

The Abbey Today

In 1960, the monks of New Melleray produced and published *The New Melleray Book*, an 8½" by 11", 64 page brochure, beautifully written, printed, and illustrated to tell the story of Our Lady of New Melleray. In the *Prologue*, the author asks "What is a Monastery?" and he answers:

Well a monastery is many things. From the outside looking in, it is first of all a building, sometimes a little village of buildings with good thick walls, because a monastery by its very nature is permanent and its roots must reach deep in the earth.

A monastery, at least a Trappist monastery, is also a farm with cows and chickens, hay and pumpkins. In the springtime there is always the plowing and planting, the rains and the good black earth. In the autumn there are always cribs overflowing with golden corn and trees heavy with apples.

A monastery is a body of men who once worked in an office or factory, went to school or served in the army, played baseball, had a home and family — which they left; men who were once in the "world" but now are outside of it. Yet while perfectly normal and healthy these men are somehow different because God has His roots in them and they have their roots in God.

But most of all a monastery is a place in the universe where God is honored and dwells, dwells in tabernacles of metal and tabernacles of flesh; a place where He can

sweep His arm across the horizon and say, "These are My lands and these are My people."

Such is the Abbey of Our Lady of New Melleray in Iowa, home of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance. Here the return of the seasons, and the liturgy, and the daily round of the monks remain much the same as they were a hundred years ago and as they doubtless will be a hundred years from now.

Four times a year — Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter — the monks at New Melleray publish a mimeographed newsletter, called *Monastery Seasons*, and distribute it to their friends and benefactors. Likewise, a periodical record, *The Abbey Chronicle*, is produced for members of the community. In these publications, the monks tell the story of the Iowa Monastery for 1960-1961 in their own words, much of it written by Father Cronan, able writer and Abbey chronicler.

Spring and Summer

With March usually comes the return of life to the land. In April, thunderstorms rolling up the Mississippi valley from the south mean getting the tractors oiled up and another year's plowing under way.

Gradually the year becomes of age and spring melts into summer. The shaved heads of the brothers working in the hay fields or on the new building begin to turn brown. Spirits are high and, in the refectory after the long day's work, laughter comes easily at the humorous passages in the reading, while ample amounts of soup, lettuce and ears of corn are consumed.

August, Our Lady of Assumption, the countryside is

like green velvet with golden squares of oat fields. The tomatoes are ripe and the corn is maturing in the fields. The sun is hot in a blue porcelain sky and a few lazy clouds float in from the Dakota plains.

Autumn

Autumn and harvest time. The year mellows and wanes and one begins to feel old, as old as the land. The mornings are sharp and misty; the afternoons are warm and hazy. Red and yellow leaves are framed by a smoky blue sky.

But there is little time to contemplate nature with a king-sized harvest to get in before the heavy frosts and snows. Tomatoes, apples and pears come pouring into the cannery, oats into the granary, grapes into the winery.

The Harvest 1960

It has been a good year for us, with a bountiful harvest. Providence has given us a fine summer with ample rainfall and sunshine, good strong backs and a will to work. Well into September this Iowa countryside was thick and green with abundance.

The corn harvest beginning in mid-November and continuing until the early part of December, set a new record — 36,000 bushels. The farm department also reports 30,000 bales of hay and 9,000 bales of straw put up, and a granary filled with oats.

Our five acre garden produced 400 bushels of potatoes, 350 bushels of tomatoes, 50 bushels each of sweet corn and carrots. In addition lesser quantities of melons, lettuce, and strawberries were cultivated.

The canning department reports the following put up for the winter: 900 gallon cans of tomato juice, 600 of whole tomatoes, and 50 of apple jelly. In addition 250 half-gallon jars of pickles were produced. Fifty bushels of grapes from the vineyard went into the making of 150

gallons of monastery wine, and another 10 bushels were marketed.

This past year our herds of beef cattle — Black Angus and Herefords — have been diligently fostered and increased to 500 head, while the brothers are continuing their efforts to develop a fine dairy herd of Holsteins and increase milk production. Despite the drain of our building expansion they are in the process of remodeling the old cow barn and modernizing the technique of dairying. At present forty cows produce 160 gallons of milk daily.

Out on the Building

The year, 1960, saw much progress on our building program. During the summer and autumn, the various departments — electrical and plumbing, cement crew and brothers down at the quarry — combined their efforts to erect a shell of the entire novitiate — a five-story wing including basement. With winter approaching, the roof was put on in record time — three shifts working from daybreak until dark accomplished the job in about a week. Partition walls are being completed and steam risers and radiators are being installed by the plumbing crew.

