One of the things I noticed right away when I became the SJU Archivist was the place of honor given a framed photo of Peter Engel on the wall in the Archives. It may have been there only because it was an easy place to keep it, but nonetheless I wanted to learn more about him. A few years back, I made a note to myself to do a history lesson about him in November 2021 – the 100th anniversary of his death – but I decided to save it until today, to mark the annual visit to the Assembly by our current abbot.

Photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Engel, Peter Hoffmann 112 plate.jpg
Worship & Work, p. 222
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11156
I knew that this building had initially been called simply the Science Hall, clearly labeled as such above the door... (maybe not so clearly in this photo, though).
Science Hall (Engel Hall/Simons Hall)
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5804
...but that it had been re-named as Engel Hall in honor of the scientist-Abbot. By the time I was a student in the 1970s, it was familiar to everyone as Engel Hall, but the connection to the sciences had been lost....

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\image01 Engel Hall Apr 1997.tif
...with the 1965 construction of this building, which, for over 30 years, was known simply as the Science Hall. From the mid-1960s, all the science classes were held in this building. It was finally given a name, the Peter Engel Science Center, in 1999...
...when the former Science Hall/Engel Hall was renovated and re-named in honor of the renovation donors, the Simons family.

Simons Hall south view 2006 plr photo
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/59
https://apps.csbsju.edu/csbarchives/TimeLineDetails.aspx?id=200
Inset image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\Simons Hall\...renaming 1999...
Not coincidentally, 1999, the year that the current Science Hall was renamed the Peter Engel Science Center – aka the “Pengel” – was the same year that the building we still know only as the “New’ Science Center” was dedicated. (20-some years later, it’s no longer “new,” but it, too, will probably need to await a major renovation before it gets named in honor of a big donor!)

New Science Center  https://www.csbsju.edu/sju-archives/sjuhistory/sjubuildings/new-science-center

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\New Science
But back to Peter. Like our present abbot, he was raised in rural Minnesota. Born on February 3, 1856, two months before the monks arrived in St. Cloud, he came to St. John’s from St. Michael in 1869, was sent to St. Vincent’s for his novitiate, made simple vows before Abbot Boniface Wimmer there in 1875, and returned to St. John’s to teach and continue studying. He was ordained in 1878. Without going into the details, there was a lot of turmoil in the community when the 2nd abbot resigned in 1890, and not all of the bad feelings had been healed before the early death of the 3rd abbot. Peter Engel only very reluctantly accepted his election as 4th abbot in 1894.

Peter Engel’s early life is recounted by him on p. 224 of *Worship & Work*.  
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11158

Text info:  
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\People\ABBEY OSBs\Engel, Peter, OSB\ From fundraising doc for New Science Bldg, in Bldgs box.pdf

Left image:  
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\People\ABBEY OSBs\Engel, Peter, OSB\ From fundraising doc for New Science Bldg, in Bldgs box.pdf

Right image:  
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Parish slide 27 Peter Engel portrait.jpg
In 2008, a few years after I became the archivist, the *Abbey Banner* published this article by Lee Hanley about Peter Engel’s trip to the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. This was a year before he became Abbot. The Fair featured electricity, telephone lines, a new motion picture machine, and the first “Midway,” featuring a huge revolving wheel with glass-enclosed carriages designed by a bridge builder named George Ferris.

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/24385/rec/3

2008 Volume 08 Issue 01 Abbey Banner
The *Banner* article noted that Fr. Peter had lugged his camera all over the Fair to take photos, in those days on glass plate negatives – plates which have been preserved in the Abbey Archives.

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/24385/rec/3

2008 Volume 08 Issue 01 Abbey Banner
Hardly a day goes by that I don’t feel gratitude to Peter Engel for his photographic efforts. Many of my “history lessons” would be pretty bland – or even impossible – if he hadn’t had the ability, the foresight and the image-ination [pun intended!] to preserve St. John’s history in photographs such as this one, with includes Fr. Peter on the right.

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Matted Photos\PC07 Box 08\PC07 Box 8 no 06 Fr Peter Engel, Otto, Justin, Fidelis 1891.jpg

Worship & Work notes that Fr. Peter started with a camera he made himself, with a
photo shop first in the corner of his chemistry room; then in the old Frame House;
and later on the 3rd floor of the new library, what we know today as Wimmer Hall.
It was complete with a large skylight, necessary in those days before flash
photography.

Text: Worship & Work, p. 227
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11161
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Misc\Colman Barry
Notebook\Quad Porches & Wimmer Hall p139.pdf
Thousands of these photos were made and preserved. The studio in Wimmer Hall was also equipped with a selection of backdrops and furnishings such as these...


