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**I have heard that there is a connection between Archmere Academy and the Empire State building. Can you tell me if this is so?**

Bernard Olejniczak '53

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## February 2016

### Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

“I have heard that there is a connection between Archmere Academy and the Empire State building. Can you tell me if this is so?”

Bernard Olejniczak '53

### Answer:

Dearest Bernard,

What a fascinating inquiry! Indeed, there most certainly is a connection – one I’m sure that many in my readership are not aware of. For your enjoyment of this story, it is necessary to know a little about both the Norbertine prep school in Delaware and a little about John Jacob Raskob, owner of the estate on which it stands.

**Archmere Academy** is a college preparatory co-educational academy school located in Claymont, Del. This Norbertine school was founded in 1932 by me and my Norbertine confreres. Our own dear Rev. Michael Mc Keough, O.Praem., was its first headmaster. Arguably the most illustrious alumnus of this Norbertine foundation is Joe Biden, vice president of these United States.

Now, be it known that it was I who made what some regarded as the risky decision to purchase the land upon which the academy still stands. Prior to coming into Norbertine hands, the property was the **Delaware estate** of John J. Raskob, a



### 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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driving force behind the construction of the Empire State building. In 1929 Raskob, a former General Motors executive, joined forces with Coleman du Pont, Pierre S. du Pont, Louis G. Kaufman and Ellis P. Earle to form Empire State Inc. They nominated Alfred E. Smith, former governor of New York, to head the corporation.

Raskob resided at Archmere with his wife, Helena Springer Green, and their 12 children. Buildings on the 38-acre property included The Patio and The Manor – the Raskob’s home and servant’s quarters, respectively. In 1951, the Raskob estate sold the building for \$34 million to a syndicate including Roger I. Stevens and the Chicago Crown family, who immediately sold the building to Prudential Insurance Company of America.

Thank you again for your question, Bernard. I encourage other readers to **share their inquiries**, as well. I certainly welcome these opportunities to walk down memory lane in your company!

*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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De Pere, WI 54115  
920-337-3181  
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