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## Lost Saint John's, Part 2: Mills and Greenhouses

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# “Lost” Saint John’s

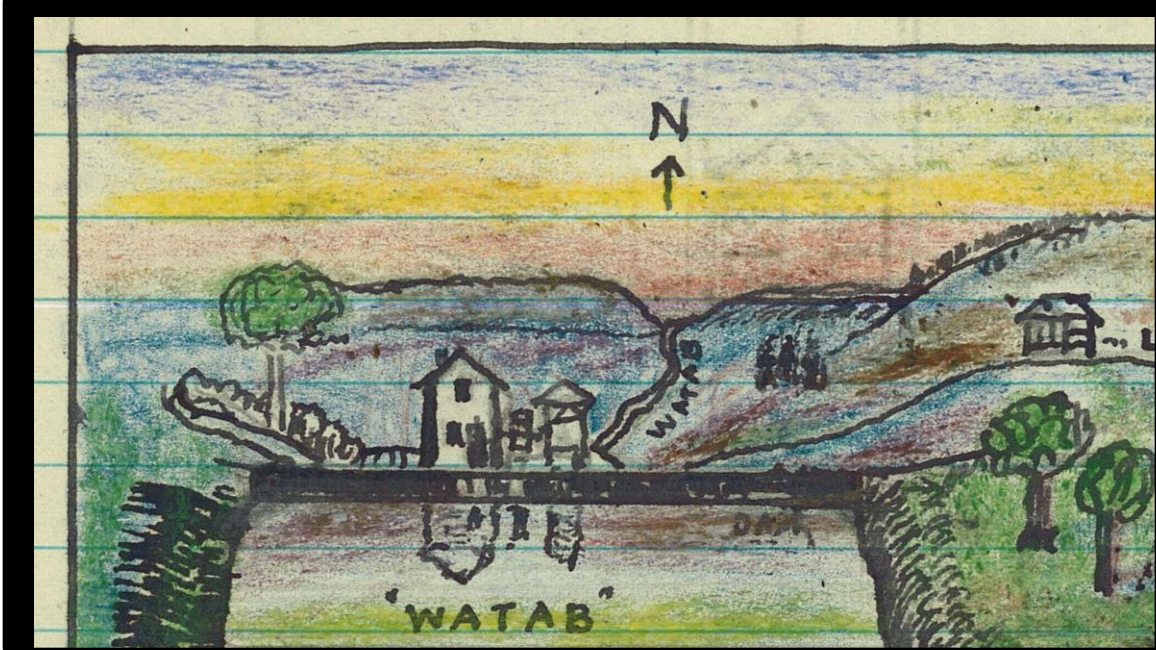
## Part 2:

## Mills & Greenhouses



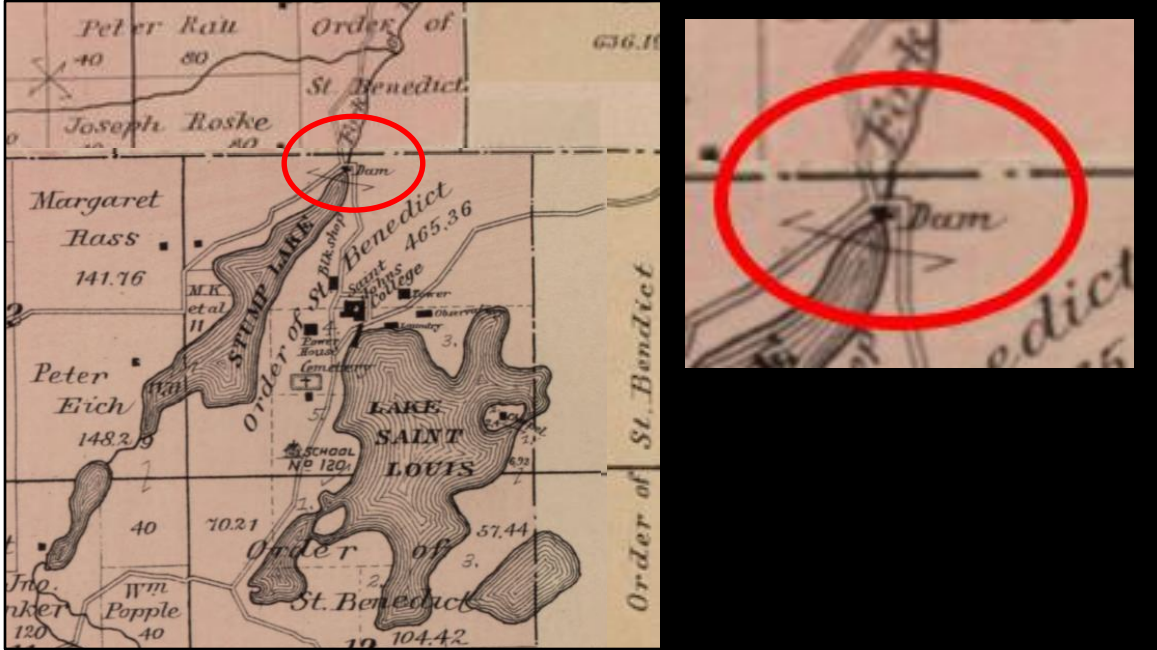
(Buildings *LOST* - as opposed to just *MOVED*)

**Remarks:** Welcome to the second installment of my occasional series I’m calling “Lost’ Saint John’s” – with a nod to PBS and its episodes of “Lost Minneapolis” - “Lost St. Paul” - and “Lost Duluth.” Last time, I covered the St. Cloud Priory, the Indianbush buildings, and the Old Stone House, and if you missed it, you can see it as a pdf in Digital Commons or linked from the Archives’ websites. This time, I’m going to tell you about some utilitarian buildings.



As with “Part 1,” some of the earliest structures at St. John’s aren’t represented in the Archives in *photos*. Last time, I shared Alexius Hoffmann’s sketch of the buildings at “Indianbush.” I’m beginning today with another sketch by Father Alexius, this time of the *sawmill* and *flour mill* that were built on the dammed-up Watab River.

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg



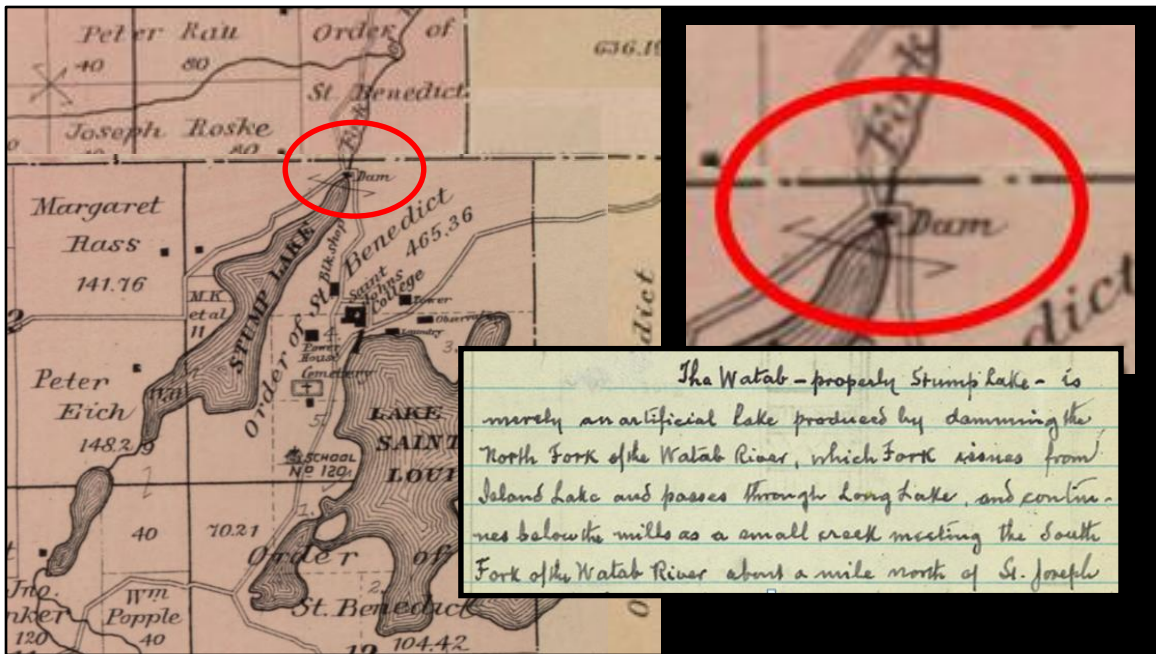
**You can see the dam marked on this 1896 plat map showing part of the Collegeville and Avon townships.**

