

Chronological Development

of St. Procopius College/Illinois Benedictine College

1887 - 1901, Founding Years

The educational institution that became St. Procopius College was founded at St. Procopius Parish, 18th & Allport Streets, then in the heart of the Slav community. The parish was formed in the 1870's and had about 4,000 families (16,000 to 20,000 people) in 1885. They had approximately 700 students in ten classrooms in the parish school that year. The Czech population was third largest in any urban area of the world, behind only Prague and Vienna; and there were 50,000 Czech immigrants in Chicago and only three Czech parishes.

St. Procopius Abbey was founded as a priory in 1885, and administration of the parish was granted to the Benedictines in January, 1886. The priory was granted status of an Abbey February 23, 1894, the year after the Columbia Exposition in Chicago and in the midst of strikes and social unrest (Haymarket riot).

The educational work began March 2, 1887, when Rev. Procopius Neuzil taught the first class to two students in two small rooms of a house in the rear of 704 Allport Street. These were remedial high school subjects, and came at the time when Rev. Nepomucene Jaeger was pastor of the parish. Before the four month first session ended there were three additional teachers, including Valentine Kohlbeck (who was not yet ordained).

The College was incorporated and chartered by the State of Illinois in 1890. The first full year began in Autumn, 1887, and recruitment at nearby parochial schools brought the enrollment to 43 by Spring, 1888. From this time until 1904-05, only a two-year high school program was offered; in 1904 the first four-year high school program was offered.

In 1894 Father Neuzil was succeeded as rector (equivalent to principal) by Rev. Ildephonse Wittman, O.S.B., who at the time taught English, Latin, German, Bookkeeping and Religion.

As the school grew it was determined that more space and a better atmosphere was needed. The Abbey purchased the Morris Neff farm -- 104 acres -- near Lisle in 1896.

1900 - 1910, A Rebirth in Lisle

Groundbreaking for the new building, attended by Abbot Jaeger, was held April 19, 1900. Dedication was July 1, 1901, presided over by Bishop Peter Muldoon of the Chicago Diocese.

When the school was transferred to Lisle in September, 1901, there were six faculty members and, because of relocation, a new 11-member student body. This was a "rebirth" of the institution, in effect. Two programs of high school courses were taught -- a "classical" and a "commercial." Enrollments for the first five years:

1901-02	11
1902-03	16
1903-04	50
1904-05	58
1905-06	96
(1st college course, in Philosophy)	
1908-09	107

Tuition for five months was \$80 until 1909. In 1909 it was raised to \$100 per semester.

First clubs were formed in 1904-05, and the first lay teacher, employed in 1904-05, taught piano.

Intramural baseball and football began in 1904-05 by "St. Procopius Athletic Association," a group of students.

First "Field Day" activities were held in Spring of 1905 in connection with May Day. First student publication appeared May 20, 1908.

First upper level college courses taught in 1909. They were

Philosophy, French and Spanish.

First varsity team, in baseball, began in Spring, 1909. First public drama performance was the play "Richelieu," on May 1, 1909.

First building addition was the west wing of Benedictine Hall in 1908.

Rev. Thomas Vopatek became the third rector in September, 1908.

1910 - 1920

In 1914 the Abbey received permission from Rome to relocate at Lisle. Previously it had remained at the parish, but in time more monks were working and living in Lisle than in Chicago. In September, 1914, Rev. Cosmas Vesely became the fourth rector at St. Procopius College, a post he held 15 years.

In 1915 the commercial program was dropped with some courses integrated into the classical (college prep) program.

In 1916 the first catalog was printed in the English language. According to archive records, the College sought to become "Americanized."

July 18, 1916, dedication of the south wing of Benedictine Hall took place and the Abbey began relocating in Lisle.

September, 1916, the seminary opened with enrollment of four seminarians who were not Abbey members. The seminary continued operation until Spring, 1967, when operations were suspended. The charter still exists.

In 1917-18 enrollment reached 205.

On July 2, 1919, Rev. Valentine Kohlbeck became the second Abbot and thus second ex-officio president of St. Procopius College. Rev. Cosmas Vesely continued as rector.

1920 - 1929, Rising Aspirations

In 1921 first varsity football team was formed.

In 1921 and 1922 experimental university level summer sessions, including prestigious educators from other institutions, were held at St. Procopius College. This has been credited with raising the academic aspirations of the Benedictine community and generating interest in strengthening science programs at St. Procopius College. In the following years several Benedictines earned Ph.D.'s. A partial list included Fathers Hilary and Edmund Jurica, Father John Cherf, Fathers Richard and William Shonka.

