

The Many Menominee Manifestations

(Try saying that three times fast!)

The USA Province of the Society of the Divine Savior has a lengthy history of buying “unique” properties that most people would NEVER think about for religious usage. We turned them into religious places anyway! Two provincials in particular – **Fr. Bede Friedrich** (1931-1936 / 1939-1947) and **Fr. Paul Schuster** (1953-1959) – had a knack for finding odd establishments and envisioning religious uses for them.

(Many of those stories are already familiar and have been written about in some of our past Archives’ history pages: a “Buffalo Farm” became a seminary; a mud-bath resort was turned into a college; a dairy was transformed into a parish; a resort hotel – turned “National Swine Palace” – became our Novitiate; and an army barracks was used for a boys’ high school.) Another such property that underwent numerous

transformations was in Menominee, Michigan. In this small city on the border of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and the state of Wisconsin, a set of buildings near the county’s tiny airport saw a variety of uses over the years – not just before the Salvatorians purchased it, but even while we owned it!



Menominee County School of Agriculture – 1907-1929

Built in 1907, this county school was authorized by the state legislature to develop scientific agricultural methods for the farmers in the Upper Peninsula. Until 1925, when the economic situation across the country began to shift, the school was operated under county supervision and with county funds. The state took over the operations for the next four years, but the failing economy that would lead to the Great Depression forced even the state to close the school in 1929.

Michigan Military Academy – 1930-1931

With the agricultural school’s closure, it was hoped that the property could continue being used for something educational, and it was believed that the economic crisis across the country might encourage families to send some of their boys to military schools. So in 1930, a military school in Illinois expanded its operations and they opened an adjunct school on this property, calling it the Michigan Military Academy. But the \$800 annual tuition cost was far too great for most families in the area. The school ran for only one year and the property reverted to county control once again.



Jordan College – 1932-1939

The economic crisis of the early Depression was not as harsh for the Salvatorians as it was for many people. Wanting to expand its educational presence to other places across the country besides Wisconsin, and having been alerted to an expressed need a decade earlier by a member ministering in the Upper Peninsula, the Society kept its eyes and ears open for the possibility of operating a college program in the U.P. With the closing of the military academy, a new opportunity presented itself and the administration of the province began to look into the matter right away. Soon, after agreements and contracts were drawn up between the Society and local city officials, “Jordan College” was opened by the Society as a non-sectarian school, open to all high school graduates. The curriculum included classes in religion, philosophy, Latin, Greek, English composition and literature, modern foreign languages (German, French, Spanish, Italian, Polish), journalism, history, sociology, economics, mathematics, botany, zoology, chemistry, physics, and music – not a bad deal considering that the tuition cost was only \$50 per semester! Students lived off-campus, either in their own homes or with families willing to take in boarders – a popular option for bringing in a little extra cash during hard times. Because advanced degrees were required to teach in the school, most of the faculty members came from outside the Society, and there were never more than eight Salvatorians on the teaching staff because of that requirement. Having to hire more lay teachers and pay them a living wage made the costs of running the school very high, unfortunately. All this while the country was in the midst of the Great Depression as well!



Because of these combined factors, Jordan College would only survive until the end of the 1938-1939 school year. The property was allowed to remain in the Society’s trust. It just simply wasn’t a good time to try to operate a school of this kind, but for the years that it was open, the Society was able to provide a solid and morally sound education for those who were able to attend college during a tough economic time.

Jordan Seminary – 1941-1943 / 1949-1962

After some negotiations with the city leaders regarding ownership of the property, the Society ultimately purchased the land outright. They decided to open another kind of school – a seminary for “belated-vocations.” Unlike today, when a large number of seminary students come in as “second career” vocations, pretty much anyone who hadn’t attended high school seminary in those days was considered a “belated-vocation” student. With students referred to as “Specials” by Salvatorians, Jordan Seminary opened in 1941. There were nine students, and three priests served as the faculty. Because advanced degrees were not required for teaching in a school like this, the Society did not have to hire outside faculty members and could assign its own members to teach. This made the costs of running the school far more manageable. The teachers offered classes in Latin, religion, introduction to philosophy, and whatever else a particular student needed to take. The goal was to eventually place the students in college seminary programs, in whatever grade seemed appropriate for each student.



