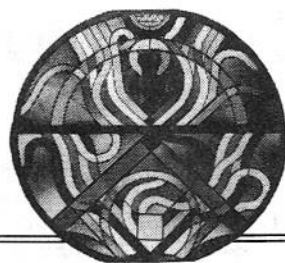




St. Peter's Abbey Newsletter

Vol. 16 No. 2 Spring/Summer 1994



Fr. Matthew, 'colorful' monk, dies at 97

By Abbot Peter Novecosky

In January we lost our oldest monk. Fr. Matthew Michel died at the age of 97. He missed his goal of living to be 100 by just three years.

He belonged to that tradition of monks whom we would call "colorful." He was not afraid to say what was on his mind, whether it was to his parishioners or to the abbot. And he also had a heart so soft that tears could easily come to his eyes.

He began his life as a monk in the first monastery, behind St. Peter's Cathedral. His link to St. Peter's Abbey went back to Abbot Bruno Doerfler. Fr. Matthew saw St. Peter's Cathedral while its inside was still bleak and bare, before the brush of Berthold von Imhoff transformed it into a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. He saw the basement being dug for St. Peter's College and he watched the first bricks being laid. He

was the first monk of St. Peter's to study for and obtain his doctorate. It was during this time that he met the famed Babe Ruth and received one of his prized possessions: an autographed baseball.

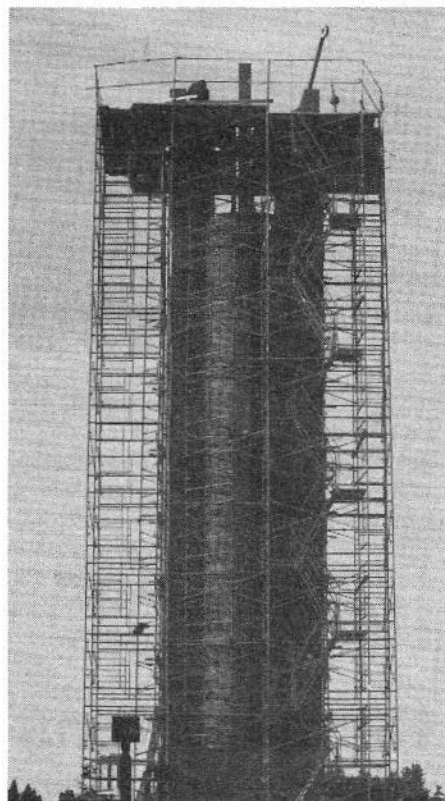
Fr. Matthew lived through the difficult and debt-ridden years of the Dirty Thirties. He helped transform rural life in Saskatchewan by his work with rural electrification in the 1940s and '50s. And most of his years were spent as a parish priest serving a variety of parishes in the abbacy. He retired to the abbey in 1984.

I remember seeing a picture of Fr. Matthew in front of my grandparents' house, at St. Scholastica. He used to stay there overnight on Saturdays when he drove there weekly as parish priest in the 1920s. He was a young priest then and was not afraid to travel long distances in summer or winter, in all kinds of weather. I remember him telling me how the parishioners of St. Scholastica, my home parish, moved the church across the road, without asking permission, so that they could stay within the bounds of the abbacy.

Fr. Matthew was instrumental in beginning the pilgrimage at Mt. Carmel some 72 years ago, and he was there when Fr. Patrick Peyton began his famous rosary crusade there in the late 1940s.

Before Fr. Matthew retired from driving his four-wheel-drive Eagle car, I remember some of the Elizabethan sisters from Cudworth worrying out loud about his driving habits. They feared he was an accident waiting to happen. But luck was with him and I don't think he had any serious accidents.

To the end he kept a lucid mind. I was always amazed at how well he could put words together, even in his



Bell tower being built by Koby Construction of Saskatoon.

late 90s. He could be downright eloquent of speech while chatting in our recreation room.

And I kept being amazed at his sense of humor. To the very end he enjoyed playing a trick, with a twinkle in his eye.

Fr. Matthew's life spanned most of the history of St. Peter's. At the end, he remembered incidents from the early years better than he remembered the events of the previous week.

