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Peter Engel, Saint John's Fourth Abbot [2022]

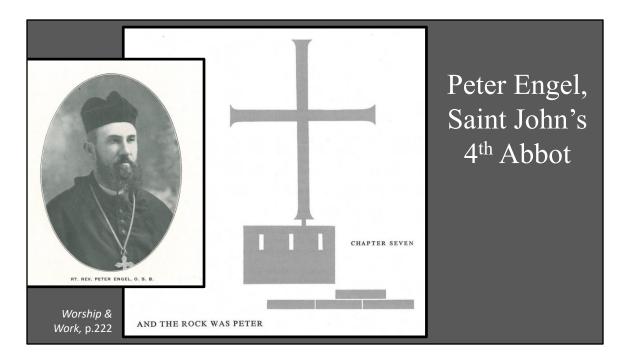
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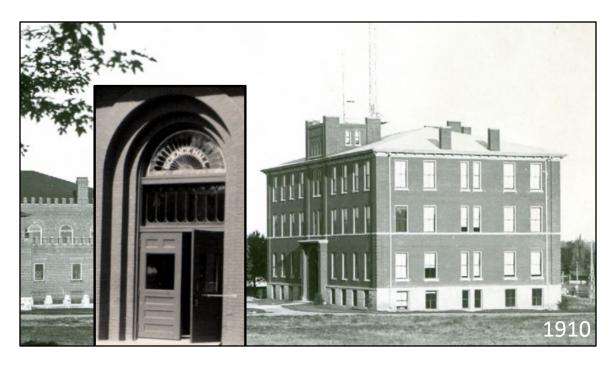
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One of the things I noticed right away when I became the SJU Archivist was the place of honor given a framed photo of Peter Engel on the wall in the Archives. It may have been there only because it was an easy place to keep it, but nonetheless I wanted to learn more about him. A few years back, I made a note to myself to do a history lesson about him in November 2021 – the 100th anniversary of his death – but I decided to save it until today, to mark the annual visit to the Assembly by our current abbot.

Photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Engel, Peter Hoffmann 112 plate.jpg

Worship & Work, p. 222



I knew that this building had initially been called simply the Science Hall, clearly labeled as such above the door...(maybe not so clearly in this photo, though).

Science Hall (Engel Hall/Simons Hall)

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5804

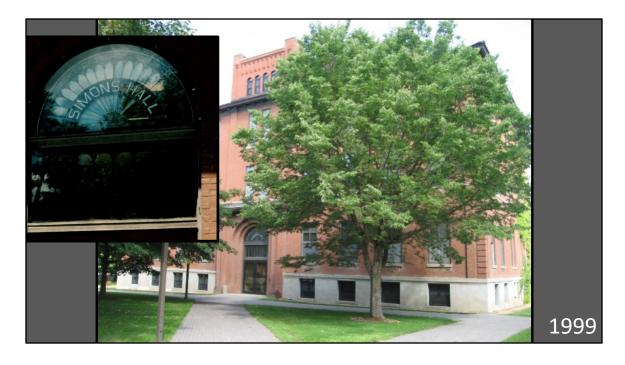


...but that it had been re-named as Engel Hall in honor of the scientist-Abbot. By the time I was a student in the 1970s, it was familiar to everyone as Engel Hall, but the connection to the sciences had been lost....

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\image01 Engel Hall Apr 1997.tif



...with the 1965 construction of this building, which, for over 30 years, was known simply as the Science Hall. From the mid-1960s, all the science classes were held in this building. It was finally given a name, the Peter Engel Science Center, in 1999... O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Peter Engel Science\PEngel 2006.jpg



...when the former Science Hall/Engel Hall was renovated and re-named in honor of the renovation donors, the Simons family.

Simons Hall south view 2006 plr photo

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/59

 $\underline{https://apps.csbsju.edu/csbarchives/TimeLineDetails.aspx?id=200}$

Hall\...renaming 1999...



Not coincidentally, 1999, the year that the current Science Hall was renamed the Peter Engel Science Center – aka the "Pengel" – was the same year that the building we still know only as the "New' Science Center" was dedicated. (20-some years later, it's no longer "new," but it, too, will probably need to await a major renovation before it gets named in honor of a big donor!)

