

St. Peter's Abbey 1903-1921

by
THE REV. JEROME WEBER, O.S.B.

St. Peter's Abbey has been the spiritual centre of St. Peter's Colony from its inception in 1903 to the present. From it have gone out the priests who have ministered to the spiritual needs of the people of the colony in the parishes and the missions, who have been their leaders in spiritual matters, and who have taken the initiative in the foundation of those religious institutions which serve them. The history of these forty-six years is too extensive to be condensed in a short paper, and hence we shall confine ourselves to a consideration of only part of the history.

The period from 1903 to 1921 may appropriately be taken as one unit. It was in 1903 that the Priory of St. Peter began; in 1911 it was raised to the dignity of an abbey, and in 1921 it became an *Abbey nullius dioceseos*, being thus separated from the diocese of Prince Albert to which it had belonged.¹ The transfer of the community from the older buildings to the present one was made in the very same year. Thus the year 1921 may be considered as marking the end of a period of the history of the Abbey and the beginning of a new period.

Several stories must be pieced together before they merge into the single story of St. Peter's Abbey.

Students of the history of the United States and Canada know how immigrants came in great numbers in the decades preceding the first world war.² They also know that by about the year 1890, the number of free homesteads with good land in the United States was fast declining. When this happened many of the seekers of land were drawn to the vast open spaces in the Canadian West, which, especially after 1897, was widely advertised in the

¹ At the beginning of the colony Prince Albert was a vicariate; it was erected into a diocese in 1907. Cf. *St. Peter's Bote*, Muenster, Sask., (hereafter referred to as *Bote*), 3, Nov. 21, 1907, p. 1.

² Statistics relative to immigration to the U.S. show that from 1881 to 1890 over four and a half million immigrants came, in the next decade over three and a half million, and from 1901 to 1910 over eight million. (Hicks, *A Short History of American Democracy*, Houghton & Mifflin, 1943, p. 550.) During the same period, from 1881 to 1890, over eight hundred thousand came to Canada, from 1891 to 1900 about three hundred and fifty thousand, and from 1901 to 1910, over a million and a half. (*Canada Year Book*, 1936, p. 186).

United States.³ Many immigrants, indeed, had been settling along the C. P. R., which was completed in 1885 to the West coast. By 1901, Manitoba, which had been established as a province in 1870, had a population of approximately two hundred and fifty-five thousand.⁴ But there remained the vast tracts of land in what was then known as the North West Territories, which had, in 1901, a scattered population of about one hundred and eighty thousand. Into this territory came a very great influx of settlers in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Among these immigrants coming into Western Canada were German-speaking Catholics from the United States. They were scattered, for the most part, in small groups and lacked the services of Catholic German-speaking priests. Some of them, therefore, wrote to the pastors of the parishes they had left in the United States asking for priests.⁵

Among those who received such petitions was the Rev. Conrad Glatzmeier, O.S.B., parish priest of Albany, Minn. He communicated these petitions to his superior, the Right Rev. Peter Engel, O.S.B., Abbot of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn., and urged him to consider the feasibility of establishing a large German Catholic colony in Western Canada. Before Abbot Peter Engel would come to any definite decision, however, he wanted more information about the region in which such a colony should be located.

Accordingly a small group was organized to explore Western Canada and see if there was a place which would be suitable for a colony. On August 12, 1902, the Rev. Bruno Doerfler, O.S.B., at the time Rector of the College at St. John's Abbey, H. J. Haskamp of St. Cloud, M. Hoeschen of Freeport, and H. Hoeschen of Melrose, all in Minnesota, set out for the Canadian West.

Travelling by train they reached Winnipeg the next day, and went westward along the C.P.R. the same evening. After stopping at Whitewood, in the southern part of what is now Saskatchewan, to examine the country, they went on to Calgary, and thence to Wetaskiwin, not far south of Edmonton, where the railroad ended at that time. Since they had found no suitable site for a colony thus far, they set out by team and wagon from

³ Cf. Hedges, *Building the Canadian West*, (MacMillan, New York, 1939), p. 139. "The importance of the propaganda of the Dominion Government agents in giving stimulus and direction to the exodus of American farmers to the Northwestern provinces of Canada cannot be emphasized too strongly. No opportunity was overlooked in an effort to educate the rural folk of the middle western states with respect to the country to the north." 1897 saw the inauguration of a more aggressive land policy under the new liberal Laurier regime.