And for those who were privileged to know him, his life will be remembered as one that gave color to our community and to our abbacy.



Fr. Matthew Michel at age 95.

Colleague recalls a famous homily

By Francis Lohmer, OSB

(Fr. Francis was born just 15 miles from Fr. Matthew's birthplace in West St. Paul, a suburb of Minneapolis. Fr. Matthew was six years his senior.)

He laughed, he wept, he sang — all contained in that one hour-long Good Friday Homily never to be forgotten by the parishioners of St. Michael's Parish, Cudworth, of which I was pastor at the time and Fr. Matthew was chaplain of the hospital; I thought he would appreciate being invited to give the Good Friday Homily. "Well, being it's Good Friday, we're expected to do a bit more penance," one parishioner commented after the service.

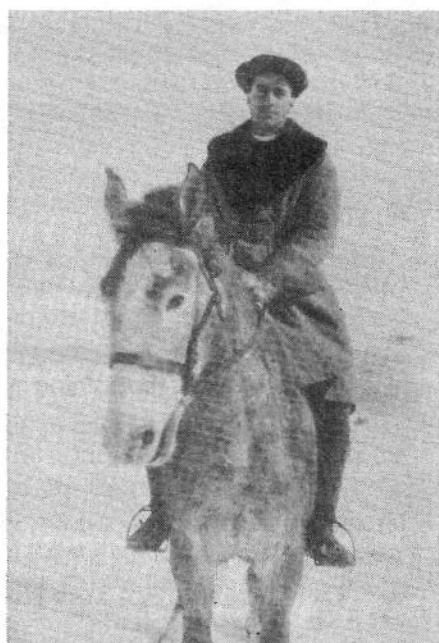
I came to the area at the end of June 1921 with Frs. Paul, Leonard and John, and Fr. Matthew was appointed our socius and as such gave us our 'jobs' for the day and also put up a list of what we were to do and not to do during the day; often it meant helping at the building of the new Abbey/College in progress at the time, pushing wheelbarrows of cement with our soft delicate hands and weak backs and then return to the old Abbey beside the cathedral; not only that but Fr. Matthew forbade smoking!

The largest room in the old Abbey was the chapel. I recall one incident Fr. Matthew never forgot was the time Prior Peter accidentally dropped his snuff box and as it rolled along the floor Fr. Matthew could not help laughing, thus causing quite a distraction during the Office, and as a result Prior Peter gave him a penance — I believe it was several Our Fathers and Hail Marys.

Shortly after the boundaries of the newly formed Saskatoon Diocese were announced, it was found that the little Scholastica church was outside our Abbey and so one night Fr. Matthew with a crew of parishioners moved the church across the road to the present site within our Abbey. The cemetery, however, remains in the Saskatoon Diocese.

Fr. Matthew was responsible for building several churches in the Abbey. He always enjoyed bragging about the way he built churches with a good third of it in the ground. After building St. Joseph's Church in Fulda, he remarked, "That's the way all our churches should be built in Western Canada. It withstands the cold."

Of course, everybody knew him as a first class baseball player and fan, and



Fr. Matthew's 'winterized' horse

in handball, no one could be superior. He had a voice that reached the clouds. Though as far as I can recall, he never played a musical instrument but he could sing like Caruso! Even in his last years he loved to sing German hymns and "Take Me Out To The Ball Game" at the top of his voice!

Recollections of Fr. Matthew abound

Father Matthew was our parish priest at St. Martin's & Naicam. I think it was in the late '40s when he got the power lines to farmers in that district. My parents bought a deepfreeze when we got the power. The freezer was given to me by my mother, Mrs. Karl Draude Sr. It served me for years. On Jan. 22, 1994, the day Fr. Matthew died, my deep freezer gave up the ghost. Seems ironic to me that this should have happened the same day. — Mary Baran

Fr. Matthew took several walks each day. Often he would wander over to the fish tank outside the Porter's Office where Sr. Victoria

heard the inevitable poem recited: "Fishy, fishy in the brook/Papa catch him with a hook/ Mama fry him in a pan/Baby eat him like a man."/"Oh yes, pretty fishy!" At the parakeet cage he would say: "Pretty Dicky, pretty Dicky bird."