<u>New Science Center</u> https://www.csbsju.edu/sju-archives/sjuhistory/sjubuildings/new-science-center Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\New Science



But back to Peter. Like our present abbot, he was raised in rural Minnesota. Born on February 3, 1856, two months before the monks arrived in St. Cloud, he came to St. John's from St. Michael in 1869, was sent to St. Vincent's for his novitiate, made simple vows before Abbot Boniface Wimmer there in 1875, and returned to St. John's to teach and continue studying. He was ordained in 1878. Without going into the details, there was a lot of turmoil in the community when the 2nd abbot resigned in 1890, and not all of the bad feelings had been healed before the early death of the 3rd abbot. Peter Engel only very reluctantly accepted his election as 4th abbot in 1894.

Peter Engel's early life is recounted by him on p. 224 of Worship & Work.

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11158

Text info: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\People\ABBEY OSBs\Engel, Peter,

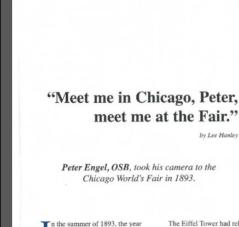
OSB From fundraising doc for New Science Bldg, in Bldgs box.pdf

Left image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\People\ABBEY OSBs\Engel,

Peter, OSB From fundraising doc for New Science Bldg, in Bldgs box.pdf

Right image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Parish slide

27 Peter Engel portrait.jpg



Actor Actions

Abbot Peter Engel, OSB, 1856-1921

n the summer of 1893, the year before his election as the fourth abbot of Saint John's Abbey, or Father Peter—professor of chemistry and physics and an avid photography buff—took his camera to the Chicago World's Fair and left us a remarkable

record of his visit.

The Eiffel Tower had relegated the Washington Monument to second place among the earth's tallest structures. In addition to Chicago beating out New York in a congressional vote to determine the host city, the project's planners, architects and artisans survived major fires and lousy weather to complete the 633-acre

Holmes set up his office and crematorium at the far end of the spanking new "El" train line carrying folks to the fair and there he lured young women into his office and murdered them.

The Columbian Exposition was a dazzling showcase for cutting edge

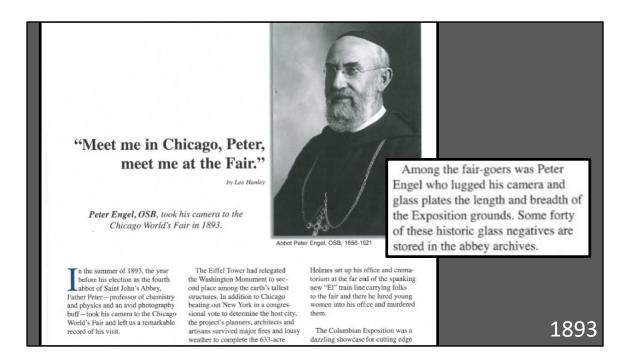
The Columbian Exposition was a dazzling showcase for cutting edge products and technology. It was the first event of its kind to be powered and lit by electricity—thus the "White City" moniker. Telephone lines made it possible to broadcast live a New York orchestra concert. Other new products included Thomas Edison's motion picture machine, Cracker Jacks, Shredded Wheat, Cream of Wheat, Quaker Oats, Aunt Jemima pancake mix, Juicy Fruit gum, diet carbonated soda and Pabst beer.

The term "Midway" for the fair's central corridor was coined here, and there was a 166-foot high "wheel" designed by Pittsburgh bridge-builder George Ferris. This was the first Ferris wheel with thirty-six glass-enclosed cars, each of which accommodated sixty passengers or a total of 2,160 at one time. The White City

1893

In 2008, a few years after I became the archivist, the *Abbey Banner* published this article by Lee Hanley about Peter Engel's trip to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. This was a year before he became Abbot. The Fair featured electricity, telephone lines, a new motion picture machine, and the first "Midway," featuring a huge revolving wheel with glass-enclosed carriages designed by a bridge builder named George Ferris.

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/24385/rec/3 2008 Volume 08 Issue 01 Abbey Banner



The *Banner* article noted that Fr. Peter had lugged his camera all over the Fair to take photos, in those days on glass plate negatives – plates which have been preserved in the Abbey Archives.