1896 Plat maps\Collegeville Twnship NE 1896 cropped;  
1896 Plat maps\St Joseph Twnship NW 1896

<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/stearns/id/389/rec/1>

p. 27, Avon Township; p. 43, Collegeville Township

Text image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg



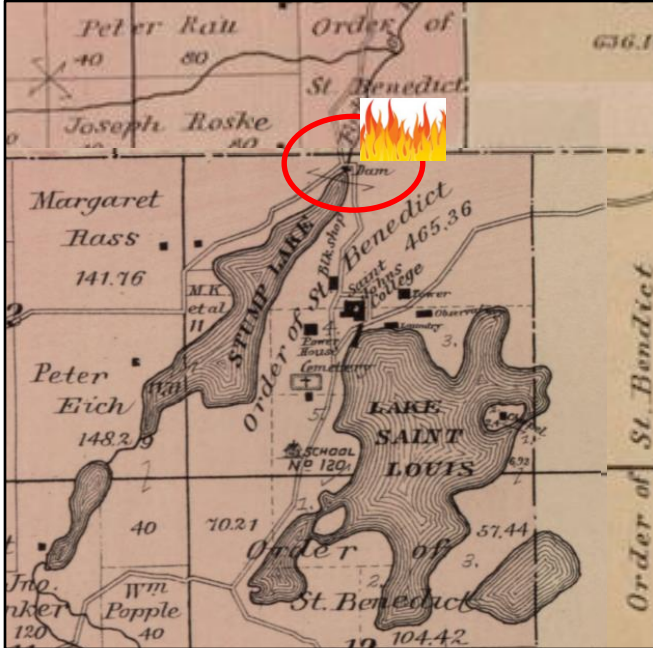
**Alexius writes: “The Watab – properly Stump Lake – is merely an artificial lake produced by damming the north fork of the river, which issues from Island Lake...and continues below the mills as a creek meeting the south fork of the Watab River about a mile north of St. Joe.”**

1896 Plat maps\Collegeville Twntship NE 1896 cropped; 1896 Plat maps\St Joseph Twntship NW 1896

<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/stearns/id/389/rec/1>

p. 27, Avon Township; p. 43, Collegeville Township

Text image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg



"In the early spring of 1868, a saw mill was erected on the bank of the north fork of Watab Creek...

This mill, located east of the present course of Watab Creek, was destroyed by fire on February 16, 1873."

*Scriptorium* 1953 v.13 n.2 p.75

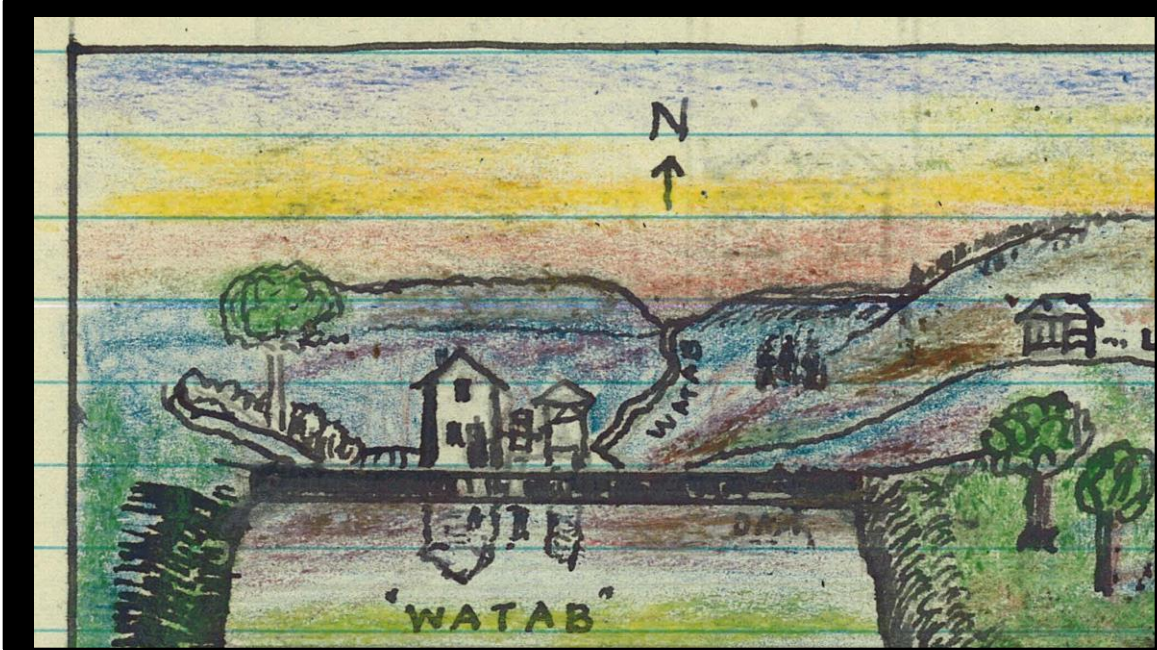
***Scriptorium*, a now-defunct publication of St. John's, documented the history of the Abbey. A *Scriptorium* article noted that, in the spring of 1868, a sawmill was built on Watab Creek, and that it was destroyed by fire in 1873.**

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>

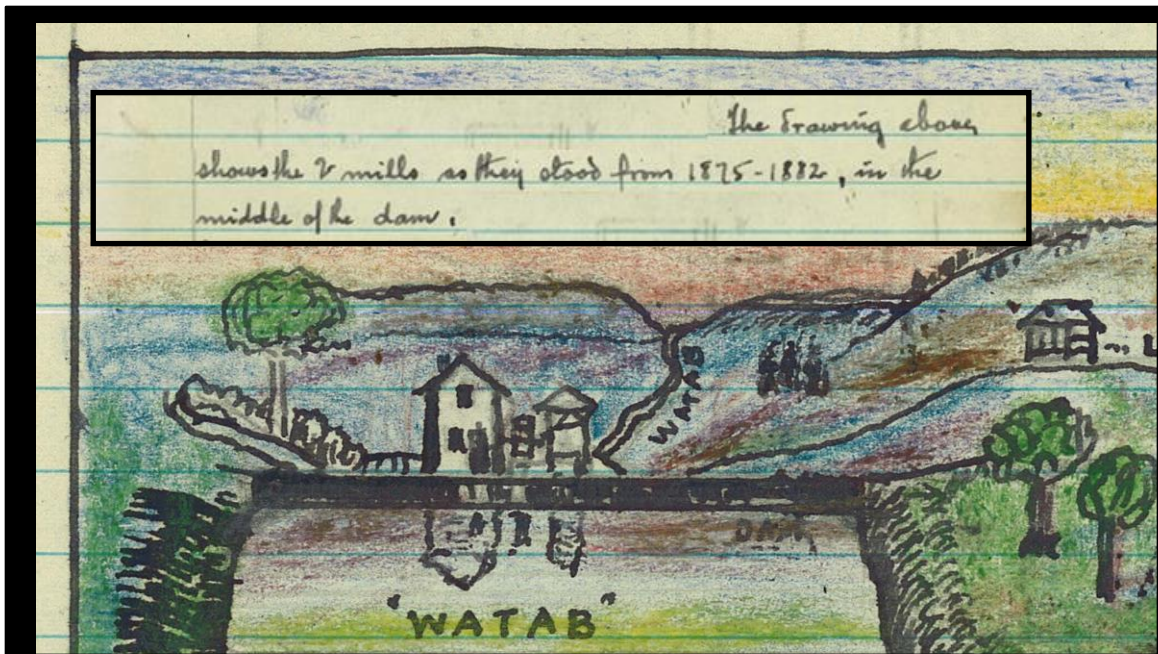
p. 27, Avon Township; p. 43, Collegeville Township

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3659/show/3617>



So actually this sketch by Fr. Alexius is *not* of that first mill that burned down in 1873. It's of the next one – or rather the next two, one a sawmill, and one to mill four – that replaced it. Alexius explains:

Images: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg



**“The drawing...shows the two mills as they stood from 1875-1882, in the middle of the dam.”**

Images: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg





**And, because St. John's photography studio got underway in 1880, we actually do have photographic evidence of these early – though not the earliest – mills.**

