

St. Peter's Abbey Newsletter



Vol. 23 No. 3 Summer/Fall 2001

Second prior appointed 100 years ago

By Martin Brodner, OSB

The year 2001 has marked the 100th anniversary of the death of Oswald Moosmueller, first prior of Cluny Monastery, on Jan. 10, 1901 (see *St. Peter's Abbey Newsletter*, Spring 2001).

The year 2001 is also marking the appointment by Rome three months later as its second prior Fr. Alfred Mayer, monk of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn., after two efforts to elect a monk from St. Vincent's Archabbey, the founding abbey, failed to bring forth someone to succeed Oswald. Fr. Alfred accepted the appointment for a term of five years.

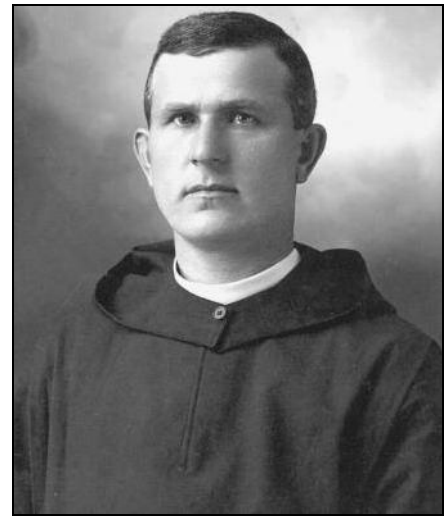
Alfred Mayer was born on June 12, 1858, at Cayuga, Ont., whither his parents, shortly before, had immigrated from Sigmaringen, Germany. As a young lad he, along with his parents and relatives, moved to Jordan, Minn., where his family permanently settled. At the age of 20 he pronounced his vows as a monk of St. John's Abbey on July 11, 1879, and took studies in philosophy and theology in preparation for priesthood. He was ordained July 25, 1882.

For the next five years Fr. Alfred was

professor at St. John's College and assistant in various parishes. He was then assigned to Assumption Church, St. Paul, Minn., and worked there for 10 years as assistant and then as pastor. However, he awakened powerful enemies in the Archdiocese of St. Paul by his determined and courageous efforts in favour of Catholic parish schools and Catholic German patriotism. For this reason his superiors deemed it advisable to assign him elsewhere: to St. Clement's Parish, Duluth, Minn., until he was appointed prior of Cluny Monastery on April 26, 1901, at the age of 43.

A word about the beginnings of Cluny. Already in 1881 St. Vincent's Archabbey was drawn to undertake mission work among the German Catholics in the Ohio and Mississippi River area. A certain Mr. Hight in Cairo, Ill., area donated 400 acres of land under the condition that a monastery be erected thereon. To this was added more land to a total of 950 acres (cf *St. Vincent Journal*, p. 221, January 1901).

Abbot Boniface Wimmer (St. Vincent's) accepted the offer and sent two monks, Frs. Englebert Leist and Augustine Schneider, to this location



Prior Alfred Mayer, OSB

about 30 miles north of Cairo. The monks built a church, St. Joseph's, for the Catholics of the nearby village of Wetaug, Ill. Soon other buildings were added: monastery, barn, sawmill, flour mill, as most of the land was rich timberland. However, this land, at the junction of the two rivers, was swampy and also malaria infested.

In August 1892 the monastery became incorporated as a priory with Oswald Moosmueller appointed as its first prior. As there were only a few Catholic families in the area, Prior Oswald hoped to support his priory with the sale of the rich timber and the publication of *Die Legende*, a monthly magazine on the lives of the saints and the Catholic faith. Most monks, however, began succumbing to malaria. The outlook was bleak.

Prior Alfred Mayer takes over a new venture

Prior Alfred made his first trip to Cluny on July 1. At once he sized up the



St. Peter's Monastery Church, Muenster, Sask., erected July-September, 1903 (south-west view).

Continued on page 7

A message from Abbot Peter's desk

Dear friends,

The summer of 2001 seems to have slipped by rather quickly. It will likely be remembered as being one of the driest and hottest on record. There are drought conditions in various parts of Saskatchewan. Our area has been more fortunate than other areas. And for that we can be very thankful.