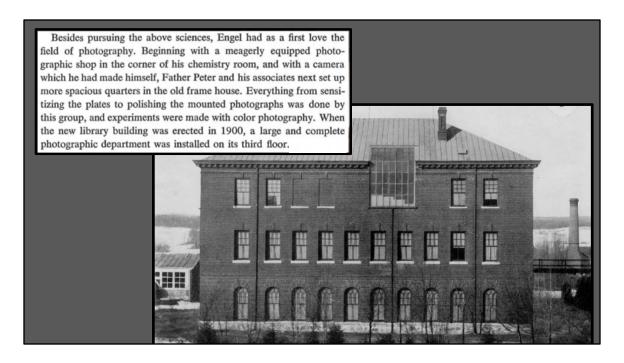
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/24385/rec/3 2008 Volume 08 Issue 01 Abbey Banner



Hardly a day goes by that I don't feel gratitude to Peter Engel for his photographic efforts. Many of my "history lessons" would be pretty bland – or even impossible – if he hadn't had the ability, the foresight and the *image*-ination [pun intended!] to preserve St. John's history in photographs such as this one, with includes Fr. Peter on the right.

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Matted Photos\PC07 Box 08\PC07 Box 8 no 06 Fr Peter Engel, Otto, Justin, Fidelis 1891.jpg

Matted Photos Box 8 #6 (1891) L-R: 1. Fr. Charles Cannon 2. Otto Weisser 3. Fidelis Lucking 4. Ansgar Osendorf 5. Justin Welz 6. Bernard Kevenhoerster 6. Fr. Peter Engel



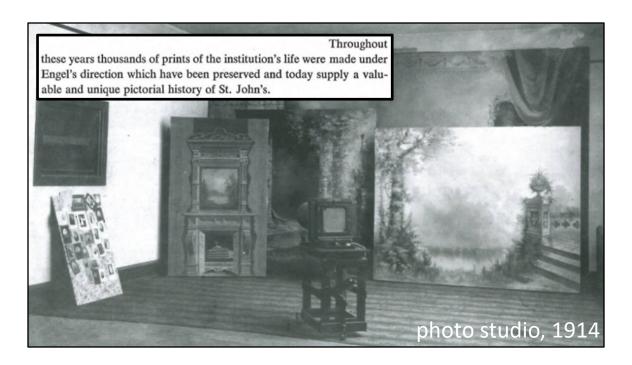
Worship & Work notes that Fr. Peter started with a camera he made himself, with a photo shop first in the corner of his chemistry room; then in the old Frame House; and later on the 3rd floor of the new library, what we know today as Wimmer Hall. It was complete with a large skylight, necessary in those days before flash photography.

Text: Worship & Work, p. 227

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11161

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Misc\Colman Barry

Notebook\Quad Porches & Wimmer Hall p139.pdf



Thousands of these photos were made and preserved. The studio in Wimmer Hall was also equipped with a selection of backdrops and furnishings such as these...

Wimmer studio in 1914 <u>2008 Volume 08 Issue 01 Abbey Banner</u>. See <u>The beginning of the St. John's Photo Studio</u>,

https://apps.csbsju.edu/csbarchives/TimeLineDetails.aspx?id=808

Text: Worship & Work, p. 227

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11161

Image: Abbey Banner

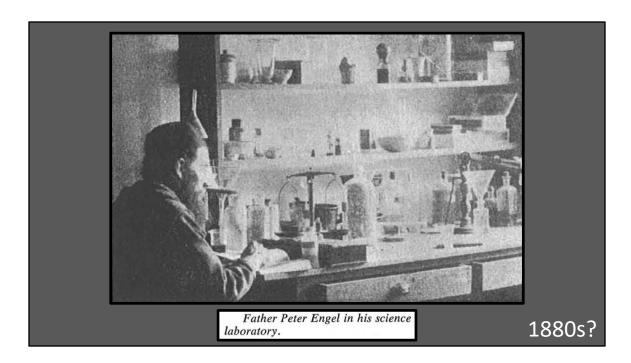


...and the galleries were also placed at the service of the local people for family portraits such as this one, which shows the Michael Joseph Roske family, including my husband's grandfather, Joe, in the center.

