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24 March 1994

Conrad E. Slanina
6625 Church Avenue
Pittsburg, PA 15202

Dear Mr. Slanina:

This is in reply to your letter of 18 March asking for information about St. Joseph's Institute in Bristow, Virginia.

I found some information in a book called The Fruit of His Works: A History of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Benedict's Convent, Prince William County, Va., by Sister M. Helen Johnston. (Linton Hall Press, Bristow, 1954)

St. Joseph's Industrial School at Bristow was founded by the Benedictine Fathers, opened in the spring of 1894 as St. Joseph's Institute. It was abandoned by the Fathers between 1924 and 1927, when the Benedictine Sisters took it over as part of their convent and school. It seems to be part of the present campus of Linton Hall School, currently run as a private day school by the Sisters.

See photocopies, attached, of selected pages from the history.

You may contact Linton Hall School at 9535 Linton Hall Road, Bristow, VA 22013. Phone (703) 368-3157.

We hope this information will be of help to you.

Sincerely,

Donald L. Wilson

Donald L. Wilson
Virginiana Librarian

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*The Fruit of
His Vowes*

A HISTORY OF THE BENEDICTINE SISTERS
OF ST. BENEDICT'S CONVENT
Bristow, Prince William County, Virginia

by SISTER M. HELEN JOHNSTON, O.S.B., B.S.

With an Introduction by
FRANCIS P. LE BUFFE, S.J.



LINTON HALL PRESS
Bristow, Virginia

Prince William County Public Library

CHAPTER IV

The Benedictines Enter the Picture

During all the years of her convent life Sister Baptista had not been unmindful of her responsibility to "Lintonford", and toward the close of the century the thought of its future disposal began to cause her some anxiety. The Southern Railroad had been built through part of the plantation, cutting off many acres which had been acquired as "right of way".

Miss Anne was constantly in need of money, demanding that more land be sold or converted into farms. The once far-flung plantation was gradually dwindling, along with all the other "land grants" of colonial times.

About this time, Sister Baptista happened to read "The Monks of the West" by Count de Montalembert. This account of the work of the Benedictine Monks so influenced her that she conceived the idea of giving over what remained of the Linton Estate to this order for educational purposes.

Miss Anne's future had been assured by some generous benefactor, who had promised to pay an annuity of \$1500 to Miss Anne as long as she lived. This remittance came regularly, twice a year, from a bank in Baltimore.

Rt. Rev. Bishop Haid, O.S.B. of Belmont Abbey, North Carolina, was known to Sister Baptista through mutual friends and by reputation, so she turned to him first with a plan which must have seemed bristling with unsurmountable difficulties, but Bishop Haid was in favor of the undertaking, seeing thereby, an opportunity to spread the Faith in northern Virginia.

Sister Baptista's plan was two-fold in scope; she would

divide "Lintonford" into two parts, a large tract to be taken over by the Benedictine Fathers, on which a school for poor boys was to be erected; another part, of about five hundred acres, was offered to the Benedictine Sisters to be used in a similar manner for poor girls. Bishop Haid persuaded Mother Edith to accept the trust, after having visited the place and studied its possibilities. It required a strong trust in God to visualize any future in such good works as were expected to be brought forth in the wilderness of Lintonford as it was at that time. But Bishop Haid and Mother Edith were both of a pioneering spirit, and the trust was accepted. Father Julius Pohle, O.S.B., was selected by Bishop Haid for the difficult task of beginning the foundation at Bristow, a wise choice, made after much prayer and deliberation.

Father Julius was one of the first group to be associated with Bishop Haid in the young Belmont Community, and he had worked hard in building up the new monastery in North Carolina. At this time, 1893, he was director of the college, filling his post ably and well. It was a sacrifice on both sides, since Father Julius dearly loved his monastery home and the boys among whom he worked, and Bishop Haid was hard pressed to find a successor for this important job. However, the Bristow mission had been accepted and it was necessary to begin work on it at once. Since the Benedictine Fathers' school for boys was to be an industrial institution, Father Julius went north early in 1893. He made a tour of several of the schools of this nature existing at that time, studying the methods of operation, and making plans for Saint Joseph's Industrial School at Bristow. There was no endowment connected with the proposed Lintonford foundations, neither was Belmont able to finance the undertaking; so Father Julius spent some time calling on

friends in the north, explaining his need for money and obtaining donations where possible. By September, Father Julius was back at Belmont, and two weeks later he set out for Bristow with two lay brothers, Brother Gilbert and Brother Louis. They stopped off at Richmond to consult Mr. Fritz Sitterding about building materials and that gentleman graciously offered to accompany them to Bristow.

