Brother Gerard Kaufman

February 14th is the anniversary of the death of Brother Gerard Kaufman. Ludwig Kaufman was born in Belleville, Illinois, on September 1, 1884. After completing grammar school there, he became a coal miner, an occupation he followed for 12 years. When work in the mines would slow down he would turn to foundry work.

Ludwig was nearing 30 years of age when he came to Subiaco. He professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on June 24, 1915, receiving the name Gerard.

After working briefly in the vineyards, Brother Jerry became custodian of the dining rooms for students, monks, and guests where he worked for 20 years. In 1935, he became custodian of the house and he continued this work into his early 90s.

But, it is perhaps with the abbey museum that he will always be identified, serving as its curator from 1930 to 1978. During these years he filled the museum with thousands of trinkets, antiques, and other items of interest, which he fondly called "schnixies." The museum quickly became a delight to children and a fascination to adults.

Adept at playing the accordion and mouth harp simultaneously, Brother Jerry often managed a musical concert for visitors to the museum. Until he was 80 years old, he would climb the water tower carrying his musical instruments and sit on the ball on the top of the tower, 135 ft. in the air, playing and singing. This came to a halt only because at that age he was ordered not to climb the tower anymore.

On the occasion of his golden jubilee of profession in 1965, Brother Jerry was asked for his formula for happiness in the religious life. His reply was simple: "Pray a lot and don't worry."

Gradual physical weakening finally called for his living in the monastic infirmary, where he spent the last two years of his life. Even there he gave joy and delight to those around him. Pneumonia finally brought his vibrant and cheerful life to a close on the evening of Thursday, February 14, 1980, as he died in peaceful sleep.

At the time of his death, Brother Jerry was 95 years old and in the 64th year of his monastic profession. He was the oldest monk in the Swiss-American Congregation of Benedictine monasteries. He is buried in our cemetery.