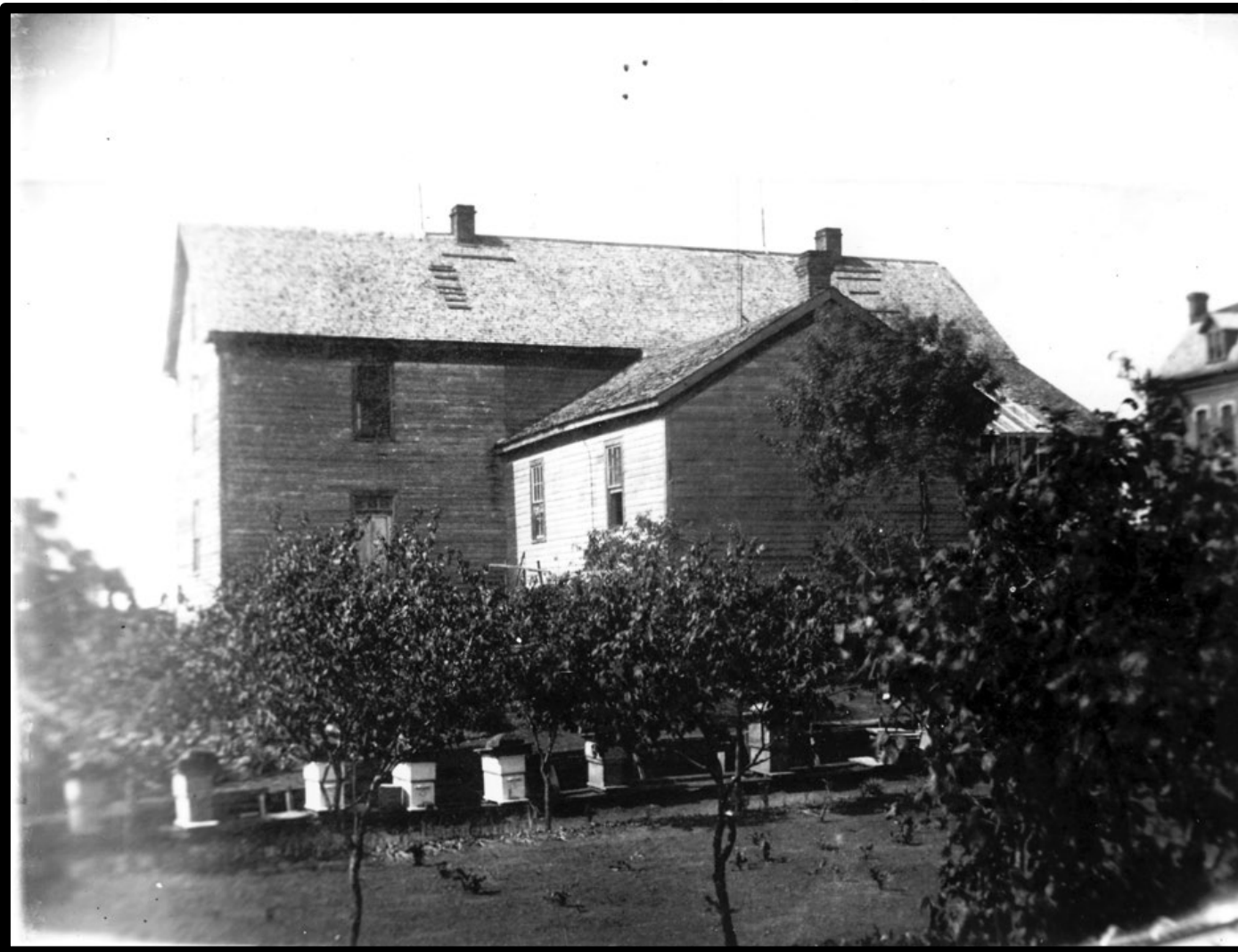
1. Arise, O Ye Servants of  
Seminary Choir, 8 parts
2. Evae Nomen Domine  
St. Anselm Hall Chorists
3. Break Forth O Beatitude  
Seminary Choir.
4. Organ Solo  
Rev. Herbert Gorke, O.S.B.
5. While Shepherds Watch  
St. Anselm Hall Chorists
6. a) Et Incarnatus Est.  
b) Sanctus  
Seminary Choir and St. A.