The harvest has been one of the earliest on record. All the grain, except for the canola, was harvested during August. And the weather has been exceptional; too hot if anything. And no rain. We will need lots of rain this fall to replenish what we didn't get this summer. And we will be tapping into the Saskatchewan River pipeline this fall to ensure an adequate water supply for the abbey and college this winter. This will be an extra expense. But we are fortunate we are able to hook onto this pipeline, as are many other farmers in the area. The lack of snow last winter has meant our reser-



From left, Abbot Peter Novocosky and Fr. Leo Hinz, at the general chapter at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn., June 17-22.

voir is low this year.

Progress has been made since our last newsletter on improving our facilities for the sick and elderly monks. Some generous donations have been received, so that the Eldercare Fund now stands over \$13,000.00.

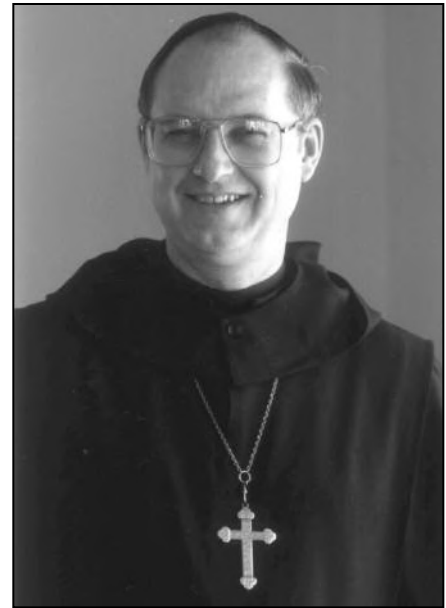
Fr. Norbert Schwinghammer was recently moved to a renovated room in the Eldercare area, a room vacated by plant manager Br. Basil Schaan. Some equipment has been obtained as well. A second-hand sit/stand lift as well as a total body lift have been received. While not needed right now, they will be useful to have for the future. A room near the Eldercare area has been prepared for the whirlpool bath and the bath will be moved there by the time this newsletter is printed. Training of some monks in caring for the sick is planned for the near future as well.

Two of our elderly monks had birthdays recently. Fr. Francis Lohmer, our oldest monk, turned 99 on Sept. 3. The next day, Sept. 4, Fr. Norbert Schwinghammer turned 91.

This summer Fr. Leo Hinz and I took part in the general chapter of our congregation, June 17-22. This meeting of all abbots and a delegate from each of the 24 monasteries of our congregation is held every three years. This year's week-long meeting was held at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn. Many of us have studied at St. John's so it was good to revisit the campus and renew acquaintances with monks we knew from school days.

One of the events of the chapter was the election of an abbot president for our congregation. Fr. Melvin Valvano had served 12 years in that position. Elected to replace him was Abbot Timothy Kelly, recently resigned abbot of St. John's Abbey.

One of the main items of discussion at the general chapter was the education apostolate of Benedictine monasteries. A couple of days were spent discussing the topic. All monasteries today are facing the same challenge: they have fewer



monks teaching in their schools or colleges and more lay people are being hired. The challenge is how do Benedictines pass on their charism/spirituality to the lay people taking their place.

Guest speaker Fr. Dominic Melroy of Ampleforth Abbey, England, noted that, as monks, we pick up the charism of Benedictine spirituality by living in the monastery and breathing the air. It's quite different for lay staff. Benedictine values have to be made quite explicit if the particular values of a religious school are to be transmitted to the next body of students. Of course, it helps to have monks involved at various levels of governance, administration, teaching, chaplaincy and maintenance.

This brings me to end on a positive note. On Aug. 20 two candidates joined our community: Gabriel Viveiros and Ken Mansfield. We ask you to pray for them and we thank God who continues to bless our community in new ways.

*"... that in all things
God may be glorified."*

— Benedictine Motto

Monastic circle widens beyond monastery

By Lawrence DeMong, OSB

Monasticism is not something we monastics own. It is a way of life, a spiritual experience that goes beyond the monastery walls, a moment in the life of anyone who is serious about meaning, about living, about seeking the source of all being.