Our Abbey Secretary, Myrna Hofmann, recalls the following incident: Once when Fr. Matthew's niece called from the States, I took the call and relayed the message to him as he couldn't hear well enough to understand her on the phone. She had asked me to give him a big hug from her and when I did, he was very touched, (and so was I). He had tears rolling

down his cheeks.

After using a new car for a while, Fr. Matthew was asked: "How many miles on a gallon will the car go?" He replied, "I don't know. When I want to go somewhere, I don't care how much gas it takes." Jerome Weber, OSB, was Fr. Matthew's abbot for 30 years.

Fr. Martin Brodner, OSB, who speaks German fluently, recalls one of Fr. Matthew's favorite expression: "I don't believe it? I don't believe it" — Es ist zu krein — (it's enough to make one cry?) This was usually in response to something he did not hear or understand well.

Around the abbey with the monks

By Martin Brodner, OSB

The winter, with its record deep-freeze temperatures, has helped us accumulate enough snow to fill our 17 million gallons reservoir with snow water. Many neighboring homes take advantage of this pure snow water to replenish their cisterns.

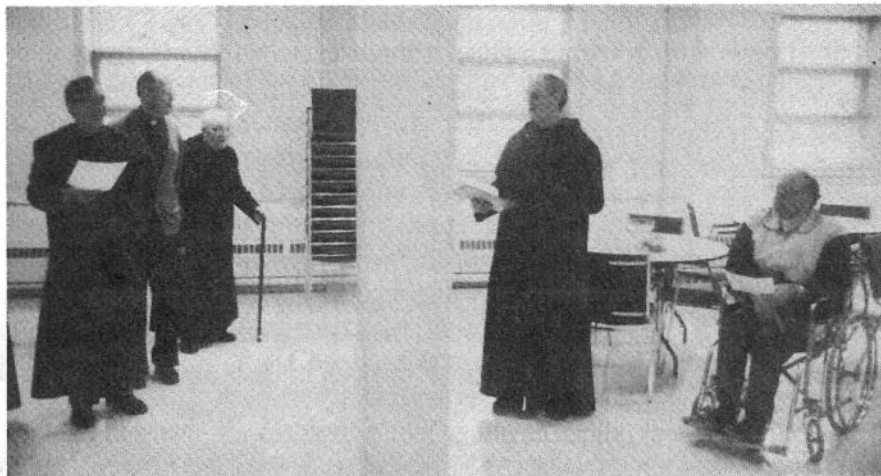
A FAST RISING BELL TOWER is the most exciting activity on the Abbey grounds. With its foundations begun March 21 (Feast of St. Benedict) we look to its completion by end of June. At present, mid-May, it is half-way to its 75-feet height.

RE-ROOFING was badly needed above the dorms in the arena. Dorms should be in good condition by end of May.

SEVERIN CONFERENCE CENTRE For many years part of the lower floor of Severin Hall served as our main library. This was moved last summer to the chapel area which was vacated when our church was completed in 1990. During the winter months, Br. Wolfgang, Br. Francis and Allen Vedress prepared the place for a convenient conference and guest recreation room. Officially named Severin Conference Centre, it was blessed on May 20 when the monks were all home for a chapter meeting.

The colored glass windows project for the abbey church was also completed with their blessing on February 20 with due appreciation being expressed to Fr. Alfred, Sister Salesia, OSE, and her brother Walter Zunti for their many hours of patient work. Fr. Alfred estimates 2,875 hours given to this undertaking.

NEW TELEPHONE SYSTEM was installed last Fall. Fr. William soon mastered its possibilities and "ironed out many a wrinkle" to bring it to its present good use. Fr. William is now at work at a final major church project: the reconstructing of our pipe organ.



Abbot Peter, second from right, blessed the Severin Conference Centre.

HEDGE TRIMMING Fr. Albert and Br. Randy are keeping their eyes on our hedges and have been trimming them down to size these early spring weeks.