#### PART II.

8. Christmas Pastoral  
Organ Solo—Rev. Nor

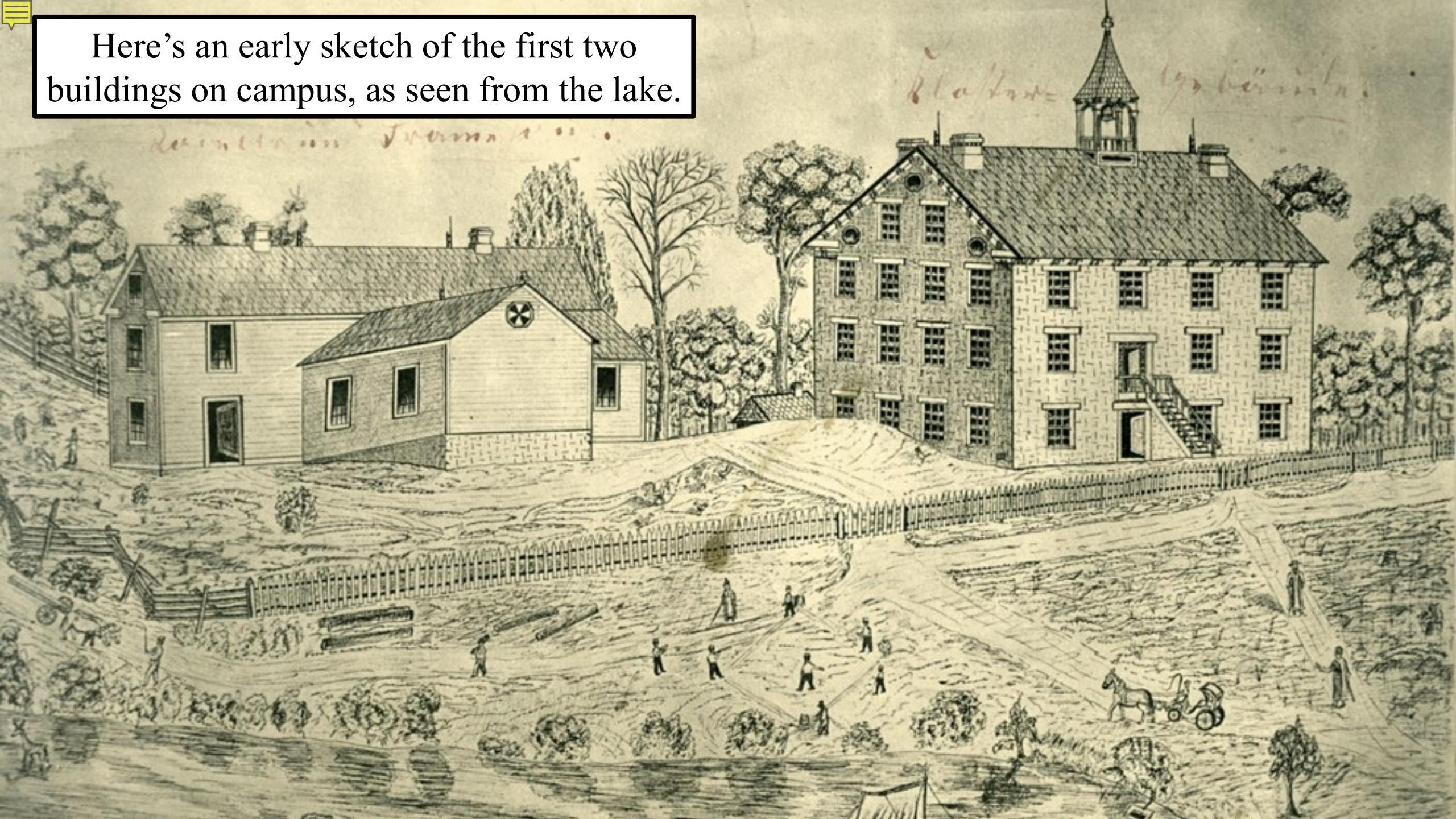
The distance between the the stone house and the do students entered the frame b reach the chapel was about cold fifty feet early in the when we hurried through w attend morning services.

### THE FRAME HOUSE

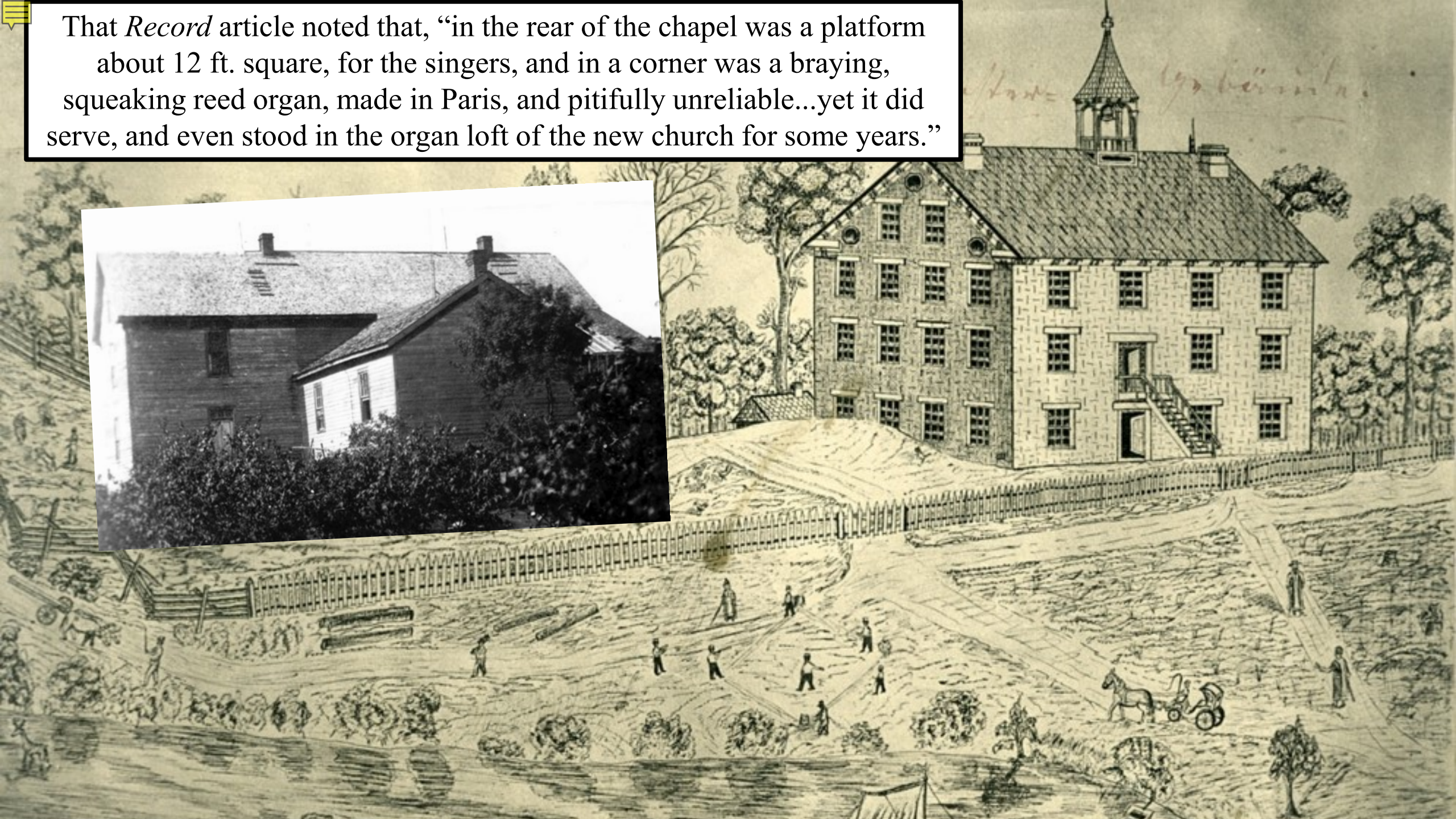


This photo was used in a December 1924 issue of *The Record* and accompanied an informative article about the building.