“To be a monk begins with one’s spirituality,” reflected Brazilian Br. Marcelo Gomes Costa. “To be a monk is to seek God, to experience God everywhere. Some were surprised and disagreed with that idea. But it’s true that many people live a deeply monastic life in their families, in places beyond the monastery.”

In trying to get at the heart of what took place at St. Benedict’s Monastery and St. John’s Abbey July 27-31, I asked two monks living at St. Peter’s with whom I travelled to Minnesota, to tell me what struck them most.

Referring to the Conference of Oblate Directors and Oblates, Br. Basil Schaan added, “Some, I believe, got hung up on the feminist detail of a woman being a monk, but in fact, becoming a monk is a spiritual reality.”

True, some old paradigms fell on hard times as people like Janet Buchanan described her doctoral investigation on oblation as an ongoing way of life.

From her study and personal experience she concludes that the monastic heart is in everyone, to be experienced and lived at one time or another. When an individual reaches the point where he or she can say, “What I want most in life

is to be a monk” then the way is open to a whole new stage of living.

On the other side of the coin, said speaker Buchanan, “To leave seeking is to leave monasticism. When tradition becomes synonymous with the system, we have abandoned faithfulness. . . . Benedictinism lives in individuals who are Benedictine, not in monasteries.”

These are notions that some may dispute, but they are becoming more current as studies in monasticism are pursued by lay people and the experience of monasticism is widening through the oblate way of life.

With ideas like the above incarnated in people present such as Mary Stamps, the Methodist woman who calls herself a monk, is employed at the St. John’s ecumenical centre and who has begun a monastery on the abbey property, then we are gently challenged to modify our thinking!

Other impressions left with Brothers Basil and Marcelo were the high level of education and monastic wisdom among oblates. Both were deeply marked by Rita Tybor, oblate of St. Bede Abbey, Illinois. Her message to monastics and oblates is “Prayer, prayer, prayer. Prayer is the heart of our alliance with monasteries,” she insisted.

Beyond the study sessions there were many contacts that impressed the two monks having their first experience of a North American gathering of oblates and oblate directors. “I met new people, I heard new ideas about monastic life, about oblates, I saw how they relate to each other and so on,” said Br. Marcelo.

“Meeting people, seeing how they relate with their particular monastery, how they experience monastic living in their own home,” added Schaan, “I was impressed with how one oblate was involved with her parish liturgy, how she carefully studied the readings to prepare the Sunday intentions.”

Recalling his work with oblates in Brazil, Costa described how in several months a group of three swelled to 20. “I was impressed with their deep spirituality.”

Truly there is a hunger out there and the widening of the monastic circle means more and more people will be participating in our life as vowed monastics at a variety of levels. Our challenge will be to let the light of our tradition shine, to share what has been a gift to us and, without hiding it under the proverbial bushel, let it shine for many others seeking to live more fully the call to become the seekers, the desert dwellers, the “monks,” that each of us is in the depths of our being marked as we are with the touch of God.



Br. Kurt Van Kuren looking over the squash in the organic garden.

*In your last will and testament
please remember St. Peter’s Abbey.*

Our legal title is:

ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT
Muenster, SK S0K 2Y0

People and events around the abbey

By Martin Brodner, OSB

May — Spring came in early and dry. Our spring run-off left our reservoir at the lowest level ever — of 10 feet. Seeding, of course, was over quickly by May 24, and a first rainfall in mid-May of one inch was a real blessing to get things growing well.

May 2 — We excavated the path for a sidewalk from the abbey to the powerhouse and to the car garage. With the concrete sidewalk poured, we are now ready for the “rainy days”!

In the weeks that followed Br. Randy, college building manager, removed the stage area of the gym as part of the renovations to the gym.



Br. Randy Senecal dismantling the stage in the gym.

A major leak was also discovered in the steam pipeline from the boiler room to the abbey. Under the guidance of Br. Basil and Alan Vedress new pipelines were laid and covered over by June 19.

May 7-8 — The first major tour of the season, teachers from the Kamsack-Preeceville area of Saskatchewan, arrived. Ann Back, our laundry manager, has also become our tour guide, and has reported four more tours since then.

June 3 — It was a special Pentecost in our diocese this year in the absence of



Pouring the sidewalk from the abbey to the car garage.