A day worth remembering was the opening of the new community kitchen. The old cast-iron, wood-burning stove, and the century old stone walls have given way to modern ranges and cookers, and to cream tiled walls in a light and airy atmosphere. Adjoining it is the new bakery with a new bake oven and mixing equipment. This new bake oven, capable of baking 72 loaves in forty-five minutes, turns out some 245 loaves per week for the community and 165 for the guesthouse. It consumes almost 700 pounds of flour a week. Now we can supply visitors to the guesthouse with all the bread they want, the same bread which gets the Monks through Lent.

Mostly choir religious and priests are employed on the building allowing them ready access to the church for

fulfilling their choir duties — the daily solemn High Mass and hours of the Divine Office. The lay brothers with their longer hours devoted to manual labor are for the most part assigned to farm chores.

Along the Cloister

The theology and philosophy classrooms were completely renovated for the new school year. Paint and electrical departments supplied fiesta colors and florescent lighting. Just as students in the large state universities and in colleges throughout the country resume their work in September, autumn brings the young Trappist choir monks back to their books for another year of hard study. At present we have ten simple professed enrolled in a 2½ year philosophy course, and some seventeen religious in the 5 year theology course — requisite for the reception of the priesthood. For about two hours a day — six days a week, these monks attend morning classes. In the afternoon they return to their customary manual labor, their individual trades as stone cutters at the quarry, plumbers in the new building, and other tasks. Work is the Cistercian word for recreation.

New Melleray's broom-closet library has been moved to larger quarters on the second floor center wing just south of the oratory — capacity around 21,000 volumes. The wooden shelves were a gift from the old Loras College Library, while tables and chairs were supplied by Clarke College. In the completed monastery, the library will occupy a still larger area.

Comings and Goings

Mid-summer saw the departure of seven of our priests and three lay brothers for Canada to help Our Lady of the Prairies, a Trappist community near Winnipeg, Canada. Later, two of this group returned to New Melleray enroute to Indonesia to assist the monks at Our Lady of the Cheerful Marsh Abbey. Since their departure we

have received over ten postulants — choir and lay — into the New Melleray community to make up the loss in numbers.

On November 6 at a convocation commemorating the dedication of the new Loras College Library, Abbot Philip of New Melleray Abbey delivered the principal address and received an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws before a distinguished assembly of prelates and laymen.

The New Melleray community turned out to vote in full force (including voting by fathers and brothers in foreign duty) in the November presidential election. Iowa went Republican, but the Peosta precinct went for Kennedy 305-150.

Winter came quite slowly to our land this year. With the first frosts autumn had its short burst of glory, but this hung on to an ebbing life for some weeks — finally slipping imperceptibly into the past. The opening week of November felt the first freeze, brought a few snow flurries, and great waves of high flying geese. Occasionally a few stragglers would stop over on our little pond, down the hill from the monastery.

Monastery Christmas

Christmas crept up on us this year. A few days before the great feast a light snowfall covered the fields. The windows frosted up and the temperature dropped from 15° to 20° below zero. Reminiscent of bringing in the early English Yule Log or the Pilgrim Christmas Tree, a handful of brothers drove our 20 year old trucks down into the woods. Returning with a couple of young pine trees and a load of branches and cones, they began our simple traditional decorating.

At a High Mass on Christmas morning one of the choir monks made his solemn profession. This colorful ceremony together with Pontifical Vespers, rounded out the days liturgy.

Man does not live by bread alone but it helps especially if it has raisins in it. That is our luxurious Christmas breakfast fare. The generosity of the Abbey's benefactors supplied ice cream for dinner, fruit cake for supper, and a delicious 160 lb. cheese.

On the afternoon of Christmas day, the younger members of the community put on a light hearted but artistic rendition of Christmas carols of the various nations throughout the world. Brothers of various national origins sang carols in the tongue of their forbears. German, French, Czech, Byzantine, Italian, Irish and English carols were heard as well as a negro spiritual. The universality and historical continuity of the Mystical Body, and the ageless message of Christmas, peace on earth to men of good will, could not have been more accurately portrayed.