Most students would take classes for two years in the Jordan program. The World War II years, however, brought in even fewer men than had originally started, and so the Jordan students were transferred to St. Nazianz during that time. Most of the priests and brothers remained in Menominee.. The priests brought in money by assisting in local parishes, and the brothers operated the community farm and made repairs and alterations to the school buildings. During this time, the community was able to reduce the huge debt that had accrued during the earlier Jordan College days.

Salvatorian Novitiate – 1946-1955

So as not to leave the buildings entirely unused until the students could return, the Society decided to move the Novitiate to Menominee in 1946. Even at the beginning of the 1940's, the idea of moving other segments of community life and administration away from the Salvatorian Monastery and Seminary property in St. Nazianz, Wisconsin, was being discussed again. Back in the 1920's, the Society had moved the graduate school seminarians to Elkton, Maryland, and then to Washington, DC. There, the students took their classes at Catholic University, and they lived in a community house just a few blocks away. In 1935, a larger piece of property was purchased several miles away in Lanham, Maryland, and the other scholastics (those taking their philosophy courses in the last two years of college) went from St. Nazianz to live there. In 1941, a new structure was finished and named Divine Savior Seminary. The community house near Catholic University was closed and all the major seminary students then lived together in Lanham.

In November of 1946, the Novitiate community packed up and moved from the large property in St. Nazianz. The temporarily-unused campus in Menominee was a perfect spot for the Society's Novitiate. The new novices had begun their Novitiate year in St. Nazianz in September, and then just two months in, these novices, along with their new director, boarded the bus for Menominee.



Fr. Francis Stolwyk replaced Fr. Leo Herbst as Director of Novices, and he led the Menominee Novitiate through its years there. Not always in the best of health, he often had to rely on help from other

Salvatorian priests. They assisted in conducting some of the conferences and other duties required of Novice Masters. In May 1955, Fr. Francis resigned and was replaced as Director of Novices by Fr. Maurice Kelch, who completed that Novitiate year, and then the Society moved him and the Novitiate program to Colfax, Iowa.



In 1947, the provincial, Fr. Jerome Jacobs, moved from St. Nazianz to Menominee, calling it his "temporary residence." This was another way of trying to move the focus of the province away from its largest



property. They had moved the provincial offices away once before, in the early 1920's, to Milwaukee. But the Society returned the provincialate back to St. Nazianz in 1930. Fr. Jacobs remained in Menominee until 1953.



In 1949, Jordan Seminary resumed holding classes in Menominee. The post-war years saw an increase of men looking into religious life and priestly ministry, and Jordan Seminary flourished with a large increase in its student population.





In addition to their studies, the Jordan students also presented the “Passion Play” production each year during Lent. These plays, begun in 1939 in the seminary in St. Nazianz, had become an annual event at every Salvatorian seminary across the country. They were well attended and many people knew of the Salvatorians primarily because of these annual productions. They were among the most successful Salvatorian fund-raising events and they helped keep the seminaries in operation.

In 1961, the province decided to move away from the classical “six-year Minor Seminary / six-year Major Seminary” education structure. It was replaced by a “four-year high school / four-year college / four-year graduate school” system. This had become a common practice across the country. In 1962, Mount St. Paul College opened in Waukesha, Wisconsin. Most of Jordan Seminary’s faculty members were transferred there. The “Specials” students program moved to St. Nazianz for three years and then to Waukesha, although at that point the students were simply subsumed into regular college life and were no longer referred to as “Specials.” The Brothers’ Juniorate, which had begun in Menominee in the late 1950’s, was transferred to Lanham, Maryland. Just a handful of priests and brothers remained in Menominee and the property was sold in 1967 to the local YMCA, which is still present on that land. Only one of the buildings from the Jordan Seminary years remains today. The “Y” allowed a few of the Salvatorians to live on the property until 1974, the year the Society’s presence in the city ended. Through its many years and its many manifestations, the Menominee campus is remembered fondly by the Salvatorians who lived there.