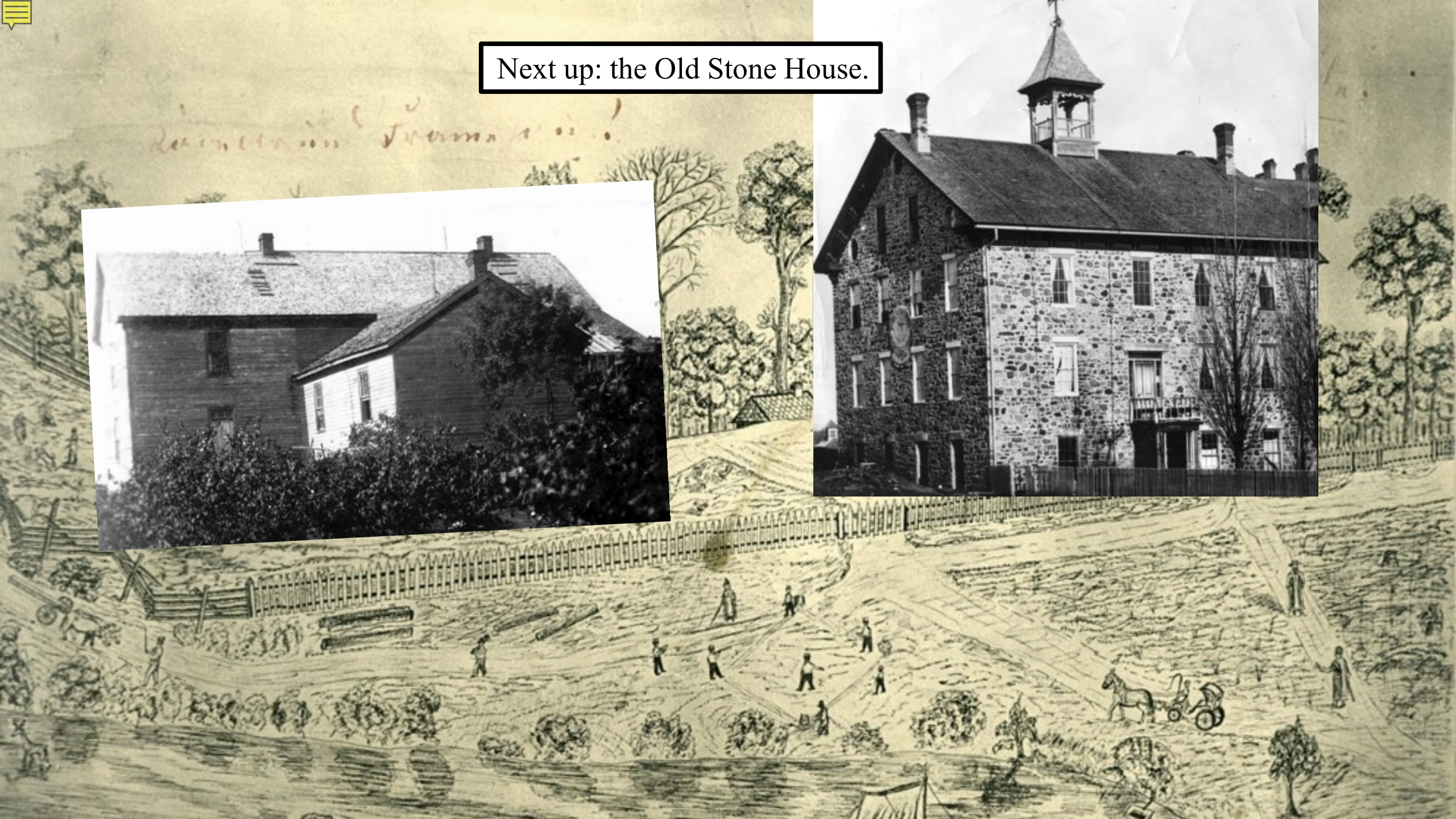
Here's an early sketch of the first two buildings on campus, as seen from the lake.



That *Record* article noted that, “in the rear of the chapel was a platform about 12 ft. square, for the singers, and in a corner was a braying, squeaking reed organ, made in Paris, and pitifully unreliable...yet it did serve, and even stood in the organ loft of the new church for some years.”



Next up: the Old Stone House.





“The 'Old Stone House' was 46x50 feet, with basement, two levels and attic. Facing east, and two hundred feet from the lake, this Old Stone House was a frontier adaptation of the simple colonial stone houses and Pennsylvania Dutch gabled structures which the Minnesota monks had known around St. Vincent in the foothills of the Alleghenies.”

