

# St. Peter's Abbey Newsletter



Vol. 23 No. 2 Spring 2001

## 100th anniversary of Prior Oswald

By Thomas Ward, OSB

Jan. 10, 2001, marked the 100th anniversary of the death in 1901 of Prior Oswald Moosmueller, the founding prior of our monastic community.

To mark this event we offer a brief outline of the life of Fr. Oswald.

The son of a well-to-do forester and gamekeeper in Bavaria, William Moosmueller was born in the Alpine village of Aiding on Jan. 26, 1832. When he died 69 years later near a small hamlet in southern Illinois, his life had come to exemplify a delicate balance between the best of 19th century missionary zeal and the high standards of traditional monastic observance.

As a youngster, while studying at St. Michael's Abbey monastic school at Metten, William Moosmueller learned of the work being done among German immigrants in North America by Fr. Boniface Wimmer.

At the age of 20 he decided to join the Benedictines in North America, arriving at the Priory of St. Vincent, Latrobe, Penn., on May 18, 1852.

William entered the novitiate at St. Vincent on Jan. 6, 1854, taking the name Oswald.

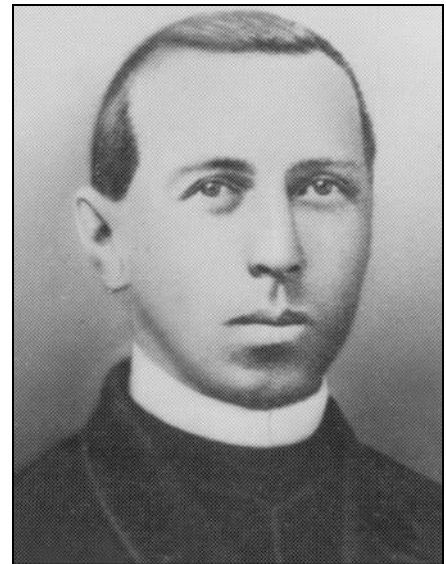
On Jan. 14, 1855, he made solemn vows and a year and a half later, on May 18, 1856, he was ordained to the priesthood in the cathedral of Pittsburgh by Bishop O'Connor. During this time he taught Latin at St. Vincent College. Almost immediately, Fr. Oswald was sent to St. Benedict's Priory in Carrolltown, Penn. This was followed by assignments assisting at Holy Trinity Parish in Brooklyn, helping to establish a German parish in Covington, Ken., and working among the Germans of Rondout, N.Y.

In 1861, Wimmer received a request from Bishop Pierre Adolphe Pinsonnault of London, Ont., for monks to take over the administration of Assumption College in Sandwich, Ont. Wimmer sent two priests, two clerics and several brothers under the direction of Fr. Oswald.

In the summer of 1862 Fr. Oswald went to Rio de Janeiro to discuss with the nuncio possible steps which the American monks might take to prevent the collapse of the Benedictines there.

Fr. Oswald spent a year in Brazil, but the anti-clerical government made it clear that it would not welcome North American interference. In November 1863, he was appointed prior of St. Mary's Priory, Newark, N.J., staying for three years. Back at home Fr. Oswald took up teaching duties as well as being appointed prior and procurator of St. Vincent on July 25, 1871.

When the 25th anniversary of the arrival of the Benedictines in North America was celebrated in October of

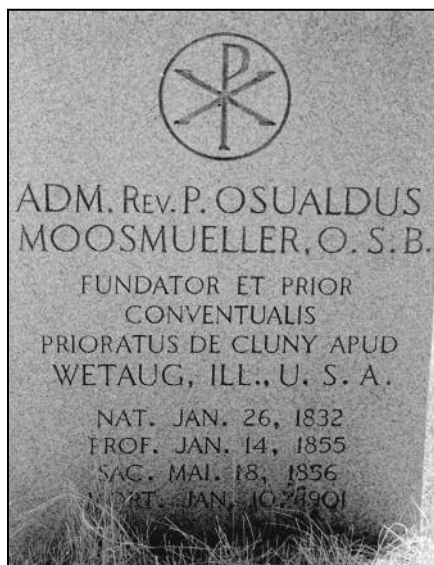


Prior Oswald Moosmueller, OSB, died 100 years ago.

that year, Fr. Oswald was commissioned by the abbot to write a history of the community. The book was called *St. Vincenz in Pennsylvanien*, published by F. Pustet of Cincinnati and New York in 1873. A year later he published a small *Manual of Good Manners* for the students of St. Vincent College.