In 1925, gymnasium construction began at a cost of \$180,000. It and the powerhouse became the school's second and third buildings in 1926.

In 1926, first varsity basketball team played.

May 18, 1926, the St. Procopius Alumni Association was formed; it was chartered in 1929.

During the 1920's until 1931 the St. Procopius College orchestra and band, directed by Rev. Francis Sindelar, gave numerous on-tour performances. It became known as "Mundelein's Band" after being praised by George Cardinal Mundelein for its performance at the 1926 Eucharistic Congress at Mundelein Seminary.

September, 1929, Rev. John Cherf became the fifth rector of St. Procopius College, during the onset of the depression. Because of the depression Father Cherf faced a difficult period when the College began losing both enrollment and income. The College inquired about accreditation from the North Central Association and was told it must separate the College and Academy if either was to be accredited. Because of dwindling enrollment and lack of funds this was not possible.

1930 - 1939, Problems of the Depression

In 1930-31, the combined College and Academy enrollment dropped to 140.

In 1932 with the failure of the Kaspar American Bank in Chicago, St. Procopius (Abbey, College and Academy) lost a large percent of its cash deposits. Father Cherf was faced with maintaining and rebuilding the institution. Fortunately, the faculty was almost exclusively Benedictine, so there were few salaries to pay. Student publications and athletics apparently were continued and there was no drop in the quality of academic programs. The Abbey was able to continue sending younger monks to graduate schools.

In the summer of 1934, Father Francis Sindelar traveled more than 9,400 miles on two trips through the Midwest and East, in an attempt to personally solicit support from alumni.

In September of 1934 St. Procopius College was recognized by the State of Illinois for Teacher Certification.

In 1937, permission was given for a loan to begin construction of a science building.

In March, 1937, Father Procopius Neuzil was elected the third Abbot (and president of the College thereby) of St. Procopius Abbey.

No major improvements of the campus were possible during the depression, but excavation of the campus pond and construction of athletic fields and the grotto south of the gymnasium was accomplished by the monks and students.

1940 - 1949, War and Post-war Boom

On July 4, 1942, the three-story brick science hall was dedicated. This building was designed and hand-built by the monks and was under construction for three years.

In 1944 Father Cherf was named Prior, the second highest post at the Abbey, and Father Thomas Havlik became the sixth rector of the school.

World War II once again depopulated the College including both the students and faculty, leaving behind mostly high school students and seminarians. During this time, some older faculty members (the brothers Jurica and Father William Shonka, among them), left temporarily to teach at DePaul and other universities.

After the War, the College experienced an influx of new students, and new facilities were needed. A temporary building (Butler Quonset hut) was erected in 1947. Alumni Memorial Field was dedicated in 1948 to alumni who died in the War.

In November, 1946, Rev. Ambrose Ondrak, who had been a leader in the labor movement and president of the Back of the Yards Council, was elected fourth Abbot. He received the official blessing in January, 1947.

Beginning in the post War period a change began to be noticed in the student body. Illinois residents replaced out-of-state students among the student body, and the percentage of day or commuting students rose. There also emerged a larger percentage of lay faculty members.

Autumn, 1948, St. Procopius College Productions began its first full season.

1950 - 1960, Accreditation and the modern era begins

In 1950-51 enrollment was 343, including 201 college students. This was the first college enrollment of more than 200 and was twice the pre-War figure.

To accommodate the increased enrollment, ground was broken on

November 8, 1950, for the first dormitory building, the three-story Jaeger Hall. Students began living in Jaeger Hall in December, 1951.

In 1952 the Observatory was constructed.

In 1955 reorganization of the College began, to prepare for accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The office of rector was discontinued; the Chief Administrator became known as the President. The Abbot (Ambrose Ondrak) was designated Chancellor of the College and Academy. Father Thomas Havlik, former rector, became Principal of the Academy. Father Adolph Hrdlicka became President of the College, after serving as librarian for several years.

1954 a Physical Science Laboratory was organized under the direction of Dr. Francis Shonka, formerly faculty member and senior physicist at Argonne National Laboratory. Dr. Shonka developed tools and instruments to detect nuclear radiation. (He died in October, 1970, and was succeeded by Dr. John Spokas, formerly Physics Dept. chairman.) The laboratory operates under an Atomic Energy Commission grant.

In 1956 a Lay Advisory Board of thirteen members was established. The first floor of Benedictine Hall was remodeled to convert classrooms into administrative offices.