⁴ *Canada Year Book, 1936*, p. 101.

⁵ Cf. also Morice, R. P., O.M.I., *Histoire de l'Eglise catholique dans l'Ouest Canadien*, (Montreal, 1922) Vol. III, p. 410.

Wetaskiwin on August 20. They went eastward as far as Battleford, and then, along the right of way which had been surveyed for the Canadian Northern Railway, to Saskatoon, where they arrived on August 27.⁶

Since they had still not found a region which they considered suitable for their purpose, they continued their search. They went north to Rosthern by rail, and then by team from Rosthern to the east and south. Once they had crossed the Saskatchewan River, and gone some distance from Fish Creek, houses, which were fairly numerous around Rosthern, were few and far between. After travelling for about forty miles, the party came to the region where Leofeld now stands. Then, in the words of Father Bruno: "Our way led up the slope toward the northeast for several miles, and as we proceeded, our enthusiasm increased over the found treasure, for we found the soil to improve continually. When finally we arrived at the summit of the slope, we were greeted by a gently rolling plain, studded with beautiful groves and crystal lakes. The soil on this plain was of the very choicest, for it was a deep black humus ..."⁷

After the return to Minnesota in the early part of September, the men of the party gave their report. It appeared very satisfactory to those interested in a new colony, and plans were speedily made to establish it. Abbot Peter and the Chapter of the Abbey decided to take over the spiritual care of the settlers who would come to the new colony. The German American Land Company was formed by Messrs. Haskamp and Hoeschen with the idea of buying about a hundred thousand acres of land in the district to supplement the homesteads available in the area chosen, and which were to be sold to German Catholics.⁸ The Catholic Settlement Society of St. Paul, Minn., under the direction of Messrs. Lange and Costello, agreed to advertise the colony and supply settlers. Before the end of the month another party, which included the Benedictines Father Bruno, Father Conrad, and Father Herman Bergman, then Prior of St. John's Abbey, and other promoters of the colony, set out to examine the newly chosen spot.

⁶ Here H. Hoeschen decided to return to the U.S. He took the train which ran between Prince Albert and Regina via Saskatoon.

⁷ Father Bruno Doerfler wrote a rather detailed account of the whole trip into Canada which was published in successive issues of *The Record*, St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn., and it appears in Vol. 16 and Vol. 17. The whole account was reprinted in the *Prairie Messenger*, Muenster, Sask. in successive issues, beginning on June 27, 1928, on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Colony. The part quoted above is from Vol. 17 of *The Record*, p. 360.

⁸ Cf. Dawson, C.A., *Group Settlement, Ethnic Communities in Western Canada*, p. 286. Here we learn that 108,000 acres were bought from the North Saskatchewan Land Co. Also that an agreement was reached with the Dominion Government to the effect that fifty townships would be reserved to the Company on condition that it bring in five hundred settlers per year for three years.

They made a more thorough tour of inspection in the region selected by the first party of exploration a month previously, and were themselves satisfied with the choice. After the rest returned to the United States, Father Bruno stayed with Mr. Hoeschen and continued his explorations. As he was about to return to Minnesota, he met a party of twenty-six German Catholics in Rosthern who were anxious to pick homesteads at once. Hence he accompanied them, and each of them selected a homestead before returning to Rosthern.⁹ Thus in the late autumn of 1902 the location of the colony had been definitely decided upon, plans for its settlement had begun, and homesteads actually taken up.¹⁰

Plans to provide for the spiritual welfare of the colonists, which St. John's Abbey had decided to undertake, had now to be made. That the Abbey was relieved of the main burden of this work was due to an entirely unforeseen circumstance – namely, the situation in the Priory of Cluny.

