“Lost” Saint John’s

Part 2:
Mills & Greenhouses

(Buildings LOST - as opposed to just MOVED)

Remarks: Welcome to the second installment of my occasional series I’m calling “‘Lost’ Saint John’s” – with a nod to PBS and its episodes of “Lost Minneapolis” - “Lost St. Paul” - and “Lost Duluth.” Last time, I covered the St. Cloud Priory, the Indianbush buildings, and the Old Stone House, and if you missed it, you can see it as a pdf in Digital Commons or linked from the Archives’ websites. This time, I’m going to tell you about some utilitarian buildings.
As with “Part 1,” some of the earliest structures at St. John’s aren’t represented in the Archives in photos. Last time, I shared Alexius Hoffmann’s sketch of the buildings at “Indianbush.” I’m beginning today with another sketch by Father Alexius, this time of the sawmill and flour mill that were built on the dammed-up Watab River.

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg
You can see the dam marked on this 1896 plat map showing part of the Collegeville and Avon townships. 1896 Plat maps\Collegeville Township NE 1896 cropped; 1896 Plat maps\St Joseph Township NW 1896 http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/stearns/id/389/rec/1 p. 27, Avon Township; p. 43, Collegeville Township Text image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg
Alexius writes: “The Watab – properly Stump Lake – is merely an artificial lake produced by damming the north fork of the river, which issues from Island Lake...and continues below the mills as a creek meeting the south fork of the Watab River about a mile north of St. Joe.”

1896 Plat maps\Collegeville Township NE 1896 cropped; 1896 Plat maps\St Joseph Township NW 1896
http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/stearns/id/389/rec
p. 27, Avon Township; p. 43, Collegeville Township
Text image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg
"In the early spring of 1868, a saw mill was erected on the bank of the north fork of Watab Creek... This mill, located east of the present course of Watab Creek, was destroyed by fire on February 16, 1873."

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

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

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

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

http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3659/show/3617
So actually this sketch by Fr. Alexius is *not* of that first mill that burned down in 1873. It’s of the next one – or rather the next two, one a sawmill, and one to mill four – that replaced it. Alexius explains:

Images: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg
“The drawing... shows the two mills as they stood from 1875-1882, in the middle of the dam.”

Images: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Hoffmann Sketches ca 1800s\Box 2571 Folder 8 & 14\Color\Color p.1 2Mills&Ludwigs-Hoehe.jpg
And, because St. John’s photography studio got underway in 1880, we actually do have photographic evidence of these early – though not the earliest – mills.
Another *Scriptorium* article tells us that “after the first mill burned in 1873, a larger one, with a gristmill, had been erected closer to the banks of the Watab. One waterwheel did service for both.”


O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Flour and Saw Mill edited&flipped.jpg
On December 16 [1882], before sunrise, the saw and grist mills on the Watab were burnt to the ground together with a considerable quantity of grain and timber. Since that time no effort has been made to rebuild the mills…”

Hoffmann, 1907, p. 70

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

Text: Hoffmann, *SJU: A Sketch of Its History*, 1907, p. 70
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Flour and Saw Mill edited&flipped.jpg
We even have photographic evidence of the aftermath of the mill fire.
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Mills\Ruins of our mills 1883 Physical Plant binder.jpg
In the interest of connecting today’s history lesson to the main topic, I’m going to skip ahead by about ten years and talk about another feature that Saint John’s used in its efforts toward Benedictine sustainability – greenhouses. Here we have a late 1800s photograph, apparently taken from an upper window of Wimmer Hall – where the photo studio was located - looking south toward the cemetery. (You can see the white cross among the trees off in the distance.) Here, in 1892, “a green house was erected at the south end of the buildings.”

Text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey Notebook - green, in SJUArchives\Abbey Notebook.pdf, p. 43
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 23 conservatory about 1898.jpg
I don’t think this is a photo of that very first greenhouse, which was short-lived. Its fate is related in an old chronology in the Archives, which says that the 1892 conservatory “had been pretty well flattened by the storm” – meaning, the 1894 tornado. Text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey Notebook - green, in SJUArchives\Abbey Notebook.pdf, p. 43
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 23 conservatory about 1898.jpg
So work was “begun on the greenhouse at the northwest corner of the quadrangle.” (The writer is directionally challenged here; he had to have meant the SOUTHWEST corner of the Quad.)

Text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey Notebook - green, in SJUArchives\Abbey Notebook.pdf, p. 43
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 23 conservatory about 1898.jpg
The greenhouse “was entirely reconstructed and soon became popular as the “Crystal Palace” – a reference to the one built for the London World’s Fair in 1851. The new greenhouse was “a fabulous glass edifice 50’ x 24’ x 15’, containing all sorts of strange and exotic plants.”

Text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Abbey Notebook - green, in SJUArchives\Abbey Notebook.pdf, p. 43
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 22 greenhouse.jpg
The so-called “Crystal Palace” greenhouse didn’t last all that long, either. Less than ten years later, in 1902, a new greenhouse was built “south of the new library building” – i.e. Wimmer Hall – that was 75 feet long and 20 feet wide. It was “Predominantly used to grow flowers for liturgical use and campus beautification…Vegetables were also raised for consumption.”