Fr. Oswald's stay at St. Vincent was short-lived for in 1874 he was sent to St. Benedict's Priory, Atchison, Kan. When Fr. Oswald took over as prior, St. Benedict's was in debt to more than \$50,000 at 10 to 12 per cent interest. By January of 1876 he was able to report that he had managed to cut the annual interest payments in half.

When the Roman brief arrived at St. Vincent granting the elevation of St. Benedict's Priory to the rank of abbey, there was a good deal of speculation that Fr. Oswald would be elected first



The grave marker where Prior Oswald Moosmueller rests.

*Continued on page 7*

# A message from Abbot Peter's desk

Dear friends,

At a recent community meeting we discussed the needs of our elderly monks. It became clear that there will have to be some changes made at the monastery, so that we can provide better care for those who are infirm and who are sick. Many of them have put in many years of service for the abbey, the college and the parishes.

Right now, we are fortunate that home care is able to provide most of the health care services that we need. Home care ladies come in every day to help some of our elder monks with their baths. A nurse comes in once a week as well. And then there are a number of monks who pitch in part time or full time to take care of our brothers during the rest of the day, to take them to prayers and to meals, etc.

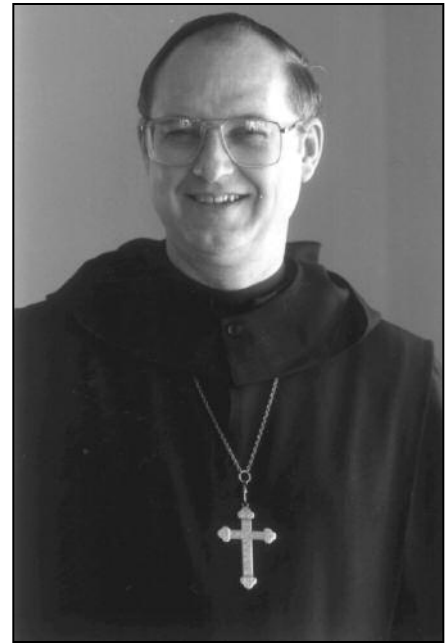
Soon we will need to provide more services by trained personnel. Now, we appreciate the fact that, so far, we can provide most of these services ourselves in our own home — at the abbey.

In this next year, we are looking at upgrading our physical space as well.

For example, our elevators will need a makeover. The abbey elevator is almost 40 years old, and needs a new cylinder. The elevator between the abbey and the abbey church is a freight elevator and the elderly need an assistant in order to use it. This elevator needs to be upgraded to make it more accessible for the elderly.

One of the other changes that is anticipated in the coming year is to provide a more accessible place for a whirlpool bath for the elderly who can't take a shower. And we will need to provide a nursing station in the infirmary and even some facilities for doing some preparing and serving of food for those who can no longer go to the dining room.