BR. DEMETRIUS WASYLYNIUK completed his second year theology at Mt. Angel Abbey, Oregon, and returned home on May 14. The alert was sent out to our BEES and they arrived within a week. Along with BR. KURT the two look forward to replenishing our honey supply during the summer . . . and so do we all!

SABBATICAL Fr. Andrew Britz, editor of the *Prairie Messenger*, left

mid-February for a five-month sabbatical to European shrines and the Holy Land. Since May 17, he is in Rome taking a five-week course in monasticism, and hopes to return to the Abbey on July 12. On his return he will take up residence as parish priest at Englefeld to replace Fr. Harvey Wingfield whose assistance we gratefully welcomed for the past three years. He will be returning to St. Martin's Abbey, Lacey, Wash. Fr. Andrew continues as editor of the *Prairie Messenger*.

HOME CARE Our youngest monk, Br. Anthony Nguyen, has been doing

— Continued on next page



Pool table, donated by Leonard Novecosky, and book and magazine stand.

Around the abbey - more changes

Continued from previous page

excellent home care service, helping our elderly monks, especially Fr. Matthew (+ January 22 at 97) and Br. Conrad who patiently bears the affliction of Alzheimers. He is also janitor of both Abbey and church.

RETIRED and/or RECYCLED Last August Fr. Martin, golden jubilarian, returned to the Abbey, still nursing his sciatic legs a bit, and is finding oodles of "unfinished work" to nibble at. Besides Fr. Alfred (already mentioned), we find Fr. Norbert still supplying valuable music service in our worship (along with Br. Gerald, Br. Kurt and Fr. William) and Br. Gregory who at 89 1/2 is the oldest monk residing in the Abbey, while Fr. Francis at 91 1/2 still takes care of St. Scholastica and St. Mary's Villa (weekdays) from Humboldt.

COLLEGE Fr. Richard Meidl is replacing Fr. Andrew in College Administration and also helping in the Business Office. With our two-year university program, we had about 200 students this past year and are looking forward to possibly even more for the coming school year.

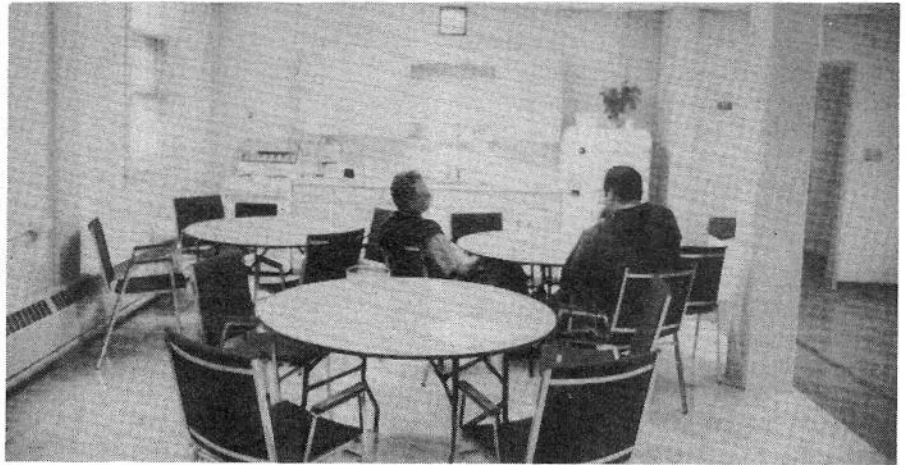
FARM/GARDENS are ably monitored by Br. Bernard. The seeding is well advanced. We are trying a new brand of corn this year. Come and sample it in September.

SMOKE FREE AREAS Along with the growing desire of visitors and the public in general, we are feeling our way to designating smoke free areas in our College, Press, Guest Wing and other areas. Allowance is made to accommodate the "smokers" as well "with charity to all; with malice to none."

SUMMER EMPLOYEES this year are all students, most of them students of St. Peter's College: they are Vanessa Gzenda, Daniel Aspel, Gerard Saretsky, Adam Shaw, Jason Blechinger and Kim Loehr. Vanessa, with several years' experience in our gardens, is supervisor

of student workers. Inadvertantly omitted in the last issue was the name of a permanent employee Gregory Saretsky. Greg will soon be completing his first

year as a switchboard operator in the porter's office of the Abbey. In the evening, during the school year, he works in the library.



