Saint John’s Abbey Woodworking – A Brief History
The somewhat calamitous history of woodworking at St. John’s
Photos and design by K. C. Marrin
Early mentions of carpentry in St. John’s historical sources
Ascheman Sesquicentennial photos LP096.1857.sketch
And now let us return to the cradle of St. John’s Abbey and University. As I have previously mentioned, a house, 12x72, had been erected during the spring. The priests and lay-brothers, assisted by Mr. Lodermeier did the carpenter work. P. Bruno had brought tools with him from St. Vincent Abbey. A small raft that could not pass on account of low water was purchased. I might say, at our door. There was no dressed lumber to be had; consequently we had to dress it with planes ourselves. The doors for our building were not finished until late in October, although by this time it is so cool in Minnesota that the mosquitoes creep into winter quarters. Without a stove and with only a bedsheet for a door, rooming was not a comfort during that season, nor did we seek for such luxury, for our hands were full of work and we had to hustle to finish all the work necessary for our new home.

Carpenter work to build the St. Cloud Priory of the Benedictines

*The Record* 1889 March p. 26 – P. Bruno = Father Bruno Riess.

http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8045/show/8034
Carpenters building the St. Cloud Priory were assisted by a Mr. Lodermeier! (ancestor to the archivist)

*The Record* 1889 March p. 26 – P. Bruno = Father Bruno Riess. This article was written by him.

http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8045/show/8034
Early home to carpentry, the Old Frame House
1898 Feb. Record p. 30
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/9825/show/9812
& frontpiece http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/9825
Location of the carpenter shop in the Old Frame House
Floor plan by Alexius Hoffmann, OSB, from *Saint John's Furniture 1874-1974*, p.9
Location of the Old Frame House
Ascheman Sesquicentennial photos LP068.1883.Quad.StoneHouse
A history of St. John’s carpentry was included in a booklet for an exhibit on *Saint John's Furniture 1874-1974*
New shop built in 1878; Br. Andrew and Br. Leo Martin are carpenters
Text from *Saint John's Furniture 1874-1974*; photo on p.10
From *Worship & Work*, p. 228, re: plans for a new science building: “The site of the old carpenter shop was chosen, and a three-story brick building to accommodate all the sciences was erected.”
Article about 1883 croquet ground mentions the carpenter shop
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/9893
Grove mentioned in 1890 March Record p. 31
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8420
Possible location of the 1870s-1880s era carpenter shop
Ascheman Sesquicentennial photo LP012.WoodCords
Photo ca. 1890 (had to be after 1886 and before 1893)
Another carpenter named Br. Leo dies early
1890 Sept. Record p. 100-101
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8307
The 1894 tornado damages the carpenter shop
1894-07-01 *The Record* p. 151-152, 156
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8210/show/8192
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8210/show/8193
Tornado damage photo of what is now the Abbey Health & Retirement Center
1894-07-01 The Record  p. 151-152, 156
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/8210/show/8192
Ascheman Sesquicentennial photos LP082.1894.Cyclone – June 1894, one month after the demolition of the Old Stone House was completed
A new carpenter shop/blacksmith shop is built in 1903
A power plant to burn wood is built in 1909. Ascheman Sesquicentennial photos LP118.1stPowerPlant [built 1909]; it is replaced by a new one in 1945.
The Woodshop in relation to the rest of the campus, ca. 1920s
LP186.1920.AerialView photo ca. 1922 (when Benet Hall was built) to 1927 (when construction on the Auditorium began)
The Woodshop in relation to the rest of the campus; note the grove of trees LP186.1920.AerialView photo ca. 1922 (when Benet Hall was built) to 1927 (when construction on the Auditorium began)
1868 – first sawmill built along the Watab; it burned down twice and was moved to NE woods
1870s – an improved sawmill was added at abbot Alexius’ direction. *W & W*, p. 135
Ascheman Sesquicentennial photos LP198.LumberingCrew
The grove of trees is no longer standing!
Ascheman Sesquicentennial photos LP013b.1913.Logs  ca. 1920s-1930s  [photo includes Benet Hall (1922), with Old Gym before it was moved west (1937)]
The portable sawmill
Undated photo of sawmill, ca. 1920s-1930s, from the Woodworking website, http://www.sjawood.org/main/1/history.php. Photo includes Benet Hall (1922), with Old Gym before it was moved west (1937). “[After] a flourmill and sawmill...were consumed by fire, the sawmill became a portable unit pulled by horses to wherever the trees were felled and logs were being stored.”
Woodshop, powerhouse stack, and lumber shed
After 1909 [first powerhouse smokestack is visible behind 1903 Woodshop], and probably also after 1925 [when new lumber shed was built (The Record April 30, 1925 p. 11 http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/24902), but before Carpenter shop fire in 1939.]
The carpenters refurbish the Monastery's refectory