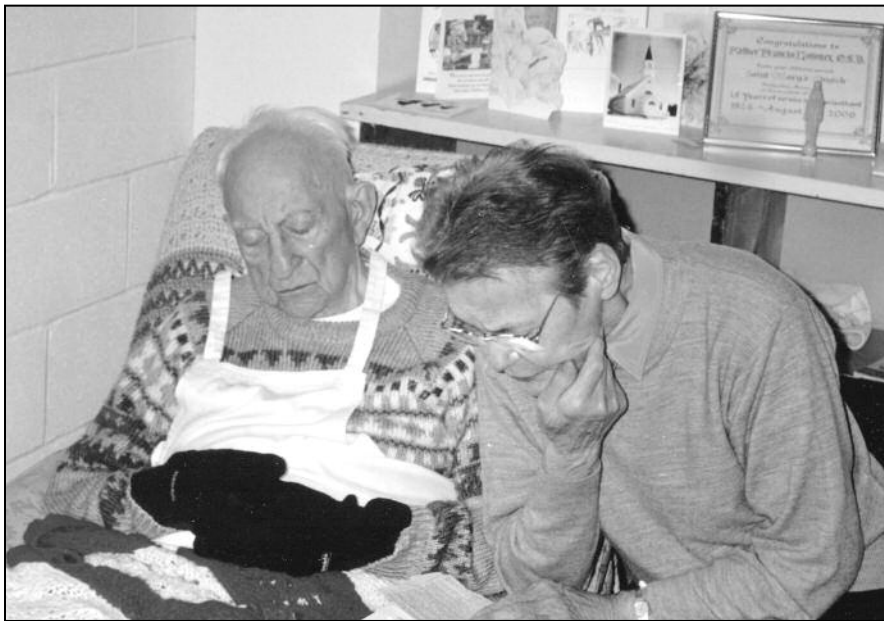
Some abbey rooms will need to be adapted for more adequate care of the sick and infirm. This will provide better accessibility for visiting with family and friends as well. And then some abbey offices will have to be relocated in order to provide the necessary space. The business manager's office and the plant manager's office are in the infirmary area at present and will need to be moved.



In order to upgrade our facilities for the elderly and also to provide adequate home care and nursing services in the future, the community has decided to set up an Elder Care Fund. We will solicit donations to this fund in order to assist us in paying for the changes that are required. An initial goal of \$50,000 has been set, to initiate the first stage of upgrading our facilities. If any of our friends or benefactors wish to make a contribution to this fund, we welcome any donation you might be able to make.

A number of people have made generous donations to various causes here at the abbey. The care of the elderly and the infirm monks is a new cause we are presenting to those who wish to and are able to make a financial contribution to St. Peter's Abbey. Donations can be made out to: Elder Care Fund, St. Peter's Abbey, Box 10, Muenster, SK S0K 2Y0.

A tax receipt will be given for any contribution over \$10. If a person wishes to fund a particular project, please write me to discuss various options. A plaque will acknowledge a major donor for a particular project.



*Celine Wolsfeld visits with Fr. Francis Lohmer almost every day.*

# Weakness shared is a gift for all

By Lawrence DeMong, OSB

I would like to celebrate something special about St. Peter's Abbey: It's the presence of our aged and infirm monks. When we look at a natural family with children, parents, grandparents at all the stages of growth we see life the way it was designed and the way it is the healthiest.

One of my most precious memories of Brazil was meeting young families where grandparents were living in the same house as children. I recall one home I visited shortly before leaving where the interaction between the infirm grandmother to whom I was bringing the sacraments and the grandson about three years old left a profound mark on me.

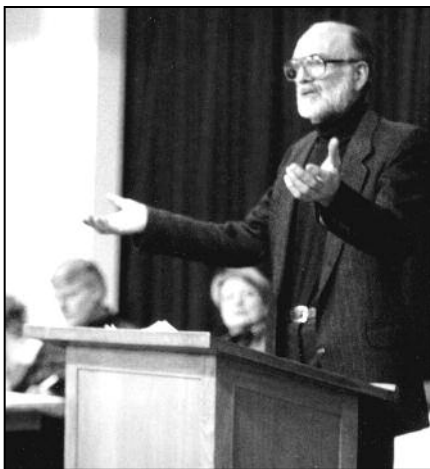
The unique quality of the child-grandparent relationship is its gratuity. Parents have to challenge and discipline their children. Grandparents can provide the unmixed blessing of pure love. Theirs can be the truest and clearest image of the God of infinite love. So profoundly important is the love of a grandparent, psychologists tell us, that children will seek out such a person when no grandparent is present.

Thirty-four years ago when I was between two summer schools of study at Laval University, I had the privilege of working with Fr. Francis Lohmer at St. Augustine's Parish in Humboldt. He was a prince of Benedictine hospitality and it was a great year. Now he has returned home and become highly dependent. Although caring for him is often quite demanding, involving for me as little as three hours of sleep on a bad night, I have found caring for him a very rewarding experience. At 98 he is truly a grandfather to many of us.

