

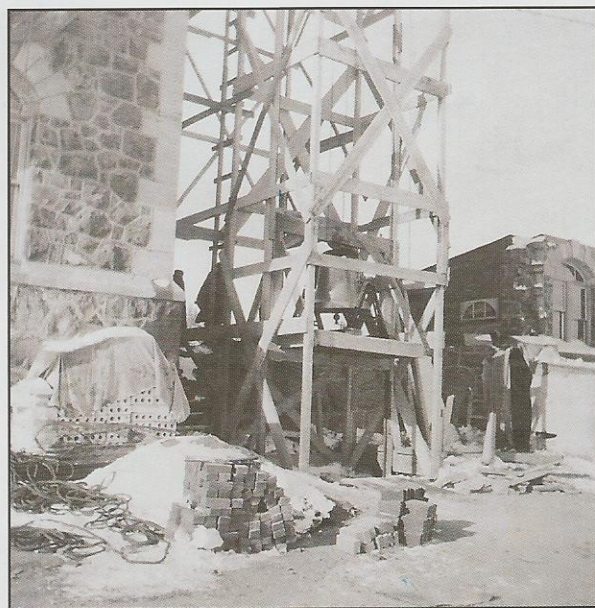
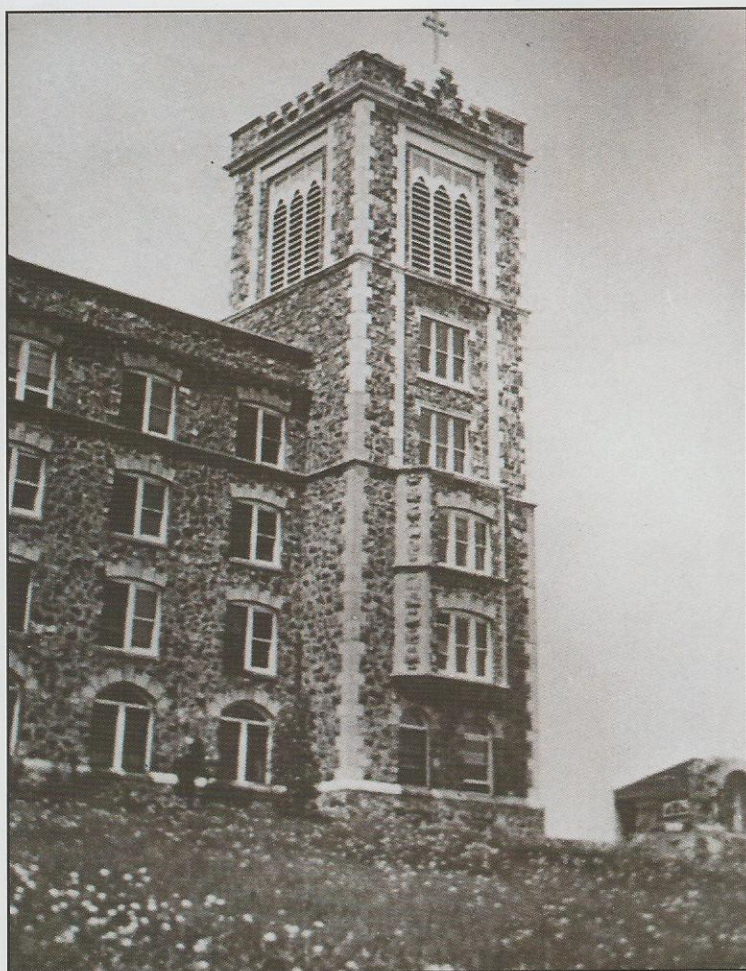
REMEMBERING THINGS PAST: THE BELL BENEDICT

By Sister Margaret Clarke

*"I praise the true God, I call the people, I assemble the clergy, I weep over the dead,
I call upon the faithful in time of pestilence that disease may cease."
—Ritual for the dedication of a church bell*

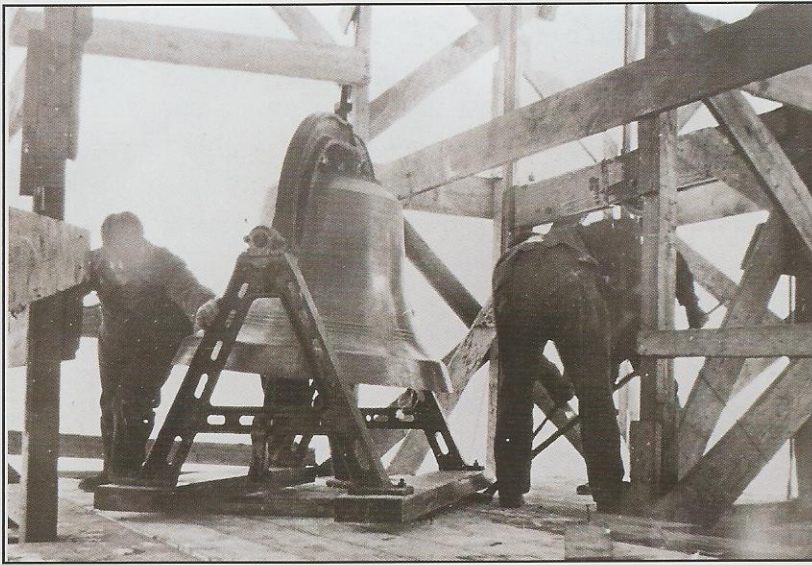
In 1921 the Duluth Benedictine community made several additions to the St. Scholastica campus, including a free-standing gymnasium, an extension to a lateral wing of Tower Hall and the construction of the first tower at the north end of the main building. In conjunction with the completion of this tower, Henry and Patrick Agnew, good friends of Sister Amata Macket, donated a two-thousand pound church bell to hang in it.

