



St. Peter's Abbey Newsletter



Vol. 28 No. 1 Winter 2006

Christmas at St. Peter's 2005 and years ago in 1905

By Werner Renneberg, OSB

Weather-wise, Christmas 2005 was one of the most pleasant and beautiful on record. There was snow on the ground, an inch or two. The snow had remained where it fell, as we had no strong winds move the snow into bushes and ditches. The temperature was only a few degrees below freezing and the moon shone in all its glory.

We still have four resident priests in parishes and another three pastors residing at the abbey. Fr. Leo Hinz is pastor of Cudworth and St. Benedict; Fr. Joseph

Ackerman pastor of Bruno and Peterson; Fr. Andrew Britz caring for Lake Lenore and Naicam, and Fr. Rudolph Novecosky, Anaheim, also in charge of St. Gregor. Each celebrated Christmas in their own parishes. Fr. Richard Meidl, OSB, resident at the abbey, offered the Christmas Eve mass in St. Benedict, part of Fr. Leo's regular charge.

Fr. Roman Schneider, aged 84, offered Christmas evening mass both in St. Scholastica at Burr, and Assumption of Our Lady Parish in Marysburg. Fr. Bernard Stauber, celebrated Christmas in

his Pilger and Middle Lake parishes. Fr. Daniel Muyres offered the Christmas masses in St. Peter's Parish, Muenster. The latter three priests reside at St. Peter's Abbey. Fr. Werner's offered Christmas day mass at St. Mary's Villa, Humboldt.

Former Abbot Jerome Weber, OSB, aged 90, residing at the abbey, but regularly offering Sunday mass at St. Elizabeth's Convent, Humboldt, took the evening Christmas mass for the Franciscan Sisters of St. Elizabeth, as well as the morning mass Dec. 25.

Fr. Lawrence DeMong, resident at the abbey, has a special out-of-the-diocese assignment. He spends two Sundays a month in the Archdiocese of Keewatin-LePas, once at La Ronge and again at Cumberland House, to minister to mostly Aboriginal Catholics. Christmas was spent at La Ronge with a mass at 8 p.m. Christmas eve, and another on Christmas day at 11. Both places are at a distance of about 375 kilometres from the abbey.

The tradition of having Christmas mass at midnight came to the former St. Peter's Colony, later St. Peter's Abbacy, from Germany and the United States. As you will see in account of masses 100 years ago, not every place had their first mass at midnight. We must remember that the settlers only began to arrive in 1903. Until then it was all virgin land. However, the early settlers along with their families, flocked to the Christmas masses. Their means of conveyance were sleds drawn by horses or oxen. At first there were no roads, but that quickly changed. Roads were a priority.



This nativity scene was indoors and near the entrance of Sts. Peter and Paul Abbey Church. The attempt is made to represent many different nations, cultures and ways of life. It shows that Jesus Christ was born for everyone and everyone has his/her place in the Bethlehem stable. The sketch in back is of St. Peter's Cathedral at Muenster.

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A message from Abbot Peter's desk

Dear friends of St. Peter's Abbey,

We are well into a new year as this newsletter is going to press. A common refrain one hears is: "Where does the time go?"

That may be a strange comment to hear, especially at an abbey. But even at an abbey in Saskatchewan there are many different people passing through and different events taking place, in addition to the regular ones.

This year the St. Peter's College board hired Rob Harasymchuk as its president and he reorganized the administration of the college. There was a slight increase in the number of students registered for classes. The staff is working on increasing the enrolment. This means casting the net farther afield as the enrolment in the surrounding schools is decreasing. A full-time student recruiter has been hired.

This fall the college successfully completed its \$1.5-million fundraising drive. It's the first drive we've had in 40 years and we've learned a lot from the experience. It's amazing and gratifying to see the hard work volunteers put into such a drive and the generosity of donors. We realize again that we are all interdependent in rural Saskatchewan and we have to work together to create the best community possible.