As is true today, we have often had infirm monks at the abbey with one or two confreres caring for them.

For example, Fr. Norbert Schwinghammer, 90, is being cared for mostly by Brs. Anthony Nguyen and Neil Pitzel.

In the case of Fr. Francis I suspect the larger group of volunteer helpers have come forward not only because he



Fr. Lawrence DeMong

needs more support, but because we found in him a close friend over many years. First among those friends for sure is his long-time housekeeper, Celine Wolsfeld, also a Benedictine oblate. When Fr. Francis is at a low ebb, it is she who can usually perk him up.

Abbot Peter and Fr. Werner, with their rooms close by, have been a great support to Fr. Francis as well. With the use of an electronic monitor, Abbot Peter has also been his night helper, a

service which I have often taken when he was away. Many other monks help along, as well as volunteers from St. Scholastica Parish where he was pastor until his accident last fall.

This is the United Nations' Year of the Volunteer. The concrete experience of caring for Fr. Francis is a wonderful opportunity to return some of the loving hospitality we received from him over many years. But more profoundly and apart from what he might have done for us, it is a powerful participation in weakness which for St. Paul was a most direct way of entering into the mystery of Christ's dying in the hope of rising with him.

When I think of all those who know and love our infirm monks, including also the Brodner brothers, Fr. George and Br. Gregory, as well as our hermit, Fr. Robert Gannon, I'm delighted that we are setting up a fund for helping to make life better for those who gave so much to so many for so long. Our hired help may well need to be increased and if it's good for us to be directly involved in volunteer care, it opens the door to many others who may wish to reach out a volunteer hand, however far away they may be.



## The Saskatchewan Benedictines

invite you  
to experience

### Monastic Life

by living with the monks at  
St. Peter's Abbey

To assist you in discerning your life vocation share some time  
with a community of Benedictine monks by contacting:

**Richard Meidl, OSB**

Vocation Director

St. Peter's Abbey

Box 10

Muenster, SK S0K 2Y0

Ph: 306-682-1791 / Fax: 306-682-1766

E-Mail: [frichard@stpeters.sk.ca](mailto:frichard@stpeters.sk.ca)

see our web page at [www.stpeters.sk.ca](http://www.stpeters.sk.ca)

# People and events around the abbey

By Martin Brodner, OSB

Jan. 10 — The 100th anniversary of the death of Prior Oswald Moosmueller, OSB, our founder and first prior at Cluny monastery in Wetaug, Ill., on Jan. 10, 1901. His bones were transferred to our abbey cemetery in September 1929.

Jan. 18 — The monks and College Board of Governors met to study at greater length our need for a student residence. After the closing of the high school in 1972, the student residence was gradually turned into our present Severin Hall Guest Wing.

Jan. 25 — With the increase of monks in our home care area, the sacrament of anointing of the sick was given to seven of our elderly and infirm today.

Jan. 26-28 — We welcomed another large group of students from St. Thomas



**Christ has risen. He has risen indeed.**  
*A new look for the cross at St. Peter's Abbey.*



## **Saskatchewan Writers/Artists Colony — Winter 2000**

*Back row (l-r): Liz Philips, Dianne Warren, Arlene Metrick, Honor Kever, Betsy Rosenwald, Katherine Lawrence, Judy McCrosky, Art Slade, Darlene Hay, Shelley Sopher*

*Front row (l-r): Dave Carpenter, Dave Margoshes, Laureen Marchand, Reg Silvester, Mary Walters, Frances Rondeau*

More College, Saskatoon, for their annual retreat.

Feb. 1 — Fr. Leo underwent a quintuple heart bypass surgery, experiencing a slight stroke along with it. He is at present in City Hospital for several weeks of physiotherapy.

Feb. 6 — “Yes, Lawrence, in the world’s eyes you’re plumb nuts,” said Benedictine Oblate Al Gerwing, “but many of us are glad you’re nuts. You saw the land, the water and the sky you love threatened and you came to their defence. You saw all the nobodies of the earth threatened and you flew to their defence with the same zeal.” That was part of the introduction to Fr. Lawrence DeMong receiving the Global Citizens Award from the Saskatchewan Council for International Co-operation.