Cluny, named after the famous Cluny of the Middle Ages, and located in the southwestern part of the state of Illinois, not very far from the city of St. Louis, Mo., had been founded from St. Vincent's Abbey, Latrobe, Penn., in the year 1892. A monk from the Abbey, the Rev. Oswald Moosmueller, O.S.B., was the first Prior. He died unexpectedly of pneumonia in 1901. The chapter of the Priory gathered to elect a successor, but neither of the two men who were chosen successively, was willing to assume the burden that went with the office of Prior. Accordingly, the Rev. Innocent Wolf, O.S.B., Abbot of St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kansas, who presided at the election, decided to ask the Holy See to appoint a Prior.

The man selected in April, 1901, for a term of five years, was the Rev. Alfred Mayer, O.S.B., a member of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn. Some time after his arrival at the Priory, he was convinced that Cluny was no place for a monastery: the Priory had made little progress from the beginning, due, perhaps, to many difficulties, such as a poor climate, frequency of malaria, a sparse population, marshlands and thick forests. He began to look about for a new location for the small community. A few ventures proved unsuccessful, and he was ready to advise the disbanding of the community. At the same time Abbot Peter Engel was wondering how he could spare enough priests for the colony which was soon to begin in Western Canada. Hence he suggested to Prior Alfred that the monks of Cluny transfer to Canada, and at the same time look after the spiritual welfare of the new settlers in the proposed colony. The latter accepted the

⁹ This information is contained in a letter written by M. Renneberg, who was one of the party. Cf. *Bote*, 9, April 4, 1912, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Bote*, 9, April 11, 1912, p. 4. Here the names of most of the 26 men who were the first to file homesteads in the new colony are given. The names of other men who visited the district shortly after this are also given.

suggestion and when the matter was laid before the chapter of Cluny on December 22, 1902, it was decided to transfer to Canada, provided the consent of the Holy See could be obtained.

In January, 1903, Prior Alfred, accompanied by Father Bruno, set out for the site selected for the new colony, to see it for himself. After their arrival at Rosthern, they proceeded to the selected site, and each celebrated Holy Mass on January 11, in the north west part of the present colony. Then they went to Prince Albert, to confer with the missionary Bishop, Francis Regis Albert Pascal, O.M.I., the Vicar Apostolic of Prince Albert, in whose vicariate the new colony would be. Soon an Agreement was drawn up (January 16) signed by Bishop Pascal and Prior Alfred, the two witnesses being Father Bruno and the Rev. William Brueck, O.M.I. In it the Bishop agreed to hand over to the Benedictines the care of souls in the townships 35 to 40, ranges 18 to 22, and townships 37 to 41, ranges 23 to 26, a total of fifty townships.¹¹ They were also to establish their monastery, in the colony. The name Cluny was dropped, and St. Peter chosen – to be a continual sign of gratitude toward Abbot Peter of St. John's Abbey, to whom the community and the colony owed so much. This agreement, with slight changes, was approved at Rome in September 1904,¹² and at the same time the Holy See agreed to the transfer of Cluny to Canada.

After his return to the United States, Prior Alfred began to prepare for the transfer. Arrangements were so far completed by about the middle of May, 1903, that part of the community could go. Some of its members, as well as several priests from St. John's Abbey, who had volunteered to share the pioneer life in the new land, had to remain at their respective tasks until necessary arrangements could be made to relieve them of their work. Hence the first group which left on May 12, 1903, consisted only of the following: Prior Alfred, Father Bruno, Father John Balfrey and Father Meinrad, who were priests, Father Rudolph Palm, a deacon, Brother Adolph Steiger, Brother Bruno Fuchs, a novice, and a postulant for the brotherhood, Alois Gleissner. The small party arrived in Rosthern, the railroad station nearest the colony, on May 14, 1903, and having made the necessary purchases of supplies and equipment, set out on May 16 for the colony.

¹¹ At this time, the region lay in what was known as the North West Territories. In 1905, part of the Territories was divided among the two provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the colony lay in the latter province.

