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Ask the Abbot

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In your response to last month's question, you mentioned how much you valued the early domestic staff. Who helped you with the outside work in those days?

Dennis McGuire '61

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May 2015

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

In your response to last month's question, you mentioned how much you valued the early domestic staff. Who helped you with the outside work in those days?

Dennis McGuire '61

Answer:

My dear Dennis,

I thank you most graciously for this inquiry, which reminds me of one particular individual most important in the history of the college. Many of my readers will not have had the honor of knowing Mr. Albert Zelten as I did. For many years, he alone filled all the roles associated with a modern-day department of facilities.

This hardworking man was undoubtedly one of the most dedicated employees ever to have set foot on campus grounds. He was the first in this role, maintaining all the order's facilities: college, abbey, church, grade school and even the sisters' home on the corner of Grant and Second Streets.

Mr. Zelten worked alone from 1916 to 1956, then continued to hold the post part-time for three further decades. Indeed, when he left off full-time working, I seem to remember that neither of the two men who replaced him stayed very long, as there was just too much work to be done!



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.

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In the old days, Mr. Zelten would rise each morning at 4:30 a.m. to fire up the furnaces in the heating plant. Using a wheelbarrow for cargo purposes, he'd unload coal by hand into the boilers to heat the old abbey building.

His duties also included those of farmer. He would plant potatoes and other vegetables on nearby farmland, using a borrowed team of horses for plowing. Additionally, he'd gather eggs for the abbey community each day from the chicken flock and milk cows that were pastured near the St. Joseph Priory.

This fine man received a nominal salary, a residence at 114 Grant Street, milk for his family and some potatoes.

Now, as campus has expanded and facilities have evolved, much has changed. Gone are the days when we witnessed cows at pasture on campus. Even today, though, we can depend on the fine souls on our buildings and grounds-keeping crews to do an estimable job of ensuring the campus continues a lovely place to live, study, grow, work and learn.

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.

St. Norbert College

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