Feb. 9-23 — The Saskatchewan Writer’s Guild had the largest turnout of members for the Winter Colony, with 16 members in the first week and 16 in the second.

Feb. 13 — The abbey just received the video of the one-and-a-half hour movie Solitude which was filmed on the abbey grounds in July 2000. With the early summer rains at that time the

abbey grounds looked “their best” both in the movie and in reality!!! Naturally, we were eager to view the results of the monthlong filming.

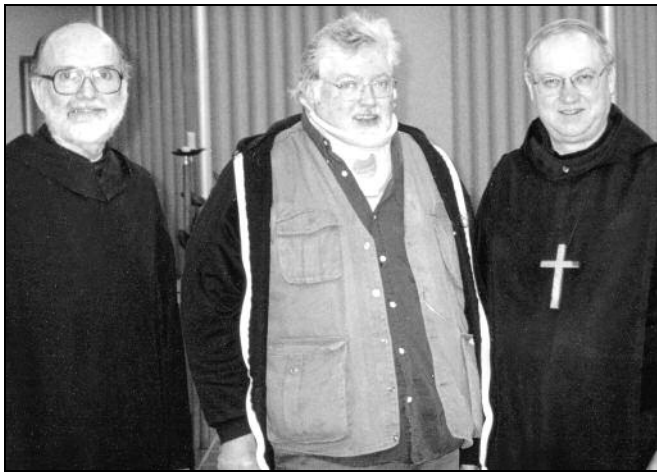
Feb. 22-25 — Abbot Peter Novecosky attended the annual meeting of the Western Conference of Bishops in Edmonton.

Feb. 28 — Definite break in the cold February we had, following a rather mild January. Time was well used by our maintenance crew under Br. Basil Schaan and Allan Vedress for indoor repairs, updating main valves in our waterline system, and installing a new pressure boiler.

March-April — After a slack first two months the guest department was solidly booked on the weekends for these two months. The groups included two marriage encounter weekends, one engaged encounter weekend and six major denominational retreats.

March 6 — Fr. Leo Hinz returned to the abbey to continue physiotherapy after the two surgeries.

March 8 — The 40-page booklet, Our Bruno: the story of the first abbot, was printed by St. Peter’s Press. It is the first of several possible publications expected for the Centennial of



*John Livingstone Clark became a Benedictine oblate candidate. He is seen here with Fr. Lawrence DeMong and Abbot Peter Novecosky.*



*Abbot Peter Novecosky (right) accepted the final oblation of Mary-Rose Wolff on Oblate Day at Vespers. Pictured here with Fr. Lawrence DeMong.*

St. Peter's Abbey and Colony in 2003. The book is selling for \$5.00 plus shipping from St. Peter's Press.

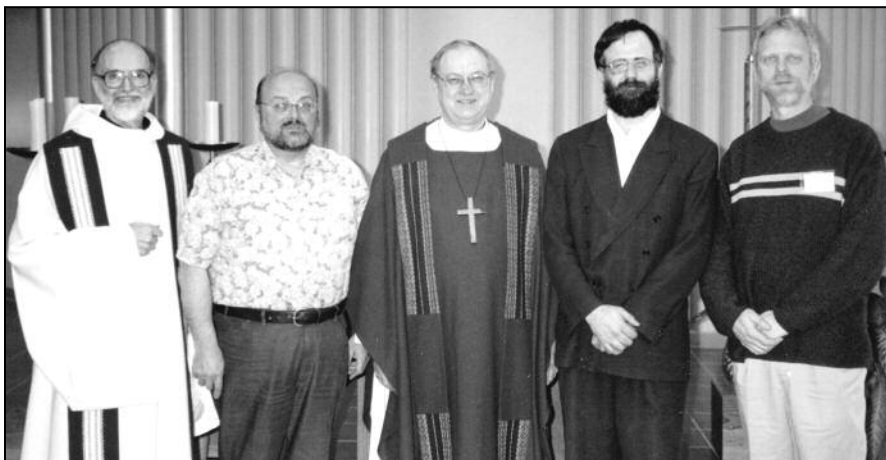
March 8 — We checked the dwindling water supply in our reservoir. It revealed three feet of ice and two feet of water still remaining. At this point we are waiting for more snow for a much needed spring run-off.