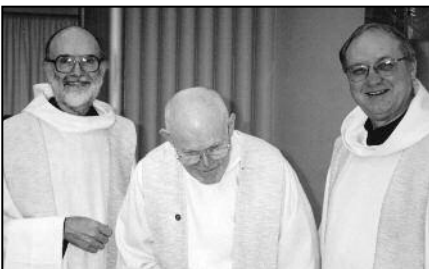
a bishop. The various pastors were delegated to administer confirmation in their parishes, and most of them did so on this Pentecost Day. A great coming of the Holy Spirit on our diocese indeed!

June 3-7 — Fr. Thomas Ryan, CSP, now working in New York led our annual retreat this year. The general theme was: holiness is wholeness on all three levels of our person — spiritual, psychological and physical.



Retreat master Fr. Thomas Ryan, CSP

June 5 — Fr. Robert Gannon made his final oblation as a Claustal Oblate.



Fr. Robert Gannon makes final oblation as a claustral oblate, seen here with Fr. Lawrence DeMong (left) and Abbot Peter Novecosky.

He had been one of our hermits since 1972, but was forced to retire to the abbey because of parkinson’s disease.

June 14 — Bernard Duerr of Humboldt died at the age of 94. He was from the first class of St. Peter’s College in 1921. Fr. Francis Lohmer is the only one left from that class over which he was a prefect.

June 16-23 — Abbot Peter Novecosky and Fr. Leo Hinz, flew to St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minn. for the triennial General Chapter of our Benedictine congregation.

June 21 — Fr. Martin discovered a “wonder of creation” along the paths of the wooded area south of the abbey. It was a dandelion with a stem 42” long with the tuft of white seed to top it off. Fortunately, to measure its length, he had his cane along which measured 34.5.” He is sure that it was **not GM** modified! See photo.



Fr. Martin Brodner and his 42” long dandelion.

June 27 — Br. Thomas Ward went to spend a month with his parents in England.

June 29 — Fr. Jerome Weber, abbot for 30 years, celebrated his 60th anniversary of priesthood. Fr. Jerome has slowed down now — we don't see him shoveling snow in the winter or mowing the grass on a summer's day very often. He is looking after the pastoral needs of the patients at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Humboldt.



Fr. Jerome Weber celebrates 60 years of priesthood.

June 30 — Oblate Day. Fr. Wayne Sturgess, Anglican priest from Birch Hills, Sask., and Fr. George Brodner, OSB, told their stories about their vocations. But the high point of the afternoon came with the discussion about the care of the sick. Oblate Celine Wolsfeld, housekeeper to Fr. Francis Lohmer for many years, told of how he went from being a pastor, leader, healthy independent person to one needing 24-hour care, and Oblate Rose Marie Fowler read from the Rule of Benedict, chapter 36, "Care of the Sick," in the light of her experience as professional nurse and caregiver for her mother.

July 1-15 — We again welcomed the two Saskatchewan Youth Choir Camps in these first two weeks of July with a total of about 150 youth plus staff attending. They deserve highest commendation for the work that they can accomplish in five days.

July 15 — Home Care Area. With the increase of elderly monks in the community, the need for updating our home care facilities was evident. Work is now underway for adding new facilities: nurse's station, whirlpool bath, first aid room, etc. Home care personnel visit our elderly several times a day.

July 20 — Family Day. The monks again welcomed the staff and families in an appreciation afternoon centred around an outdoor barbeque in our Stanley Park nestled between the college and Severin Hall.

July 22 — Was a double blessing for our area. First, it was the annual Mount Carmel Pilgrimage. Secondly, it was the day that broke our threatening drought. The rain started falling as the morning eucharist concluded and the pilgrimage had to be ended.

The heavens opened up and the rain reached almost an inch by evening. The rainy days continued adding another inch and a half in the next 10 days. This broke the severe drought and helped the crops, gardens and orchard to make a promising comeback. Heartfelt thanks rose spontaneously to our Provident Father!

July 26 — We have a bishop! The news release this morning informed us that Fr. Albert LeGatt, rector of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Prince Albert, has been appointed bishop of Saskatoon to succeed Bishop James Weisgerber who was transferred to Winnipeg 13 months ago.

