

Alumnus Profile:



Father Boniface

A. Bauer, O.S.B.

When Fr. Boniface was recommended as a subject for ALUMNUS PROFILE, we decided for his convenience, to have him write a short sketch of his life. It was intended to then ask him questions after reading

the sketch and thus compose the article from the ensuing interview. However, after reading the sketch we agreed to print in unchanged. We believe it provides a unique opportunity to view a life well-lived.

The editor of this paper has asked me to write something about the principal events of my life. Not that it is of great importance to anybody, but here is a short account of what life has done to me in the course of the years.

I was born in Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany. In my early youth I attended the elementary school and the Gymnasium (a combination of High School and College). When I was eighteen I came to America where I entered what was then called St. Mary's College (later named Belmont Abbey College). I finished the two years of the required college studies and then entered the novitiate of Mary Help Abbey. In 1908 I made my first vows and thereby became a monk of the Abbey. This marked the beginning of my seminary life, a preparation for the priesthood. The president of the seminary was Bishop Leo Haid, Bishop of North Carolina, who was also Abbot of Mary Help Abbey. After finishing the course of Seminary studies, I was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Haid in 1912. My first assignment after my ordination

was to St. Joseph's Institute in Bristow, Virginia. The property on which the institute was located, comprising 1,800 acres of land, was donated to the diocese of Richmond by two women -- one of them a Visitation Nun -- with the promise that a house for poor, friendless boys be established on the property. The monks of Mary Help Abbey accepted the offer and put up the buildings required for the management of a school. In this school I spent the first two years of my life as a priest. There were about fifty boys at the school, ranging between the ages of six and sixteen. My job was to teach several grades which were naturally small in number, and to supervise the conduct of the boys during the free periods of the day. I enjoyed the company of the youngsters many of whom did not even know whether their parents were alive or not.

After two years of this kind of work I was transferred to the Benedictine School in Richmond, Virginia. This was in the year 1914, two years after the opening of that school. The number of students was small, less than fifty. In those days people did not appreciate the value of a high



Fr. Boniface, 2nd from the left, is pictured shortly after entering Mary Help Abbey.

school education. The slogan was "The father of the house went to work immediately after finishing the grade school. He has a good job and provides for the necessities of the family. What was good for him is good enough for the boys."

Those were difficult years for the men who had to conduct a school. In the summer months they had the arduous task of drawing up students. During those years I had some interesting experiences with the people I visited. I recall especially one experience which I have never forgotten. I visited a home where the lady of the house received me very graciously. I told her that it had come to my knowledge that her boy had finished elementary school and I came to find out whether the parents would be willing to send him to our school. She said, "Father, we cannot afford to send our boy to your school." The tuition then was fifty dollars a year. I said to her, "Well, perhaps we could give the boy a scholarship." She said, "How much does that cost?" I told her that it would cost her nothing. On the strength of that assurance she sent the boy to our school. When the boy came on the opening day of school, we found out that we had to supply him with textbooks, and even with the uniform which was required at a military school. We supplied the boy with these articles just for the sake of building up our school in numbers. At the end of the school term we learned that the boy could not even absorb a high school education. We bid him a hearty "good bye" with the gentle reminder to return the uniform to the school.

In 1917 I received orders to report to Savannah, Georgia. It was the first time that I had the opportunity of living in the deep South. The landscape, the palm trees, the azaleas and the sulfuric-tasting water had a novel influence on me. But I adjusted myself quickly to these conditions and found Savannah a very pleasant place to live in. The school was the first military school staffed by the monks of Mary Help Abbey, having been founded in the year 1902. The buildings, being ten years older

than those in Richmond, were architecturally not as beautiful, but they served the purpose quite well. For three years I taught the same subjects I had taught in Richmond.

The people soon realized the value and need of a high school education, and so the enrollment increased from year to year. The subjects I taught at the high school were Latin, French, and history. I found the students well behaved and courteous to the teachers.

Richmond is a beautiful city with many reminders of a historical past. The people are friendly and made one feel at home in their midst. I must acknowledge that I spent fifteen happy years in Richmond.

In 1932 I was appointed Prior of the community and pastor of the adjoining Sacred Heart Church. This was to me the beginning of a new life. The country was in the midst of the worst depression it had ever seen. Three months after my appointment as Prior, the president of the United States ordered all banks throughout the country to be closed in order to save the economy from collapse. There were times when both rich and poor lived in stress. In my dreams I used to see red elephants, wondering how I could get enough cash to pay the interest due on our indebtedness.

There were 13 million people out of work. Even people who before the depression had had a comfortable income were looking for jobs. To solve the problem, the president inaugurated a public work system to provide jobs for the needy. Since there were more unemployed people than there were jobs available, the directors of public works invented jobs which bordered at times on the ridiculous. As one humorist put it, we were told to rake leaves from one side of the street to the other and then back again. Like all human affairs, even the depression came to an end, and things began to run their normal course.

The Benedictine School had quite a good reputation in Savannah, especially in matters

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Fr. Boniface, now retired at Belmont Abbey, is seen near the grotto.