In 1956 the office of Development and Public Relations, directed by Rev. Francis Clougherty, was established.

From 1956 to 1957 a self-study of the College was conducted for submission to the North Central Association. It showed among other things that 82 percent of the College's students were from Illinois (a study in 1960 showed that 92 percent of the students were from Illinois). It also showed that the faculty consisted of nine lay

teachers (four were hired that year) and thirty-six Benedictines (in 1966, the faculty consisted of 52 full-time lay teachers and 16 Benedictines). Today (1975) there are 50 full-time lay teachers and 13 religious teachers, and a number of part-time teachers.

In 1957 St. Procopius Academy began operations on its new campus north of Maple Avenue, site of the former St. Joseph's Orphanage. The move was important in the future accreditation of St. Procopius College.

On June 27, 1957, a draft of the self survey was presented to the North Central Association.

In 1958, 150 alumni conducted a personal solicitation among friends, foundations and corporations in St. Procopius College's first public appeal for funds. The campaign sought \$775,000 for a new library (\$600,000), faculty development (\$100,000) and scholarships (\$75,000).

On March 28, 1958, St. Procopius College received accreditation by North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, following the examiner's inspection in the Fall of 1957.

In Autumn, 1958, the architectural firm of Barry, Byrne and Parks was engaged to draw up master development plan for the campus.

On March 2, 1959, the first adult education and evening courses were conducted.

On April 14, 1959, the Board of Trustees, which was formed from the Lay Advisory Board, held its first meeting.

In May, 1959, Father Daniel Kucera, former Dean of Studies, was appointed President of St. Procopius College.

1960 - 1970, Continued expansion and construction

In March, 1960, construction of a second residence hall, Kohlbeck Hall, began.

In September, 1960, enrollment reached the 500 mark for the first time. A study showed that 85 percent of the student body were from within a 30-mile radius of the campus.

On May 21, 1961, Kohlbeck Hall was dedicated.

In June, 1961, summer sessions were introduced.

On December 23, 1961, Abbot Ambrose Ondrak died.

Construction of a new library building began in October, 1962. Until then the facility had been housed in Benedictine Hall.

On May 10, 1963, the first Trustees' Dinner was held at the Drake-Oakbrook Hotel to raise funds for the college.

On April 12, 1964, the new library was dedicated.

On July 8, 1964, Father Daniel W. Kucera was elected fifth Abbot of St. Procopius Abbey.

In March, 1965, the Institute for Management conducted its first classes. The program for middle managers is supported by sponsoring corporations who enroll students in the four-year evening school.

On September 19, 1965, Father Roman S. Galiardi, former Dean of Academic Affairs, was installed as President of St. Procopius College.

In May, 1966, the first graduating class of more than one hundred students (101) received diplomas at the 65th Annual Convocation.

On November 26, 1966, the first Educare Ball was held at the Cress Creek Country Club to raise scholarship funds.

In August, 1967, construction was begun on the Science Learning Center. The \$1.5 million two-story building houses the departments of biology, physics, mathematical science, and chemistry/biochemistry.

On December 8, 1967, ground was broken for the new St. Procopius Abbey, across College Road from the campus.

On January 12, 1968, construction of Neuzil Hall, a third dormitory, began.

On May 23, 1968, the Benedictine community voted to have the Board of Trustees assume control of the College.

In September, 1968, St. Procopius College became coeducational with the enrollment of 44 full-time women students. In the first two years women were temporarily housed at the adjacent Academy, and then in Jaeger Hall.

On March 21, 1969, Neuzil Hall was dedicated, and the library was named in memory of Theodore F. Lownik, former chairman of the Board of Trustees.

On May 18, 1969, the Institute for Management held its first commencement, granting certificates to 39 graduates.

On September 6, 1969, the new Science Learning Center was dedicated.

In September, 1969, the largest freshman class, 359 students, was enrolled.

On November 24, 1969, construction of the first new women's residence hall, to be called Ondrak Hall, was begun.

In April, 1970, the revised curriculum, giving students greater choice in selection of courses, was approved by faculty.

In May, 1970, the Degree Completion Program for students aged 23 and over was approved by the faculty. It allows adults to complete degree work part-time.

On June 10, 1970, the new St. Procopius Abbey was dedicated. Within days, the Benedictine monks moved into their new home, vacating the monastery they had occupied since 1916. The vacant space in Benedictine Hall was acquired by the College for expansion.