Text: Worship & Work, p. 227
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11161

Image: Abbey Banner
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital(collection/SJUArchives/id/24387/rec/3
...and the galleries were also placed at the service of the local people for family portraits such as this one, which shows the Michael Joseph Roske family, including my husband’s grandfather, Joe, in the center.

Text: Worship & Work, p. 227
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11161
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Ascheman Coll.- historical photos\LP184.Roskes.jpg
The photo studio was one manifestation of Peter Engel’s mindset as the industrial age was in full swing and technology was advancing. Colman Barry writes in *Worship & Work* that Peter Engel understood the scientific dogma of his time, and used it to contribute to the Church’s effort to synthesize *progress* with *faith and tradition*. In addition to photography, Peter Engel taught chemistry and physics, algebra and geometry...

*Worship & Work*, p. 186 of the pdf
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11083
...and he also taught astronomy. He had a telescope mounted on a revolving dome when the water tower was erected in 1890. It was later moved...

Abbey Quarterly 1985
...in 1894, to the new Observatory on a hill above Lake Sagatagan, where the Prep School is today. *Worship & Work* says that Peter Engel’s reputation as an astronomer was such that he was even considered for the job of director of the Vatican Observatory in Rome.

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\PP5\Images\003\n
*Worship & Work* p. 227 re: Vatican Observatory.
Our scientist also established Saint John’s in meteorology, with a weather station mounted, at first, atop the “college tower” of the University.

Image: https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/6644
It later moved to a specially-built space at the top of the new Science Hall’s stairs, and the daily weather observations have been taken by monks and reported to the state Weather Bureau since the beginning.

Science Hall (Engel Hall/Simons Hall)
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5804
Later moved atop one of the root cellars, the weather station is monitored faithfully nowadays by Br. Neal Laloo – who sends me the weather report every month for archiving.

SJU Archives photo.
The top of the Science Hall was also a good place for the wireless telegraph and radio efforts to begin, and towers were erected on top of and next to the building. (See my 2019 history lesson about the history of Wireless at St. John’s if you missed it.)

Science Hall (Engel Hall/Simons Hall)
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5804
I regard this map drawn by Peter Engel as one manifestation of his abilities in geography...

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Maps\1921 Map of vicinity by PEngel from 56Shelf5Box1f1.pdf
Portrait: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\LP171.4thAb.P.Engel.jpg
...and Colman Barry notes that Abbot Peter also “studied ornithology privately” – for which I found evidence in the Archives, in this notebook of “Bird Notes” taken by Peter Engel in the early 1900s.

2020 f35 Engel, Peter and Thelen, Lambert (Bird Notes) Observations
Under Abbot Peter’s watch, electricity came to Saint John’s, horticultural developments took place (such as Fr. John Katner’s “alpha grape”), and a fish hatchery provided food and sport for the students and monks.

Left: Photo #74 in Worship & Work
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11084; description about grapes p. 236

Photo #72 in Worship & Work
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11084; description about Fish hatchery p. 238

P. 227- ELECTRICITY
St. John’s second abbot, Alexius Edelbrock, is generally regarded as “The Builder” – since it was during his leadership that the Quad was built. But Peter Engel's term as abbot saw a lot of building, too.

Left: Alexius Edelbrock, photo #39 in Worship & Work
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/10992

Right: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Abbot Peter Engel
Matted photos Box 16 #56 PC07.0535
The expansion of the campus during Abbot Peter’s term was remarkable: Joe Hall, ... [etc.] The Gym was featured on this postcard which Abbot Peter mailed in 1907. 084/7 (Box 1:45) St. John's Gymnasium Postcard. O:\Archives\SJUArchives\PPS\Images\003\20150240044.jpg. The Gym was built in 1901. Picture postcard, sent to John Cismowski, Muenster, Saskatchewan, and postmarked at Collegeville September 16, 1907.
Here’s a cheer for the Rats to try! [RA-zle, DA-zle, Siss – Bum – Boo] 
Regarding athletics, “when the Minnesota Athletic Conference was formed, Abbot Peter readily entered St. John’s in its membership.” To a dissenter he said, ‘Well now, we have to be up with the times.”

084/7 (Box 1:45) St. John's Gymnasium Postcard.
O:\Archives\SJUArchives\PPS\Images\003\201502400044.jpg. The Gym was built in 1901.