¹² *Bote*, 3, May 10, 1906, pp. 5-6. Bishop Pascal was in Rome when the document from the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith came through, and it was given to him personally. On his return journey he stayed in France for some time, and the document disappeared. After his return to Canada, a copy of the original was asked for, and sent from Rome. This explains how it came about that the decree was published in the *Bote* only on May 10, 1906, whereas the agreement had been ratified in September 1904

On May 21, the feast of the Ascension of our Lord, the party, with the exception of Father Meinrad, who went to Leofeld to care for the colonists already there, and Father Bruno, who remained in Rosthern to help the incoming colonists, reached the region which had been chosen for the monastery. An altar was speedily erected in a tent, and Prior Alfred offered up Holy Mass in thanksgiving for their safe arrival. After a few days, a log house with a sod roof was built, while a tent served as a temporary chapel.¹³ As soon as lumber could be brought from Rosthern, work was started on a small frame house. This was completed in June. A church, the sides of which were of logs, was finished in September.

By the end of the year 1903, then, the foundations for the colony had been laid. The Priory, from which were to go the priests who would serve the parishes and missions, was there. The quest of immigrants for new farm land, the plea for priests who could speak German, and the need of Cluny for a new location—all played a part in the founding of St. Peter's Colony.

Much could be written about the privations and hardships which the members of the community shared with the other pioneers during the first years after the foundation was laid. There are still some living who experienced them. But our main concern must be to relate the development of the work of the Priory, and the expansion of the activity of its members to all parts of the colony as immigrants took up homesteads or bought land. Approximately one thousand homesteads were taken the first year; by 1906 the population was about six thousand.¹⁴ And as the population grew, the demands on the Priory grew.

During the course of the first summer, the community also grew, as one after another of those who had belonged to Cluny, or those who had volunteered to help the new colony, were able to come. It became possible, then, to proceed with the work of organizing parishes and missions among the settlers. As we have seen, two parishes were already established, Leofeld, the pastor of which soon had St. Benedict as a mission, and St. Peter.

Prior Alfred began a tour of the colony to determine in what parts other parishes should be first established. On July 19, 1903, the parish of the Assumption was set up at Dead Moose Lake, now known as Marysburg. Trustees were elected at a parish meeting, and the site for the church selected. Until the log church was completed in December of the same year, mass was offered in the home of Lawrence Lindberg whenever the pastor came. The Rev. Chrysostom Hoffman, O.S.B., who had come from St. Anselm's Abbey, Manchester, New Hampshire, to help in the pioneer work,

¹³ A detailed account of the trip from Rosthern, and the final selection of the site for the monastery, after several moves, was written by Brother Alois, and published in the *Bote*, 9, May 9 and May 16, 1912, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Bote*, 3, March 29, 1906, p. 3.

was appointed first pastor.¹⁵ He had St. Joseph, Fulda, as a mission. The church in this latter place was built in the summer of 1904, and the parish had its first resident pastor the next year in the person of The Rev. Ildephons Molitor, O.S.B., who arrived from St. John's Abbey, in July, 1905.

Several days after the foundation of the parish of the Assumption, Prior Alfred offered Holy Mass on the feast of St. Ann, July 26, in the home of Adam Specht, near the present town of Annaheim. The Rev. Dominic Hoffman, O.S.B., who had arrived from Minnesota a few days before, was the first pastor. Before the end of the year, 1903, a building with two rooms, which served as a church and a parish house, was built, and Father Dominic became the resident pastor of St. Ann's Parish.¹⁶

The first Holy Mass celebrated in the far eastern part of the colony was on August 2, 1903, by the Rev. Peter Windschiegel, O.S.B., a member of Cluny, who had reached the colony in the early part of the preceding June.¹⁷ The Guardian Angel's Parish was established on August 30, and Father Peter was the pastor. As there was no parish house, he resided at St. Peter's Priory, and as there was no church, he offered Mass in the homes of the pioneers on Sundays. The Rev. Benedict Steigenberger, O.S.B., who succeeded Father Peter as pastor in Feb., 1905, took up his residence in the district, staying at the home of Jacob Spring, a few miles north west of the present town of Watson. In 1905 it was decided that the large territory in the eastern part should be divided. Hence churches were built, Holy Guardian Angel's at Englefeld, and Sacred Heart, farther east at Watson. Then Father Benedict lived at Watson and had Englefeld as a mission.¹⁸

The first years, then, saw the establishment of the following parishes, — Leofeld, St. Peter, Annaheim, Dead Moose Lake and Englefeld, and the missions, St. Benedict, and St. Joseph. We need not go into the details of the foundation of other parishes and missions, for they all followed a similar pattern.¹⁹ As time went on, it was possible to build larger and more beautiful churches, to replace those built during the early days of the Colony.