*Worship & Work, p. 83*



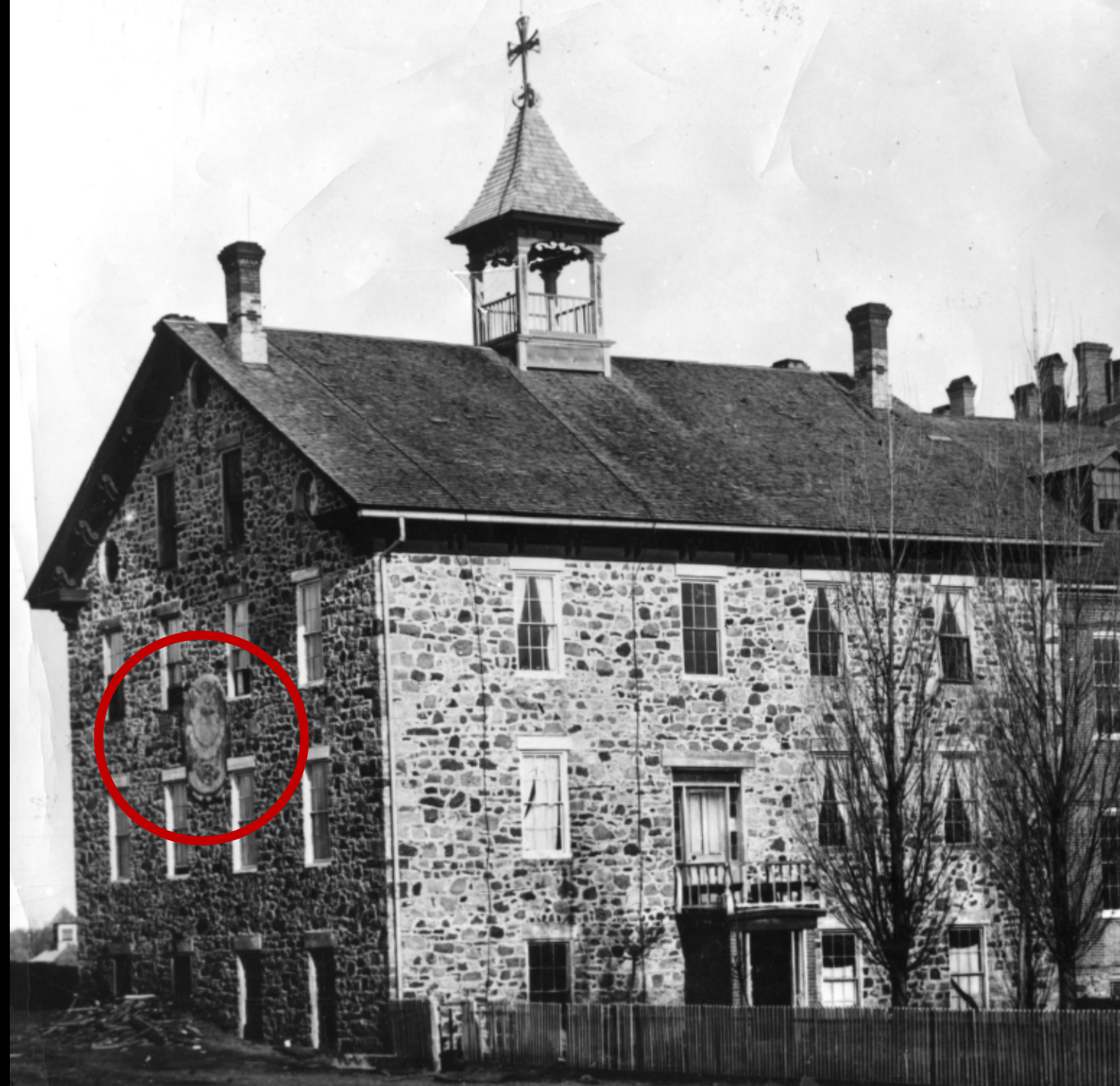
“The basement was used for a kitchen and dining rooms; the first floor was divided into study halls and classrooms; on the second floor the monks had their rooms, and the attic was used as a dormitory.”