Quote from the “Green Notebook” in the SJU Archivist’s office, p. 120.
Abbot Peter’s responsibilities were not so heavy that he could not also serve as the pastor for the Collegeville parish, which he did from 1910-1917. He was warmly remembered in the Parish’s centennial history book, *Stones & Hills*, as a fine priest. To quote a biography in the Archives: “His zeal for the local people is legendary. There was not a morning that he did not spend half an hour in the parish confessional... He knew all the local children by their first names...and always had a full pocket [of candy] for them.

*Stone & Hills, chapter 3C part 3 (pp. 88-99)*

Text from p. 95 & p. 100

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Three Students, Peter Engel, Anselm Ortmann 1909 Students v1 p28 no3.jpg

The biography referred to is the “Green Notebook” in the SJU Archives office, p. 118.
“Stories surround the humanness of that pastor...” but not so much his *humor*, of which I could find scant evidence. But here’s one.

Stone & Hills, chapter 3C part 3 (pp. 88-99) Text from p. 95 & p. 100

https://www.csbsju.edu/documents/SJU Archives/Chapter 3C.pdf
This photo is believed to be from Abbot Peter's 1903/04 Jubilee, celebrating his 25 years as a priest...
Engel Peter Jubilee program 1903 (celebrated in 1904) Box 2020 f4
Stone & Hills, chapter 3C part 3 (pp. 88-99)
https://www.csbsju.edu/documents/SJU Archives/Chapter 3C.pdf
– though the major celebration was delayed, from the actual anniversary in November 1903, until the following summer, when the festivities were combined with the 1904 Johnnie reunion.

Engel Peter Jubilee program 1903 (celebrated in 1904) Box 2020 f4

He was elected abbot in 1894, but not officially installed until 1895 (W & W p. 223), hence the dates 1903 & 1904.
We have another booklet, from his other jubilee, marking his 25th anniversary as abbot.
Engel Peter Jubilees program, 1920. Box 2020 f4.pdf
The author of this piece no doubt took some pride in his cleverness with the alphabet and the verses – and threw in an “IOGD” for good measure..

Engel Peter Jubilees program, 1920. Box 2020 f4.pdf
The lasting contributions that Abbot Peter made to St. John's itself during his long administration are more difficult to measure. These so-called intangibles were the values, the spirit and the atmosphere that gave character to his term of office and continue on at the abbey and school to the present time. This lasting contribution was, perhaps, best summed up by the monks, students and friends of St. John's who so often declared that he was deeply loved.

“Long years of self-discipline made it possible for him to live the Benedictine life as though it were a simple and easy experience… He brought to his monks spiritual confidence and inspiration through his own example.”

“Abbot Peter wanted the St. John's family to grow in charity and knowledge through generous living according to the precepts of St. Benedict's Rule.

Wisely and kindly he strove for this by example and counsel.”

By all accounts, Abbot Peter was more than a builder, a scientist, and a leader. His lasting contribution: “He was deeply loved.”

Text: Worship and Work p. 249-250
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11191
Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\PP5\Images\003\20200170001-2.jpg
“Those who too often missed morning choir could expect to have Abbot Peter knock at their rooms on his way to the choir and say: ‘Father, we are just about to begin Lauds.’”

“He was reluctant to cause pain. He asked his monks to look at the bright side of developments ‘and then everything will be all right.’”

“He possessed an open mind, however, and did not expect his men to agree with all his views.”
“Before giving a command or making a correction, he would prepare every word in advance, write a letter by hand and correct it, hold off and rechart his course.

He claimed that he never mastered the art of expressing his thoughts so as not to offend.

He was correct to the extent that his brief and halting public speeches were undistinguished.”

Hmm, that last one seems like a backhanded complement... Except for the “slobbery” comment a few slides back, this is about as close as I got to anyone saying anything negative about Peter Engel, which didn’t give me much material for humor this time around! Otherwise, he is described as prudent, patient, with an easy-going temperament (Worship & Work, p. 563, footnote 17), with “broad knowledge, persistent energy, ... love of study, religious depth, [and with a] quiet but firm leadership (Green Notebook, p. 112).

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Engel Peter OSB Scriptorium_Vol15No01_p.92.jpg

Quotes on slide from Worship and Work p. 250
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11191
The end. But I have an addendum. I think...

Photo: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\People\Engel, Peter OSB\Engel, Peter Hoffmann 112 plate.jpg
Worship & Work, p. 222
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11156
...that this donor-less, generically-named “New Science Building” may also deserve to be named. And I suggest that the Development staff and the Powers That Be consider the name...

Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\New Science
... of another chemistry professor turned Abbot. (And preferably before it would need to be named the “John Klassen MEMORIAL Science Center”!) Image: O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Buildings\New Science