

Brother Conrad Spirig

May 3rd is the anniversary of the death of Brother Conrad Spirig. Joseph Spirig was born on January 6, 1881, in Canton St. Gall, Switzerland. He was from a family of lace makers. They did piece work at home for a central house that supplied the patterns and marketed the final products. The long hours of work indoors gave him a frail, pale appearance that eventually was a factor in his coming to Subiaco.

As a boy, Joseph Spirig had decided to become a religious brother. When he applied for entrance at the Cistercian monastery near his home, the superiors took one look at him and decided he was not strong enough.

Next he applied at the Abbey of Maria Einsiedeln. Because of the crowded condition there, he was told that a new monastery in Arkansas was looking for candidates and it was suggested that he apply for admission there.

In 1898, when Father Bonaventure Binzegger returned to the United States from a visit to Einsiedeln, brother-candidate Joseph Spirig and priest-candidate Athanasius Zehnder traveled with him. Traveling aboard the same ship were a group of young candidates for the sisterhood at Holy Angels Convent in Jonesboro, Arkansas. One of these young women was Joseph Spirig's sister; a second sister of his entered the convent in Switzerland.

As a 17-year-old boy, Joseph Spirig found plenty of work in the kitchen and on the farm; any appearance of frailty or paleness waned during the next 65 years of his life at Subiaco.

Joseph Spirig professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on June 3, 1900, receiving the name Conrad. For many years Brother Conrad was manager of the students' dining room. In 1925, he was appointed baker, and later vintner. His bread quickly earned the highest praises, as he turned a daily need into an art.

The first important tool of learning upon his arrival in this country was a notebook, always kept in his pocket. When he heard or read a new word or expression in the English language which he was just learning, he jotted it down immediately and didn't rest until he had studied and mastered this new thought.

Brother Conrad died at Crawford County Memorial Hospital in Van Buren, Arkansas, on Sunday, May 3, 1963, after an illness of several months.

At the time of his death, Brother Conrad was 82 years old and in the 62nd year of his monastic profession. He is buried in our cemetery.