March 13 — John Livingstone Clark, one of our university professors, was accepted at Noon Prayer as a Benedictine Oblate candidate.

March 31 — Oblate Day. A warm sunny spring day which burst forth with



*Rev. Ken Watts, Gail Friesen, Therese de Margerie, Terri Zacharias and Steve Berg became Benedictine Oblate candidates. They are seen here with Abbot Peter Novecosky and Fr. Lawrence DeMong.*



*Joe Graumans, Richard Dunstan Boyko and Rev. David Hoffman made final oblation. Pictured here with Fr. Lawrence DeMong and Abbot Peter Novecosky.*

new growth of our Oblates — with five new candidates and four making final oblation. We would like to wish them all the best in the future as they continue on their spiritual journey.

Those making final oblation were: Rev. David Hoffman of Regina, Sask.; Joe Graumans of Prince Albert, Sask.; Richard Dunstan Boyko of Ottawa, Ont.; and Mary-Rose Wolff of Calgary, Alta.

The five new candidates were: Therese de Margerie of Saskatoon, Sask.; Gail Friesen of Saskatoon, Sask.; Rev. Ken Watts of Saskatoon, Sask.; Steve Berg of Stoney Plain, Alta.; and Terri Zacharias of Meadow Lake, Sask.

# People and events around the abbey

April 1 — Humboldt celebrates its new status as a city. It was declared a city on Nov. 7, 2000. It had been incorporated as a village July 5, 1904.

April 6 — Last day of college classes was fittingly highlighted with a Student Appreciation Lunch of pizza and coke, “fun presentations” to various students for “noteworthy” achievements.

April 7 — Fr. Leo Hinz was able to return to his parish in Cudworth for the Holy Week services, after his various surgeries.

April 8 — A happy day as it was announced at breakfast that water from the spring runoff was beginning to flow into our reservoir. The water had reached its lowest level since the first runoff in our new reservoir in 1971. “Waters of the Lord bless the Lord!”

April 12-15 — For the first time in our abbey’s 98-year history, the Easter Triduum was celebrated in the abbey. It had been celebrated in the Muenster parish church from the very beginning of our colony because most of the 15

monks in those pioneer days were needed in the new parishes.

After we became an Abbey-Nullius in 1921 the abbot, as “Ordinary,” was required to celebrate the Triduum in his “cathedral.” Since we are now part of the Diocese of Saskatoon since 1998 that obligation is no longer there, and monks are also a bit older than those pioneer monks.

April 17-24 — Fr. Richard Meidl attended the annual Benedictine Formation Directors Conference which this year was held at St. Joseph Abbey, a short distance north of New Orleans. Trappist monk Michael Casey of Australia facilitated a workshop on “Marketing the Traditions to our Communities.”

April 19 — For one week Br. Basil Schaan made efforts to pump water near the reservoir into it. He succeeded in raising the low water level by about a foot, raising it to a level of 10 feet, two inches. This level is still eight feet below the maximum level which we were able to reach in most previous years. What we need is lots of rain this summer!



*Fr. Lawrence DeMong assisting Fr. Francis with a glass of water.*

April 19-26 — Fr. Andrew Britz conducted the annual retreat for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate at Queen’s House of Retreats, Saskatoon.

April 26 — Since our water supply is so precarious, the community explored the possibility of hooking up to the Saskatchewan River line which had been laid from the Saskatchewan River via Wakaw through Humboldt and on to Annaheim and Lake Lenore.

Since this is not only possible but also advisable, the Benedictine community today approved this project. This hookup can be made this fall we hope.