This fall we welcomed back Earthcare Connections, with Duane Guina and Laura Deibert. Since Earthcare Connections is farming some of our land and using some farm buildings it made sense for them to centralize operations here at the abbey. The former Press/Abbacy



Gerald Seniuk, Chief Judge of the Provincial Court, presents Abbot Peter Novecosky with the Saskatchewan Centennial Medal on Dec. 10, 2005, on the Province of Saskatchewan's 100th anniversary in Confederation.

Centre was renovated and that is where the Earthcare office is now located. Earthcare is spearheading the Forest 20/20 project, which saw 33,000 hybrid poplar trees planted this spring. These trees grow eight times as fast as regular poplars and they will be ready for harvest in 20 years. By that time we may be out of natural gas — or it may be beyond our price range — and we may have to use wood for heating again!

The Prairie Messenger is planning to archive all its past issues digitally on computer. Br. Kurt Van Kuren has set up the computer program for this project and it will take some time to scan the 80+ volumes of the Prairie Messenger onto discs. After that, the German-script St. Peter's Bote — our earliest newspaper going back to 1904 — will be the next challenge.

This fall we welcomed Adam Exner, retired archbishop of

Vancouver, to the abbey. He plans to stay with us for a year. He joins us in prayer and work, as St. Benedict recommends. He even takes his regular turn at dishes a couple of times a week. He will be involved in the Prairie Messenger archival project.

Besides the work that keeps monks busy at the abbey or in parishes, several monks also volunteer their time and talents for national or international groups. Fr. Werner Renneberg has accepted a three-year term as a member of the national trio for Marriage Encounter Canada. This will be his second turn at this. Fr. Lawrence DeMong has just been asked to serve as a member of the international trio for Marriage Encounter organization. Fr. Richard Meidl serves on the Canadian board of AITRI, the Association of Treasurers of Religious Institutes of the Canadian Religious Conference, English section. I am on the national communication committee for the Canadian Religious Conference as well.

If someone asks where does the time go, this may give a small idea of the opportunities a monastery provides on how to use one's time for the benefit of the community and the wider church.



Duane Guina and Laura Deibert at their Earthcare Connections office.

People and events around the abbey

By Martin Brodner, OSB

2005

September — We pick up our chronicle after a rather wet and cool summer, which helped the weeds get out of hand, gave us abundant crops, and caused some grain to lodge. Neither could the corn ripen well. The potato fields were partly under water. But we were grateful for their abundance.

Aug. 22 — Ken Mansfield, assistant Oblate director, left for Rome for the first International Conference of Oblates. He has since then built up a mini-library for Oblates in our main entrance.

Sept. 10 - 12 — Due to a 4" rain, the northern end of Severin Hall basement was flooded and has received a major cleanup.

Sept. 8 — Br. Randy Senecal was diagnosed as having a cancerous brain tumour. It was removed Sept. 12. He underwent radiation treatments and is recovering well (by January).



Brs. Pierre and Neil are caregivers for Fr. Albert Ruetz. (Stuffed peacock in the foreground.)

Sept. 24 — St. Peter's College Academic Awards Night. The students returned in the first week of September.

Oct. 5 — Fr. Lawrence DeMong was accidentally thrown from a bicycle and suffered a cracked hip bone, which hospitalized him for several weeks. After several months he was able take up his pastoral visits to La Ronge and Cumberland House.

Fr. Albert Ruetz became quite sick and was also taken to the hospital for surgery. He is back at the abbey, recovering slowly.

Oct. 13 - 16 — Our guest department hosted one of its largest workshops: the International Harvest Conference, with people here from New Zealand and Texas. Its general theme: Enhancing the Quality of Life in Rural Communities. This group is working with the Canadian Church Rural Network.

Oct. 21 — Oblate Day. Fr. James Gray explained the Liturgy of the Hours for the Oblates. Alan Riese made his final oblation. Marian Kirzinger and Bernard Merkosky became Oblate candidates.

Oct. 27 — At our regular Christian Faith Conference, Megan McKenna presented the scriptural reflection: "How a Shepherd became a King."