The new kitchenette facilities



The new lounge area.



A completely enclosed meeting room for 12.

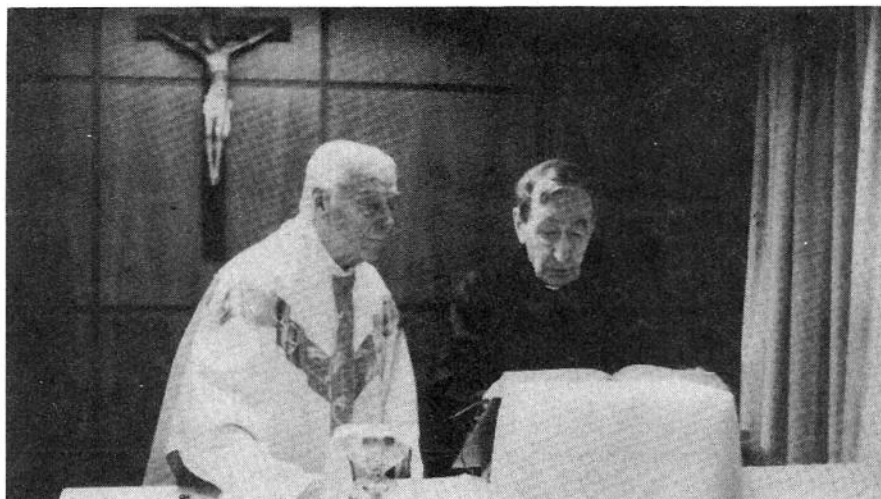
Fr. Matthew made things happen

By Norbert Schwinghammer, OSB
(Written in 1986)

My first recollection of Father Matthew is from a grain elevator fire in the village where he was on his first priestly assignment, as assistant to the pastor. The fire was out of control, and villagers and firemen stood in hypnotic awe as the young parish assistant appeared on the scene, the scapular of his Benedictine habit tucked under the belt:

"Give me an axe. . . . Give me a hand!" In minutes the newly animated fire squad had hewn down the cat-walk which joined the small office building to the elevator. No one mentioned it then, but more than likely it was thanks to the saving of that little grain-buyer's office that many a farmer in the district received his grain cheque that winter without delay.

The next recollection is of a streak of dust painted by a silver McGlaughlin Six. That was Father Matthew off on his regular weekend parish mission from St. Peter's College, where he was the first rector. In winter, and in the '30s, when the silver McGlaughlin was grounded for want of money to buy gas, the streak of dust was headed by a



Fr. Norbert assisting Fr. Matthew with the celebration of the eucharist.

coal-black pony.

Father Matthew (Arthur) Michel was born in St. Paul, Minn. He came to St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn., in the fall of 1910, and soon headed the university ball team as the no-hit-no-run-left-hander from St. Paul. He entered the novitiate for St. Peter's Abbey at St. John's, and made the first profession of his vows on July 11, 1917. He was ordained to the priesthood on March 27, 1921, by Bishop O. C. Charlebois, OMI, at Le-

Pas, Man.

One of the major achievements in Father Matthew's parish life was his work in promoting rural electrification in Saskatchewan.

At a banquet in Naicam in September 1968, the Hon. Gordon Grant, minister of Public Health and minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, dubbed Father Matthew, "Father of rural electrifica-

— FOUNDER, page 8

Homily at wake details powerful incidents

By Albert Ruetz, OSB

Several years ago, in his semi-retirement, Fr. Matthew once said: "There are two things that I will never forget how to do - to drive a car and to say Mass." I don't know if Fr. Matthew ever forgot how to drive a car, he never drove the last years of his life. But he was able to keep saying mass until a couple months before his death. Thanks to Fr. Norbert's assistance, Fr. Matthew was faithful in saying mass almost every day.