Text: Worship & Work, p. 227

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11161 Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascheman Coll.- historical

photos\LP184.Roskes.jpg



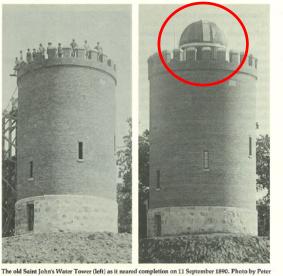
The photo studio was one manifestation of Peter Engel's mindset as the industrial age was in full swing and technology was advancing. Colman Barry writes in Worship & Work that Peter Engel understood the scientific dogma of his time, and used it to contribute to the Church's effort to synthesize progress with faith and tradition. In addition to photography, Peter Engel taught chemistry and physics, algebra and geometry...

Worship & Work, p. 186 of the pdf https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11083



Was I less curious than other students of the 1930s about some things which stood on the campus? If memory serves me right, only once in the more than fifty years-when I walked the trails of this campus - was I inside the tower which overlooked the whole campus and stood as a guard over anyone who came near the campus. Looking more like a medieval turret than a water tower, it might well-for all I knew-have hidden a monk watching through a conning window and alerting the entrance office to the arrival of strangers. Perhaps there were heaps of stones lying on the crenellated top, perhaps even a medieval sling to repel any strangers. I never knew for I never stood atop the building.

More than once I had climbed that hill, approached the building, handled the fat padlock which secured a steel door, browsed around the area, and found a pit just north of the tower. Only once in those many trips was the lock open, and I dared to pull the steel door. Inside was the beginning of a circular wooden staircase wrapped around a huge tank. Timidly I began the dark climb, tested each step, found



The old Saint John's Water Tower (left) as it neared completion on 11 September 1890. Photo by Peter Engel 0.3.m. After the Tower was completed, a telescope was mounted on a revolving dome (right). Abbey Archives photo. 1890

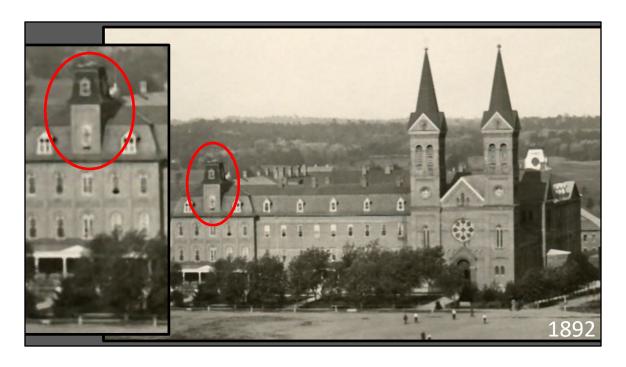
...and he also taught astronomy. He had a telescope mounted on a revolving dome when the water tower was erected in 1890. It was later moved...

Abbey Quarterly 1985

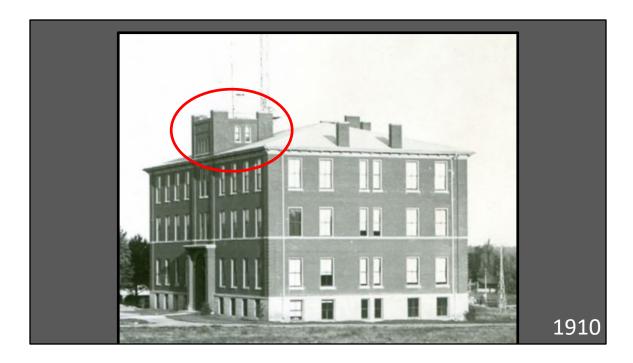


...in 1894, to the new Observatory on a hill above Lake Sagatagan, where the Prep School is today. Worship & Work says that Peter Engel's reputation as an astronomer was such that he was even considered for the job of director of the Vatican Observatory in Rome.

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\PP5\Images\003\
Worship & Work p. 227 re: Vatican Observatory.

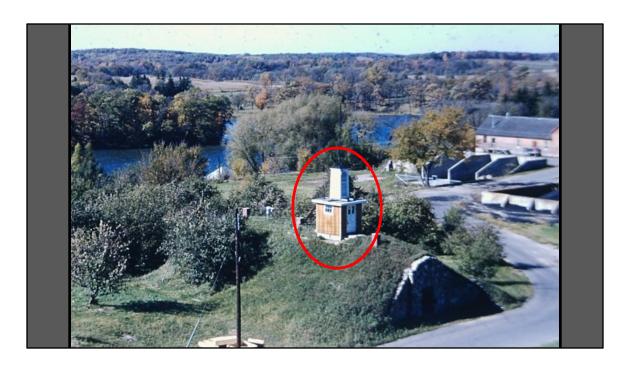


Our scientist also established Saint John's in meteorology, with a weather station mounted, at first, atop the "college tower" of the University.