Less than a year after the establishment of the Priory, Prior Alfred set about supplying what he considered another need of the new colony — a German newspaper. The first number appeared under the date of February

¹⁵ *Bote*, 9, June 6, 1912, p. 4. Father Chrysostom is in his seventy-fourth year, and while residing at the Abbey, is still the pastor of St. George's Church, Naicam, and goes there regularly for Sunday services.

¹⁶ *Bote*, 9, June 13, 1912, p. 4. Father Dominic is in his 76th year. Though residing at St. Augustines's Parish, Humboldt, of which he was pastor for over twenty-five years, he is unable to do any pastoral work.

¹⁷ Father Peter is at present the Prior and Procurator of St. Peter's Abbey.

¹⁸ Father Benedict had been a member of Cluny. He now resides at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Humboldt, where he was chaplain for almost two decades.

¹⁹ *Bote*, 3, March 29, 1906. Three years after the beginning of the Colony there were 11 churches. Sixteen parishes and missions had divine services regularly. There were four resident pastors of parishes, each with a mission, besides the parish of Muenster. The other parishes and missions were taken care of from the Priory.

11, 1904. It was printed in Winnipeg, and the editor was Prior Alfred himself. In the first issue attention was called to the fact that it was the only newspaper in the German language in the whole of Canada. It was published in Winnipeg until, after the coming of the Canadian Northern Railway through the colony in the fall of 1904,²⁰ and after the setting up of a new press at the Monastery, it was possible to publish the paper at Muenster. The first issue from this address appeared on September 5, 1905.²¹ Week after week it gave its local, provincial, dominion and world news, as well as news about the Church throughout the world, whether under the editorship of Prior Alfred, or his successors, Father Benedict, Father Bruno, Father Joseph or Father Peter.²²

The same year, 1904, saw the first visit of Bishop Pascal to the Colony. He reached Leofeld on the evening of May 3. During the morning of the next day he blessed the new church, and in the course of the afternoon confirmed thirty-six persons.²³ In the ensuing years he made frequent visits to St. Peter's Colony, sometimes to confirm, sometimes to confer Holy Orders, sometimes to bless a new institution, sometimes just to visit the Monastery.²⁴

At all times there was the greatest harmony and mutual understanding between him and Prior Alfred and the latter's successor, Prior Bruno. He appointed Father Bruno his vicar general, and later, administrator of the diocese, and obtained permission from the Holy See for him to administer the sacrament of confirmation.

Prior Alfred's term of office expired on April 26, 1906, and the chapter

²⁰ The coming of the railroad through the Colony was a very important event; for the distance to Rosthern from the monastery was about 75 miles. It is vividly described in the *Bote*, 1, October 11, 1904. From week to week in many previous issues, the progress of the railroad was followed with the greatest interest.

²¹ After the coming of the railroad the post office address, which was St. Peter, was changed, to Muenster, because there was another post office with that name. Muenster is a derivative of Manasterium, the Latin word for Monastery. *Bote*, 1, August 16, 1904, p. 6, and *Bote*, 2, December 21, 1905, p. 3.

²² Father Peter, the present Prior of St. Peter's Abbey, was the editor of the *Bote* for 27 years and 9 months. Hence we are deeply indebted to him for much of the information about the Colony and the Abbey, for he made it a point to secure such information. The paper was discontinued on July 31, 1947, principally because of the decline of subscribers, since many of the second generation in the Colony could no longer read German. As early as May, 1922, an English paper was also published at the Abbey every week, and it still continues under the name of the *Prairie Messenger*. The *Bote* was compelled to appear in English for more than a year, from October 1918 to the end of December, 1919, because of a Dominion Order-in-Council.

