

Our Catholic History  
Rev. P. Eugene Hagedorn, O.F.M.  
serialized in The Teutopolis Press  
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as the friars celebrated fifty years since their coming to the U.S.  
(edited by Fr. Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M.)

### **The Temporary Monastery**

“At 3:45 A.M. we were roused from sleep, the straw sacks were removed, whereupon we made our meditation in this room from 4 to 5 o’clock. In the evening the time for meditation was from 8 to 9 o’clock. The Very Rev. Fr. Provincial Gregory, however, who came in 1860 to make the canonical visitation, changed this arrangement.” After meditation, the community wended their way to church, where the scaffolding for the plasterers from Centralia had just been put up. Bro. Paschal, the sacristan, carrying a lantern, headed the procession; the others followed in Indian file, i.e. one by one. The streets were then at times in a wretched condition. We cannot now form an idea of the temporary bottomlessness of Main Street in those days. Long boots were requisite to make a sick call even in the neighborhood of the church, and while the ill-fated pedestrian extracted one leg from the mud, the other was embedded up to the calf of the leg in the slough, until covered all over with perspiration from his laborious undertaking, he arrived at the house of the patient. At intervals logs had been placed across the street, to enable the people to cross it dry-shod by leaping from log to log. The dire but ridiculous consequences often resulting in case of stout or old people we can easily imagine. Bro. Julius once attempted to take a short cut, but found cause to rue his rash undertaking. Finding himself sinking into a bottomless morass, he with difficulty extricated himself and by a bold leap endeavored to gain a secure foothold on the next log and, having either misjudged the distance or slipped, he measured his length in the mud and had to return home for a change of clothes.

The altar of the church consisted of a few boards, roughly joined together, and was covered with linen. Here the three Fathers celebrated the holy sacrifice by turns, at each of which the community assisted. Brother Julius alone, cook and baker, withdrew sooner, to prepare for his brethren the frugal breakfast, consisting of coffee and bread. The only “machine” had a capacity of two breads only; hence the brothers had to bake every day.

When the Franciscan arrived towards the end of September, 1858, the weather was still as hot as in the “dog days,” i.e. midsummer in Germany. In winter, however, the cold was so severe, that Fr. Servace repeatedly was near a fainting spell, while celebrating low Mass. Like in many churches of Germany, the church at Teutopolis seems to have been without stoves until about the year 1866.

### **Life in the New Monastery – Rev. Fr. Damian Hennewig, O.F.M., First Superior (1858 – July, 1862)**

About eight days before Christmas, the friars moved into the new monastery. It was a two-story frame building, 40’ x 30,’ veneered on the inside with brick, only the exterior being then finished. As the foundation had been laid before the friars’ arrival, only a few changes in the interior could be made. Thus instead of four larger rooms, nine small cells were provided for. The building (with an addition put up in

1861-1862) was west of the church. It was removed farther south when the present northern wing was erected which was torn down about 1890. In spring 1859, a large barn and stable were constructed.

The land behind the church was soon converted into a garden by the diligent hands of Bro. Marianus. In front of the residence there was a lawn. When the monastery was occupied, the walls had not even been whitewashed. The cells were partitioned off, not by walls, but by pillars, and were exceedingly small. Bro. Irenaeus manufactured old grocery boxes into bedsteads. No stoves were to be found in the cells except in that of the superior. Later on a stove was put up in the refectory, while someone of the community might go and warm himself. Through some holes, some warmth penetrated from the kitchen into the cells. Even in the workshops there was no stove. Bro. Edmund plied an awl and thread in the carpenter shop. To keep warm, he had to sit in the shavings.

There was no lack of work. All handicrafts and talents that were dormant were not resuscitated from “the dead past” and put to practical use in “the living present.” Bro. Julius built a chicken coop; Bro. Marianus laid out walks; Bro. Edmund built a cobbler’s bench; Bro. Paschal made candles; baked altar bread, etc.; Bro Irenaeus manufactured the most necessary furniture. Fr. Servace taught the other friars English. Fr. Superior and Bro. Herman tried to do “all sorts of useful things,” as Fr. Damian wrote to the Provincial.

At first the community suffered from lack of food because the people were not acquainted with the ways of the mendicant friars. Before long this was changed. When the Fathers attended the stations and gave missions, the grateful people brought victuals, such as meat, eggs, potatoes, in abundance, enough for a larger community, so the Father regretted the absence of poor men with whom to share their abundance. As there was no cellar in the monastery, the potatoes often froze in the house. The meat was partly salted and lasted them the whole year. Fresh meat could not be had, first because there was enough of salted meat, secondly, because none was for sale at Teutopolis in those days. At times the people brought chickens, wild turkeys, even a hunk of deer. Once a good lady offered Bro. Julius one and one half dozen chickens. He was frightened “at such superfluity” and refused saying, “We cannot use so many.” Finally he accepted half a dozen. During Lent preceding Easter, pancakes of buckwheat during the week and pancakes of wheat flour on Sunday were the usual menu. Herring was not to be had in town. The only fresh fish they occasionally indulged in was catfish sent them by the Washeforts, their kind benefactors. Water was their regular drink. The following anecdote from Bro. Edmund’s letter to the writer<sup>ii</sup> shows their poverty. Once Bishop Juncker paid them a visit. While at table, water – aqua pura et naturalis – was served as usual. Suddenly the doorbell rang and soon the porter, who had answered the call, reported that the good and thoughtful Mr. Washefort had donated a few bottles of wine to enhance the splendor of the occasion. As soon as the Bishop learned of this, he bade the brothers pour out the water by saying in his Alsatian dialect: “Brieder, shuett’s Wasser in die Kumps,”<sup>iii</sup> and forthwith something stronger was served for a change.

Though poor friars, the Fathers nevertheless kept a horse, both because the Bishop desired them to do so and because they knew from experience how necessary this was. Thus they avoided exposing the eternal salvation of immortal souls to great danger by being able promptly to answer distant sick calls. Thus these pioneers lived a simply and poor, but happy and contented life. “Enough is as good as a feast.” It is not riches, not honors, that make us happy, but a good conscience, trust in Divine Providence, a life of prayer, and faithful work for our Lord in our state of life.

It is more or less true what the poet says:

If solid happiness we prize,  
Within our breast this jewel lies,  
And they are fools who roam,  
The world has nothing to bestow;  
From our own selves our joy must flow,  
And that dear hut – our home.

(To be continued)

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<sup>i</sup> Stove.

<sup>ii</sup> Fr. Eugene Hagedorn, O.F.M.

<sup>iii</sup> Brother, throw the water in the swamp.