

Father Gregory Kehres

August 21st is the anniversary of the death of Father Gregory Kehres. Joseph Kehres was born in the German Catholic colony of Spielerville, Arkansas, on September 30, 1883. Joseph's father, Andrew Kehres, was a volunteer in the French army from Alsace-Lorraine. He came to the United States and settled in Ohio before coming to Logan County, Arkansas, in 1878.

In the summer of 1878, Andrew Kehres was the building superintendent for the church, the first building erected on the original monastery site. That same year, Andrew Kehres and Mary Bauer, along with another couple, were the first to be married in the new settlement.

Their son, Joseph Kehres, began elementary school when he was eight years old, the normal age for beginning school at the time. He attended St. Benedict's School for one and a half years. He then entered the scholasticate of our monastery in December of 1892 at the age of nine. He completed the equivalent of high school and two years of college by the age of 15.

In October of 1899, at the age of 16, he began his novitiate. Joseph Kehres professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on the feast of St. Gall, October 16, 1900, receiving the name Gregory. By 1906, at the age of 22, he had completed his seminary training and was ready for ordination to the priesthood, for which a special dispensation had to be obtained because of his young age.

It was in the abbey chapel on August 26, 1906, that Bishop John B. Morris of Little Rock ordained Father Gregory Kehres and his classmate, Father Benedict Borgerding. They were the first priests to be ordained from St. Benedict's Parish in Subiaco, and they were the first native Arkansans to be ordained by Bishop Morris.

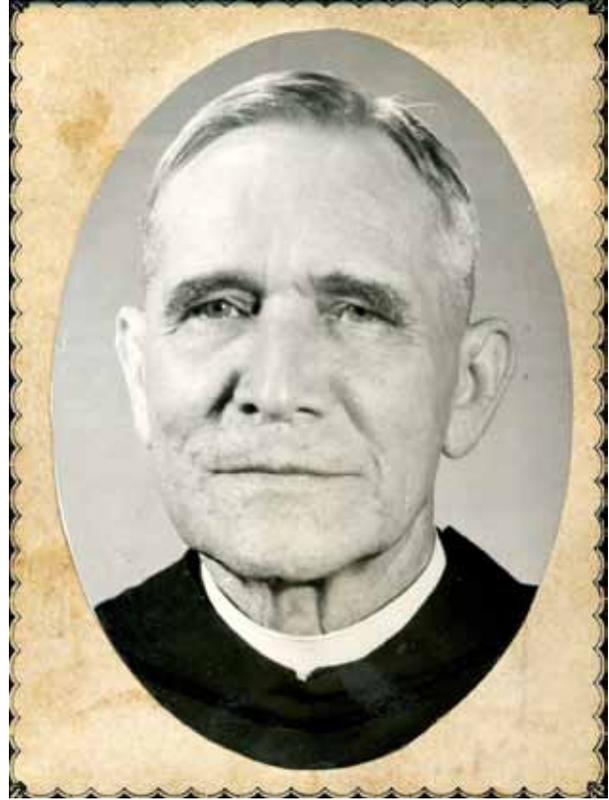
After ordination, Father Gregory spent two years at St. Louis University where he pursued studies in science, chemistry, and physics before joining the faculty of our academy. Later he took post-graduate studies at Notre Dame University and the University of Chicago. Music, sciences, languages, theology, and Sacred Scripture were some of the major subjects that he taught at our academy and seminary for over 30 years.

In 1913, Father Gregory was one of the founders and charter members of the Subiaco Alumni Association. He served for 25 years as executive secretary of the organization and was instrumental in its development.

He served our community for 10 years as subprior, and he served on the abbot's council under three different abbots. During much of his teaching career he was secretary of the monastic chapter.

Father Gregory was an accomplished musician and he played many instruments, although the organ was his first love. From 1899 to 1939 he was organist for the abbey, and for many years he was director of the school band. When a fire devastated the monastery in 1927, Father Gregory went on a musical concert tour to raise money for the rebuilding of the abbey,

After 30 intensive years of work at the abbey, his health began to weaken and a change was needed. In 1939, he was appointed pastor of St. Mary's Church in Altus, Arkansas. Six years later he became pastor of St. Boniface Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas. From 1945 to 1952 he remained at this assignment, although recurring and ever-increasing attacks of asthma bore heavily upon his stamina.



By 1952, the asthma attacks were so severe that he had to take a leave of absence to seek medical attention in Tucson, Arizona, and Biloxi, Mississippi. Returning to Arkansas in 1953 without any improvement in his asthmatic condition, Father Gregory was relieved of his pastorate in Fort Smith. He entered Crawford County Memorial Hospital in Van Buren, Arkansas, for treatment. In 1954, while Father Gregory was in the hospital, the chaplain, Father Marmon, died. Father Gregory immediately took his place, becoming the resident chaplain of the hospital for the next six years.

In the comparative quiet of the hospital, he was again able to devote himself to scholarship. For the next five years he put his Latin, Greek, and Hebrew to good advantage as he translated a German commentary on the psalms into English, a five-volume work covering 3,000 pages.

In 1956, Father Gregory celebrated his golden sacerdotal jubilee. He has the distinction of being the first native-born Arkansan to reach his 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood.

In 1960, Father Gregory retired as chaplain of the hospital and returned to the abbey where he was a substitute or temporary helper at various parishes and chaplaincies. He also published serially in the *Social Justice Review* the life of a Catholic lay pioneer of Arkansas. In 1960, he celebrated his diamond jubilee of religious profession.

In early August, 1962, while on assignment at the "Old St. Vincent's Home" in Little Rock, Arkansas, Father Gregory became ill. He entered St. Vincent's Infirmary in that city where he underwent prostate surgery. Less than a week before his 56th ordination anniversary, Father Gregory died in St. Vincent's Infirmary on Tuesday, August 21, 1962, following a heart attack and asthma seizure.

At the time of his death, Father Gregory was 78 years old and in the 61st year of his monastic profession, the 55th of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.