²³ The author was told by Father Peter that Bishop Pascal could not speak German. He had to speak English therefore, or use an interpreter when necessary

²⁴ Bishop Pascal's first visit to St. Peter's Priory occurred on August 13, 1905. During his stay of two weeks he conferred minor and major orders, and confirmed 57 persons, and made a tour of some of the neighboring parishes. *Bote*, 2, September 5, 1905, p. 4.

of the Priory elected Father Bruno to succeed him. This choice was ratified at Rome and on June 27 Father Bruno assumed the burden of the new office.

By this time, too, the land and property which the community had at Cluny was sold. With the proceeds of the sale, it was possible to erect more substantial buildings. In the summer of 1906 work was begun on the new building which then served as the monastery until 1921.²⁵ The foundation for a large new church was started in the late autumn of 1907. It was completed sufficiently by September 26, 1909, so that Sunday services could be held in it.²⁶

Recognition from the Holy See came to the Priory in 1911. The request that it be raised to the rank of an Abbey of the American Cassinese Congregation was granted, and Prior Bruno was appointed the first Abbot.²⁷ Bishop Pascal was at hand to officiate at the solemn blessing of Abbot Bruno on October 18, 1911.²⁸

At the time of the abbatial blessing, eight and a half years after the coming of the Benedictines, there were nine parishes and fourteen missions in the Colony. By this time, too, the first Sisters had come to start a new foundation there.

These were the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, whose motherhouse was in Klagenfurt, Austria. On the occasion of the celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of the foundation of their convent, the Sisters expressed the desire to begin a new foundation. This came to the knowledge of Prior Bruno through Father Alexander Berghold, who at the time was living in Austria, but had formerly been pastor at New Ulm, Minn. He immediately took up correspondence with them, inviting them to come to St. Peter's Colony and establish a hospital. The Sisters decided to accept the invitation, and on May 14, 1911, the first group, consisting of three Sisters, Sisters Augustina, Philomena, and Gabriella, arrived at Muenster.²⁹ Humboldt was chosen as the location for the new hospital. It was completed in 1912, and Bishop Pascal himself blessed the new building on October 8. The second group of Sisters, seven in number, had come the previous July 26, in the company of Abbot Bruno, who had visited the motherhouse of the Sisters at Klagenfurt, during his stay in Europe. In the next year another group of three came to Humboldt. The new foundation became an independent community August

²⁵ After the transfer of the community to the new building a mile farther south in 1921, this building was used as parish house for the pastor of Muenster until 1947. In that year the pastor took up his residence at the Abbey. The building was taken down completely in 1948.

²⁶ The beautiful paintings in the interior of the church were completed in 1919. Berthold Imhoff was the artist. See *Bote*, 16, August 27, 1919, for a lengthy description of these paintings.

²⁷ The relevant documents, in German translation, are in the *Bote*, 8, September 7, 1911, p. 1.

²⁸ *Bote*, 8, October 26, 1911, p. 1, contains a description of the events of the day. There were present several Abbots, a great number of the clergy, and many laymen from all parts of the Colony.

²⁹ *Bote*, 8, May 18, 1911, p. 4.

30, 1913, and Sister Pulcheria was chosen first superior. From its foundation the hospital has been a great asset to the Colony. Before very long it proved too small, and by 1920 an addition, that more than doubled its size, was completed.³⁰

The second order of Sisters in the Colony was the Ursulines. They, like the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, were persuaded to come through the efforts of Abbot Bruno. Their task, however, was to teach in the schools. Schools had been built almost from the outset of the colony for the education of the children of the pioneers, but, though efforts had been made to secure teaching sisters, nothing came of them, until 1913.³¹ On September 2 of that year, two Ursulines arrived at Muenster. In less than a year fourteen Sisters had come, most of them from the motherhouse of the Ursulines at Haseluenne, Hanover, Germany. They took charge of the schools at Muenster, Bruno, Leofeld and Dead Moose Lake. The outbreak of World War I, shortly after the last group left Germany, made it impossible for more to come at that time. At the suggestion of Abbot Bruno, Bishop Pascal obtained permission from Rome to declare the foundation independent of the motherhouse in Germany so that novices could be received. This was done in 1916, and Mother Clara became the first superior. The motherhouse was at Dead Moose Lake, but when a new building was to be erected the community decided to transfer to Bruno. This building was completed in 1919 and was blessed on November 9 of the same year by Abbot Michael Ott, O. S. B., who succeeded Abbot Bruno.³²