On November 14, 1921, Bishop McNicholas with a delegation of diocesan clergy came to dedicate the bell—a ceremony reminiscent in popular imagination to its baptism. Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Agnew were designated the bell's "sponsors." In accord with the ritual that dates back at least to the ninth century, the bell was first washed inside and out with blessed water, and then anointed with holy oil with seven crosses on the outside in commemoration of the seven sacraments and four crosses on the inside signifying the four corners of the world to which the bell would sound. Then the bishop prayed, "May this bell be hallowed, O Lord, and consecrated in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. In honor of St. Benedict. Peace be to thee." Thus the bell acquired its formal name: Benedict.



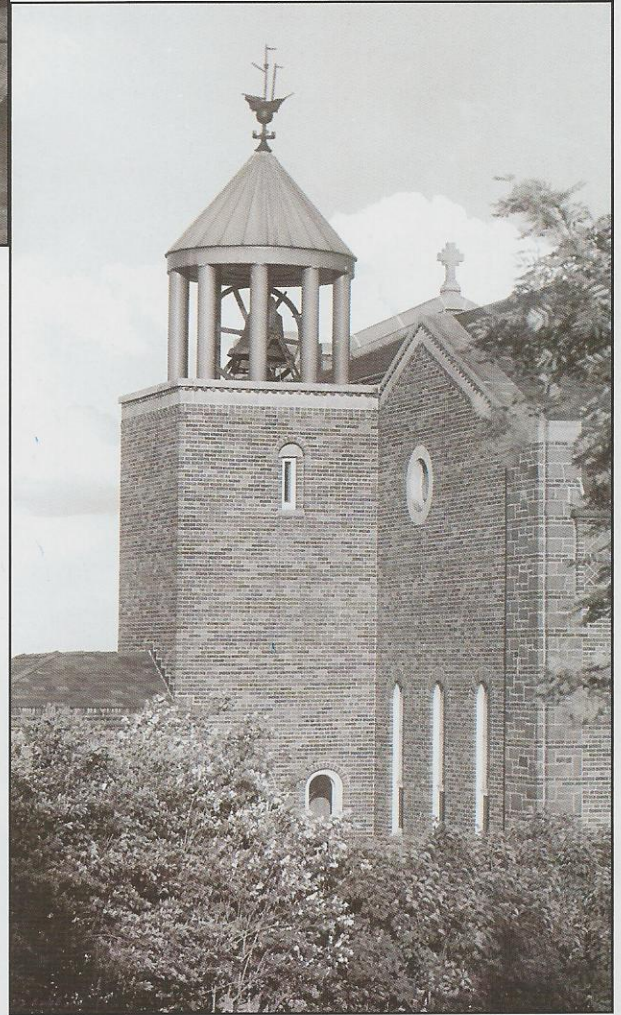
Left: First tower completed, 1921

Above: Scaffolding constructed to lift bell into tower



*Above: Workmen move bell onto scaffolding, 1921
Right: Benedict in the bell tower of Our Lady Queen of Peace Chapel, 1938. The ringers' room is indicated by the larger curved window next to the trees. The weather vane represents the "bark of Peter"—the Church sailing through the storms of the centuries.*

Photos from Monastery Archives



Benedict hung in this tower and was rung to announce times for the Angelus prayer at dawn, midday, and evening, to call the Sisters to Mass, and to announce the passing of one of the Community members into eternal life. In accordance with the tradition common in the British Isles, the Angelus ring was a modification of the passing bell—the “3-3-3-33” pattern indicating the death of Jesus. “3-3-3” announced the death of a man (a woman was 3-3) and the 33 were the years of his life. In this Community, the passing bell still tolls the number of years of the Sister’s life at her funeral.

In 1938, with the completion of Our Lady Queen of Peace Chapel and its separate bell tower, Benedict was moved to its present location. Until recently, generations of novices learned the arcana of manual bell-ringing: how to stop after an odd-number of “bongs” without the embarrassing “ding” indicating a neophyte ringer, and most importantly, how not to be lifted off one’s feet on an upward swing. A few years ago, with the decline in the number of able-bodied young Sisters, the whole mechanism was automated, and now everything is generally done electronically, although the bell can still be rung manually.