Laws of Minnesota.

CHAPTER XLVII.

An Act to Incorporate the St. John Seminary.

St. John’s Incorporation
Fr. Francis Pierz and Bishop Cretin
After Mass on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 1856, Father Cornelius Wittmann, OSB, opened the first school within the present boundaries of Stearns county.

It was a parish elementary school which at the same time inaugurated free public education in central Minnesota.

_Worship & Work_, p. 46

Photo from _Worship & Work_, p. 38d

Cornelius Wittmann starts a school
The first school was in a small frame building owned by Joseph Edelbrock, “who cheerfully donated the use of one of the rooms... It was a free school, for no tuition was asked, and the teacher received no pay.”

*History of Stearns County, v. 2, p. 1343*

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph (Eva) Edelbrock were among the earliest settlers in St. Cloud.

The Edelbrocks “donated” even more to St. John’s: their son Anthony was in its first class.

*Photo from St. Cloud Into the Millennium: A Pictorial History of St. Cloud, F 614 .S25 1998, p. 10*

Edelbrocks provide space
He later became Abbot Alexius Edelbrock, OSB
(1875-1889)

Photo from the Ascheman Collection in the St. John’s Abbey and University Archives
Prior Demetrius di Marogna’s task
“The Father of St. Cloud,” John L. Wilson, outside his home in St. Cloud

5th Ave. & 2nd St. N., 2 blocks north of the present Radisson Hotel

Photo from Stearns History Museum’s Minnesota Reflections collection,
http://collections.stearnsmn.org/027/stearns1871

John L. Wilson
John L. Wilson, the “Father of St. Cloud,” was a representative in the 1857 Minnesota Territorial Legislature.

Wilson worked with Prior Demetrious on proposals to:

- Incorporate the Order of St. Benedict in Minnesota
- Petition for a charter for St. John’s Seminary
- Incorporate the Rothkopp Addition into the city of St. Cloud

Wilson introduced the petition for a St. John’s charter on January 22, 1857.


John L. Wilson’s efforts for St. John’s
<table>
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<th>Section 1.</th>
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<td>That the members of the religious order of St. Benedict, Demetrius Maragno, Cornelius Wittman, Bonee Reis, Alexius Acetser, and their associates and successors in office, which order is instituted for scientific, educational and ecclesiastical purposes, be known by the name and style of ‘Order of St. Benedict’...</td>
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from a copy of a copy of the Charter in the SJU Archives
Charter, Section 2

"The principal object shall be the instruction and education of youths..."

"...to be known by the name...of 'St. John's Seminary.'"
Bishop Cretin, critically ill, summoned Prior Demetrius to St. Paul, who stayed with him through his illness.

While there, Prior Demetrius lobbied for the charter.

He got the support of an important Catholic: **Territorial Governor Willis Gorman**
As for the (Territorial) legislative process...

When brought before the Committee of the Whole in February, the last sentence of Section Two was amended. Instead of saying:

“...that also good talented boys of the poorer classes may enjoy the benefit of said institution”

...it was altered to say:

“No student shall be required to attend the religious worship of any particular denomination, except as specified by the student, his parent or guardian.”

On February 9th a vote to reconsider the amendment was defeated by a tie vote.

\[Worship & Work, p. 47\]
“The charter was ‘fought desperately’ by three Protestant Ministers in the Republican camp. Three Democratic Catholic lawyers defended the bill.

The opposition to St. John’s charter on either political or religious grounds is difficult to understand in view of the earlier charter voted without such amending to [Methodist] Hamline University.

It was an obvious effort...to keep legal status from any Catholic educational effort. Such movements were not new in American history.”

Worship & Work p. 48

Hamline began as a Methodist institution in 1854 in Red Wing, where it was located until 1869. In 1880 it was re-established in St. Paul.

Worship & Work, p. 527

Charter fight for St. John’s, but not Hamline
The charter bill, with its controverted religious amendment, passed the House on February 13, and went to the Council of the Minnesota Territorial Legislature.

Here the amendment was struck out, and the bill quickly passed... to be returned to the House.

In the House the fight resumed, with an interruption while the legislators attended the funeral of Bishop Cretin, who had died on February 22, 1857.

Striking out the House's amendment further complicated the issue; now it was a question of preserving the honor of the House, and the bill was moved back and forth between the two bodies.

*Worship & Work* p. 48-49

Charter amendment controversy
Prior Demetrius let it be known that he would ask Wilson to withdraw the bill if the amendment were retained.

Meanwhile, Wilson was working to exchange votes among his friends who served with him on standing committees.

When Wilson was able to turn the tide, the House concurred to strike out the controverted amendment, and the bill passed, as originally drawn, on February 27, 1857 by a vote of 24-12.

The support of Governor Gorman was assured, as he had spoken out not only in support of public schools, but also favorably concerning private seminaries and colleges.

Worship & Work p. 49

Charter bill passes
Territorial Governor Willis A. Gorman signed the act authorizing St. John’s Seminary on March 6, 1857.

Charter approval
St. John’s thus has the distinction of having been chartered as the first **Catholic** institution of higher education in Minnesota, and is also the oldest Minnesota institution of higher education that has (unlike Hamline) **enjoyed uninterrupted existence**.

*Worship & Work, p. 47*

St. John’s distinction
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