Once in the early '60s, I relieved Fr. Matthew in Naicam when he went to visit his relatives in St. Paul. When he returned on a Sunday morning, he hadn't said mass yet, and I volunteered

to serve for him. Many times during that mass, he had to stop, because of the deep sobs and tears. I will never forget this experience as long as I live.

He drove his horses hard, he drove his cars hard and he drove himself hard. Several times this almost cost him his life. Once with his four-wheel-drive Eagle going from Cudworth to St. Benedict at night in winter when he made a wrong turn and got way out in a field where even a four wheel drive was no help. Luckily he had the presence of mind to switch his lights off and on and was rescued by a farmer with his tractor.

The life of Fr. Matthew had an influence on others especially through rural electrification. We take electricity for

granted today in rural Saskatchewan - but it got its start with Fr. Matthew; he was called the "father of rural electrification". As a token of appreciation for this he was presented with a new car.

We living here at St. Peter's will miss him - His famous baseball signed by Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. His singing in the recreation rooms: "Take me out to the ball game . . . with peanuts and cracker-jacks . . . I don't care if I never get back. . . ." His shuffling down the corridors, asking, "Where am I?" or "What day of the week is this anyway?"

"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day." May God grant him eternal life.

Benedictines ministered in Rosthern

By Jerome Weber, OSB

Most homesteaders and settlers who came to St. Peter's Colony between 1902 and 1904 from the United States or Europe arrived at Rosthern by train. It was the station nearest to the area described as St. Peter's Colony. There the settlers could buy the supplies they needed and receive directions and advice.

Among the arrivals in May 1903 were Benedictine priests and brothers who had been members of a Priory at Cluny, not far from St. Louis. They had agreed to transfer the Priory to a new location, at Muenster, and to provide pastoral care for the Catholics in St. Peter's Colony.

In February 1904 they began the publication of St. Peter's Bote there, a weekly newspaper in German, though the actual printing was done in Winnipeg. From some news items in it we learn that Benedictine priests offered mass in the waiting room of the rink, or in the home of Jos. Kopp. Further we learn that

early in 1904 a small church was built, for the Catholics there, and that Fr. Benedict was the first pastor. The church was named St. Odilon (or Odilo); he had been the abbot of the Monastery of Cluny, in France, 994-1049.

After the railway came through Muenster in late 1904, it was no longer necessary to go to Rosthern. Fr. Benedict went to Muenster, and the Oblate priests took charge of the parish.

A few years ago the parishioners bought what had begun as a Co-op store, and remodelled it to be their church. The blessing of this church by Bishop Blaise Morand of Prince Albert took place May 1, 1994. Under one roof is the church and also a hall, kitchen, classrooms and washrooms. Because of the Benedictine connection with the beginning of the parish an invitation to attend the blessing was sent to St. Peter's Abbey.

Abbot Peter Novocosky asked Fr. Jerome Weber to represent the abbey and he was present to concelebrate the mass which followed the blessing.

After that, there was a good pot-luck meal, and then a program. Fr. Jerome explained to the people how it came about that there were Benedictines involved with the beginning of St. Odilon and thanked them for the kind invitation to be present at the blessing of their new church.

WANTED

Grand or Upright Piano
(in good condition)
for new Guest
Meeting Room

Guestmaster
682-1775

Deaths

Deaths which have occurred since the last SPANewsletter are:

Agnes (Hinz) Enright, sister of Fr. Leo -
Dec. 24, 1993

Mrs. Josephine Junk of St. Mary's Villa
- Feb. 16, 1994

Esther Vindevoghel of Wolseley, Sask.,
mother of Br. Stanley - March 2,
1994

Henry Dosch, father of Leander Dosch,
OCSO - March 29, 1994

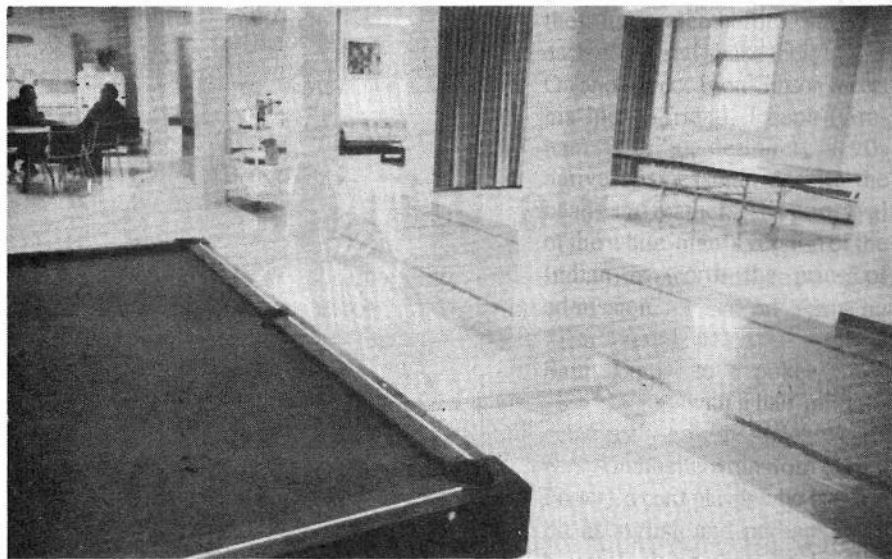
Frank van Amelsvoort of Saskatoon -
March 2, 1994

Archbishop Charles Halpin of Regina -
April 16, 1994

Sr. Lidwina Gerdes, OSU, of Bruno -
Jan. 31, 1994

Sr. Bernadette Wald, OSE, of Humboldt
- Feb. 27, 1994.

Lee Nickel, wife of Ben Nickel - May
17, 1994



The recreation area of Severin Conference Centre.

In your last will and testament please remember St. Peter's Abbey. Our legal title is:

ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT
Muenster, Sask. SOX 2VO

Long-term guest begins Oral History

The first successful applicant for the experimental "Temporary Commitment" program at St. Peter's Abbey is Mr. Simon Boivin of Winnipeg.

Simon intends to spend at least a year as a long-term guest where he will be able to exercise his talents for the benefit of the monastic community. After spending several years with the CBC (French Network), he embarked on a new talent and goal - i.e. Oral History.

After interviewing 82 members and friends of the Manitoba Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Mr. Boivin is convinced that Oral History is the area in which he does his best work.

He gained valuable expertise in dealing with personal relationships while a resident of the Homes for Growth Inc., in Manitoba.

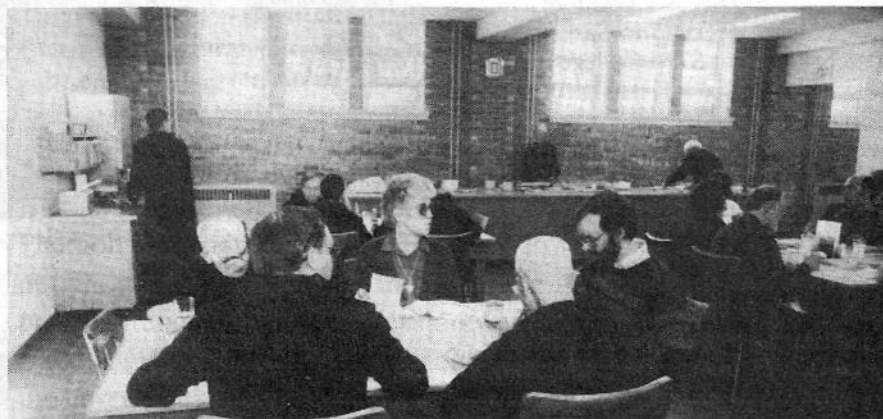
Simon has come to St. Peter's to "have a Christian experience and a year of discernment." While here he will assist with the college French classes as well as Oral History.

The purpose of Oral History is primarily to obtain as complete and accurate a history of a community as is possible. The members of the community are at liberty to choose to be interviewed. However, after several members of St. Peter's Abbey have permitted their life history to be recorded on

tape, Simon is convinced once more that this is the best way to gather and keep a history of this area.

The interviews of the older and

younger monks alike of our community could prove to be a source of great value and interest to historians in the 21st century.