Nov. 1 — Earthcare Connections has moved its office from Humboldt to our renovated Abbacy Centre, with Executive Director Duane Guina, and Laura Deibert as office manager.

Nov. 7 — Three great events:
 a) University of Saskatchewan governing board meets SPC governing board over supper in the gym;
 b) Annual Pro-Life meeting (Humboldt)
 c) Former Abbot Jerome Weber induct-



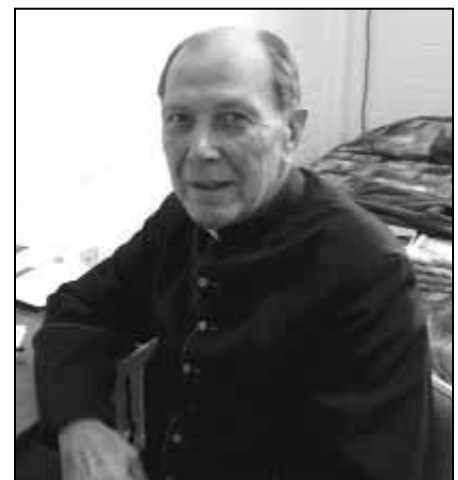
Br. Kurt at the computer.

ed into the Humboldt and District Sports Hall of Fame: "He was honoured for his contribution to SPC and district. He made sports a large part of the daily life of the college students for many years."

Nov. 21 — We began the major operation of replacing many windows on the abbey and Severin Hall. This is a major energy saving project.

Nov. 11 — Archbishop Adam Exner, OMI, retired as archbishop of Vancouver, arrived and will spend some time at the abbey, praying with the monks and sharing in the work. He had earlier been bishop of Kamloops and Winnipeg.

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Archbishop Adam Exner, OMI, is spending a year at St. Peter's Abbey.

Christmas at St. Peter's involves a day of decorating

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In recent years, the midnight masses were dropped in nearly all of the parishes in favour of evening masses. Before Vatican Council II afternoon and evening masses were forbidden. We are now allowed to anticipate the next day's mass in the previous evening. It is a sign of the times. Evening masses, rather than midnight, are more convenient for old and young. Travelling today is much faster, cars with efficient heaters today replace the open-horse or oxen-drawn sleighs of 100 years ago; roads are excellent, families are smaller and thermostats keep constant temperature in houses, fuelled by natural gas. Compare this to earlier wood stoves where the fire would be out, and uninsulated houses would be ice boxes, especially when the temperature dropped to -40 degrees, either F or C.

In 2005, midnight masses were offered only at St. Peter's Abbey, Muenster and St. Augustine Church, Humboldt. The latter is one of the largest parishes in the Diocese of Saskatoon. Formerly it was served by Benedictines priests, but now by a diocesan priest, Fr. Murray Kuemper. Fr. Kuemper's parents



Brs. Kurt, Paulus and candidate Carl decorated the Christmas tree in the abbey church.

incidentally grew up in former St. Peter's Abbey parishes of Muenster and St. Gregor. Fr. Kuemper offered two evening masses before the final midnight mass to serve the many parishioners and relatives visiting families in their hometown.

St. Peter's Abbey's traditional midnight mass was celebrated at 12 p.m., Dec. 25, in the abbey church by Abbot

Peter Novecosky. Br. Paul Paproski, a deacon and in his final year of studies for the priesthood, was home for Christmas. He served as deacon at the mass.

Community member priests at the



Jim Ternier of Ternier Garden Seeds manually harvests carrot seeds at the abbey. Jim relocated his organic garden seed enterprise to St. Peter's Abbey last fall from Cochin. Here he can expand his business with the help of the monks interested in organic farming.



Br. Neil and Fr. Richard are putting the final touches on the Christmas tree in the monastic refectory. Fr. Richard (with Santa's hat) had the task of co-ordinating the decorations for the Christmas festivities. Former Abbot Jerome Weber was heard to say, "Fr. Richard certainly is good at decorating."