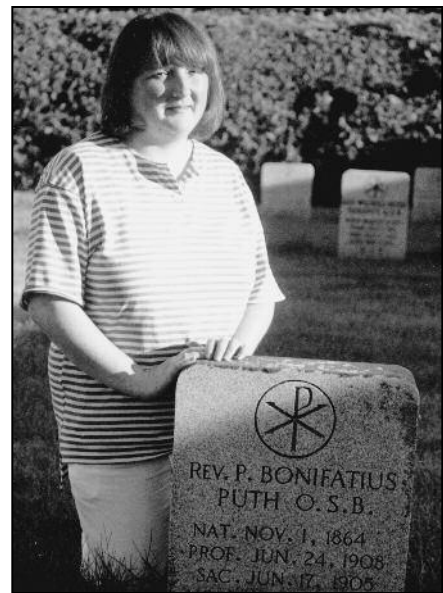
Aug. 2 — Fr. Ivan Derkash and his wife, Irene, and son George visited the abbey along with Frs. Murray Kuemper of Humboldt and Jim Moss of Watson. Fr. Ivan was appointed pastor of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Humboldt in March.

Aug. 4 — In a fall in his Cudworth rectory Fr. Leo Hinz fractured his left hip and underwent surgery at Royal University Hospital on Aug. 7. Heart complications added to his difficult road to recovery. He was transferred to St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Humboldt, on Aug. 14 and to the abbey on Sept. 6.

Aug. 8-11 — Br. Thomas Ward attended the Monastic Liturgy Forum held at St. Benedict's Monastery, Winnipeg, Man. The main theme of the conference was: "The Gift of Being Eucharist: Ministry of the Assembly."

Keynote speakers were Abbot Marcel Rooney, OSB (former abbot primate), Dr. Julia Upton, RSM, Jeanne Weber, OSB, and Columba Stewart, OSB.

Aug. 11 — A surprise visitor from Koblenz, Germany, was Annemie Puth, the grandniece of one of our pioneer monks, Fr. Boniface Puth, OSB., who came to St. Cloud, Minn., as a Salesian missionary priest in 1905. On hearing of the new Benedictine foundation in the missionary territory of Muenster, he joined the Benedictine monks here in 1906. He was active in the Carmel, Pilger and Marysburg parishes until 1916 when illness brought him to the abbey. He was the first monk to die in the new building in 1924. It was a tremendous experience, for the grandniece, to see the room in which Boniface died, and his grave in our abbey cemetery!



Annemie Puth, the grandniece of Fr. Boniface Puth, OSB, kneels at his gravestone.

Aug. 14 — We had "Open House" in the Jerome Assembly Room sponsored by St. Peter's College Capital Campaign Cabinet. It was an "awareness" gathering to inform us of the future planning for our college which included: resi-

Continued on next page

People and events around the abbey

Continued from previous page

dences for students, renovating of Michael Hall and the sports complex — gym and arena. The target is set for \$1,500,000 to help meet some of the costs. The campaign will officially open this fall.

Aug. 15 — On the Feast of the Assumption the community gathered to celebrate the golden jubilee of Fr. Werner Renneberg's monastic profession. He is especially dedicated to helping Fr. Francis Lohmer as he nears his 99th birthday.



Fr. Werner Renneberg celebrates 50 years of being a monk.

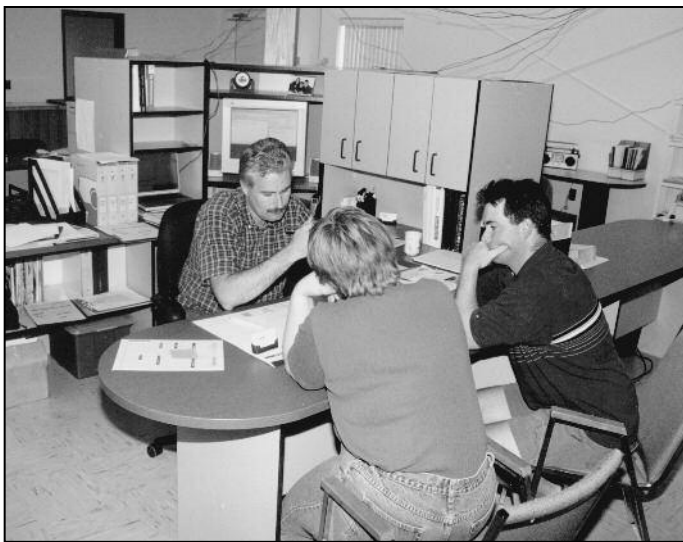


Fr. Francis Lohmer cuts his 99th birthday cake on Sept. 3.