As we have already noted, Abbot Bruno had been empowered to administer the sacrament of confirmation in the diocese of Prince Albert, in order to help Bishop Pascal who was then in his seventy-first year, and twenty-eight years a bishop. Abbot Bruno used this indult only once. His plans to confirm in the fall of 1918 had to be changed because influenza was still too prevalent, but in June of 1919 he was ready to begin at Saskatoon. Here he was taken ill during the celebration of Holy Mass. He was able to finish with great difficulty, and in the evening confirmed about twenty-five persons. Next day he felt strong enough to return to Humboldt and go to the hospital there. But he never recovered. He died on June 12, 1919, as the age of fifty-two years.

The following is part of the tribute paid to him: "In the death of Abbot

³⁰ The history of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, their arrival, the increase of their numbers, and development of the hospital to the year 1920, may be found in the *Bote*, 17, October 7, 1920, p. 1. Subsequently this community founded hospitals at Macklin, Sask., and Cudworth, the latter of which serves the western and northern part of the Colony.

³¹ In September 1905, two Benedictine Sisters, one of whom was the superior at St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minn., came to the Colony at the invitation of Prior Alfred, to decide about taking over the schools, but, apparently, they must have decided against it.

³² *Bote*, 17, September 9, 1920, p. 1, gives the history of the Ursulines from the time of their arrival in 1913 to the year 1920. Besides teaching in eight schools in the Colony they have a high school for girls at Bruno.

Bruno, the Catholic Church loses the staunch support of one of her learned prelates. Abbot Bruno has been known throughout all Canada for his learning as well as for his zeal in the cause. of Holy Mother Church. As a doctor of Canon Law, his advice and counsel were eagerly sought. As Vicar-General of the Diocese of Prince Albert, Abbot Bruno was ever a strong support to his Bishop who gladly shared his labor with him, being grateful to have at hand a man of such ability in the governing of Church matters as his Vicar-General. Especially in the last few years, when the Bishop's health began to fail and the administration rested with the Abbot, did his activities resemble more the duties of bishop than those of Abbot of a community. The Bishop considered him indispensable to the government of the diocese, and eagerly sought his advice, performing nothing of note without consulting his Vicar-General... With Abbot Bruno has passed away the actual founder and General Director of the Volksverein, to which position he was elected last January.³³ ... Abbot Bruno was a true philanthropist, and the thousands of people whom he benefitted have lost him whom they, after his own community, can in the true sense of the word, call their father. Any settler who has been in or near the Colony for some years, cannot help but admire the progress that has taken place within a few years. This progress, none dare gainsay, has been due to the never relenting efforts of Abbot Bruno to obtain for the settlers the best for soul, mind and body... Journalism, the Catholic Press, Catholic organization, the Church of Western Canada, the diocese of Prince Albert, the Colony, etc., have all suffered severely through the passing of this capable man."³⁴

The Rev. Michael Ott, O. S. B., a member of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, was chosen on July 23, 1919, to succeed Abbot Bruno. This choice was confirmed by the Holy See the following September.³⁵ At the time of his election, Abbot Michael was Subprior of St. John's Abbey, and had been on the teaching staff of the college and seminary for nearly twenty-five years. He was known as a scholar and a philosopher, having written many articles for the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. His solemn blessing took place at Muenster on October 28, 1919, at the hands of the Right Rev. Vincent Wehrle, O.S.B., Bishop of Bismarck, N.D.

In his very first sermon in the Abbey Church on the Sunday after his arrival, Abbot Michael spoke of the need of completing the work of the grade schools in the Colony by an institution of higher learning.³⁶ An appeal was made to the inhabitants of the Colony for financial support, and the collection taken up in the church on the occasion of the solemn blessing of Abbot Michael was to be the first contribution toward the fund. The Knights

³³ The Volksverein was a German Catholic men's organization for the province of Sask., as well as for Western Canada. It held meetings annually and was quite active in public affairs. Lack of space compels us to omit any more lengthy reference to this organization, which is now defunct.

