

Brother Anton Weder

May 13th is the anniversary of the death of Brother Anton Weder. Charles Weder was born in Oberreit, Canton St. Gall, Switzerland, on November 2, 1875.

Charles' father was a policeman and there were two brothers and a sister in the family, but his sister, mother, and father died during his boyhood. Together with his two brothers, Charles grew up and received his schooling in a Swiss orphanage.

Once, as a young man, Charles Weder went on a pilgrimage to the Abbey of Einsiedeln and was attracted by the life of the religious brothers there. The abbot suggested to him, instead, that he join the new Benedictine monastery in Arkansas, where there was a great need of vocations. Promptly and generously, he responded to the suggestion and came to the United States.

It was in the autumn of 1892, just a few months after the newly erected abbey had elected its first abbot, when two passengers stepped off the train at Spadra, Arkansas. The dispatch announcing their arrival at Subiaco was handed to them by the agent, who did not know where that place was. One of these men did not stay; the other young man, Charles Weder, persevered in his resolve. He professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on March 21, 1895, receiving the name Anton.

His younger brother Paul followed him to Subiaco in 1893 with the intention of also becoming a member of our community. However, this 17-year-old lad died in 1897, professing his vows on his deathbed, receiving the name Benedict Labré.

Painting was the principal work of Brother Anton during his 60 years at Subiaco. Until his eyesight began to fail, he was constantly painting, and it would be difficult to estimate the thousands of hours he spent putting a "new face" on the walls, floors, and ceilings of the many and spacious monastic buildings.

He was a skilled decorative painter as well and he was frequently called upon to do work in schools and churches in Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma. Several of his Swiss landscape canvasses have been preserved.

For many years Brother Anton also used his artistic touch as photographer for the abbey's needs.

Brother Anton liked to reminisce on the pioneer days of our monastery. At the time of his death, Brother Anton was the senior monk in the community. During the long illness of Father Basil Egloff, the priest whose ordination in 1890 was the first to take place here at the monastery, Brother Anton was Father Basil's daily companion in his sickroom during recreation periods.

On Wednesday, May 13, 1953, Brother Anton fell into the mouth of the tunnel which serves as a passageway for the steam lines that run from the boiler room to the main building. Striking his head in the fall, Brother Anton suffered a fractured skull and a severe concussion.

Nevertheless, Brother Anton made his way alone and unseen to his cell on the second floor and was not discovered until seven or eight hours after the accident. He was then taken to St. Anthony's Hospital in Morrilton, Arkansas, where he died later that day.

At the time of his death, Brother Anton was 77 years old. He had been a professed monk for 58 years. He is buried in our cemetery.