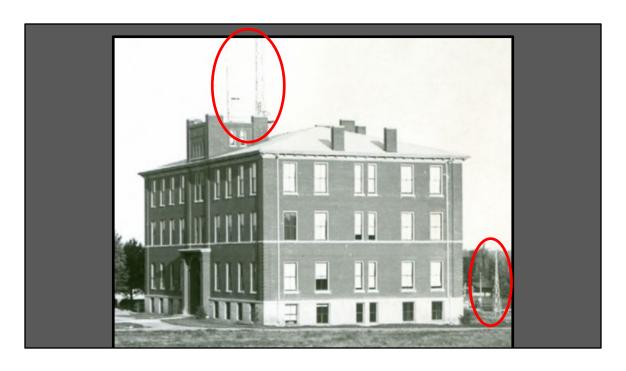
It later moved to a specially-built space at the top of the new Science Hall's stairs, and the daily weather observations have been taken by monks and reported to the state Weather Bureau since the beginning.

Science Hall (Engel Hall/Simons Hall) https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5804



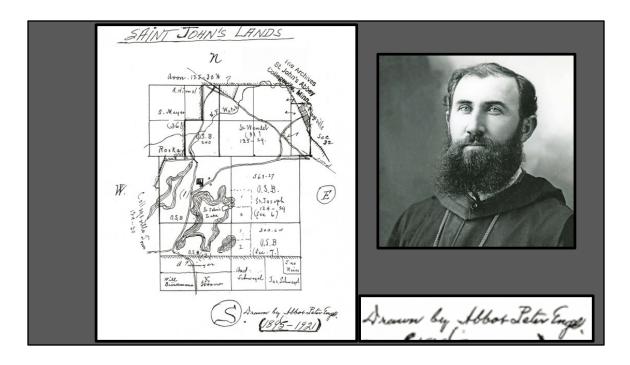
Later moved atop one of the root cellars, the weather station is monitored faithfully nowadays by Br. Neal Laloo – who sends me the weather report every month for archiving.

SJU Archives photo.



The top of the Science Hall was also a good place for the wireless telegraph and radio efforts to begin, and towers were erected on top of and next to the building. (See my 2019 history lesson about the history of Wireless at St. John's if you missed it.)

Science Hall (Engel Hall/Simons Hall) https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5804



I regard this map drawn by Peter Engel as one manifestation of his abilities in geography...

Portrait: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\LP171.4thAb.P.Engel.jpg

The Archives St. John's Abbay Collegeville, Min. Bird Notes MSS of late abbot Other Long of	March 5, 1903 Diving to Farming pass quite a number of horned lasks stocons alposingalso, chickadees, Mas 29 Clue birds more numerous than I remember, here over two cocks already. Robins somehere over a week, crows - Jose to day a flock of 27 getse going forthwess. Juncoes (State colored)
1908 - Nov. 11 - Something unusital was the his of a large flock of waxwings he bees of st John's corneture is morning slight or a large flock of waxwings is morning slight ornastruries (Umpelis gasulus) on the trees of A John's Cornetery Sew an equally large flock of Maxwings on funific trees on Remetery. Dies and Sake froze over last night, but it will likely	

...and Colman Barry notes that Abbot Peter also "studied ornithology privately" – for which I found evidence in the Archives, in this notebook of "Bird Notes" taken by Peter Engel in the early 1900s.

2020 f35 Engel, Peter and Thelen, Lambert (Bird Notes) Observations



Under Abbot Peter's watch, electricity came to Saint John's, horticultural developments took place (such as Fr. John Katner's "alpha grape"), and a fish hatchery provided food and sport for the students and monks.