³⁴ *Bote*, 16, June 18, 1919, p. 1 passim.

³⁵ *Bote*, 16, October 15, 1919, p. 4.

³⁶ *Bote*, 16, October 15, 1919, p. 4.

of Columbus organized a drive to solicit funds. The actual work of building soon began. Amid a concourse of about twenty-five hundred people, Abbot Michael laid the corner stone on June 29, 1921. In early November of the same year, the transfer of the community from the old buildings began, and classes commenced on November 17.

By this time the Apostolic See had raised the Abbey of St. Peter to an Abbey Nullius. The following is taken from the document dated at Rome, May 6, 1921: "Bishop Albert Pascal, having the prosperity of this colony at heart, and thinking it very expedient for the preservation of the colony to have it remain absolutely and, forever under the direction and care of the Benedictine monks, humbly and urgently prayed Us before he died that the Abbey of St. Peter at Muenster, with the parishes dependent on it, be erected as an abbey 'nullius dioceseos' bearing the same name of St. Peter. In consideration of these prayers and of the religious growth of the aforesaid priory, after taking counsel with our beloved sons the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, who are at the head of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, and supplying, in as far as necessary the consent of those that are really or presumably concerned, with the plenitude of Apostolic power, We dismember and sever the aforesaid territory known as St. Peter's Colony, from the diocese of Prince Albert and Saskatoon, to which it hitherto belonged, and erect and establish it as an abbey nullius, to be known as St. Peter's at Muenster, under the rule and jurisdiction of the existing abbot of that abbey, making it immediately subject to the Apostolic See. St. Peter's Church of that Abbey, We establish as the abbatial church of the newly created abbey nullius, which shall retain the same invocation and title; We likewise erect and establish therein the abbatial see and dignity after the manner of episcopal dignity for one abbot to be designated by the title of his Abbey, who shall rule over the church, the abbey, and the territory defined above."³⁷

In 1921, then, the Abbey Nullius entered a new phase of development. Great changes had occurred during the preceding eighteen years, which we have briefly reviewed. We have seen how, under the leadership of Prior Alfred, Abbot Bruno and Abbot Michael and the other members of the community, with the ever-willing cooperation of the people of the Colony, those institutions which serve the spiritual welfare of a people were firmly established. There is the monastery itself, in which, from its inception, the Divine Office has been recited daily, and the conventual Mass offered up every day. There are the parishes and missions with their churches and schools,³⁸ the convent of St. Elizabeth at Humboldt, and the convent of St.

³⁷ *Bote*, 18, July 28, 1921, p. 5. This issue contains an English translation of the document. The German translation appears in the following August 4 issue. When Abbot Michael resigned his office in 1926, due to ill health, the chapter of the Abbey chose as their abbot, Father Severin Gertken, O.S.B., a monk of St. John's Abbey, under whose guidance the Abbey Nullius has been ever since.

³⁸ It should perhaps be pointed out, yet, that these schools which began as parochial schools on the model of those in the United States with which the pioneers were familiar, have become public schools, though sisters still teach

Ursula at Bruno, and finally, there is a higher institution of learning, St. Peter's College, at Muenster, where are fostered the vocations to the priesthood of those who, as priests, will continue the work of the pioneer priests in ministering to the spiritual welfare of the people of St. Peter's Colony.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- St. Peter's Bote*, 1904-1932, 1928, Muenster, Sask.
Souvenir of the Silver Jubilee of St. Peter's Colony, St. Peter's Press, Muenster, Sask., 1928.
- Dawson, C. A., *Group Settlement : Ethnic Communities in Western Canada*, MacMillan, Toronto, 1936, Part IV – The German Catholics.
- England, R., *The Colonization of Western Canada*, P. S. King & Sons Ltd., London, 1936, Chapter 12.
- Morice, R. P., *L'Eglise dans l'Ouest Canadien*, Granger Frères, Montreal, 1923. Vols. III & IV.

in several of them. There are two separate schools in which the sisters also teach, one at Humbolt, and one at Watson.