After the bustle of the Holidays the Abbey tucks its head in its cowl for a long three months. The community systematically goes about its daily chores of choir, classes, feeding the cattle, hogs, and chickens, milking the cows, sawing lumber, repairing machinery, and construction work inside the Abbey.

Occasionally an old fashioned blizzard will blow down from the north causing a glow of excitement and snowing us in for a few days. Lent begins and we wait patiently for Easter and the return of life to the land.

The Abbey Chronicle — Spring 1961

The Farm

A Harvestore has been acquired and erected — a glass lined, steel silo capable of storing 12,000 bushels of high moisture corn in a controlled atmosphere preventing spoilage and assuring maximum protein content feed.

The spacious monastery chicken house, built in 1940, has a population of 750 hens which lay about 470 eggs per day. The Abbey's customers, located for the most

part in Chicago, include schools, rectories, stores and convents.

There are some 500 head of beef cattle on hand at present — Black Angus and Herefords — and from 350 to 400 hogs. The dairy herd numbers 60 Holsteins.

Improvements

Floors in the church and sacristy received several coats of stain and varnish during January.

A new town truck has been acquired, a 9 ton, 1961, red International.

Loud speaker systems have been installed in the chapter room, reading cloister, secular church, and a new more extensive system in the refectory and guest dining room.

Along the Cloisters

Members of New Melleray hail from 23 states, Canada 3, Ireland 5. Illinois leads with 32, followed by Minnesota with 20, and Iowa with 19. The South is represented by delegates from Mississippi and Louisiana; the Southwest by Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California. Most of the New England States are well represented.

On January 30, Dom M. Gabriel Sortais, Abbot General of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, arrived for a nine-day visit accompanied by his secretary and an interpreter from the Abbey at Conyers, Georgia. He had a personal interview with each of the professed and spoke each morning to the community in Chapter.

On Sunday afternoons tape recordings of sermons by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and by Father Eugene Boylan, former Prior of Caldey, Wales, have been heard by the community. Other tape lectures on religious themes are used in the instructional program.

The recovery and sale of cancelled postage stamps in the Guesthouse for the benefit of Trappist monasteries in mission lands continues to prosper. Over \$100 was realized from this project the past year.

Springtime again and New Melleray Abbey is a beehive of activity. Oats have been sowed, gardens are being planted, plowing is under way. Reports from the Choir Brothers and Lay Brothers in charge of the many activities at the monastery indicate the tremendous scope of the operations and the skill and knowledge necessary to perform them.

The Trappists at New Melleray are self sufficient, purchasing only condiments and staple foods. In addition to the 1,000 acres under cultivation, the 3,200 acre holding includes extensive woodlands and pastures. The raising of beef cattle and hogs for sale and grain for feed is a major undertaking; but the production of poultry and eggs, of honey, of religious goods — incense, candles, altar wine, and altar bread — are also important activities.

Today the New Melleray community numbers approximately 150 men, diverse in physical appearance, personality, and background but each with a single purpose — the love of God and the love of souls. The principal work of the monk at New Melleray today, as always, is not building the monastery, cultivating the fields, performing the many daily tasks, adapting new equipment and materials for temporal use, or accumulating wisdom; but it is *doing the work of God*. At intervals throughout the day "from early morning Vigils when the world is sleeping till the evening

Angelus when the twilight calm comes and dusk falls over the fields," monks at New Melleray Abbey devote much of their time to prayer, silence, and contemplation. Through the Divine Office of the choir brothers, the shorter special office of the lay brothers, the daily community High Mass, and daily Masses by each of the forty priests, prayers are offered for the world and its people, for each monk wants the world to live in peace and in a spirit of love for Almighty God.

CISTERCIAN MONASTERIES IN THE UNITED STATES 1961

1. Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey, Trappist P.O., Kentucky
2. Our Lady of New Melleray Abbey, Dubuque, Iowa
3. St. Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, Massachusetts
4. Our Lady of the Holy Ghost Abbey, R. 1, Conyers, Georgia
5. Our Lady of the Holy Trinity Monastery, Huntsville, Utah
6. Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey, Box 207, Lafayette, Oregon
7. Our Lady of Mepkin Abbey, Moncks Corner, South Carolina
8. Our Lady of the Holy Cross Abbey, Berryville, Virginia
9. Our Lady of the Genesee Abbey, Piffard, New York
10. Our Lady of the Assumption Abbey, R. 5, Ava, Missouri
11. Our Lady of New-Clairvaux Monastery, Vina, California
12. Saint Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass, Colorado