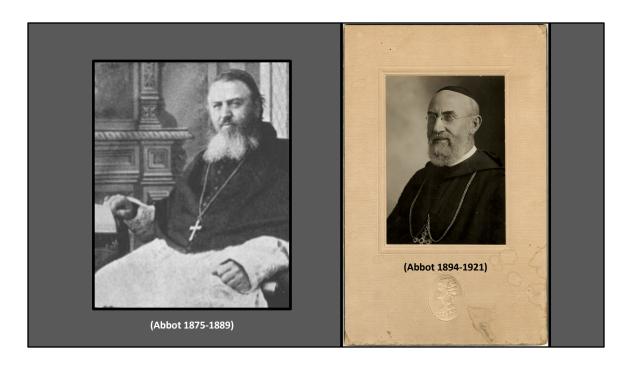
Left: Photo #74 in Worship & Work

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11084; description about grapes p. 236

Photo #72 in Worship & Work

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11084; description about Fish hatchery p. 238

P. 227- ELECTRICITY



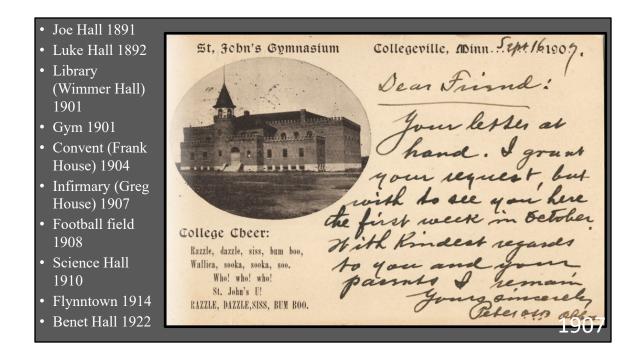
St. John's second abbot, Alexius Edelbrock, is generally regarded as "The Builder" – since it was during his leadership that the Quad was built. But Peter Engel's term as abbot saw a lot of building, too.

Left: Alexius Edelbrock, photo #39 in Worship & Work

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/10992

Right: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Abbot Peter Engel

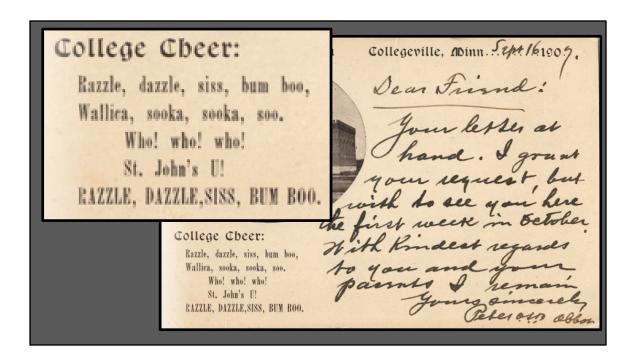
Matted photos Box 16 #56 PC07.0535



The expansion of the campus during Abbot Peter's term was remarkable: Joe Hall, ... [etc.] The Gym was featured on this postcard which Abbot Peter mailed in 1907. 084/7 (Box 1:45) St. John's Gymnasium Postcard.

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\PP5\Images\003\20150240044.jpg. The Gym was built in 1901.

Picture postcard, sent to John Cismowski, Muenster, Saskatchewan, and postmarked at Collegeville September 16, 1907.

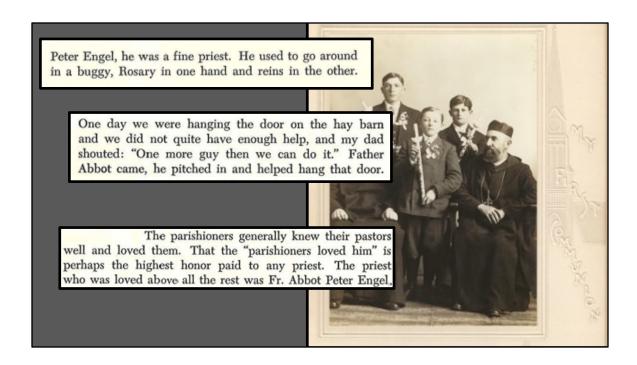


Here's a cheer for the Rats to try! [RA-zle, DA-zle, Siss – Bum – Boo]
Regarding athletics, "when the Minnesota Athletic Conference was formed, Abbot
Peter readily entered St. John's in its membership." To a dissenter he said, 'Well
now, we have to be up with the times."

084/7 (Box 1:45) St. John's Gymnasium Postcard.