Aug. 20 — St. Peter's Press. When the press staff re-entered the press building after the two-week summer break, they were greeted with an awe-inspiring sight. The entire front part had been realigned and renovated, exuding a most peaceful and bright atmosphere. It needed this adjustment because in the past 20

years the entire complex had moved into the computer, Web site, satellite era, and the entire layout had to be made labour-friendly again.

The press welcomes you to view the present setup, and the many publishing possibilities it has: from printing the *Prairie Messenger*, to job/book printing, and photo colour printing. Come and see!



The new redesigned layout room of St. Peter's Press.

Aug. 20 — At Vespers Gabriel Viveiros of Edmonton, Alta., and Ken Mansfield of Corner Brook, Nfld., were received as candidates into our Benedictine community.



Our new candidates Gabriel Viveiros (top) and Ken Mansfield.

Aug. 23 — Tri-community day, a day on which our three religious communities meet. The highlight this year was the 90th anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, May 14, 1911, to care for our hospitals, and also kitchens and laundry. The Ursuline teachers followed two years later.



Tri-Community Day, Aug. 23 — good food and good company.

Prior Alfred had a determined spirit

Continued from page 1

place as very unsuitable for a monastery and set about looking for a more favourable location. After Fr. Bruno Doerfler of St. John's Abbey had explored Western Canada in August 1902, St. John's invited the Cluny monks to consider the future St. Peter's Colony for a new foundation.

Alfred's determined spirit was evident in his undertaking three trips to the colony in the first months of 1903, claiming 50 townships for the proposed colony and obtaining Bishop Pascal's, of Prince Albert Diocese, approval for the founding of a monastery in his vicariate. Prior Alfred led the first contingent of his monks, strengthened with willing help from St. John's Abbey, into the colony on Ascension Day, May 21, 1903.

Prior Alfred proved himself a courageous leader in various ways. First, he had to ward off immigrants who wanted to claim homesteads within the colony territory. This involved numerous trips to Land Title offices in Regina, Winnipeg and Toronto.

This is evident in the many letters which he sent almost weekly to his abbot, Peter Engel, at St. John's Abbey. His first letter thanked the abbot for permitting Fr. Bruno to stay up at Rosthern



Rt. Revs. Peter Engel, Alfred Mayer, OSB, Rev. Meinrad Seifermann, OSB, Scholastic Jos. Wolf and others travelling from Rosthern to Leofeld in October 1904.

to welcome the incoming settlers and help them find their homesteads. When Bruno had to return to his abbey in September when school opened, Alfred temporarily took over this job at Rosthern. However, he had Fr. Chrysostom replace him for several weeks while Alfred himself went on those urgent trips to retain our colony lands. His letters show him residing at Rosthern from November 1903 till April 1904 when Fr. Benedict Steingenberger, after recovering from illness, arrived at Rosthern from the States and carried on the "welcoming" work, as well as editing the *St. Peter's Bote*. Prior Alfred had many "irons in the fire" at the same time. It was during his stay at Rosthern that he was able to prepare material for

and finally publish the first issue of *St. Peter's Bote* on Feb. 11, 1904.

From May till September 1904, after firmly establishing the colony, Prior Alfred continued the work of exploring the colony with horse and buggy. His plan was: to locate suitable sites for churches spaced about 15 miles apart (letter Dec. 21/03). At these sites he would place resident pastors who in turn could extend their work to the borders of the colony. Thus Prior Alfred truly deserved the title of **Founder of St. Peter's Monastery, St. Peter's Colony and St. Peter's Bote**.

During the next three years of his term as prior, Alfred could only marvel at the explosion of growth of the colony:

— By the end of 1903 approximately 1,000 homesteads were taken up.