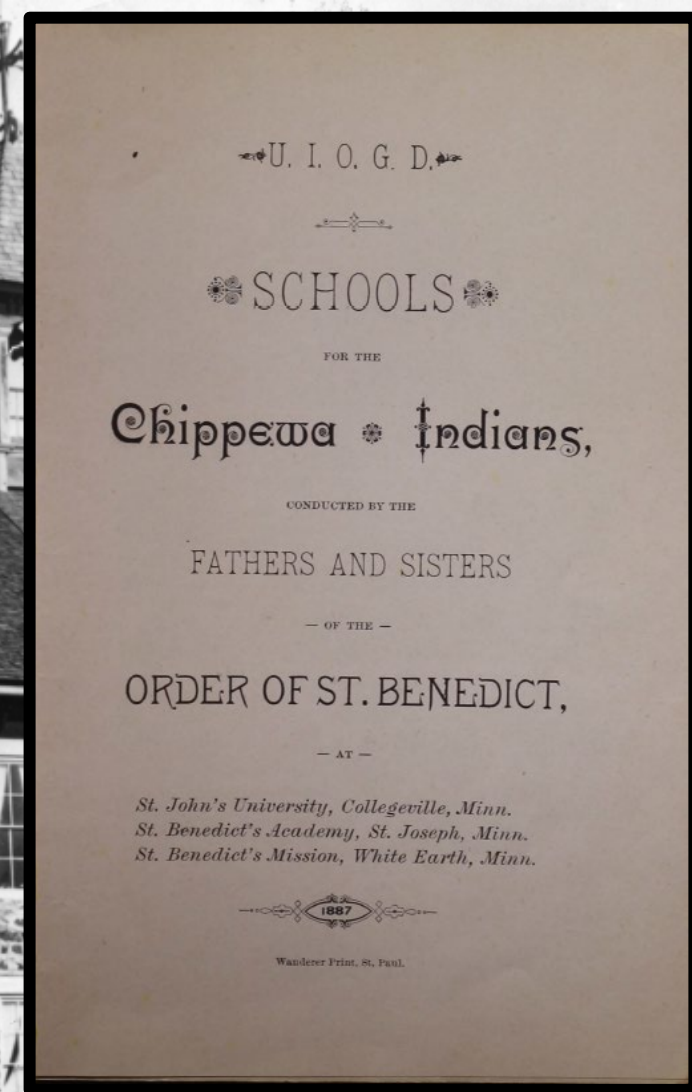
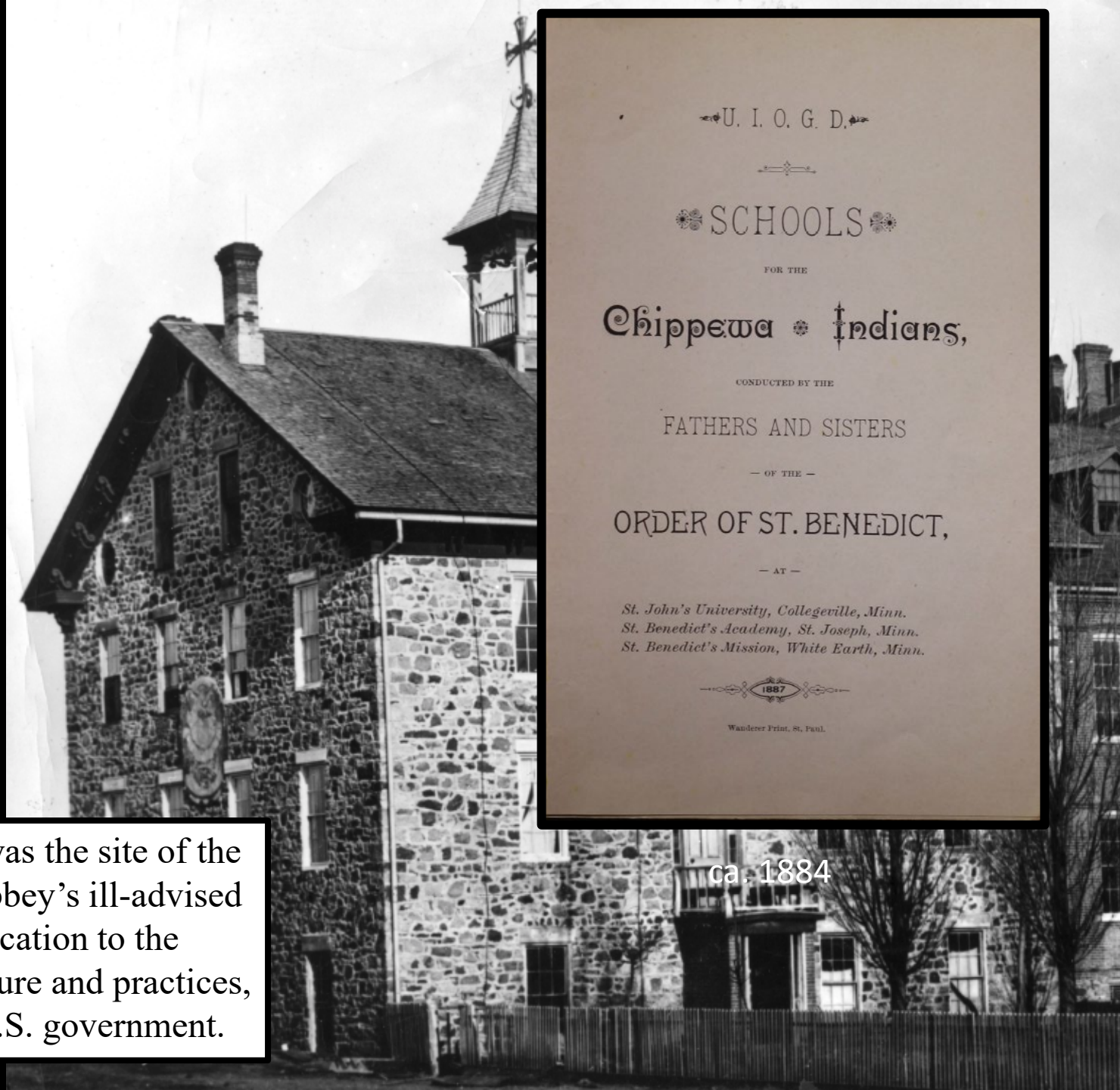
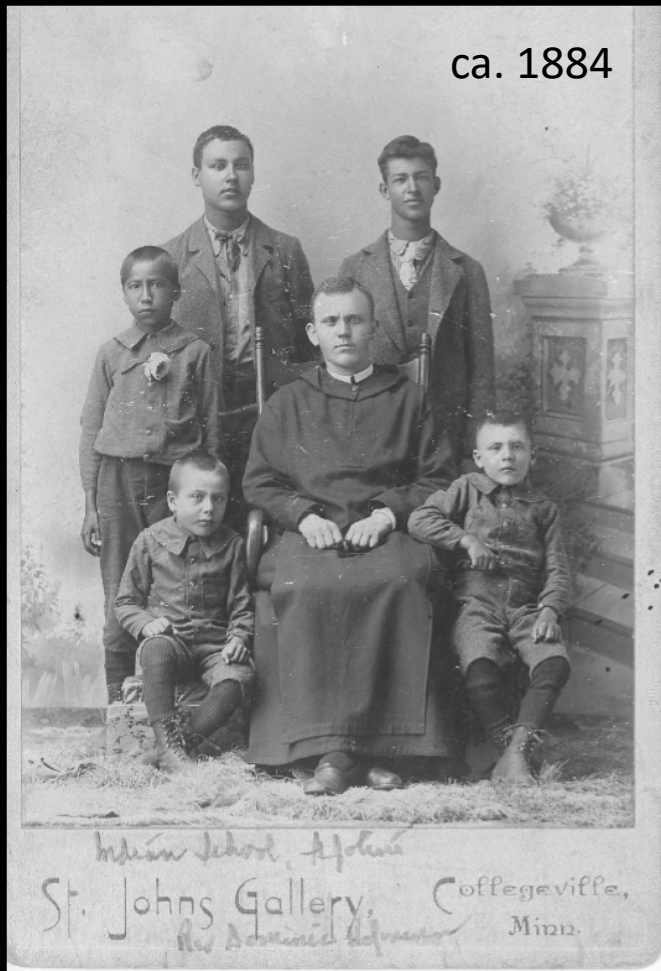




“Father Valentine painted a picturesque sundial with baroque corona in bright Bavarian colors on the south wall. It soon became a favorite target for stones...by students.”