Outdoor nativity scene near the entrance to the college gym.

abbey who concelebrated at the midnight mass were: Frs. Martin Brodner, Albert Ruetz, James Gray, Demetrius Wasyluniuk and, Prior Werner Renneberg. Abbey Brothers, along with the many guests, sang Christmas songs half an hour before 12:00, and greatly enhanced the mass with their singing. Zita Meyer played the organ beautifully for the festivity. The church was filled to overflowing.

Following the mass, lunch was served in the monastic dining room, to which all the guests and community members at the mass were invited.

St. Peter's Bote 100 years ago

No mention was made in the Bote how Christmas 1904 was spent in the

Colony. The following account of Christmas in St. Peter's monastic church and various parishes in St. Peter's Colony in 1905 are found in the Bote for Dec. 28.*



Nativity scene in the abbey recreation room.

Christmas was celebrated solemnly in the monastic church at Muenster. Rev. Prior Alfred (Mayer, OSB) had the first High Mass at 5:00 in the morning, assisted by Fr. Bruno as deacon, and Fr. Leo as sub-deacon. After that there followed quiet masses practically without a break until 10 o'clock, when the last High Mass was offered. Fr. Bruno

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Christmas at St. Peter's in 1905 focused on liturgy

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was celebrant, Fr. John was deacon and Fr. Leo assisted as subdeacon. Fr. Prior Alfred gave the festive sermon. Although there were no guests from neighbouring parishes, because all had their own services, the church could hardly accommodate all the faithful. The inspiring song of praise, "Holy God, we praise thy Name," concluded the mass.

For the great feast of Christmas, in St. Bruno church at Bruno, Fr. Chrysostomus offered three Holy Masses, at 7:30, 8 and 10 o'clock. During these, the well-rehearsed choir sang the old, beautiful German Christmas songs that the German heart has held so dear since childhood. Peter Hoffmann brought his "parlor" organ to the church, and its harmonious sound did much to enhance the celebration.

In Humboldt too, Christmas was celebrated in a fitting fashion. The spacious church was filled to the last place with the devout for the three masses celebrated by the pastor, Fr. Rudolph.

A new and nicely decorated crib intensified the devotion for believing hearts. The excellent new monstrance, donated by an anonymous person, made benediction with the Most Holy Sacrament possible for the first time in the parish. The new tabernacle and communion railing, both donated, except for the wood, had also been readied for the feast. It is to be pitied that the parish does not have a choir, hopefully this inconvenience will soon be overcome, so that in a short time worthy songs can lift the hearts to greater devotion at mass.

* * * * *

Leofeld — Christmas here was celebrated in an especially festive manner. At midnight the first High Mass was offered by our pastor, Fr. Meinrad. Prior to that the school children, directed by our capable teacher, Miss Peters, sang lovely German Christmas hymns. The parish choir had practised a fitting mass and other songs for this occasion, which did much to enhance the celebration. The

church was splendidly decorated with Christmas trees and garlands.

After the Midnight Mass some drove to St. Benedict, where at 5:00 in the morning, Fr. Meinrad had a festive mass in which he gave a sermon in two languages, German and English.

At 11:00 in the forenoon was a third mass in Leofeld, a High Mass in the presence of the exposed Blessed Sacrament, along with a sermon in German. It concluded with Benediction.

**These accounts are from recently translated local items of news from the German newspaper, St. Peter's Bote, by Fr. Werner Renneberg. The first Botes, beginning February 1904, less than a year after the Benedictines arrived, were edited in Rosthern, printed and mailed in Winnipeg, until the press was established in Muenster. The translations are found in coil-bound books, one volume per year. Seven volumes have been translated, 1904 - 1911. Volume 8, 1911 - 12 is well on the way. These books are available from St. Peter's Abbey, Box 10, Muenster, SK S0K 2Y0.*



Supper Christmas day. From left: Br. Paul, Br. Wolfgang, Br. Kurt, former Abbot Jerome, Br. Basil, Br. Pius.