Quote from photo caption from O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascheman Coll.-historical photos\ Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 22 greenhouse.jpg

Inset text: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Publications\BOOKS\Hoffmann History of Saint John’s Abbey, University, Missions\History of St. John's Chapter 8.pdf p. 227, p. 15 of the pdf
Note the Old Gym [1901] turret and St. Francis (or Frank) House [1904] in the distance.

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 22 greenhouse.jpg
Here’s another view of the greenhouse of the early 1900s. The steeple and cross atop Frank House can be seen behind it.

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascheman Coll.- historical photos\LP025.1910.Greenhouse
A campus map in the 1914-1915 *Catalogue* shows the locations of the Old Gym, Frank House, and the greenhouse or “hothouse.”

1914-1915: SJU Drawing from the 1914-1915 edition of the Catalogue, inserted between pages 4 and 5
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5899
...but at some point, the greenhouse or hothouse was rebuilt, because photos in the Archives show Luke Hall, built in 1912, and Wimmer Hall, built in 1901, with a neighboring building that looks different from the ones in the earlier photos.

1914-1915: SJU Drawing from the 1914-1915 edition of the Catalogue, inserted between pages 4 and 5
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5899
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 26 Luke, Wimmer & Greenhouse PEngel postcard.jpg
This photo in the Abbey Archives has a July 1915 date for this greenhouse...
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 25 Greenhouse July 1915.jpg
...and this photo, from 1916, shows Wimmer Hall (then the new library) and the southeast monastery wing, as well as what was behind the castle-like façade of this greenhouse. Its sesquicentennial caption says: “About 7,000 plants were grown here annually and set out to lend color to the shrines and lawns on campus. Besides the floral section, there was a green vegetable room and a fernery.”

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

Quoted text from caption to O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascheman Coll.-historical photos\LP026.1916.Greenhouse.jpg
You can see the greenhouse plainly in this 1920s aerial photo...

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

Also here: https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/6307
...although it’s a bit fuzzy when you zoom in.
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascheman Coll.- historical photos\LP186.1920s.AerialView.jpg
Also here: https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/6307
It’s also plainly labelled on this campus map from the early 1920s, as the “Floral Conservatory.” *Note also that there is a garage just west of the greenhouse.*

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/6283
An article in a June 1926 issue of *The Record* says that the old greenhouse, “of late years inadequate in space...will disappear,” and its site will be converted to Abbey park grounds. A new greenhouse will be constructed with the garage building now standing opposite it as its new front.

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

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/25321/rec/2
This photo gives a good look at what’s behind the castle-like façade of the *old* greenhouse, and conveniently also shows the garage across from it, about to become the front to the relocated *new* greenhouse.

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 24 Greenhouse on card stock.jpg
There are several photos in the Archives showing this greenhouse from different angles. Here, besides the greenhouse sections now relocated to the back of the garage, you can also see that the garage doors have been replaced with half-walls and more windows...

Caption: 024 – Unknown. Exterior of the greenhouse located where Liturgical Press now stands. ...this greenhouse was heated by a hot water circulation system.
...and this one shows it from the southwest, with the Frank House steeple and the top of the Quad in the background.

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 40 greenhouses with windows open and monk.tif
This 1932 aerial photo shows the garage greenhouse from the southeast.
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/6308
We’ve got a couple of photos of the interior of the greenhouse, in the 1940s.

“Former greenhouse conservatory located at the present day entrance to The Liturgical Press.”
The caption to this, one of the sesquicentennial photos, says this is Br. Maurus Held working with begonias.

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

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

1954 aerial view scanned from the 1954 (p. 26) Sagatagan yearbook
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/41927
It’s still there when we finally have a color photo of the campus, from 1955 or earlier...

Image printed in the 1957 yearbook,  
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJU Archives/id/5895
...though it’s difficult to see its features when you zoom in.
1957 yearbook https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5895
But this, like its predecessor greenhouses, is among the “Lost St. John’s” buildings: Here we have one wall of the old garage/greenhouse still standing as the building is being torn down to make way for the new Liturgical Press building...

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\CAMPUS SITES\Farming & Ag SJAA photos scanned 2017\Farm Photos 41 Greenhouse demolished for Lit Press
1956

...seen under construction in this aerial photo...
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/517 “Aerial view ca. 1960” but date is wrong; Lit Press building took place in 1956-57.
...and as completed in this aerial photo ten years later.
1966 Saint John's University aerial view looking north
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/14295
The Lit Press facility was hailed by *The Record* as the “first building of St. John’s second century.”

1957 June 14 *The Record*  p. 4
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/30812
The greenhouse facility wasn’t replaced until the science building, now known as “PEngl,” was built in 1965.
And oh yes, there’s this other little greenhouse on campus, too, a 2013 effort by the Sustainability Office and the Eco House students - and located – why not?! – next to the hockey rink space in Flynnstown.
To be continued…!

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