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Ask the Abbot

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You have resided at St. Norbert College for a very long time! It must seem strange to look back on your arrival in Wisconsin. Do you remember much about those days?

Gene Walsh '53

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October 2018

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

You have resided at St. Norbert College for a very long time! It must seem strange to look back on your arrival in Wisconsin. Do you remember much about those days?

Gene Walsh '53

Answer:

Dearest Gene,

What a delight it is to be in touch with you! Dear me, can it really be 65 years since I handed you your diploma? Well, you have attained enough years since to be confounded – as am I, so much your senior – at the onrushing passage of time.

To your years add many more and together we might find ourselves in the winter of 1893. It was not with the intent of founding a college that my two confrères and I had been sent across the ocean from our home abbey of Berne in Holland. Indeed such an idea was far from our thoughts as we embarked for these great United States. Ours was, in fact, a journey with a different missional intent. We were to help minister to the growing numbers of Belgian Catholics in Wisconsin – and not in De Pere, but in Wisconsin's Door County peninsula.

We disembarked in Hoboken, N.J., and from then on all was confusion and astonishment to our European eyes, as my dear friend Bill Hyland (one-time director of our Center for Norbertine Studies) was to chronicle in a well-researched article about our adventure.



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 Hoboken, we remarked on the press of humanity, all classes of men mingled together with no thought as to the strangeness of it all. And we left this bustling urban scene behind us for a lengthy journey by train, continuing to feel most overwhelmed by our new experiences. Another train north from Chicago was succeeded by a bumpy and very cold wagon ride to the sisters at Rosiere. How well I now recall their kind welcome at journey's end! Perhaps it was that experience of warmth and hospitality that, through the ensuing years with all their twists and turns, has lived on in the continuing emphasis the radical hospitality that lies at the heart of this slightly newer mission – our own dear college.

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

St. Norbert College

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