*Nancy E. Gordon reads to Fr. Norbert Schwinghammer four mornings a week while he eats his breakfast.*

*“ . . . that in all things God may be glorified. ”*  
— Benedictine Motto

# Moosmueller served in many locations

*Continued from page 1*

abbot. When time came for the election, Wimmer went to Atchison to supervise it. He told the capitulars that they might choose any monk in the American Cassinese Congregation except Fr. Innocent Wolf, prior at St. Vincent, and he recommended Fr. Oswald to them.

Fr. Oswald, however, had been quietly leading a campaign for the one man the abbot had forbidden the monks to choose, and when the votes were tallied after the first ballot on Sept. 29, 1879, it was announced that Fr. Innocent had received eight of the 11 votes, Fr. Oswald having received the others.

Four years earlier Fr. Innocent had been elected abbot of St. John's Abbey in Minnesota, but because Wimmer had plans for him to be his successor at St. Vincent, he had overturned the election.

Overturning a second election might have caused protests as vehement as those which accompanied his overturning of the first election. Reluctantly Abbot Boniface approved the decision of the Kansas monks. Fr. Oswald remained in Kansas long enough to help Abbot

Innocent Wolf get settled in his new post.

Before Fr. Oswald had an opportunity to return to St. Vincent, a new assignment came from Abbot Boniface Wimmer. In February of 1877 the abbot's troubleshooter was on his way to the coastal marshes of Georgia. At the Isle of Skidaway, he hoped to establish a school for African-American children with a small community of one cleric, three brothers and five candidates.

During Fr. Oswald's stay at Skidaway, the Priory of Maryhelp, Belmont, S.C., was raised to an abbey. Because Skidaway was going to become a dependent priory of Maryhelp, many monks expected Fr. Oswald to become abbot of Maryhelp. On the first ballot Fr. Oswald received an absolute majority of 55 votes. Since Fr. Oswald was not present for the voting, news of his election was telegraphed to him via Bishop Gross of Savannah. Fr. Oswald telegraphed Wimmer, "Thank you for the honour, but I cannot accept."

Fr. Oswald remained in Savannah for two more years and in August 1887 he was assigned by Abbot Boniface to the Benedictine mission in Alabama. His stay here was short-lived with the death on Dec. 8, 1887, of Abbot Boniface.

The new abbot of St. Vincent's, Abbot Andrew Hintenach, recalled Fr. Oswald to become prior of St. Vincent's. Fr. Oswald's assignment as prior of St. Vincent was not to be very long either. In December 1891, Fr. Oswald petitioned Abbot Andrew for permission to establish a community near Wetaug, Ill.

The desire to found the monastery came out of Fr. Oswald's increasing attraction to the thought of establishing a monastery where literary activity would provide the financial basis for living a strict monastic life. This attraction had its genesis firstly out of Fr. Oswald's own literary activity.

In addition to the 25th anniversary history of St. Vincent and the Manual for College Students, Fr. Oswald completed a history of European exploration



*St. Joseph's Catholic Church at Wetaug, Ill. Built in 1882 — torn down in October 1929.*

in America before the coming of Columbus.

Fr. Oswald's historical studies made him a prime candidate in 1884 for a position in Rome on the Vatican's newly formed Commission on Historical Subjects which, however, he turned down when it was offered to him.

Secondly, Fr. Oswald was attracted to a more contemplative style of monastic life as a result of his time as prior for Abbot Andrew. When he was elected abbot of St. Vincent it was hoped Abbot Andrew would place greater emphasis on the contemplative aspects of monastic life.

Toward the end of Boniface Wimmer's life there had been growing opposition among monks at St. Vincent to the extensive missionary activity emanating from the monastery. This attitude helped to elect Fr. Andrew as the new abbot. Fr. Oswald was to be an important part of the new abbot's plan of reform at St. Vincent.

*Continued on page 8*



*Grave of Rev. Oswald Moosmueller, OSB, prior of Cluny Abbey near Wetaug, Ill. — in the cemetery near the church as it looked in November 1918.*

# Priory moved to Muenster

*Continued from page 7*

In 1892 Fr. Oswald did attempt to develop the ideal monastery on property owned by St. Vincent in the malaria-infected area of southwest Illinois at Wetaug near Cairo.