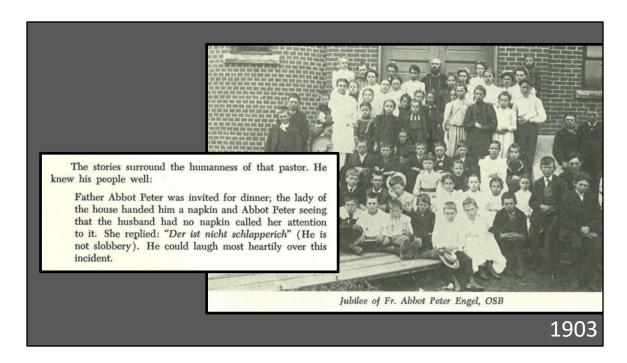
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\PP5\Images\003\20150240044.jpg. The Gym was built in 1901.

Quote from the "Green Notebook" in the SJU Archivist's office, p. 120.



Abbot Peter's responsibilities were not so heavy that he could not also serve as the pastor for the Collegeville parish, which he did from 1910-1917. He was warmly remembered in the Parish's centennial history book, *Stones & Hills*, as a fine priest. To quote a biography in the Archives: "His zeal for the local people is legendary. There was not a morning that he did not spend half an hour in the parish confessional... He knew all the local children by their first names...and always had a full pocket [of candy] for them.

Stone & Hills, chapter 3C part 3 (pp. 88-99) Text from p. 95 & p. 100 Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Three Students, Peter Engel, Anselm Ortmann 1909 Students v1 p28 no3.jpg
The biography referred to is the "Green Notebook" in the SJU Archives office, p. 118.



"Stories surround the humanness of that pastor..." but not so much his *humor*, of which I could find scant evidence. But here's one.

Stone & Hills, chapter 3C part 3 (pp. 88-99) Text from p. 95 & p. 100 https://www.csbsju.edu/documents/SJU Archives/Chapter 3C.pdf

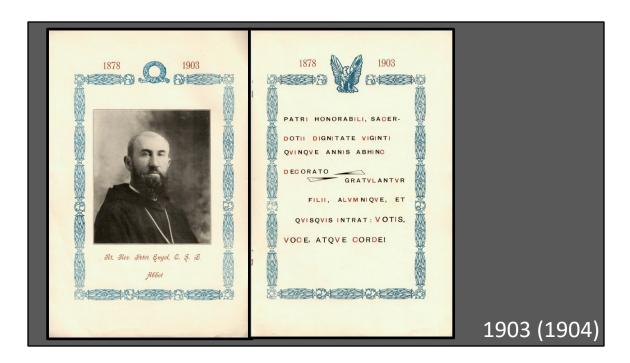


This photo is believed to be from Abbot Peter's 1903/04 Jubilee, celebrating his 25 years as a priest...

Engel Peter Jubilee program 1903 (celebrated in 1904) Box 2020 f4

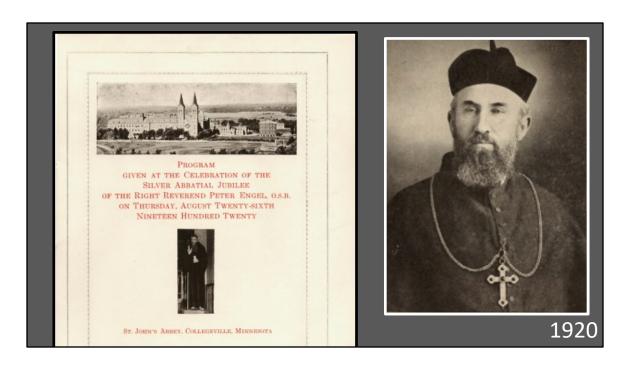
Stone & Hills, chapter 3C part 3 (pp. 88-99)

https://www.csbsju.edu/documents/SJU Archives/Chapter 3C.pdf



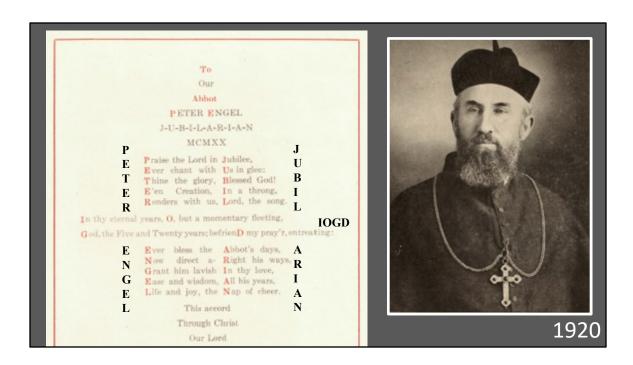
though the major celebration was delayed, from the actual anniversary in
 November 1903, until the following summer, when the festivities were combined with the 1904 Johnnie reunion.

