

Father Wolfgang Schlumpf

August 1st is the anniversary of the death of Father Wolfgang Schlumpf. Father Wolfgang was born in the town of Steinhausen, near the banks of Lake Zug, Canton Zug, Switzerland, on January 20, 1831. He professed his vows as a monk of the abbey of Einsiedeln on September 25, 1853, and was ordained to the priesthood on September 13, 1857. For 10 years, from 1852 to 1862, he served his community teaching at the Abbey School.

In 1862, Abbot Henry sent him to St. Meinrad Priory in Indiana as a missionary. In 1871 he became subprior of the newly erected St. Meinrad Abbey, where he also served as procurator, brothers' instructor, and superintendent of the abbey farm.

In February of 1878, Father Wolfgang was informed that he had been selected to make a new foundation in Arkansas, and that he was to be ready to leave in a few weeks. Concerning this order, Father Wolfgang wrote to a friend of his, Father Ildephonse Huerlimann, dean of the abbey of Einsiedeln: "I don't like to leave St. Meinrad, but I can also become enthusiastic about Arkansas. Father Abbot has given the orders, and I know and firmly believe that it is the will of God."

When Father Wolfgang, along with Brothers Caspar Hildesheim and Hilary Benetz arrived at the place of the new foundation on March 15, 1878, Father Wolfgang described the location thus: "There stood an old deserted cabin and near it a log house, so far uninhabited. No garden, no fruit trees, no fence...."

By May 26, 1878, the intrepid pioneers had built a church, and the Bishop of Little Rock, Edward M. Fitzgerald, came to dedicate it. The bishop celebrated a solemn high Mass and preached the sermon. After Mass, a number of children and adults who had received First Communion at Mass were also confirmed by the bishop.

The new monastery was made a dependent priory of St. Meinrad, and Father Wolfgang was appointed its first prior by Abbot Martin Marty. In 1881, Abbot Fintan Mundwiler, the new abbot of St. Meinrad, appointed Father Bonaventure Binzegger, a capitular of Einsiedeln, to replace Father Wolfgang as prior, and called the latter back to St. Meinrad. A year later Father Wolfgang was back in Arkansas. In 1884, he went for a short visit to Switzerland to regain his health that had suffered from fevers and the hardships of missionary life.

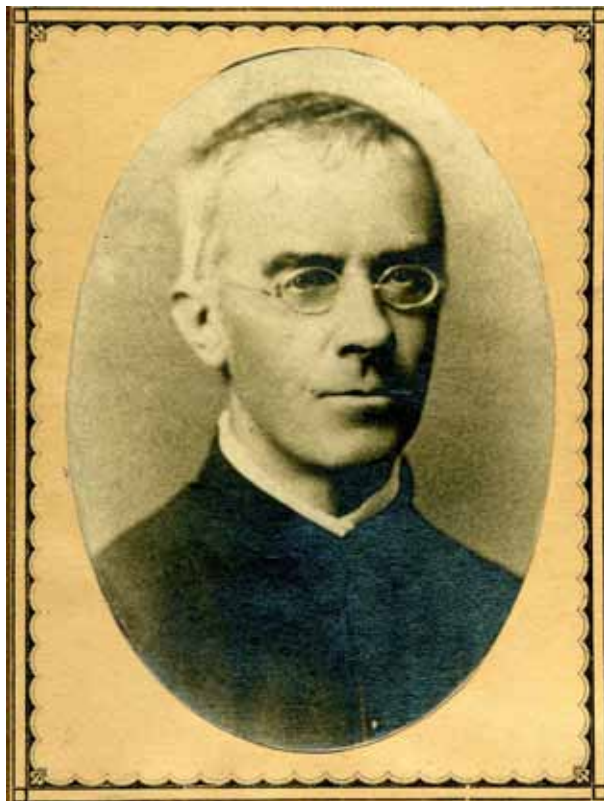
By the following year his health was renewed and he was able to lead the "Expedition" of 1885 to St. Benedict's monastery. The "Expedition" was comprised of two priests, one brother, four brother-candidates, and one candidate for the priesthood.

There were also seven Sisters destined for the Oregon mission travelling with the group aboard the Red Star Liner "Westernland," sailing from Antwerp, Belgium, to New York.

The "Expedition" of 1885 from Einsiedeln reached St. Benedict's monastery on February 12. For the next decade, Father Wolfgang served the community as prior until 1894 when he was recalled permanently to Switzerland by Abbot Basil Oberholtzer of Einsiedeln.

Father Luke Hess, abbey historian, writes: "This meant the recall of the founder of this house from his field of labor, of which he had seen all the stages from its earliest infancy to its completion."

During Father Wolfgang's last tenure as prior, our monastery was raised to the rank of an abbey and Father Ignatius Conrad was elected its first abbot.



While living in Switzerland, Father Wolfgang did not forget Subiaco Abbey for, in November 1895, our monastery received a gift of a tower clock from him. In Switzerland, Father Wolfgang was appointed spiritual director of a community of nuns in Glottburg.

Father Wolfgang died in Switzerland on Monday, August 1, 1904. At the time of his death, Father Wolfgang was 73 years old and in the 51st year of his monastic profession, the 46th of his priesthood. A marker honors Father Wolfgang here in our abbey cemetery. He is buried at the Abbey of Maria Einsiedeln in Switzerland.