(This showed not only the wisdom but also the urgent need that was present to have a monk stationed at Rosthern throughout these years to direct the influx of settlers into St. Peter's Colony.) By 1906 the population had increased to 6,000 (*Fifty Golden Years*, p. 19) and by 1910 to 8,000 (id, p. 36).

— Farm sites were maturing from sod to log to frame houses and buildings.

— With the CNR cutting through the colony in October 1904, lumber yards, stores, hamlets were taking shape.

— A dozen churches and parochial schools were built.



Second monastery building of St. Peter's Abbey, taken in 1904.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

— The number of monks increased from seven to 16, with seven parishes having resident pastors, and services conducted in 10 more missions.

The *St. Peter's Bote* was firmly established and heartily welcomed by the families. The *Bote*, printed at first in Winnipeg, soon had its own press at Muenster from Sept. 5, 1905 on, forming a strong bond among the many Catholic families.

Prior Alfred's 'mission accomplished'

When Prior Alfred's five-year term was completed, Fr. Bruno Doerfler of St. John's Abbey was chosen as prior. Fr. Alfred returned to Minnesota and resumed pastoral work at St. Cloud and later Moorhead.

In 1922 Alfred was named prior of St. John's Abbey and pastor of the Collegeville parish, building also a parochial school for the students. He made three visits back to St. Peter's Colony into which he had put his whole heart. And, three years before his death, he returned again to preach a retreat for the monks.

Fr. Alfred had accepted the appointment as prior in spite of frail health. However, the stomach ulcers which had afflicted him cast their shadow ahead to the stomach cancer which burdened him during his last years. Surgery in St. Cloud Hospital in 1928 brought neither cure nor relief.

Fr. Alfred died on May 29, 1929, and was buried in St. John's Abbey cemetery.

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ST. PETER'S PRESS, MUENSTER, SK

Thank you, good Prior Alfred, for the firm foundation which you have laid for us 100 years ago!

Epilogue: Where does Fr. Bruno Doerfler fit into these beginnings? Bruno was definitely "the explorer." He made the two exploratory trips in August and September 1902. Bruno is also "co-founder." He accompanied Fr. Alfred on his first exploratory trip to the colony Jan. 3, 1903, and was the "expert guide" to Rosthern of the first migration of monks

to the colony May 12, 1903. At that time he also stayed behind at Rosthern from May until October welcoming the onrush of immigrants to the colony and helping them find their homesteads.

Then he returned to St. John's Abbey for the school year. He remained there until he was sent to Winnipeg on Jan. 5, 1905, 1 1/4 years later, to be editor of *St. Peter's Bote*. In September 1905 he moved to Muenster and continued being its editor until he was chosen as the second prior of the monastery in 1906.



The Association of Catholic Religious Educators of Saskatchewan met May 30 - June 1 at St. Peter's Abbey.

Deaths

Since the last newsletter the following have passed into eternity:

- | | |
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| April 8 — Br. Francis Mutter, OSB, 81, St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kan. | June 22 — Fr. Clair Gannon, OSB, 89, St. Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Penn. |
| April 15 — Fr. Victor Roberts, OSB, 59, St. Gregory's Abbey, Shawnee, Okla. | July 11 — Sr. Maria Doepker, OSU, 78, Villa Angela, Humboldt, SK. |
| April 17 — Fr. James Murphy, OSB, 80, St. Gregory's Abbey, Shawnee, Okla. | July 28 — Conrad Hinz, 75, Muenster, SK. Brother of Fr. Leo Hinz. |
| April 25 — Fr. Gerard Donnelly, OSB, 79, St. Anselm's Abbey, Manchester, N.H. | July 28 — Bruce Whittaker, 87, Edmonton, AB. Father of Oblate Pat Whittaker. |
| May 22 — Sr. Bernadette Ehmann, OSU, 90, Villa Angela, Humboldt, SK. | Aug. 20 — Brian McGrath, 55, Nelson, BC. Brother of Oblate Dianne McGrath. |
| June 8 — Fr. Joel Lieb, OSB, 81, St. Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Penn. | Aug. 23 — Anthony Ha Nyugen, 71, Toronto, ON. Brother-in-law to Br. Anthony Nyugen. |