Engel Peter Jubilee program 1903 (celebrated in 1904) Box 2020 f4 He was elected abbot in 1894, but not officially installed until 1895 (*W* & *W* p. 223), hence the dates 1903 & 1904.



We have another booklet, from his other jubilee, marking his 25th anniversary as *abbot*.

Engel Peter Jubilees program, 1920. Box 2020 f4.pdf

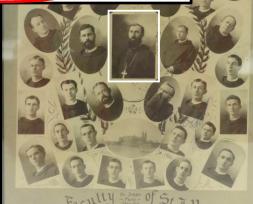


The author of this piece no doubt took some pride in his cleverness with the alphabet and the verses – and threw in an "IOGD" for good measure..

Engel Peter Jubilees program, 1920. Box 2020 f4.pdf

The lasting contributions that Abbot Peter made to St. John's itself during his long administration are more difficult to measure. These so-called intangibles were the values, the spirit and the atmosphere that gave character to his term of office and continue on at the abbey and school to the present time. This lasting contribution was, perhaps, best summed up by the monks, students and friends of St. John's who so often declared that he was deeply loved.

"Long years of self-discipline made it possible for him to live the Benedictine life as though it were a simple and easy experience... He brought to his monks spiritual confidence and inspiration through his own example."



"Abbot Peter wanted the St. John's family to grow in charity and knowledge through generous living according to the precepts of St. Benedict's Rule.

Wisely and kindly he strove for this by example and counsel."

By all accounts, Abbot Peter was more than a builder, a scientist, and a leader. His lasting contribution: "He was deeply loved."

Text: Worship and Work p. 249-250

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11191

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\PP5\Images\003\20200170001-2.jpg

"Those who too often missed morning choir could expect to have Abbot Peter knock at their rooms on his way to the choir and say: 'Father, we are just about to begin Lauds.'"

> "He was reluctant to cause pain. He asked his monks to look at the bright side of developments 'and then everything will be all right."



"He possessed an open mind, however, and did not expect his men to agree with all his views."

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Ortmann, Engel,

Communicants Box 4 No 05.jpg Text: Worship and Work p. 250

"Before giving a command or making a correction, he would prepare every word in advance, write a letter by hand and correct it, hold off and rechart his course.

He claimed that he never mastered the art of expressing his thoughts so as not to offend.

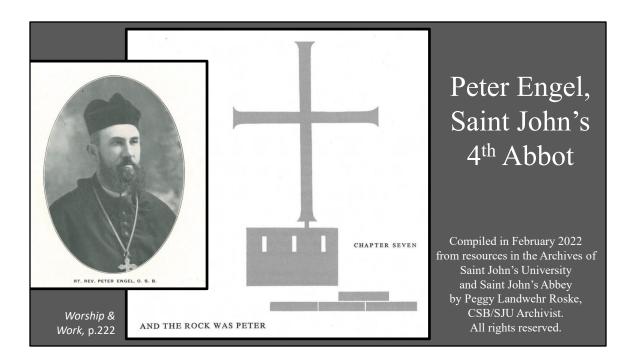
He was correct to the extent that his brief and halting public speeches were undistinguished."



Hmm, that last one seems like a backhanded complement... Except for the "slobbery" comment a few slides back, this is about as close as I got to anyone saying anything negative about Peter Engel, which didn't give me much material for humor this time around! Otherwise, he is described as prudent, patient, with an easy-going temperament (Worship & Work, p. 563, footnote 17), with "broad knowledge, persistent energy, ... love of study,, religious depth, [and with a] quiet but firm leadership (Green Notebook, p. 112).

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Engel Peter OSB Scriptorium_Vol15No01_p.92.jpg

Quotes on slide from Worship and Work p. 250



The end. But I have an addendum. I think...

Photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Engel, Peter Hoffmann 112 plate.jpg

Worship & Work, p. 222



...that this donor-less, generically-named "New Science Building" may also deserve to be named. And I suggest that the Development staff and the Powers That Be consider the name...

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\New Science



... of another chemistry professor turned Abbot. (And preferably *before* it would need to be named the "John Klassen MEMORIAL Science Center"!)

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\New Science