Arriving at their destination, they found a rather desolate scene. "Lintonford" was one huge blackberry patch covered with brambles and briars, uncultivated since the days of tobacco growing on a large scale. The unfinished mansion which had been Campbell Graham's dream stood on a little elevation near the highway. It had been used as a hospital by the Confederates during the Civil War, affording them some shelter even though little more than a shell. Nearby was the log cabin in which Miss Anne Phillips had lived for many years. After a thorough inspection, Mr. Sitterding advised Father Julius to tear down the old frame building, and erect a new one on the same foundation.

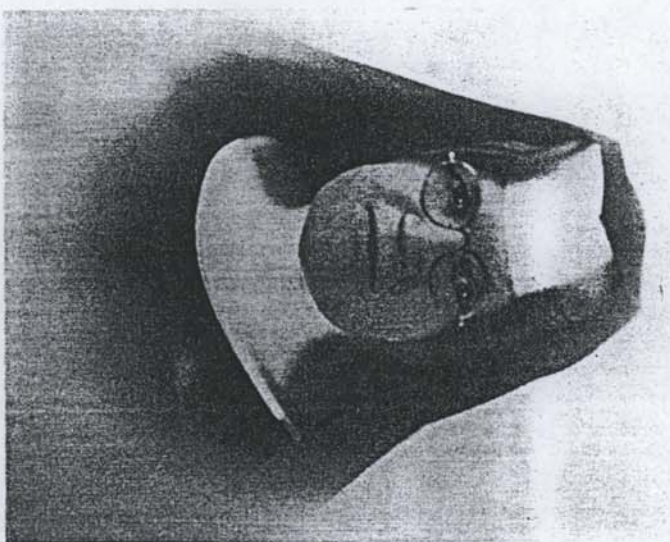
There were a number of Catholic families living in the neighborhood, and as soon as news of the proposed building reached their ears, many of them came to offer assistance. A modest frame house was planned, and work began on it at once.

In the meantime, Father Julius and the two Brothers took up their abode in the log cabin. One room was set aside as a Chapel, and in these humble surroundings the first Holy Mass was offered on the Lintonford plantation.

It seems the devil was not pleased at this intrusion on his territory, and many were the satanic devices with which he tried to frighten away the servants of God. But

Father Julius was not a man to be intimidated by earthly hardships or diabolical visitations. He blessed the little cabin, and exorcised it when the nocturnal noises became too insistent—and continued to offer the Holy Sacrifice each morning. But it was to be many years before the devil owned himself beaten and left off trying to discourage the Benedicines from taking deep root in this part of Virginia.

The new building progressed rapidly, and in late spring of 1894, Father Julius blessed it formally as Saint Joseph's Institute and began to receive boys who needed such training as could be given there. Several priests and brothers came from Belmont to fill the various posts in the classrooms, in the kitchen and on the farm. Gradually, through the years as more money came in, the building was enlarged, a frame church was erected, and the blackberry patches became a flourishing farm.



*Mother Alphonsa Bliley
Second Prioress*

CHAPTER XIV

Saint Joseph's

The industrial school which Father Julius had planned and put into operation, was, by the year 1895 a well known institution in the State of Virginia, filling a definite need for boys, who, because of broken homes, or bereavement in their families, lacked the necessary home training, or means of education. Hundreds of boys passed through the doors of this venerable home, which had been blessed in honor of the Foster Father of Jesus. Other helpers, priests and brothers, were sent from Belmont to assist Father Julius in this great work, which included not only the school, but a large farm of about twelve hundred acres. To the Sisters at St. Edith's, Father Julius was a never failing friend and adviser, and a source of providence for many necessities which they lacked during the years of getting settled.

Perhaps the greatest consolation the Sisters had when the going was hard, was the spiritual help which was always on hand from the devoted Benedictine Fathers. Father Julius was pre-eminently a Monk, his love for the Liturgy showing forth in the earnestness with which he celebrated all the feasts of the Church. The Holy Week services were carried out in every detail, attended by the Sisters and pupils from St. Edith's and every member of his own household. To have seen and heard the Lamentations of Jeremias as sung by Father Julius was a unique experience in every sense of the word. Accompanying himself on a small reed organ, his zeal would reach such an intensity of expression, that it seemed to those who were trying to follow the text that either the voice or