Fr. Oswald spent the last eight years of his life at New Cluny Priory, Wetaug, struggling sometimes against insuperable odds to make the community a successful one. He died of pneumonia on Jan. 10, 1901.

Without their former prior, the monks decided to abandon southern Illinois. After considering moves to East St. Louis, New York, California and Colorado, they decided to transfer the priory to Muenster,

Sask., Canada, in May of 1903.

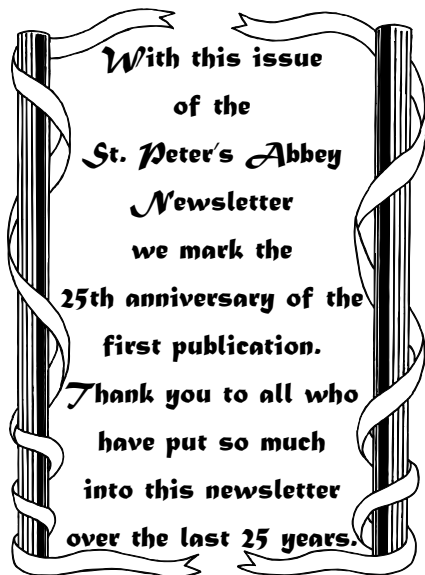
Even in death Fr. Oswald was not to find stability. On Sept. 10, 1929, the remains of Prior Oswald were exhumed by two members of the former Cluny Priory, Frs. Bernard Schaeffler and Leo Ojdowski. It is in the monastic cemetery at Muenster that Fr. Oswald has gained the stability of the monastic life that he seemed to be seeking.

Information for this article was taken from Jerome Oetgen, Oswald Moosmueller: Monk and Missionary; American Benedictine Review, Vol. 27; 1976; p.1-35.

Peter Beckman, OSB, Kansas Monks; p.95-114; and Peter Windschiegl, OSB, Fifty Golden Years; p.11.



*Rose Marie Strueby, a long-time employee at St. Peter's Press, has moved on to new employment at Canyon Meadows, Calgary, Alta.*



Published and printed by the Benedictine community of St. Peter's Abbey, Muenster, Saskatchewan S0K 2Y0, three times per year: January - May - September. Editor: Thomas Ward, OSB. Regular contributors: Abbot Peter Novocosky, OSB; Martin Brodner, OSB; Lawrence DeMong, OSB. Photo Credits: Moran, Ward, Brodner, St. Peter's Abbey Archives. Logo by Kurt Van Kuren, OSB.

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

*Our legal title is:*

**ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT  
Muenster, SK S0K 2Y0**

## Deaths

Since the last newsletter the following have passed into eternity:

- Oct. 26** — Fr. Emilian Muschette, OSB, 83, Newark Abbey, Newark, N.J.
- Jan. 4** — Br. Elmer Cichy, OSB, 85, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.
- Jan. 6** — Fr. Thomas Stumpf, OSB, 74, Mary Mother of the Church Abbey, Richmond, Va.
- Jan. 9** — Fr. Anselm Biggs, OSB, 86, Belmont Abbey, Belmont, N.C.
- Jan. 9** — Fr. Conrad Pillar, OSB, 79, St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kan.
- Jan. 15** — Br. Jerome Rice, OSB, 75, St. Maur Priory, Indianapolis, Ind.
- Feb. 2** — Fr. Raphael Zbin, OSB, 80, Saint Andrew Abbey, Cleveland, Ohio
- Feb. 17** — Ray Engele, Humboldt, Sask., brother of deceased Fr. Alfred Engele.
- March 4** — Joe Renneberg, Cudworth, Sask., brother of Fr. Werner Renneberg.
- March 17** — Fr. Lucien Donnelly, OSB, 80, Newark Abbey, Newark, N.J.
- March 21** — Sr. Mary Agnes Schachtel, OSE, 97, Humboldt, Sask.
- April 2** — Oblate Robert Langen, 82, Humboldt, Sask.
- April 13** — Fr. Benedict Nordick, OSB, 81, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.