

Brother Nilus and his architect friend designed and constructed a graceful building housing study and dining facilities for the student brothers on the site of the present Cannavino Library. The work was done by teaching brothers on their vacation time and by student brothers during the school year. The semester was lengthened from fifteen to sixteen weeks, and every week there were about a dozen students available for construction work. During this time, Nilus became suspicious of some of the working drawings being sent from Lawrence. So he went to New York City to find a mechanical engineer to review them. He looked in the phone book, and called Arbak A. Abdalian as he was the first name listed. An Armenian, Abdalian was stunned to find calluses when he shook hands with this person in a Roman collar and became a devotee of the college. (It turned out that the Lawrence architect was dying of a brain tumor, but his wife wanted to hide this fact from his clients.) This project was completed in 1956. Abdalian also did the engineering for the Donnelly, Leo, and Champagnat buildings.

There were still no sleeping quarters for the brothers, so Nilus turned to a faster method of construction: steel. An inelegant cube was constructed next to the above study and dining building and went up within months in 1957. This became the student brothers' dormitory until the construction of Benoit and Gregory houses, when the entire complex became the college library.

Almost as an afterthought, the crews built a 40' x 80' building called the Adrian Building, which served as a reception room and lay student lounge. Initially it included a small residence and office suite for Brother Nilus, as well as a high fidelity lounge and a small kitchen area. By 1965, it became the computer center, business and registrar offices; later it served as the college advancement office and the Marist Institute for Public Opinion.

At the dedication of the student housing complex in 1957, Cardinal Spellman blessed the site of the future Donnelly building which was the last major project to be constructed using brothers' labor. The construction, which took five years, emanated from Brother Paul Ambrose's dream of opening the college to lay students in the Hudson Valley.

The do-it-yourself era phased out when the college applied for government and bank funding for future building, the first of which were the Sheehan and Leo dormitories. Brother Nilus continued to supervise the construction, and did much of the site work for the bulwark at the boathouse, Leonidoff field, water lines, parking lots. His bulldozer, crane and backhoe were common sights on campus. By the mid 1970's, the era had ended.

*By Richard Foy, August 22, 2001*

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