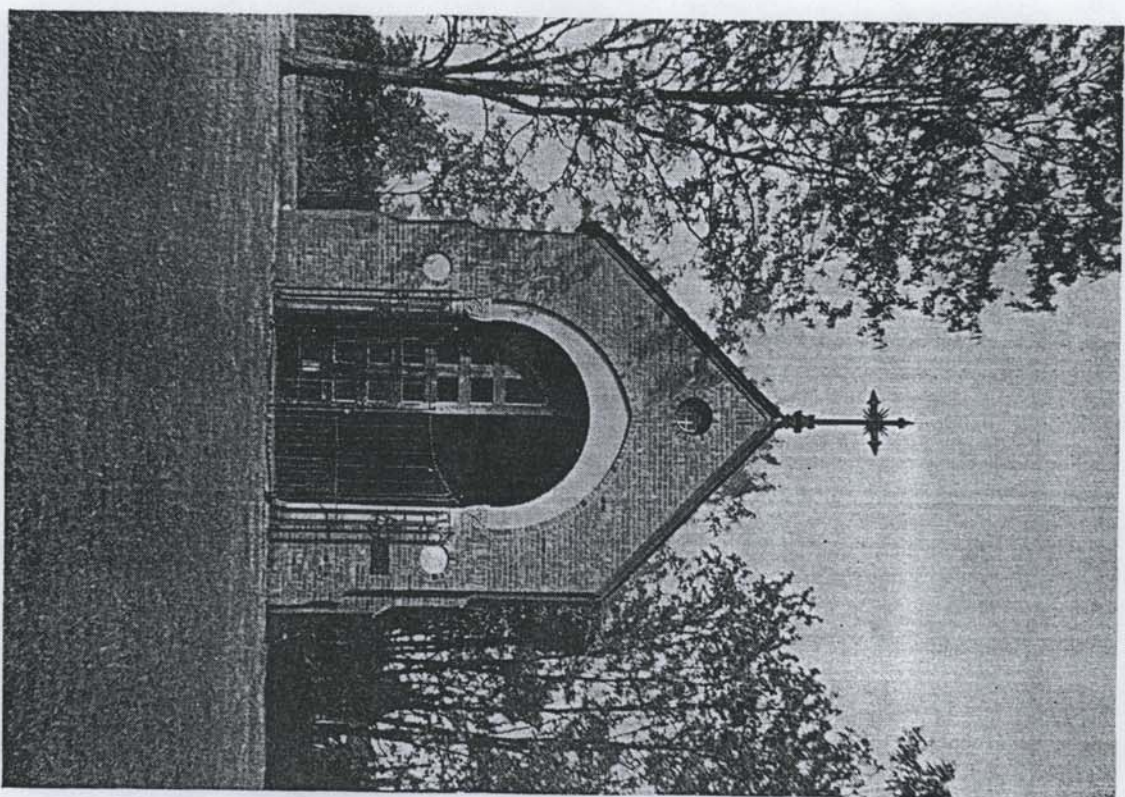
the instrument must surely reach the bursting point before it was over. For many years, the Novena in honor of St. Benedict, from March 12 to 20, was held in St. Joseph's Church, a welcome innovation to the Sisters, who trudged over through ice and snow, or whatever the weather might be, every evening at seven o'clock. After Saint Joseph's Church had been built and consecrated, the Catholic population in the vicinity was organized into a parish, and to these good people the best the Catholic Church could offer was given joyfully from year to year. High Mass was sung every Sunday, and the Major feasts were celebrated with a Solemn High Mass as long as Father Julius was able to be around. But the rigors of his early life, and the many privations endured were beginning to take a toll on this great man's energy. In the fall of 1921, he was summoned to Belmont, where before many months had elapsed he was found to be suffering from cancer of the throat. The ensuing weeks were a record of torture, borne with patience and fortitude until God called him to his eternal reward, September 6, 1924. The Bristow project had never been too favorably received by the members of the Belmont community, the great distance between the two places seeming to put a barrier in the way of development. Father Julius was heart and soul interested in the work but after his withdrawal, and subsequent death, it was difficult to find a successor who could carry on with the necessary enthusiasm. Father Ignatius Renke was sent from St. Mary's in Richmond, a man well fitted for the terrific task which faced him, in trying to keep up the school and farm. From then up to 1927, the Belmont Fathers waged a losing battle in the Bristow mission. By that time it was evident that the work could not go on, and it was decided to withdraw the

Fathers and Brothers for more pressing needs in North Carolina. In abandoning the foundation, the first offer was made to the Sisters, who after much deliberation, decided to shoulder the added responsibility. The school was closed, a step which would have been forced on the community a year or so later, when the James Barry Robinson Home for Boys was opened in Norfolk, Virginia, and placed under the supervision of the Benedictine Fathers of St. Vincent's, Pennsylvania. A day school was opened at St. Joseph's for the children of the neighborhood, and in this one classroom, Sister Berchmans labored zealously for many years, instructing the boys and girls, of all creeds, who came from nearby homes.