*Worship & Work, p. 83*





Years later, from 1884-1896, the Old Stone House was the site of the Indian Industrial School, recognized today as the Abbey's ill-advised attempt to bring Christianity and vocational education to the indigenous children, in part by suppressing their culture and practices, all with the sponsorship and remuneration of the U.S. government.

“On the ridge of the roof was an open stylized turret in which Brother Benno's bell was hung. This bell, a gift from relatives in Germany, had arrived at the St. Cloud Priory in 1857.”

It was the first bell in Stearns County.

“It accompanied the community in all its wanderings, and now announced, in the key of C, the hours of [prayer] and the school schedule.”

*Worship & Work, p. 83*



“Later Brother Benno's bell was hung in the north[west] turret [what we know as “Devil’s Tower”]... and served as the class bell for years....

With the advent of the first electric bell system, it was stored in the [St. John’s] museum...

In 1948 Abbot Alcuin gave it to St. John's priory in Puerto Rico. There today it rings forth again as of old.”

*Worship & Work, p. 83*

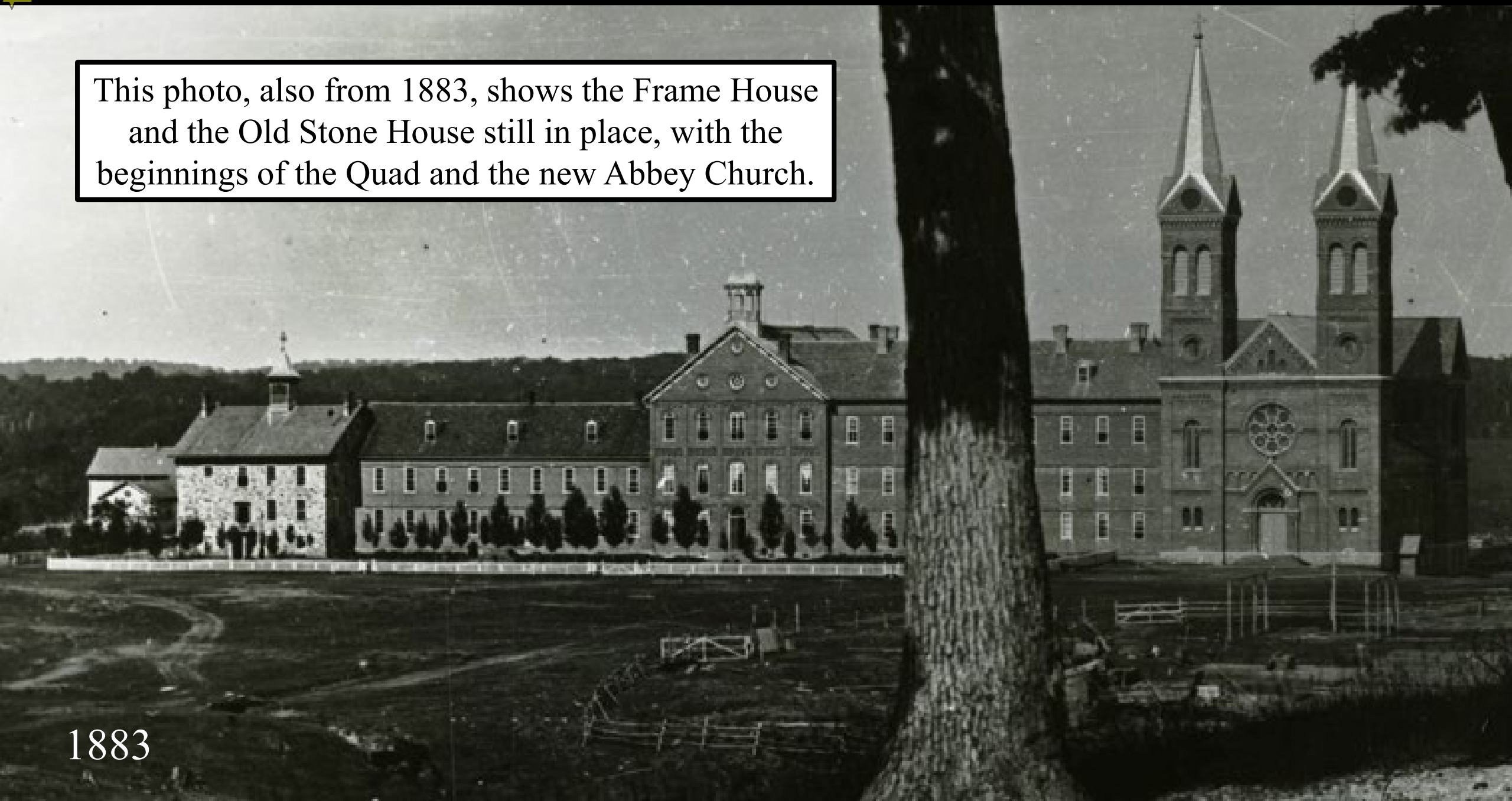


In January, 1883, the old college buildings on the farm near Colleeville station were destroyed by fire. This was no appreciable material loss, yet it was a matter for regret that the venerable landmark disappeared, leaving not a trace of buildings of any kind.