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Mills from A Visual History ppt.jpg

After the first sawmill had burned in 1873, a larger one with a gristmill had been erected closer to the banks of the Watab. One waterwheel did service for both.  
*Scriptorium* Dec. 1954

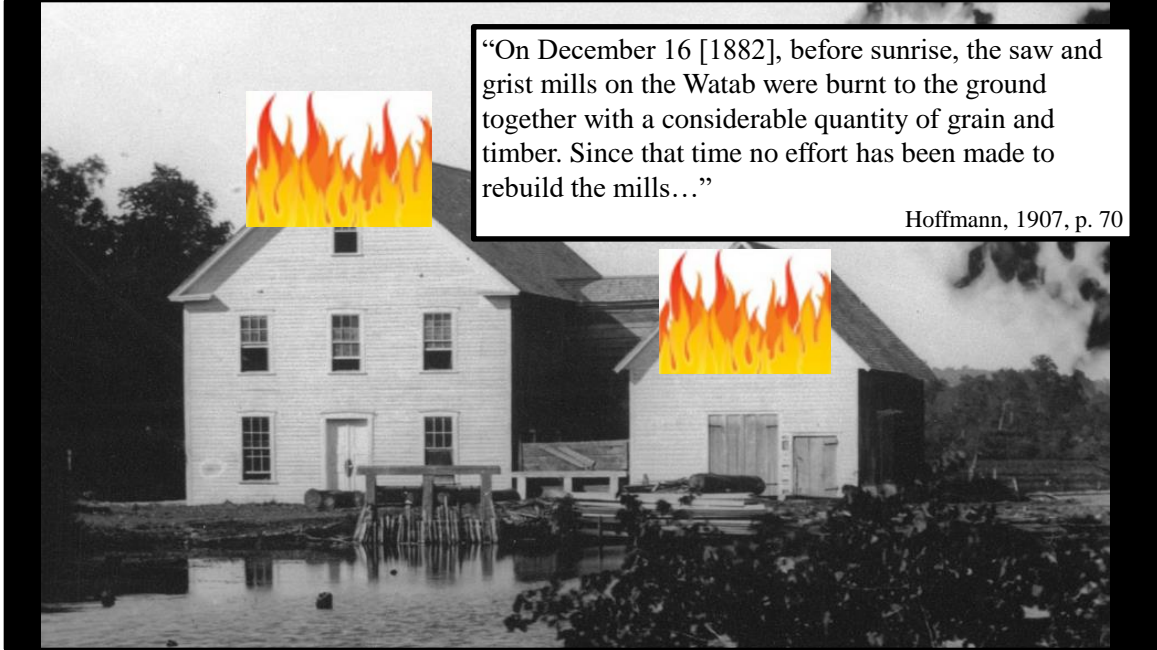


**Another *Scriptorium* article tells us that “after the first mill burned in 1873, a larger one, with a gristmill, had been erected closer to the banks of the Watab. One waterwheel did service for both.”**

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. 42

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3538/show/3451>

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Flour and Saw Mill edited&flipped.jpg



**Alexius relates the story of what happened: In December 1882, the mills burnt to the ground, along with “a considerable quantity of grain and lumber” inside. After that, these mills were not rebuilt (although they *did* have sawmills after that – ones that weren’t powered by the Watab River dam).**

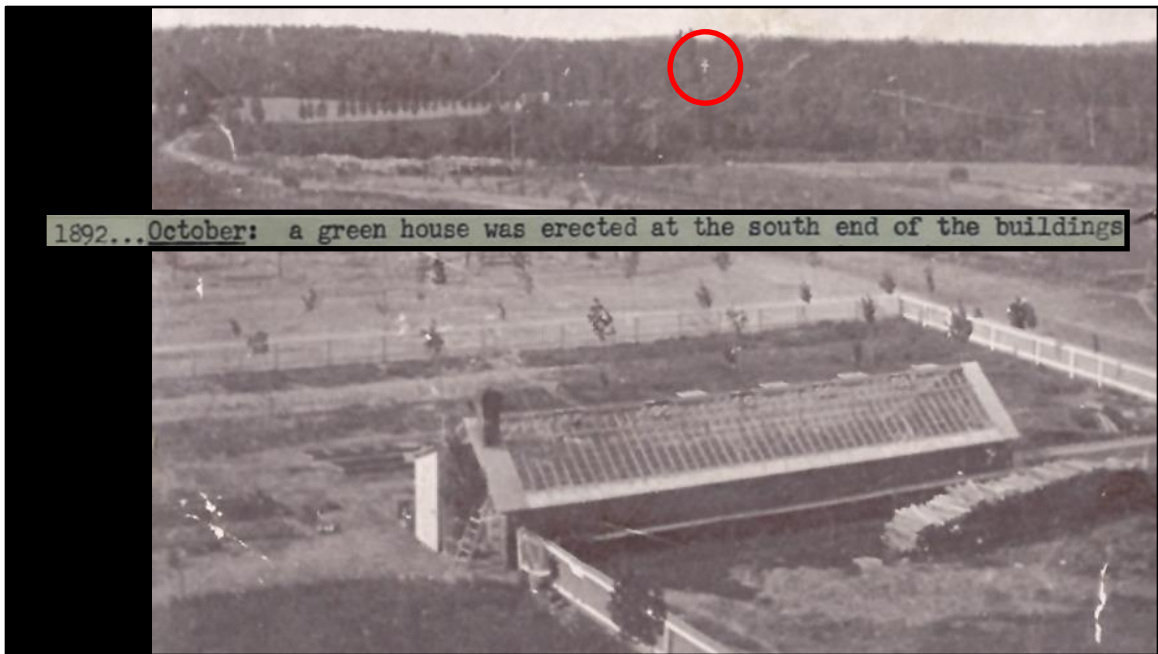
Text: Hoffmann, *SJU: A Sketch of Its History*, 1907, p. 70

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Flour and Saw Mill edited&flipped.jpg



**We even have photographic evidence of the aftermath of the mill fire.**


O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Mills\Ruins of our mills 1883 Physical Plant binder.jpg



**In the interest of connecting today's history lesson to the main topic, I'm going to skip ahead by about ten years and talk about another feature that Saint John's used in its efforts toward Benedictine sustainability – greenhouses. Here we have a late 1800s photograph, apparently taken from an upper window of Wimmer Hall – where the photo studio was located - looking south toward the cemetery. (You can see the white cross among the trees off in the distance.) Here, in 1892, "a green house was erected at the south end of the buildings."**


Text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey Notebook - green, in SJUArchives\Abbey Notebook.pdf, p. 43

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 23 conservatory about 1898.jpg



After the observatory had been finished, work was begun on the greenhouse at the northwest corner of the quadrangle. The conservatory built here in 1892 had been pretty well flattened by the storm, so it

I don't think this is a photo of that very first greenhouse, which was short-lived. Its fate is related in an old chronology in the Archives, which says that the 1892 conservatory "had been pretty well flattened by the storm" – meaning, the 1894 tornado. Text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey Notebook - green, in SJUArchives\Abbey Notebook.pdf, p. 43  
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 23 conservatory about 1898.jpg