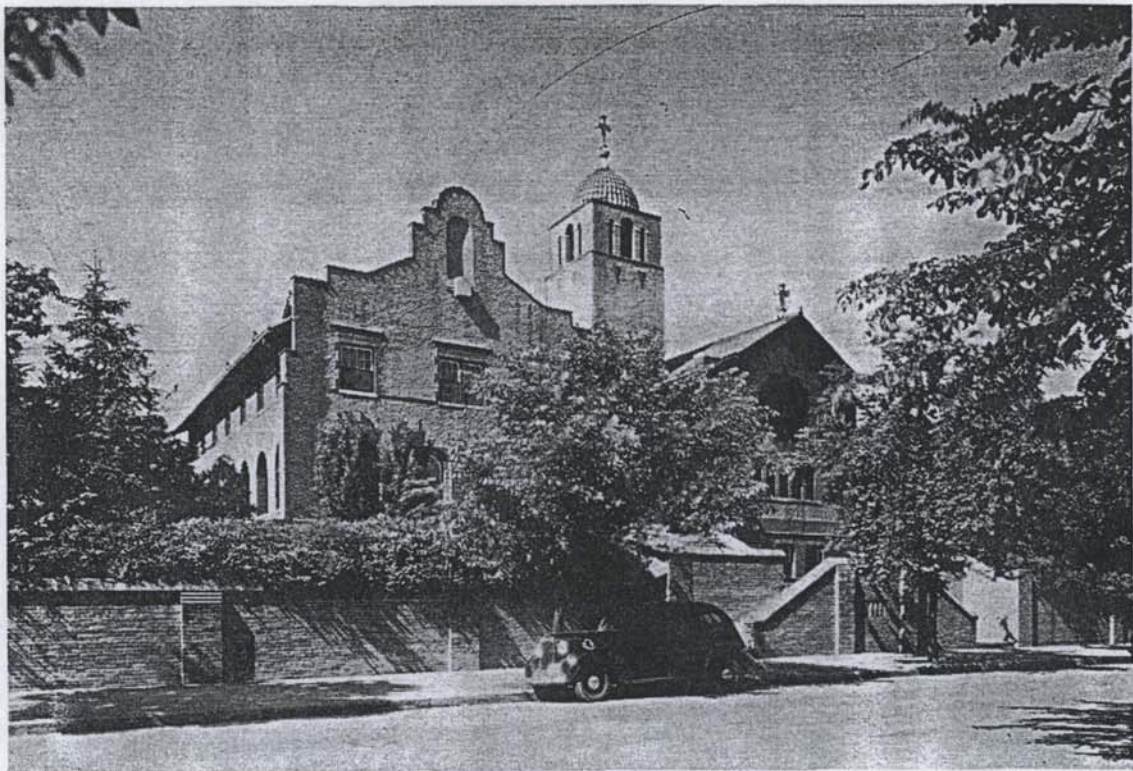
In the breaking up of St. Joseph's, the needs of the Sisters were not overlooked. Abbot Vincent Taylor, ever a faithful friend, generously appointed the Rev. Father John Smith, O.S.B., chaplain to the Sisters for life. Father John was one of the great blessings of Bristow. A typical farmer, he was never happier than when at work in one of the various fields of the farm, ploughing and harvesting along with the hired help, in the forefront where the work was hardest. He "had a way" with horses, handling a four horse team with as much skill and agility as one. He seemed to delight in having horses whose wild spirits were not altogether tamed, except when guided by his hand when they were under perfect control. In those "good old days", the winters seem to have been much more severe than they are in our times. At any rate, it is still a thrilling story to hear the senior Sisters tell about the annual bobsled rides to which Father John treated the Sisters and girls. And when summer time came around, there was the same thrilling pleasure to look forward to in the form of a hay ride.

Sometimes there would be two different loads in the party, and great was the competition as to which team could make the goal first. When St. Joseph's was abandoned as a school project by Belmont, Father John was well advanced in years, various physical ailments having forced him to retire from farming several years before. But his naturally active temperament found an outlet in the many duties attached to the position of being spiritual father to the Sisters and the boys of Linton Hall. To the latter he especially endeared himself by his great interest in their sports, watching their games with as much enthusiasm as if they had been professional players.

