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Is it true that St. Norbert College has every indigenous Wisconsin tree on its campus?

Kasey Corrado '13

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July 2014

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

Wisconsin is home to a beautiful variety of trees and plants and the landscape of St. Norbert offers its share of scenic nature views. Is it true that St. Norbert College has every indigenous Wisconsin tree on its campus?

Kasey Corrado '13

Answer:

My dear Kasey,

Try as one may, it would be difficult to argue the fact that St. Norbert College is an aesthetically pleasing place. Prospective students trying to decide if SNC will be their home away from home often take into account the beauty of this campus. Alumni returning for Homecoming or a special event seem comforted to find that their alma mater still takes such pride in its landscaping. And let's not forget that St. Norbert has been the background to literally thousands of precious wedding photos! I might be biased, but I happen to think the most breathtaking images of any college come straight from our own backyard!

You might be surprised to discover that it hasn't always looked like this, though. When I founded St. Norbert College, it was a nearly barren swath of land. My heart fills with joy when I remember the confrere who transformed our campus into the striking spot it is today – with a little help from a few fraters ... and a few trees.



Ask The Abbot

As the founder of St. Norbert College, and having a prime seat in the center of campus throughout the years, I, Abbot Bernard Pennings, hold the answers to many of your burning questions about the college.

[Submit Your Question](#)

We owe a lot to the work of the Rev. Anselm Keefe, O.Praem., Class of 1916. Keefe (1895-1974) served a variety of roles during his time at the college, between 1910 and the 1970s. He was dean, chair of the biology department, professor and theatre director, as well as serving as a colonel in the U.S. Army and, of course, as a Norbertine priest. He succeeded in transplanting most of the trees and shrubs indigenous to Wisconsin. Outfitted in the cap, camouflage shorts and combat boots that he favored from his days as a U.S. Army chaplain, Keefe planted gardens and built shrines, developed the first detailed campus tree plan and supervised the landscaping of Main Hall – including planting the first live Christmas tree in the 1930s. Aside from creating a nice view, the trees also served as a valuable resource for his biology classes. He was considered the resident botanical expert on campus. Anselm Keefe certainly had a lot on his plate!

With some help from Norbertine fraters, he turned the campus into what we see today – a magnificent arboretum containing examples of every tree species native to Wisconsin, and many that are not. There are nearly 700 – 690, to be exact – trees on our campus. Keefe's work has grown to, ahem, become one of the most defining features of our campus.

Father Keefe had not only the vision to imagine the future, but the foresight to plan for it, and people like him still exist in our college community today: Many of them express their vision and hope for St. Norbert College's future in a slightly different way – through planned gifts to the college. All those who make a planned gift to the college are honored with membership in the Anselm M. Keefe Society.

While Father Keefe never enjoyed the magnificence of his project, he knew that with a little time and steady hands he could plant seeds to transform this campus to what it is today.

Responses to "Ask the Abbot" questions are penned by St. Norbert College staff in the name of Abbot Bernard Pennings, O.Praem., who founded St. Norbert College in 1898.

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