

Brother Walter Sproull

October 19th is the anniversary of the death of Brother Walter Sproull. Francis Sproull was born in New Kensington, Pennsylvania, on September 19, 1916. He graduated from New Kensington High School with the class of 1935. After graduation he did some community work with boys in basketball.

From 1935 to 1942 he was employed as a bench operator for an aluminum company, and he played three years of minor league baseball as an outfielder for the St. Louis Browns from 1939 to 1941. Baseball was truly Francis Sproull's special love. His promising career, however, was shortened by a head injury, and he was eventually forced to give up semi-pro ball.

With the advent of World War II, he joined the U.S. Army in 1942, serving primarily in Europe where he was severely wounded in battle and earned the Purple Heart. He carried the effects of the war wound and his baseball injury through life.

While stationed at the army base in Blytheville, Arkansas, Francis became acquainted with the Olivetan Benedictine Sisters of Jonesboro, Arkansas, who told him about Subiaco. He made frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament in the parish church, and the sisters were impressed with his spirituality and his Christian generosity toward the material needs of the convent. The local superior of the sisters in Blytheville suggested that Francis consider the life of a Benedictine monk after completing his four-year term in the armed forces.

After his discharge from the army in 1946, Francis Sproull went back to work at the aluminum company where he had previously been employed. After a year, however, he decided to follow a monastic calling, arriving at Subiaco Abbey on April 16, 1947, as a candidate. He professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on December 8, 1948, receiving the name Walter.

Brother Walter served our community by working on the abbey farm for the first year and a half after his arrival. He then assisted in the abbey laundry from 1948 to 1950. For the next eight years he was custodian of Alumni Hall. His next assignment was abbey refectorian, a position he held until deteriorating health forced his retirement in the early 1980s.

A series of bone fractures and mounting health problems forced Brother Walter to spend the latter years of his life in the infirmary, mobile only with the help of a nurse and a wheelchair. His continuing decline was marked in the final two months before his death, and he lost pulse and respiration several times during the final week. Brother Walter died of apparent cardiac failure in the abbey infirmary on Sunday, October 19, 1986.

Abbot Raphael was the celebrant of the Mass of Christian burial for Brother Walter on Tuesday, October 21. At the time of his death, Brother Walter was 70 years old and in the 37th year of his monastic profession. He is buried in our cemetery.

