



ST. JOHN'S OBSERVATORY  
Once a dream's culmination

## History of a Memory

by Mike Williams

Shortly after the ground breaking ceremony for the new Prep School last September, a crane eased the top from the old observatory, preserving it for a future one. Then the crane's wrecking ball and cats' blades demolished the building to make room for the new Prep School. Nearly sixty-seven years had elapsed between the raising and the razing of the St. John's Observatory.

Back in the 1880's Father Subprior Peter Engel, O.S.B., was deeply interested not only in what lay beyond the stars but in the stars themselves. But he didn't possess the instruments necessary to indulge in his hobby and there were no instruments available to him in this area. His desire to study the stars eventually prompted him to seek some means of obtaining at least a telescope and whatever other equipment was needed to further his astronomical pursuits. He did not have the ready cash to purchase the instruments and as Father Abbot had repeatedly explained, buying them with community funds would divert money from possible community good to a non-essential. The Abbot's edict settled the matter as far as everyone was concerned—everyone, that is, except the subprior. Father Peter persisted in his desire. He reasoned and reiterated, discussed and debated, projected and proposed until 1890 when, after convincing Abbot Bernard that a telescope would be an asset to the entire community, he was given the green light to order one. Father Peter used his hard-gained permission to purchase a top-grade,

precision, 60-inch telescope from the world renowned optician, J. A. Brashear. He immediately mounted his prize on the water tower, a logical site.

Father Peter next requested permission to order more equipment because, as he cajoled, these other instruments, positron micrometer, astronomical clock, chronograph, and transit-instrument, would increase the effectiveness of the telescope greatly. Father Abbot granted this permission more readily, for by then Father Peter had done a near-complete job of "brain-washing." Immediately after receiving these instruments, Father Peter sought permission to erect a building which could contain all the instruments, explaining that it would increase the efficiency of the instruments. Abbot Bernard was very reluctant to grant this permission for one very good reason—he had no money. However, after carefully weighing the merits of the idea—academic potentiality and prestige it would bring to the campus (it would be one of the first observatories in Minnesota)—Father Abbot okayed plans for an observatory, hoping that he would soon be able to pay for it.

The site chosen was 200 yards east of the campus proper, close enough so that it could be reached from anywhere on campus in ten minutes, yet remote enough that campus lights would not impair the telescope's effectiveness. The location overlooking Lake Sagatagan was sufficiently elevated to assure a commanding view of the horizon.

In November, 1894, the telescope was removed from the water tower and, along with the other instruments, placed in the near-completed observatory. Abbot Ber-

nard died that same month. The election of Subprior Peter to succeed as Abbot was ironical, for now the observatory was ready for use, and Father Peter, the one who had most wanted apparatus for it and who was now in a position to greatly foster astronomical pursuits, would probably be too busy to ever use it.

Father Peter's dream building was outwardly very plain, yet as structurally sound as its 3-foot solid foundation of masonry. Stressing efficiency and purpose, the interior of the building was even less decorative than the outside. The observatory's three rooms were conservative in color and their 280 square feet contained no luxuries.

The only entrance to the observatory, on the southwest corner, led to the computation room, where astromen did their more complicated calculations. This room was furnished with chair, desk, and light—all that was needed. The adjoining room held the transit instruments and chronograph, the former observing the meridian passages of heavenly bodies, the latter recording the time of various observations. A thirty-two foot high tower capped by the revolving dome housed the telescope and positron micrometer.

Now the observatory is gone. And used by relatively few, but admired by most, it will live for all as long as there is an "Observatory Hill."

## At the Top of the Stairs

by Mike Faas

Designed as an attempt to encourage sound and wholesome reading and to remove Alfred Hitchcock, Superman, and Flash Gordon from teen-age hands, a Prep bookstore was recently opened for those Johnnies who are constantly booked for the night study hall.

In charge of this experiment in better reading is Greg Hall Senior Dan O'Connor. Dan became a part of the Prep bookstore idea during speech class. Last April, following an oration on books, speech teacher Father Cuthbert asked him if he would consider managing a Prep bookstore. Having accepted the assignment, Dan nosed around during the summer and came up with some useful information, the results of which are clearly seen and read.

During the first few days following the store's grand opening, sales were tops. Replenishing the reading supply as fast as it disappeared, the bookstore backed up the boast that it could obtain any paperback asked for.

Literally crammed with nothing but paperbacks, the shop's success is partly due to its great variety of subject matter. The assortment ranges from the first major novel ever written, *Don Quixote*, to such modern classics as *Main Street*, the *Ox-Bow Incident*, and *Return of the Native*. There are numerous self-help books of writing, reading, and language, and selections by