People and events around the abbey

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Dec. 1 — At a Staff Appreciation luncheon, five staff members were acknowledged for their years of service: Randy Weber (30), Lucille Stewart (20), Gail Kleefeld, Myrna Brons and Loretta Loehr (15).

2006

Jan. 6 — Two new photocopiers have been installed: one in the abbey and the other in the business office. They also serve as fax and scanners. One of our major projects will be to “scan” our Prairie Messengers, abbey archive photos, etc. The scanning began Feb. 2.

Mid-January — We began dismantling our old “skating rink shack.” Former students from the 1930s to ’50s will recall this shack on the east side of our outdoor rink. It had been near the honey house in our bushes and served as a convenient place for ripening our tomatoes and other vegetables.

Keep the Heat Fund continues to grow

By Abbot Peter Novecosky

A concern the abbey has in keeping down its expenses is the bill for heating the abbey buildings. Last year the expense for heating the abbey and guest house was close to \$100,000.

The monks are concerned with reducing that expense. The milder weather this winter has helped considerably. Even with higher prices for natural gas, the bill should be smaller because of less consumption.

Another initiative the abbey took was to begin replacing the 40-year-old windows in the abbey. We started a Keep the Heat Fund for the abbey and set a goal of raising \$50,000. This would go a long way to raising money to help us replace the windows in the abbey.

To date we have raised \$41,600 for this purpose. This fall this fund helped the abbey replace 27 double and 11 single windows. With the windows we replaced a few years ago, that means close to 60 windows have now been replaced. The monks whose rooms are now more comfortable are most grateful to our benefactors.

There are still 19 double and 26 single windows to replace in the abbey, so we still have a challenge ahead of us. I want to thank all those who were generous in helping us with their donations. We appeal to your continued generosity to help us reach our goal of replacing all our windows.

In addition to replacing windows on the abbey, the guest wing also replaced 14 windows this fall. That’s about a quarter of the complete project there. This project of replacing our windows, besides giving greater comfort now, will reduce our heating bills in the future.

The next step in reducing heating costs is to look at alternate ways of heating. Neighbours in the area are already using geothermal heat, wheat-burning furnaces and outdoor coal- or straw-burning furnaces. We need to keep using our ingenuity to keep ahead.



A crew of workers installs a double window in the abbey residence.





Mother nature did its own decorating of trees. View from the road leading to the gym, guest wing and Michael Hall. There was an abundance of hoar frost.

St. Peter's Bote

Vols. 1-7 now available

Our Roots! Captured in St. Peter's Colony News, Letters to the Editor and sprinkled with names of those who made the news — all in seven volumes of *St. Peter's Bote*. The German newspaper with that name began publishing in February 1904, nine months after the first monks arrived. Translated by Werner Renneberg, OSB, one volume per year, the hopes, dreams, suffering, frustrations and successes from 1904 to 1911 can be appreciated. Within a few short years, to the astonishment of visitors, the unsettled wilderness had been transformed into a vibrant closely knit German community by hardy pioneers and equally hardy Benedictines. Each volume, coil binding, 8 1/2 X 11 inches. Price \$20 per volume. If ordered by mail, add \$5 shipping & handling.

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

Our legal title is:

ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT

Muenster, SK S0K 2Y0

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Logo by Kurt Van Kuren, OSB

Deaths: remember the faithful departed

Since the last newsletter the following have passed into eternity:

Aug. 21 — Fr. Kieran Patrick Cunningham, OSB, St. Martin's Abbey, Lacey, Wash.

Sept. 5 — Fr. Vernon Engele, OMI, brother of Fr. Alfred Engele, OSB, Saskatoon, Sask.

Sept. 9 — Fr. Martin de Porres Muheim, OSB, Holy Cross Abbey, Canon City, Co.

Nov. 15 — Br. Alfonso Vasquez Ochoa, OSB, Abbey of Tepeyac, Mexico

Dec. 5 — Fr. Jude Krogol, OSB, St. Leo Abbey, Flo.

Dec. 21 — Fr. Placidus Riley, OSB, St. Anselm Abbey, New Hampshire.