1883

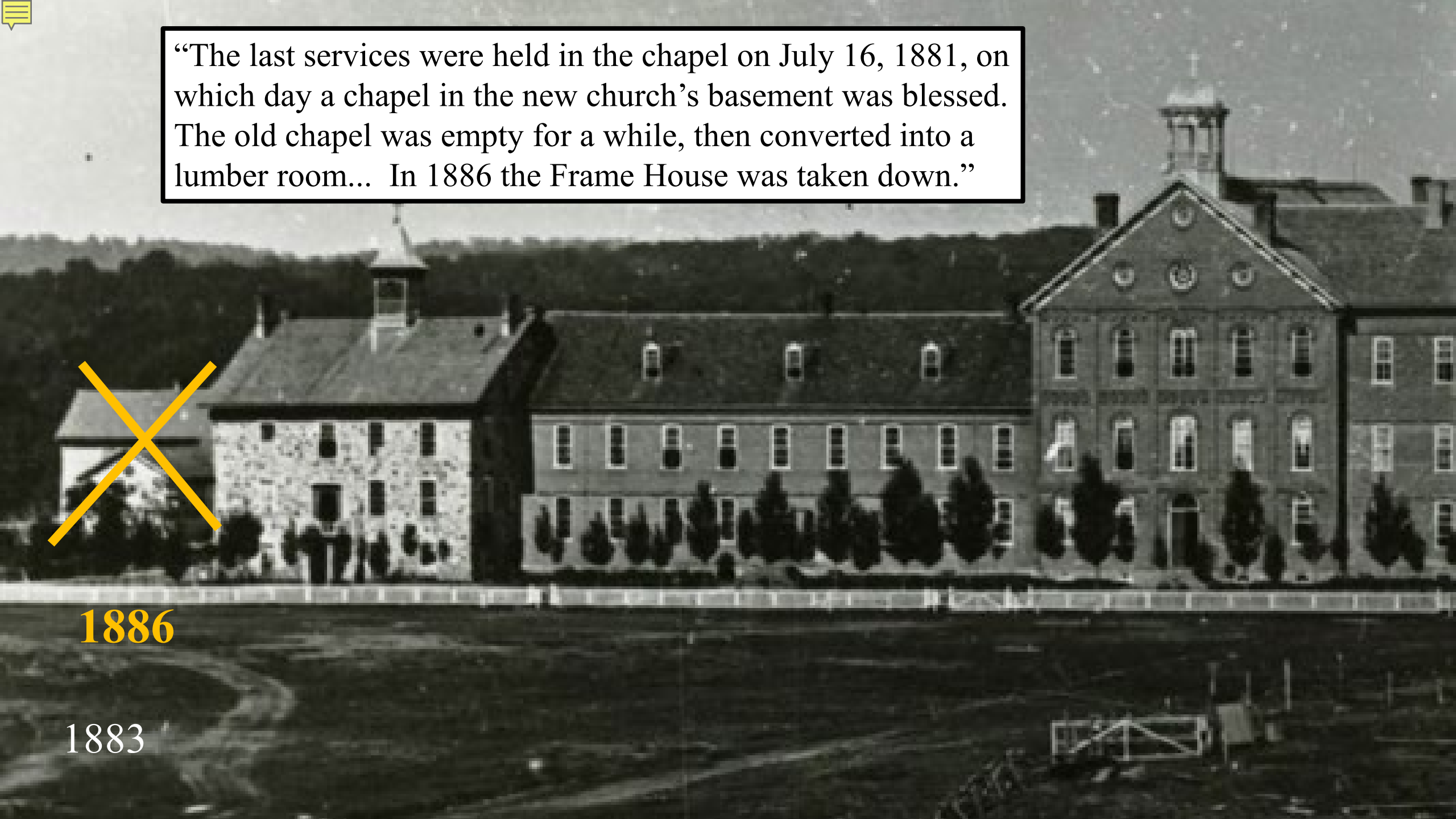
This photo, also from 1883, shows the Frame House and the Old Stone House still in place, with the beginnings of the Quad and the new Abbey Church.



1883



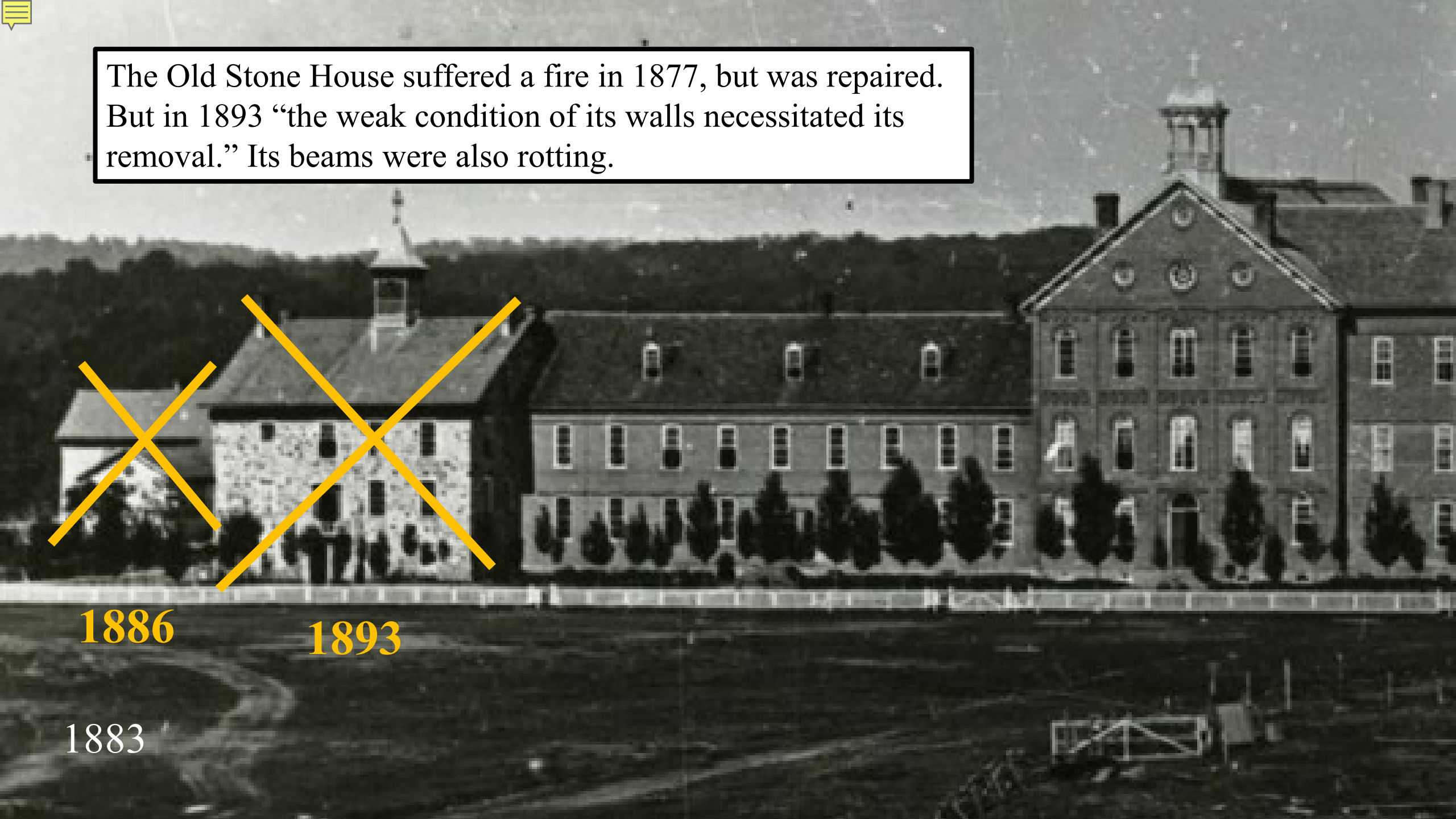
“The last services were held in the chapel on July 16, 1881, on which day a chapel in the new church’s basement was blessed. The old chapel was empty for a while, then converted into a lumber room... In 1886 the Frame House was taken down.”



