

Father Othmar Wehrle

November 7th is the anniversary of the death of Father Othmar Wehrle. Albert Wehrle was born on September 27, 1867, in Will, Canton St. Gall, Switzerland. He received his college education at the abbey of Einsiedeln. Albert Wehrle came to the United States and to Subiaco with the "Expedition" of 1888 from the abbey of Einsiedeln led by Father Justin Huwyler.

In this "Expedition" which arrived at St. Benedict's Priory on October 22, there were four candidates for the priesthood, and one candidate for the brotherhood. Of the group, two persevered, one being Albert Wehrle who professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on November 1, 1889, receiving the name Othmar.

He completed his philosophical and theological studies at Subiaco and was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Edward M. Fitzgerald at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Little Rock on May 6, 1894.

Following his ordination, Father Othmar served on the faculty of our college. Assigned as assistant pastor of St. Edward's Church in Little Rock from 1897 to 1898, he spent many years in pastoral work in Arkansas, including 22 successive years as pastor of the missions of Dixie, Bigelow, and Oppelo in Perry County, Arkansas. A plain-spoken man, Father Othmar was known for his friendly and jovial nature.

Father Othmar is especially remembered as the only eyewitness to the tragic death of Father Prior Gall D'Aujourd'hui, who drowned in Six Mile Creek on May 15, 1902. Father Othmar narrowly escaped sharing in the fate of his superior in this incident.

The two monks had spent the day visiting at the parish rectory in Altus. In late afternoon, when they decided to return to the abbey, they were urged to spend the night in Altus because of the heavy rains all day on the other side of the Arkansas River. Due to the fact that it was two days before Pentecost, Father Prior Gall felt he needed to get back to the abbey immediately.

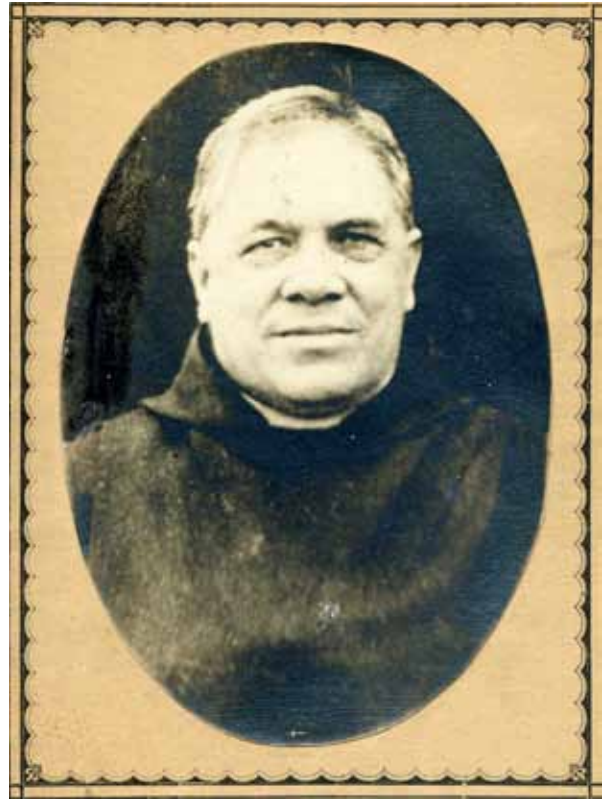
When the two priests arrived at the fork of flooded Six Mile Creek north of Short Mountain, they proceeded to force their horses and buggy across the swollen creek, through water 20 feet deep, even though both priests were unable to swim.

Frightened, the horses reared, half overturning the buggy, and Father Prior Gall was never seen alive again as the raging flood waters carried him downstream. Meanwhile, the horses bolted into the stream, out of control of Father Othmar, who saved himself by clinging to the tail of one of the horses.

After the badly shaken Father Othmar arrived at St. Joseph's Church in Paris with his mud-spattered carriage and weary, run-away team, search parties were formed to look for the body of his superior.

Almost 20 years later, Father Othmar survived another tragedy. During his pastorate at St. Joseph's Church in Rhineland, Texas, from 1919 to 1921, he happened to be alone in the rectory in late afternoon on Christmas Day, 1919, when fire engulfed the building. When the nearest neighbors arrived at the rectory, they found Father Othmar sitting in his study, dozing, with his breviary beside him.

It had been an exhausting day for him, with three Masses, sermons, and benediction. Awakened, he insisted on saving church records, valuables, etc. The men had to drag him forcibly through a window, barely getting him out of the raging inferno; the house collapsed in flames as soon as Father Othmar reached safety.



In 1921, Father Othmar was recalled to Subiaco to teach Church history and liturgy in our seminary. At this time he was suffering from advanced dropsy and asthma, afflictions with which he could no longer cope in pastoral ministry. By 1924, he had to retire on account of his illnesses.

Father Othmar died in the infirmary of our monastery on Saturday, November 7, 1925, from coronary failure and dropsy.

At the time of his death, Father Othmar was 58 years old and in the 36th year of his monastic profession, the 31st of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.