*The Record* May 28, 1925, p. 1

http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/24812
Lay people employed as carpenters included:
Peter Eich (1834-1920),
Theodore Dillenburg (1868-1943),
John Pflipsen (1892-1971)
Karl Schmoll (Austrian carver)
Maximilian Schmoeller (1869-1959; in charge of lumber shed)

Br. Hubert Schneider joins the Monastery and the crew in 1929, and takes over as head of the shop in the late 1930s

Lay people employed as carpenters; Br. Hubert Schneider takes over in the late 1930s
Photo from IA
Shortly after Br. Hubert takes over, the shop has a fire
Feb. 9, 1939 Record p. 1 Fire
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/28946
and http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/28946
January 1929 fire photos
Photos from Abbey Woodworking/Abbey Archives
Fire damage
Photos from Abbey Woodworking/Abbey Archives
Fire damage in 1939, compared to 2013
Fire photo from Abbey Woodworking/Abbey Archives
Inset photo by the archivist
1950s: busy years for the Woodshop
1950 July 27 p. 2 The Record
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/30399
1951 June 21 p.2 The Record
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/30511
“Alcuin Hall” was intended to be the name for the dorm that became Mary Hall. It was originally going to be named in honor of the long-reigning Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, OSB (1921-1950), but Abbot Alcuin changed it to Saint Mary Hall to commemorate the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin in 1950.

Ascheman Sesquicentennial photo LP011.Sawmill 1949 Br. Julius Terfer, OSB St. John’s Furniture, p. 19
Br. Hubert was highly regarded
LP194.HubSchneider; 2nd photo from Institutional Advancement collection
Br. Hubert with Br. David Manahan, his successor, and the Eichs
Photos from Institutional Advancement collection
A 1974 exhibit in the Great Hall honored Abbey Woodworking’s excellence and environmental stewardship

*Saint John’s Furniture 1874-1974*
Abbey Woodworking: Excellence and Environmental Stewardship

From Acorn to Chair—A Life Cycle of Saint John’s Abbey Wood

Winter 2013

...as do other publications over the years

Sagatagan Seasons Winter 2013 p. 4-5
Gregory Eibensteiner, OSB (b. 1934, d. 2013), young and old
Early photo from John Meoska, OSB; color photo from IA
Woodshop characters/caricatures by Drew Madsen, SJU 2009
Master Craftsmen Michael Roske and Bob Lillard with John Meoska, OSB
Photo by Eric Hollas.
Jennifer Viaene (CSB 2010), the first female to work in Abbey Woodworking
Dreams for the Future: A Woodworking Shop/Furniture Design School/Abbey Artisan Center
Design by K. C. Marrin
Dreams for the Future: floor plan
Design by K. C. Marrin
Woodworking staff, ca. 2008-09. Photo Simon-Hoa Phan OSB
Left to right: Fr. Jim Tingerthal, Br. Christopher Fair, Br. Isidore Glyer, K. C. Marrin, Bob Lillard, Michael Roske