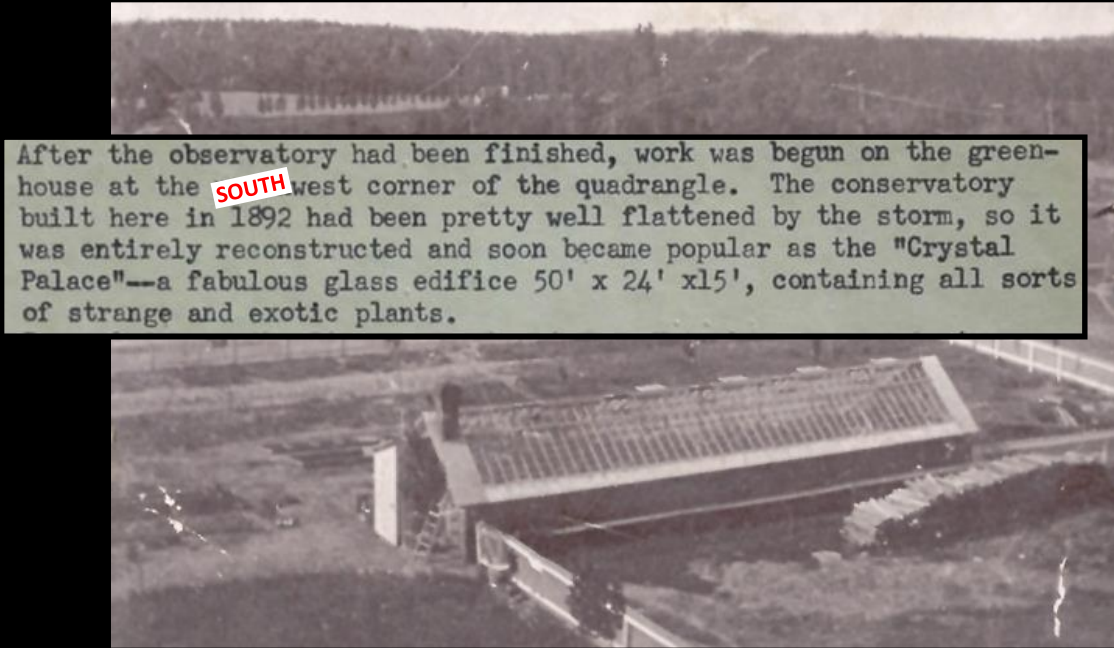


After the observatory had been finished, work was begun on the greenhouse at the **SOUTH**west corner of the quadrangle. The conservatory built here in 1892 had been pretty well flattened by the storm, so it

So work was “begun on the greenhouse at the northwest corner of the quadrangle.” (The writer is directionally challenged here; he had to have meant the **SOUTH**west corner of the Quad.)

Text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey Notebook - green, in SJUArchives\Abbey Notebook.pdf, p. 43

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 23 conservatory about 1898.jpg



After the observatory had been finished, work was begun on the greenhouse at the **SOUTH** west corner of the quadrangle. The conservatory built here in 1892 had been pretty well flattened by the storm, so it was entirely reconstructed and soon became popular as the "Crystal Palace"—a fabulous glass edifice 50' x 24' x 15', containing all sorts of strange and exotic plants.

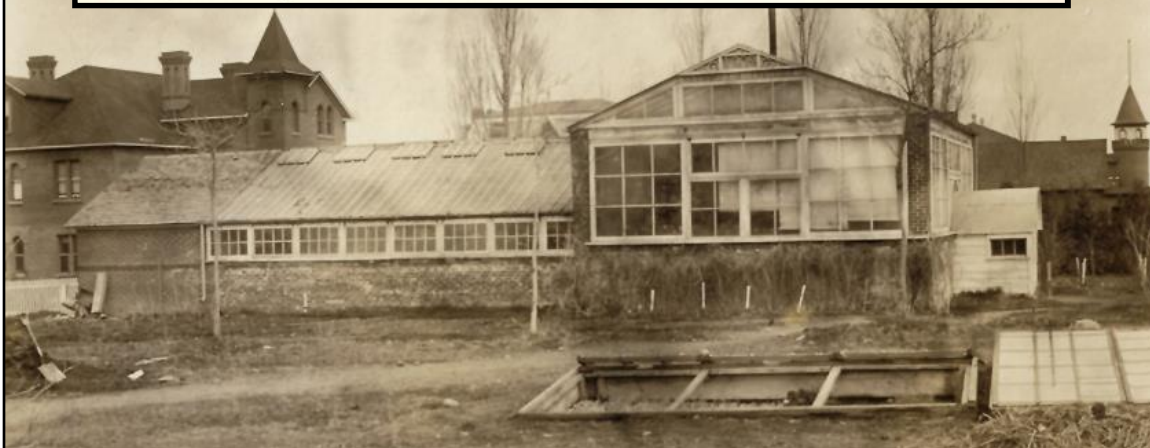
**The greenhouse “was entirely reconstructed and soon became popular as the “Crystal Palace” – a reference to the one built for the London World’s Fair in 1851. The new greenhouse was “a fabulous glass edifice 50’ x 24’ x 15’, containing all sorts of strange and exotic plants.”**

Text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey Notebook - green, in SJUArchives\Abbey Notebook.pdf, p. 43

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 22 greenhouse.jpg



During the year 1902 a new green-house 75 X 20 was built south of the new library building



**The so-called “Crystal Palace” greenhouse didn’t last all that long, either. Less than ten years later, in 1902, a new greenhouse was built “south of the new library building” – i.e. Wimmer Hall – that was 75 feet long and 20 feet wide. It was “Predominantly used to grow flowers for liturgical use and campus beautification...Vegetables were also raised for consumption.”**

Quote from photo caption from O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascherman Coll.-historical photos\

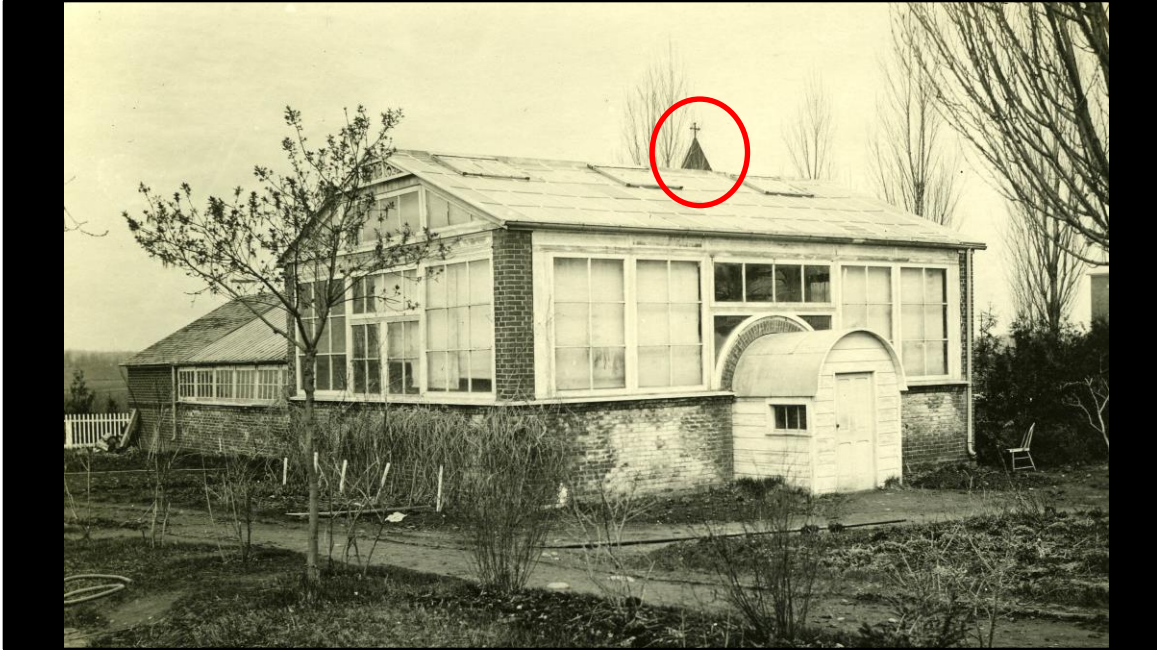
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 22 greenhouse.jpg

Inset text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Publications\BOOKS\Hoffmann History of Saint John's Abbey, University, Missions\History of St. John's Chapter 8.pdf p. 227, p. 15 of the pdf



