

# News Chips Article on Zinc Cuts

March 2007

One day in late February, I was hunting for photographs from the Province's early history. I was particularly interested in finding the photographs Sr. Theodora Brockmann included in her book on St. Clara's Province published in 1915. I searched every place I could; and then searched again. As a last resort, I went to the closet at the back of the Provincial wing to see what exactly was housed there. I was skeptical there was anything in the closet that could be helpful, but sometimes I reach a point where I need to look in every conceivable place just to satisfy myself.

I opened the door and felt a sinking feeling. It was a dark, dusty closet. I doubted I would find what I was looking for here but forged ahead. There were three large, heavy boxes labeled, "Printers cuts." Being unfamiliar with what that meant, I started to take the boxes down and search through them. I discovered blocks of wood one inch thick of varying sizes. There was a soft metal nailed onto each block of wood. The metal had a faint image that was difficult to define. A closer look with a magnifying glass revealed clusters of dots to create an image. These were negatives!

Each block of wood was wrapped in old paper or paper cloth. One of the first images I unwrapped was the only image we have of St. Boniface Hospital. It is a simple, lined sketch of an old house constructed in 1873 and destroyed by fire in 1877. Next I came across a negative of Pius Hospital; the site of our first motherhouse and hospital in St. Louis. There was something strangely familiar about the images. I knew them well. They were indeed the images from Sr. Theodora's history! Now I was excited.

Among the nearly one hundred wood cuts was a box of cuts labeled in German. There was a wood cut of the only photograph of Mother Clara known to us, the first house of our congregation in Olpe, and the first house in Salzkotten. It was a feast! Here were negatives of our most historic photographs! I was thrilled and my exclamations lured Sr. Gabe from her office to join in the discovery.



It was another "Founders Day" of sorts. Nearing the end of a cold snowy winter, I unearthed a bounty! Sr. Gabe grabbed a camera and took photographs of the discoveries included in this article. In one, I am holding an 8 x 10 color negative. There was a collection of negatives taken in the late 1950's of our then new motherhouse and grounds. From these negatives, postcards of the motherhouse had been made.

I set out to find a printer for the woodcuts. I pulled out the yellow pages and started making calls. My fifth contact was to a printer in Wheaton. I was told they may be able to help me but they needed to do some investigating of their own. Several hours later, I received a call from the former owner of the company who is retired. The business is now in the hands of the third generation of the Kjellberg family. Bill, the original owner, had been called in for this one. He asked me to bring some of the wood cuts for him to examine. I chose some of our "best shots" and paid him a visit.

Bill started Hjellberg Custom Printing Service, Inc. in 1956. He began the printing business when hot metal type was being replaced by Offset printing. Hjellberg does mostly digital printing these days but Bill's career has spanned the evolution of printing in the last fifty years.

As Bill looked over the wood cuts stained with ink, magnifier in hand, he said to me, "Now this is printing!" His enthusiasm was tangible. When I told him of the provenance of the images, from our origins in Germany to St. Louis and then Wheaton, he was impressed. Like any printer, he enjoys a good

story. I hope to have some of the wood cuts and a copy of the prints they produce on display soon.

The fruit of doing the Arcadia book is acquiring photographs which add to our story. (For more details on the book, see News Chips, Winter 2008.) The finds in the closet are just one example. I have been in contact with the Gerard Manley Hopkins Society in Ireland for a picture of the poet. I was informed the Society commissioned a sketch of Hopkins and it was done by a German artist. The Society sent me a copy of the sketch with permission to use it in the book. I have found a lithograph from 1877 of Pio Nono College in St. Francis, WI. The picture captures the school as our early Sisters would have found it when they arrived. Another wonderful find is a copy of the photograph of the first St. Francis Hospital in Cape Girardeau which I was able to obtain from the Southeast Missourian Newspaper Archives.



These acquisitions make valuable contributions to our Archives because they help us tell our story more completely. For people who ask me what I love about this work; this is one of the answers!!