In July, 1970, work on renovation of vacated portion of Benedictine Hall was begun with remodeling of ground floor into a new student dining facility, which was opened in October.

In September, 1970, Ondrak Hall was opened for women residents.

On December 22, 1970, the Abbey members voted to accept the recommendation of the Board of Trustees to change the name of the College to Illinois Benedictine College, in order to achieve an identity distinct from the Abbey and Academy (now called Benet Academy). Each institution has a distinct corporate entity, governing body and identity.

1971 - 75, New horizons in cooperation

The College enrollment hit the milestone mark of 1,000 students for the first time in September, 1971.

Following the six-year term of Father Roman Galiardi, Father Daniel Kucera returned to the College presidency on June 1, 1971. Father Thomas Havlik became the sixth Abbot of St. Procopius Abbey three days later, on June 4.

On November 18, 1971, the Jurica Natural History Museum in the Science Center was dedicated in memory of Father Hilary Jurica, who died in 1970. It holds the biological specimens and artifacts collected by the Fathers Hilary and Edmund Jurica over 50 years as teachers and pioneers in visual aids in teaching. Father Edmund subsequently died in 1972.

By vote of the faculty and trustees, an Academic Senate was established in May, 1972, and began operating in September, 1972. It is composed of faculty and student representatives who review proposals regarding academic programs and policies. Its recommendations may be overruled only by the President, or the Board of Trustees.

An initial committee meeting in December, 1972, set in motion the establishment of a computer-based management data and planning system. Early development was undertaken with a management consulting firm. The position of Director of Institutional Research resulted from this initiative, along with a system for creating an annually revised five-year plan.

Father Daniel Kucera took a leadership role in bringing the long-discussed consortium of colleges into existence on July 1, 1972. It was later named the West Suburban Intercollegiate Council, and funded partially by a grant from the State of Illinois and partially by the member colleges -- Illinois Benedictine, North Central, Aurora and George Williams. Claudette Dwyer was appointed its first director. Objective of the consortium is to bring about cooperative programs and shared resources.

The College entered into a contract with the University of Illinois to use classrooms, offices and housing on campus for an extension branch of the Police Training Institute, an academy for police officers in the northern Illinois area. The PTI began classes on July 24, 1972.

Recognizing the growing need for programs for adults, the college initiated the Office of Continuing Education on June 1, 1973. This office assumed responsibility for summer sessions, evening sessions, the Institute for Management, subsequent programs for adult students, and coordination of all contracts for facility rentals.

Thomas E. Culligan was elected the third chairman of the Board of Trustees in September, 1973, following Father Daniel Kucera and Edward Jochim.

A microbiology laboratory equipped through a grant from the Dr. Scholl Foundation was dedicated and named in memory of Dr. William Scholl on March 19, 1974.

An agreement between the College and Little League Baseball, Inc. to establish the Central States Region Little League headquarters on the campus was announced on April 23, 1974. The 25-year agreement leases playing fields and the College gymnasium to Little League in exchange for use of new facilities to be built by Little League. The College also benefits from short-term facility rentals for LL activities. The headquarters office was established in July, 1974.

In September, 1974, a School of Catechetics was opened in joint sponsorship with the Diocese of Joliet. Sixty students were enrolled in its first term of eight-week courses, designed for teachers and administrators of religious education programs.

A capital campaign with a goal of \$5.6 million was announced on August 3, 1974, after some 18 months of planning and advanced gift solicitation. Termed Project HONOR, the campaign has five objectives: construction of a Physical Education Learning Center to replace the gymnasium built in 1926 and now contracted to Little League; renovation of Benedictine Hall, the administrative and classroom building opened in 1901; establishment of endowed scholarship funds; establishment of a College endowment fund; and annual operating assistance during the period of the campaign. Trustee James P. Bourke was named to head a Development Council composed of alumni, parent, business, foundation, corporation and major gift committee chairpersons.

In December, 1974, the Dr. Scholl Foundation presented the College with a \$500,000 challenge gift to the capital campaign, payable over

five years. Under the challenge, the foundation will make annual payments provided the College raises by December of each year twice the amount due from the foundation.

Construction of the \$3,300,000 Physical Education Learning Center was started in December, 1974. Architectural firm is Wight & Company. Opening was scheduled for September, 1976.

On March 12, 1975, the College announced a gift of \$100,000 from alumnus Leo J. Kappel and his wife to establish a designated scholarship fund.

In the late fall of 1974, preparations began for an accreditation review by the North Central Association, with visitation scheduled for Spring, 1976.

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