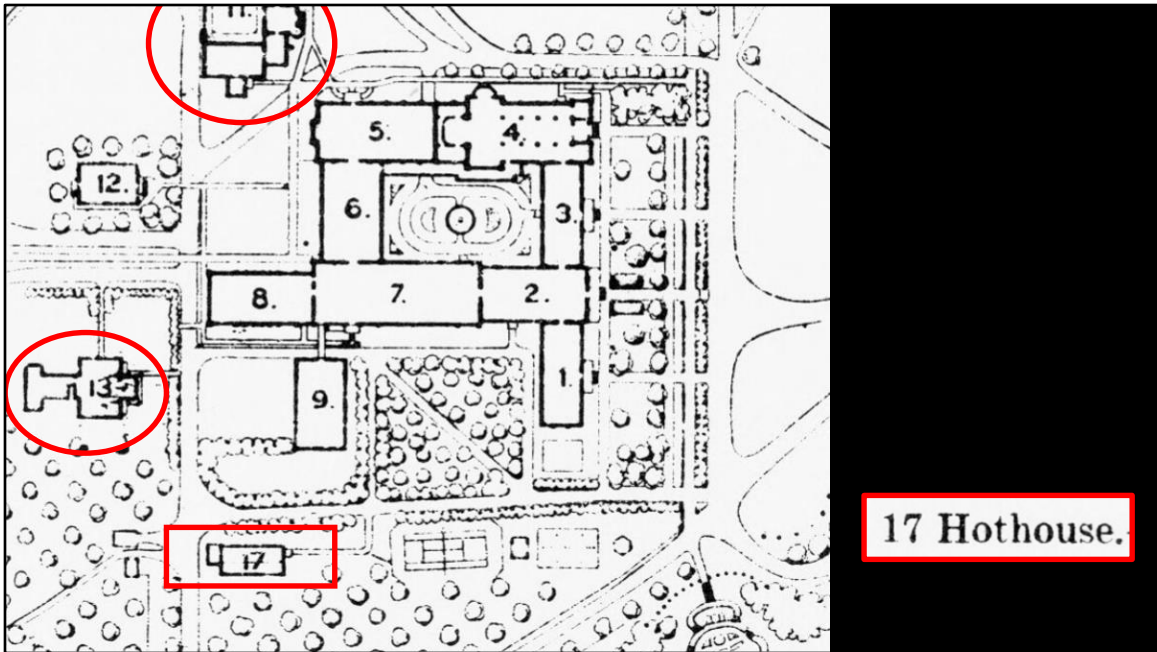
**Note the Old Gym [1901] turret and St. Francis (or Frank) House [1904] in the distance.**

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 22 greenhouse.jpg



**Here's another view of the greenhouse of the early 1900s. The steeple and cross atop Frank House can be seen behind it.**

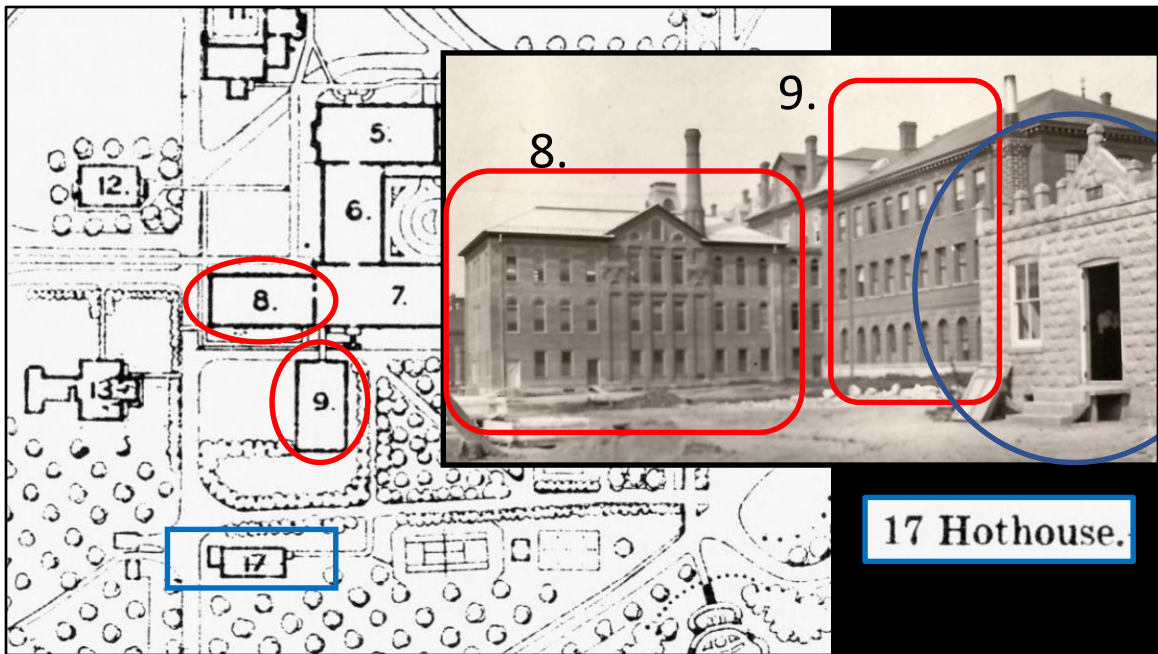
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascherman Coll.- historical photos\LP025.1910.Greenhouse



**A campus map in the 1914-1915 *Catalogue* shows the locations of the Old Gym, Frank House, and the greenhouse or “hothouse.”**

1914-1915: SJU Drawing from the 1914-1915 edition of the *Catalogue*, inserted between pages 4 and 5

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5899>



...but at some point, the greenhouse or hothouse was rebuilt, because photos in the Archives show Luke Hall, built in 1912, and Wimmer Hall, built in 1901, with a neighboring building that looks different from the ones in the earlier photos.

1914-1915: SJU Drawing from the 1914-1915 edition of the Catalogue, inserted between pages 4 and 5

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5899>

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 26 Luke, Wimmer & Greenhouse PEngel postcard.jpg



1915

*Greenhouse - July, 1915 -*

**This photo in the Abbey Archives has a July 1915 date for this greenhouse...**

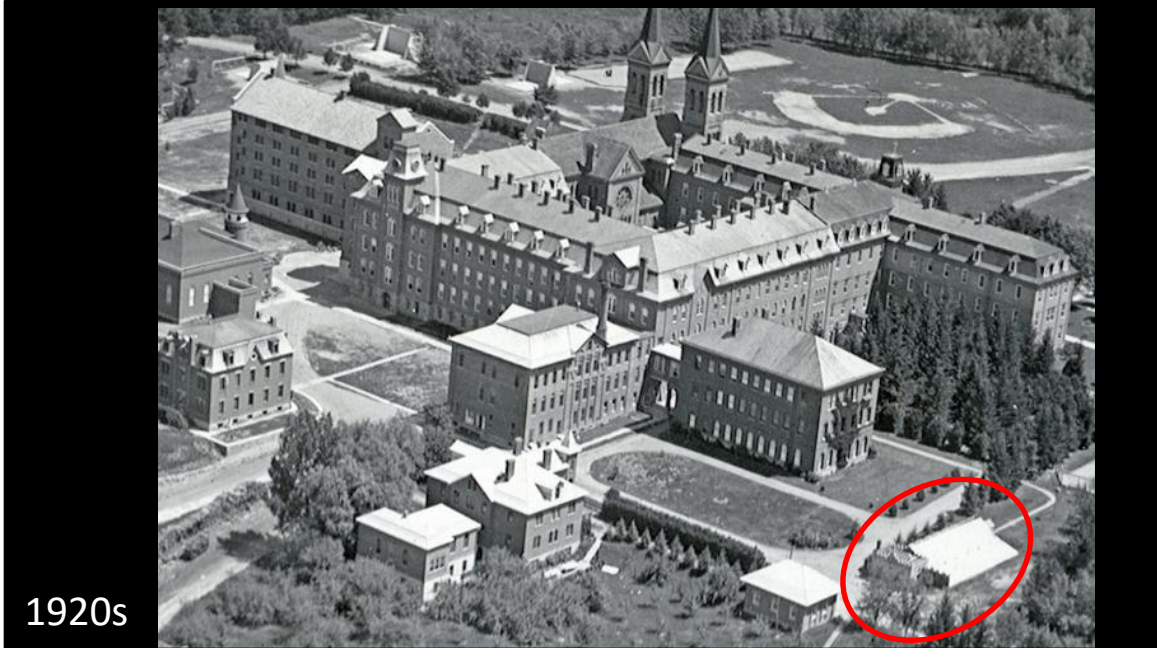
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 25 Greenhouse July 1915.jpg



**...and this photo, from 1916, shows Wimmer Hall (then the new library) and the southeast monastery wing, as well as what was behind the castle-like façade of this greenhouse. Its sesquicentennial caption says: "About 7,000 plants were grown here annually and set out to lend color to the shrines and lawns on campus. Besides the floral section, there was a green vegetable room and a fernery."**

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 28 Greenhouse Aug 1916 by Fr. Rembert card stock

Quoted text from caption to O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascherman Coll.-historical photos\LP026.1916.Greenhouse.jpg