1886

1883

The Old Stone House suffered a fire in 1877, but was repaired. But in 1893 “the weak condition of its walls necessitated its removal.” Its beams were also rotting.



1886

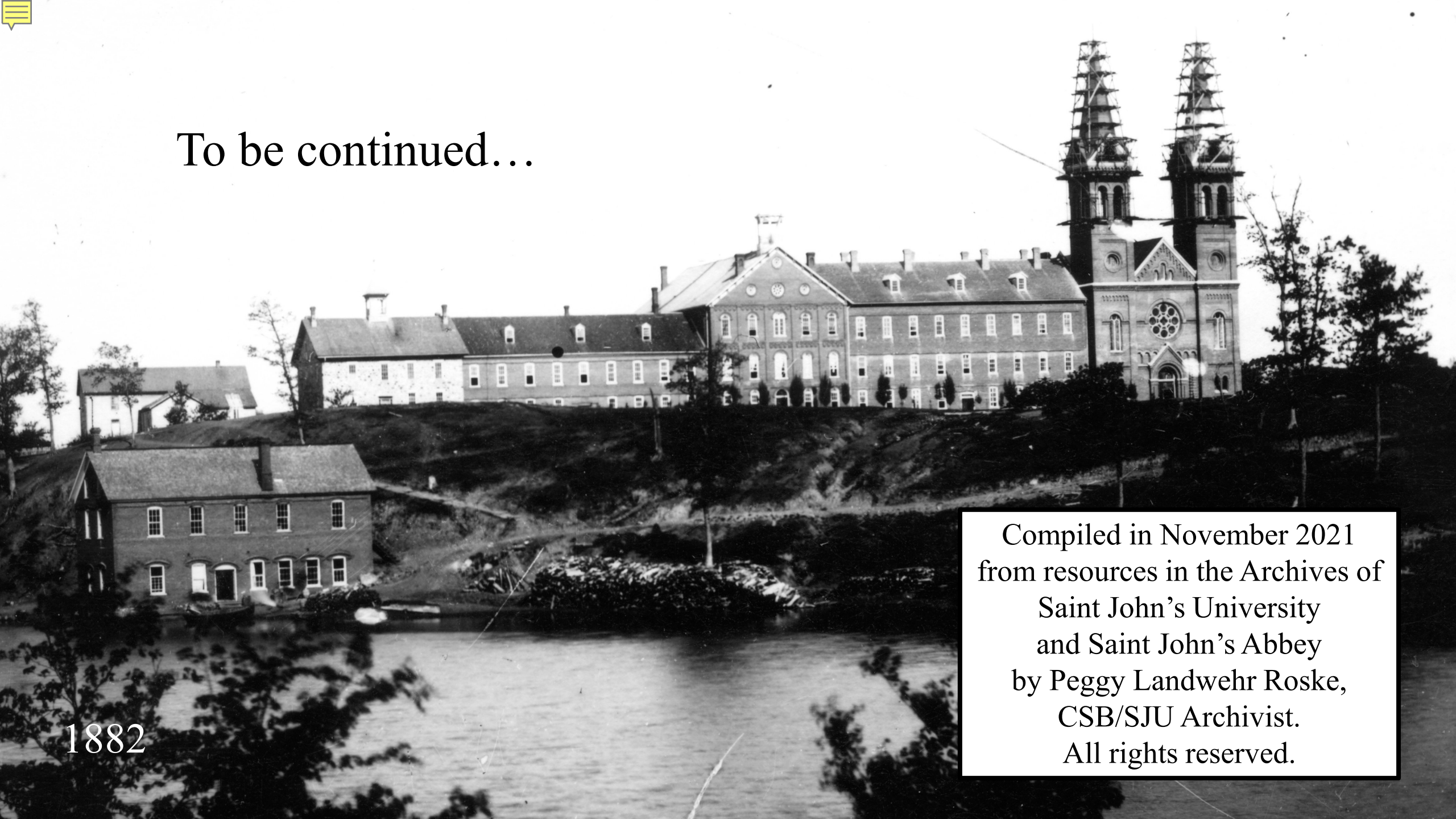
1893

1883

Thus history repeats itself. The old makes way for the new; out of the ashes the phenix arises anew. We deplore the ravages of time on objects near which so many pleasant associations cluster. In a few years the pioneer student who recollects the day when the brass band played "Home, Sweet Home" from the cupola of the edifice will return to find not the slightest trace of St. John's as it then was, save the majestic forests, the silvery lake whose gentle waves lap the sandy shores, and, above all, the cordial welcome and hospitality it ever extends, which forms the ground work of an edifice against which the tooth of time is powerless.



To be continued...



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1882