In deciding on accepting St. Joseph's as part of their heritage, the superiors had in mind a project which had been their wish for many years. The crowded condition of Linton Hall made it difficult to train novices in the peaceful environment which should be a part of Benedictine life. A separate home for these young Sisters was seen to be the ideal arrangement, and the buildings at St. Joseph's were soon utilized for this purpose. In the summer of 1927, Mother Alphonse, who was Novice Mistress at that time, began the work of renovating the place, cleaning it, and getting it ready to serve as a novitiate. Much of the work she did herself, with help from the young Sisters when they could be spared. The entire house was gone over thoroughly, walls and ceilings patched where the plaster was weak, then painted or papered, and made ready to serve the various needs of the new home. By the following spring, the house was ready for occupancy, but the formal opening was postponed until the first of July, when the Sisters returned from the missions could participate in the joyful celebration. There were two days of housewarming, one for the



St. Benedict Shrine



St. Gertrude's Convent and High School

seniors and one for the junior Sisters. Proudly they were conducted through the newly-renovated house, and in every nook and corner they found evidences of the wonderful neatness and order, combined with the artistic touch which was so much a part of Mother Alphonses's nature. The little chapel had been converted into a thing of beauty as a fitting dwelling place for the King of Kings, and adorned with gifts from various relatives of the Sisters.

A large apartment on the first floor had been set aside for the convenience of Father John, and here for many years he lived and entertained the friends who came to visit him from time to time; and here death came to him as a friend, silently and without any warning on the evening of October 29, 1942. At that time, Sister Gabriel was Novice Mistress, and following her usual custom, she stopped by Father John's room shortly after supper to see if he needed anything before the Sisters retired. She found him sitting in his usual position at his desk, newspaper in his lap, apparently asleep. But it was the long sleep of death, and to the question of the Sisters who quickly summoned Doctor McBryde, as to the cause of death, his verdict was, "His dear old heart just got tired beating and stopped". It was a sad day for Linton Hall when they saw the body of their beloved friend and Father carried down the aisle of the chapel to be sent to Belmont for burial. Father Nicholas Billey was sent by Abbot Vincent to escort the remains, and Mother Joseph and Mother Alphonses accompanied him to his last resting place. Father John was in his eightieth year when death called him, having celebrated his seventy-ninth birthday just a few weeks previously, with great "pomp and ceremony".

From that time to the present, the spiritual needs of

the community became the responsibility of the Bishop of the diocese, who took steps to secure the services of the Stigmatine Fathers from Waltham, Massachusetts.

In the march of time, there are many changes forced on the order of the house. Sad to relate, it was found necessary to have the novitiate brought back to the Motherhouse in the fall of 1943. Since that time, St. Joseph's has been utilized as a home for the tenant farmers and their families.

CHAPTER XV

The Rough Ways Made Straight

When a prosperous business man from Pennsylvania visited his sister at Bristow during one of the first years, his exclamation on alighting from the carriage was an index of what he must have felt as he was jolted and jarred over the ruts and streams from Manassas to Lintonsford. "Hattie, in Heaven's name why did you Sisters settle yourselves in this wilderness, miles from nowhere?" That sentence is a good description of what the traveler found at "Journey's End", and a stay of a few days only added to the conviction that there was no future here. The guests were accommodated in any spare room which happened to be vacant at the time. During the summer months, when there were more visitors, it was customary to transform the classrooms into sleeping quarters, the Sisters' relatives seeming content to put up with any inconvenience for the privilege of spending a vacation at St. Edith's.

From earliest days, the parents of Sister Agnes, Mr. and Mrs. Johnston of Latrobe, Pennsylvania, were frequent visitors, since besides Sister Agnes, their youngest daughter, Gertrude, was a boarder in the Academy. Their hearts were centered in this place which two of their children loved better than any spot on earth, so it was natural that when Mr. Johnston's failing health forced him to retire from business, they decided to spend most of their time at Bristow. When "The Cottage" was built, two rooms were reserved for their use, and in 1915, St. Anne's having been enlarged and made to function as a Guest House as well as a school, an apartment was



Bringing lifetimes of experience and leadership to serve all generations.

Conrad E. Slanina
Assistant State Director, Pennsylvania
6625 Church Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15202
(412) 761-6464

18 MARCH 1994

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DEAR SIR/MS.?

I AM LOOKING FOR
INFO ON ST JOSEPH'S INSTITUTE
WHICH WAS LOCATED IN
BRISTOW, VA BETWEEN
1900 & 1910.

WAS IT EDUCATIONAL,
PENAL OR OTHER?

IS THERE A
SUCCESSOR INSTITUTE TODAY?

THANK YOU FOR ANY
INFO YOU MAY PROVIDE.

SINCERELY
C. E. SLANINA
6625 CHURCH AVE