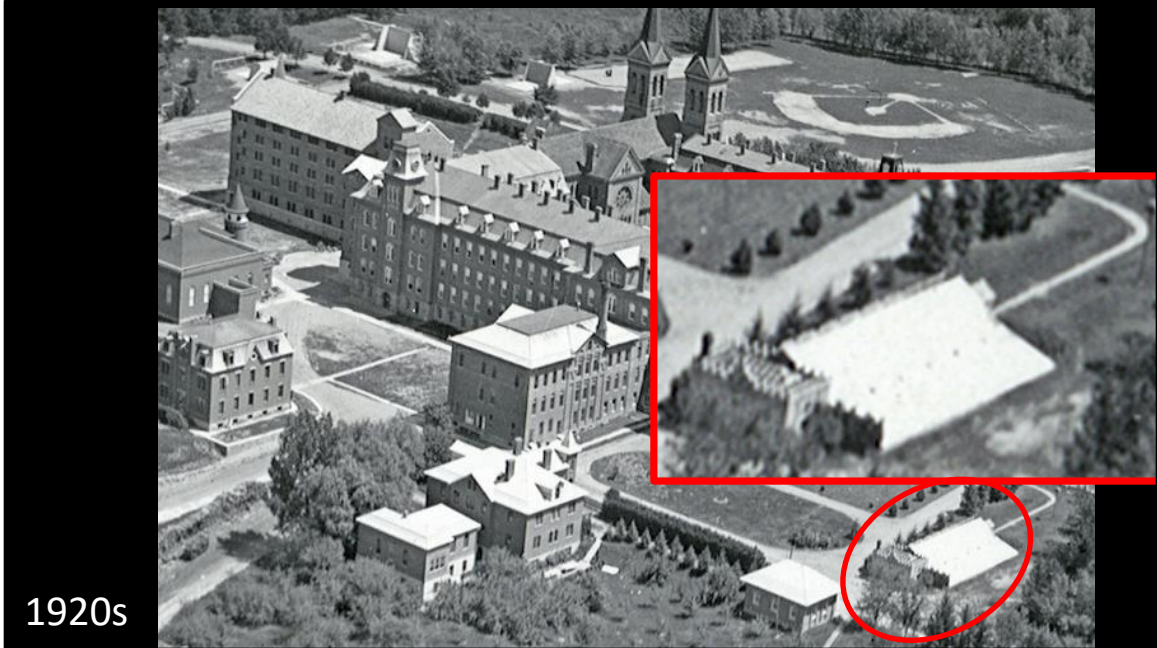


**You can see the greenhouse plainly in this 1920s aerial photo...**

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascheman Coll.- historical photos\LP186.1920s.AerialView.jpg

Also here: <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/6307>

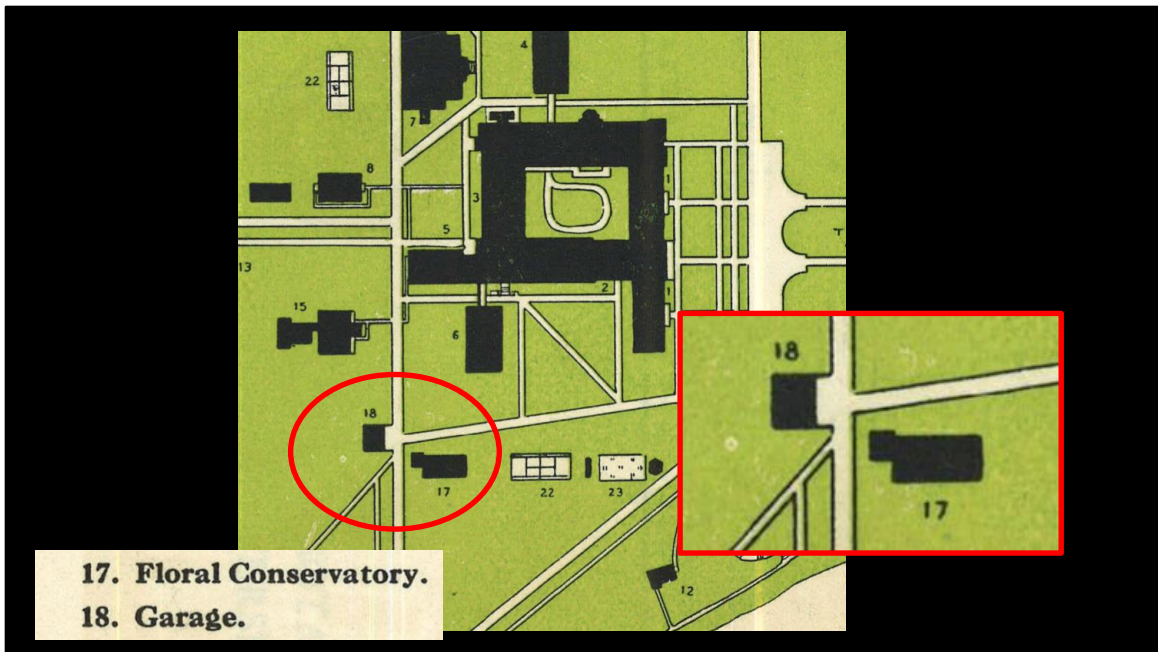




**...although it's a bit fuzzy when you zoom in.**

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascheman Coll.- historical photos\LP186.1920s.AerialView.jpg

Also here: <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/6307>



It's also plainly labelled on this campus map from the early 1920s, as the "Floral Conservatory." *Note also that there is a garage just west of the greenhouse.*  
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/6283>

## *New Green House To Grace Campus*

Brother Placid, our renowned floral artist, is to have a new house with enlarged quarters. The old green house, of late years inadequate in space for the extensive work of Brother Placid will disappear and the present site will



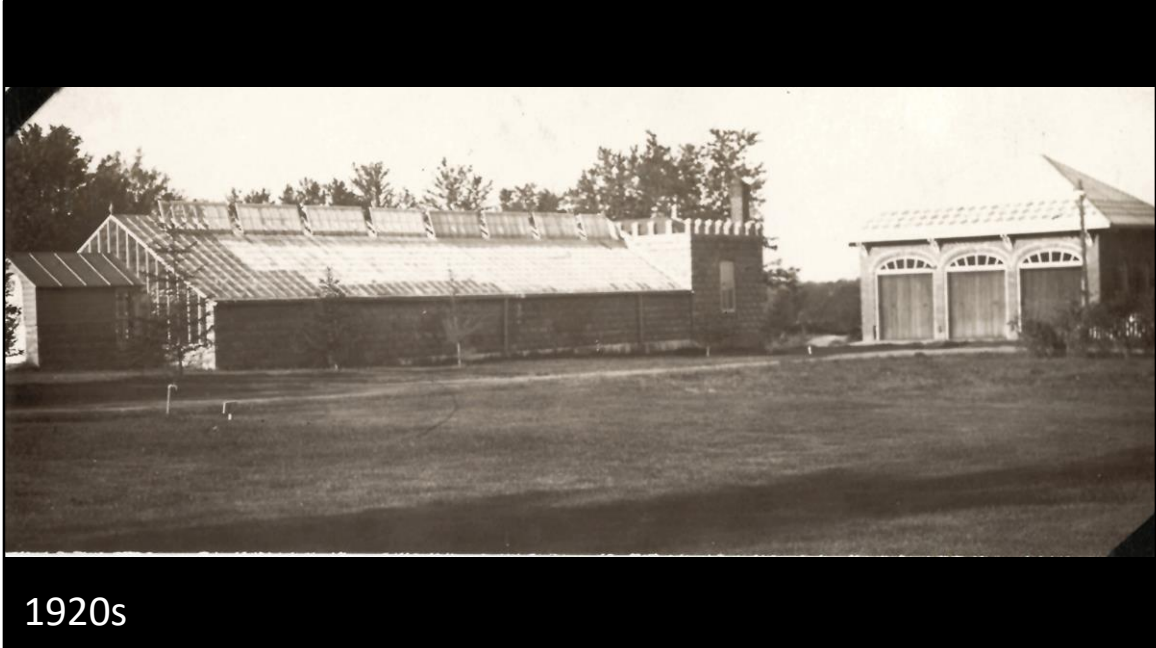
be converted into park purposes to enhance the southern grounds of the abbey. The new floral house, longer by twenty feet than the present one, will be constructed with the garage building now standing opposite the green house, as its head.