We celebrate 90 years of printing the Prairie Messenger.



Responsible for the major part of the renovation and maintenance of Severin Conference Centre are (from left): Br. Basil Schaan, Agnes Toennies, Al Vedress and Br. Wolfgang Thiem. Br. Francis Fortney missing from the photo.

CORRECTION

In the last issue it was incorrectly stated that Sylvester Vredegoor, OSB, was ordained by Bishop Francis Klein of Saskatoon. It was, in fact, Bishop Francis P. Carroll of Calgary who ordained Fr. Sylvester on June 6, 1964.

NOTICE

TO GUESTS, OBLATES & FRIENDS OF ST. PETER'S:

The Abbey/College Library wishes to update its list of borrowed books this summer. If you have any overdue library books please return as soon as possible. Thank you.



Fr. Matthew showing his autographed baseball to the Junior Choir Camp.

Two Oblates honored at St. Thomas More

Two Oblates of St. Benedict were honored at the St. Thomas More College Corporation weekend in Saskatoon last October. Former STM College members Marikay Falby of Saskatoon, and Alphonse Gerwing of Prelate, Sask., were recognized for their contributions to St. Thomas More and to the Christian community.

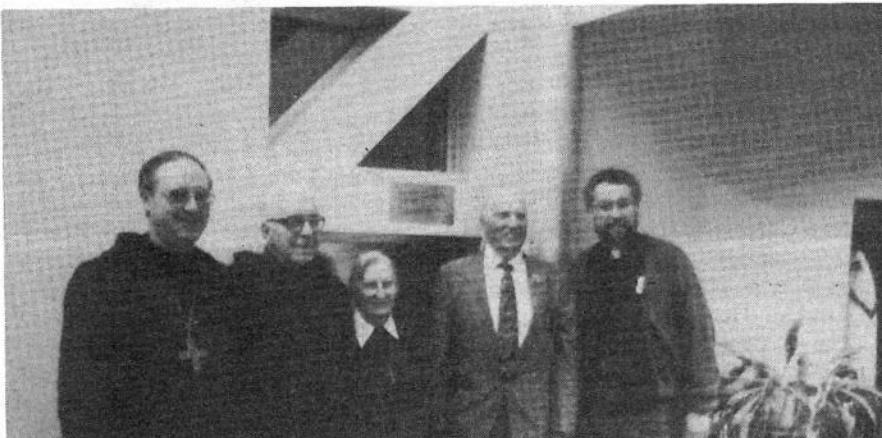
Marikay does community services work with the Saskatoon Catholic School system. Alphonse is active as a social advocate and spends many summers in Brazil involved with rescuing abandoned street kids. Congratulations to these Oblates of St. Peter's Abbey.



Al Gerwing and Marikay Falby are Oblates of St. Peter's Abbey



Abbot Severin Gertken, after whom Severin Hall & Severin Conference Centre is named.



Abbot Peter, Fr. Alfred, Sr. Salesia, Walter Zunti and Fr. Andrew at the commemorative plaque outside the Abbey Church.

Benedictine Spirituality

Are you a seeker of the sacred? Is spirituality an important part of your life? Would you like a daily companion along the way? Subscribe to THE MONASTIC WAY, by Joan Chittister, OSB, one of today's most inspiring religious writers and speakers. Monthly, single-page format with daily reflections, \$12/year. Sample copy \$1.25. Write: Benetvision, 355 E. Ninth St., ERIE, PA 16503, USA, or phone: 814-459-7199

Founder of Mt. Carmel

Continued from page 5

tion in Saskatchewan."

There is only one other title which Father Matthew cherishes more, that of "founder of Mount Carmel." Through him, the hill and vicinity were purchased from John Bunko, and he celebrated the first principal mass there July 16, 1922. He did a lot of work preparing the

mount as a pilgrimage site.

Father Matthew's last regular assignment was to celebrate the weekday masses at St. Mary's Villa, Humboldt, and the Sunday mass at St. Michael's Hospital, Cudworth.

(In 1984 he retired to the Abbey where he enlivened the community with his antics until his death on Jan. 22, 1994. - Ed)

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