*The Record* June 3, 1926

**An article in a June 1926 issue of *The Record* says that the old greenhouse, “of late years inadequate in space...will disappear,” and its site will be converted to Abbey park grounds. A new greenhouse will be constructed with the garage building now standing opposite it as its new front.**

*The Record* June 3, 1926, p. 3

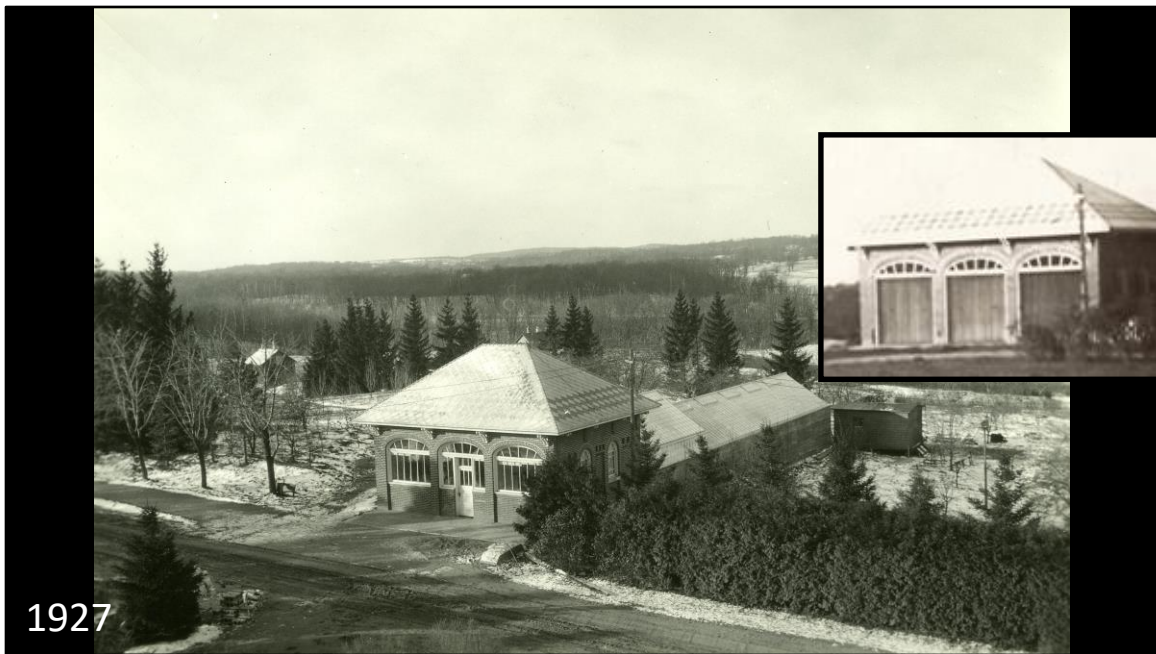
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/25321/rec/2>



1920s

**This photo gives a good look at what's behind the castle-like façade of the *old* greenhouse, and conveniently also shows the garage across from it, about to become the front to the relocated *new* greenhouse.**

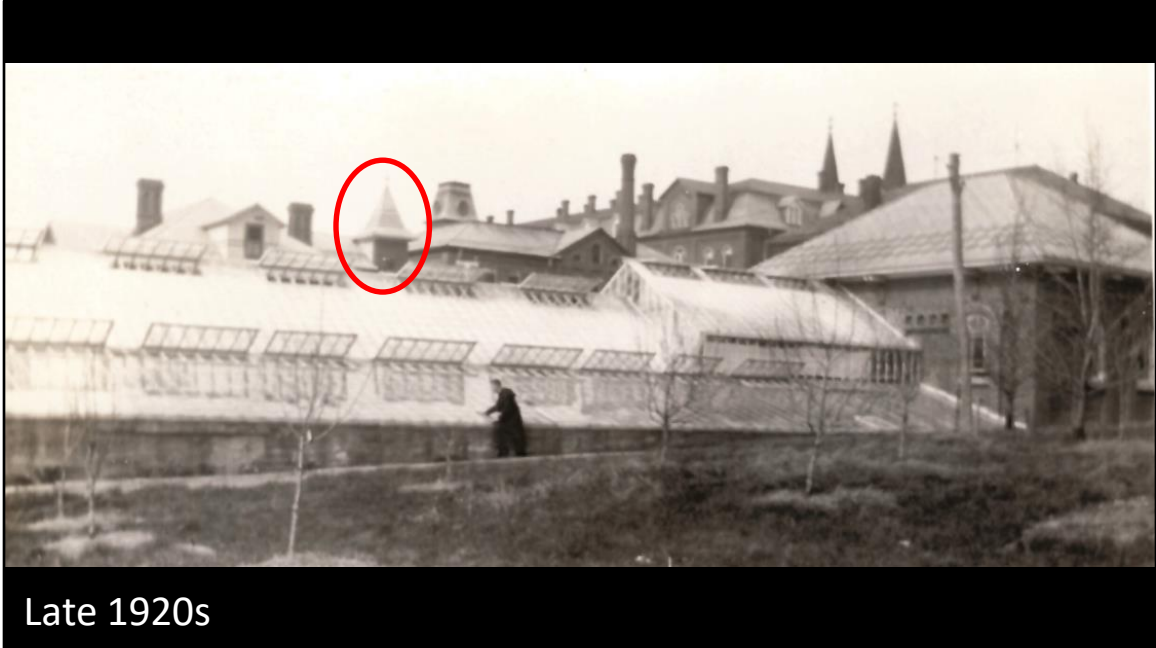
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 24 Greenhouse on card stock.jpg



**There are several photos in the Archives showing this greenhouse from different angles. Here, besides the greenhouse sections now relocated to the back of the garage, you can also see that the garage doors have been replaced with half-walls and more windows...**

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascherman Coll.- historical photos\LP024.1927.Greenhouse.jpg

**Caption: 024 – Unknown. Exterior of the greenhouse located where Liturgical Press now stands. ...this greenhouse was heated by a hot water circulation system.**



**...and this one shows it from the southwest, with the Frank House steeple and the top of the Quad in the background.**

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 40 greenhouses with windows open and monk.tif



**This 1932 aerial photo shows the garage greenhouse from the southeast.**  
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/6308>



**We've got a couple of photos of the *interior* of the greenhouse, in the 1940s.**

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascheman Coll.- historical photos\LP022.Greenhouse.jpg

“Former greenhouse conservatory located at the present day entrance to The Liturgical Press.”

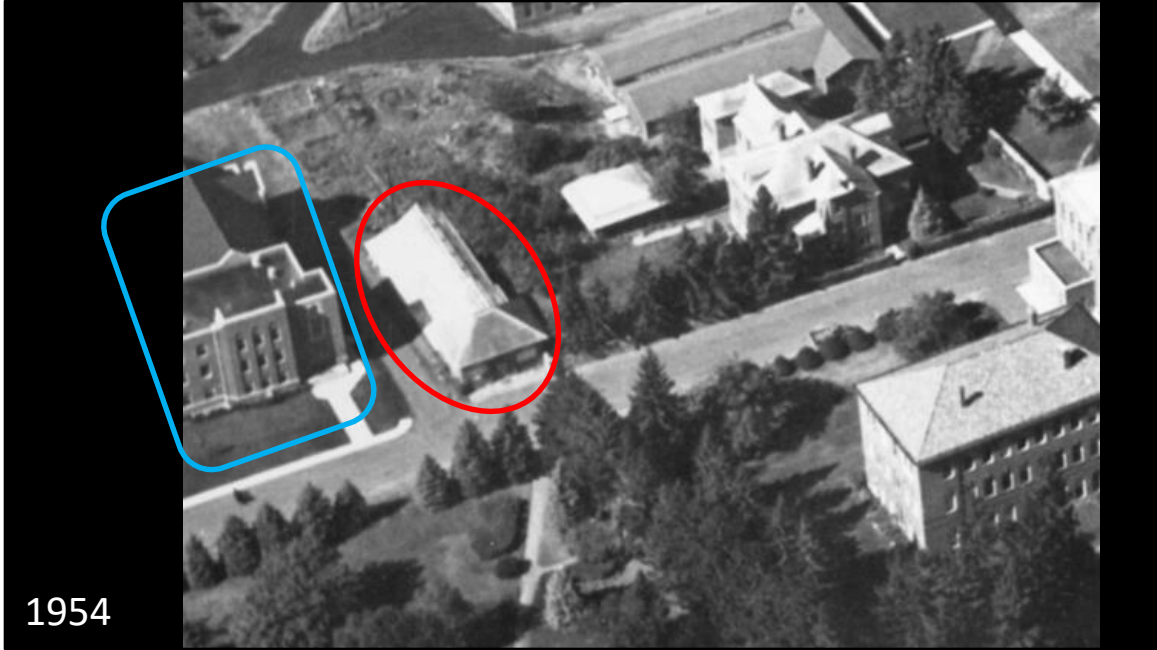




**The caption to this, one of the sesquicentennial photos, says this is Br. Maurus Held working with begonias.**

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascherman Coll.- historical photos\LP023.Maurus.Begonias.jpg

023 – 1940s. Br. Maurus Held (1872-1950) working with begonias in the conservatory.



**This 1954 aerial photo shows the greenhouse and the Seminary – now Emmaus Hall – which was built next to the greenhouse in 1951.**

1954 aerial view scanned from the 1954 (p. 26) Sagatagan yearbook  
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/41927>



**It's still there when we finally have a color photo of the campus, from 1955 or earlier...**

Image printed in the 1957 yearbook,

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5895>



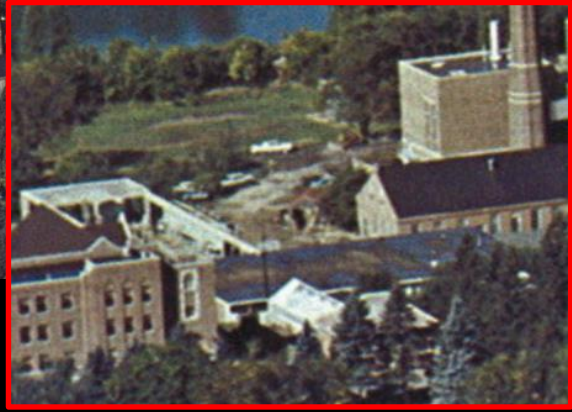
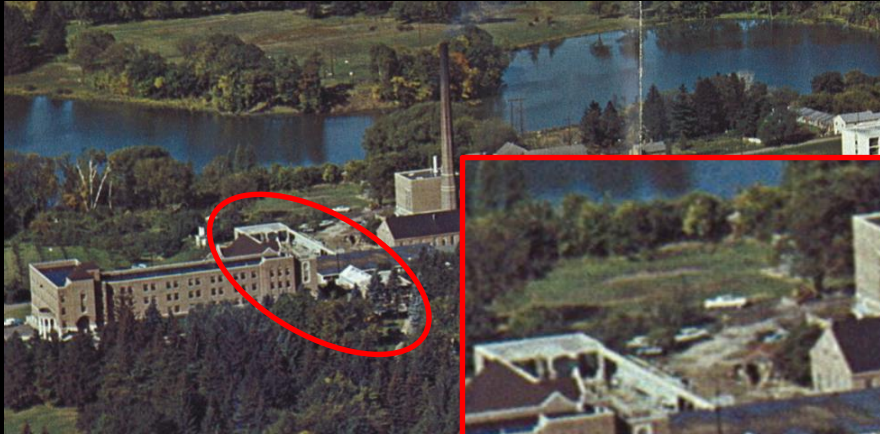
**...though it's difficult to see its features when you zoom in.**

1957 yearbook <https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5895>



**But this, like its predecessor greenhouses, is among the “Lost St. John’s” buildings: Here we have one wall of the old garage/greenhouse still standing as the building is being torn down to make way for the new Liturgical Press building...**

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 41 Greenhouse demolished for Lit Press



1956

**...seen under construction in this aerial photo...**

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/517> "Aerial view ca. 1960" but date is wrong; Lit Press building took place in 1956-57.



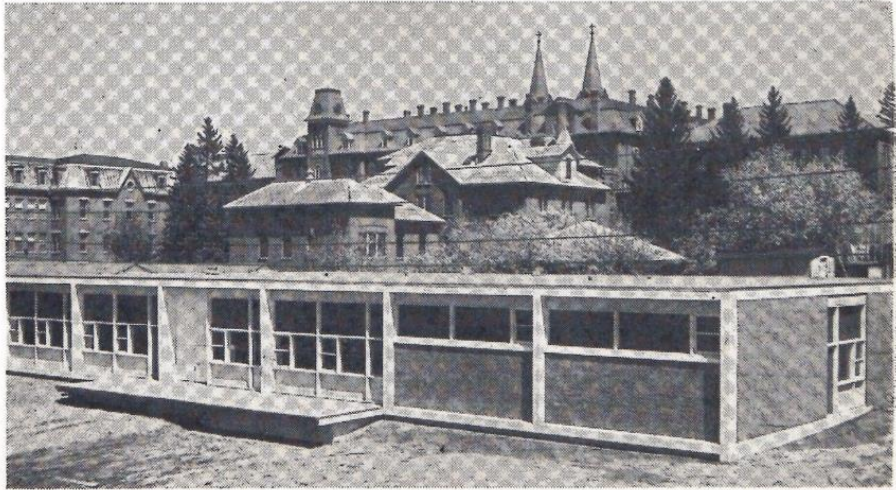
1966

**...and as completed in this aerial photo ten years later.**

1966 Saint John's University aerial view looking north

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/14295>

*First Building of the Second Century*



*The  
Record  
June 14,  
1957*

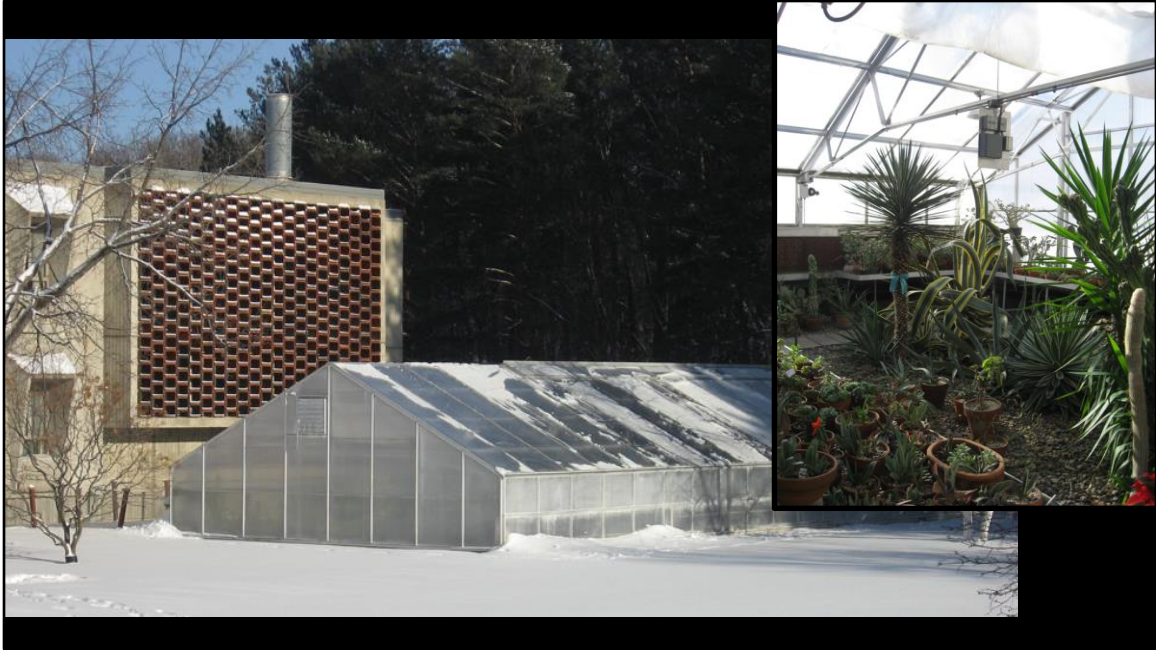
The first building erected during St. John's second century and the second stage of the one hundred year building plan is this new home of the St. John's printing department and the Liturgical Press. The

**The Lit Press facility was hailed by *The Record* as the “first building of St. John’s second century.”**

1957 June 14 *The Record* p. 4

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/30812>





**The greenhouse facility wasn't replaced until the science building, now known as "PEngl," was built in 1965.**

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Greenhouse\2008 12 17 Open House  
014.jpg  
& ...06.jpg



**And oh yes, there's this other little greenhouse on campus, too, a 2013 effort by the Sustainability Office and the Eco House students - and located – why not?! – next to the hockey rink space in Flyntown.**

# *To be continued...!*

Compiled in December 2021  
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Saint John's University  
and Saint John's Abbey  
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CSB/SJU Archivist.  
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