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Cover illustration

Despite the reputation for silent contemplation for which their religious order is renowned, the Trappist monks of Mariannahill were experts in forms of modern mass communication. When the austere brethren established their monastery outside Pinetown in December 1882, they brought with them both a printing press and photographic equipment. It is therefore clear that from the inception of their work in the colony of Natal the Trappists expected to publish documents, newsletters and books concerning their activities, and photographic images would also be used to record aspects of life surrounding the monastery. According to Christoph Rippe, who is engaged in doctoral research on the photography of Mariannahill at Leiden University, the need for photographic records was anticipated at the very beginning of the Trappist adventure in South Africa. A camera, together with its associated chemicals and equipment, was used during the brief and unsuccessful tenure of the Trappists at Dunbrody in the Eastern Cape from 1880 to 1882, though very little is known of who was responsible for photography at that stage. Christoph Rippe quotes a letter by Fr Franz Pfanner during that time, which states, “I have even the idea to forward twice a month a few sheets of light reading and interesting reports. We could add a few photos, done by our frater and this would keep awake the interest of our countrymen. This is necessary in order to obtain novices.” When the community of Trappists moved to Mariannahill at the end of 1882, photography became a more established activity. Fr Othmar Gross is recognised as the first acknowledged photographer and is responsible for the images that showed the rapid early growth of the new monastery in Natal. The research completed by Rippe indicates a two-fold interest in photography on the part of the monks. First and foremost, as Pfanner himself stated, the pictures could be used as publicity for the work of Mariannahill. His letter in 1880 only gave the reason of vocations outreach for novices, but equally essential was the unstated importance of fundraising. The newsletter Pfanner envisaged took the form of a publication named *Vergissmeinnicht*, which was printed at the mission press from 1883 until 1910, and was illustrated with photographs by Mariannahill cameramen. Pfanner intuitively understood the importance of direct communication with funders, in order to demonstrate visibly where and how donations were employed in mission work by the monastery. This served the dual purpose of justifying the original financial contributions, and motivated further generosity by the donor. The use of these distinctly modern approaches appears to have worked well for Pfanner and his monastery missions because his fundraising eventually caused a redirection of Catholic philanthropy to Africa and away from Europe, much to the dismay of religious causes there. In addition to Fr Othmar, several other monks also worked in the photographic studio that developed at Mariannahill and among them Br Aegidius Müller was the longest serving photographer, working from 1889 until his death in 1921. Later the actual photographs taken by the monks of Mariannahill were also sold commercially in another effort to raise money for the monastery, providing a contemporary expression of monastic industriousness. The composite images on the cover of this edition of *Natalia* are both taken from the Mariannahill archive, and are reproduced by kind permission of the Congregation of Mariannahill Missionaries archive in Rome. The background image depicts a view of the First Church at Centocow mission, which has recently been renovated through an undertaking co-ordinated by the Ingwe Municipality at Creighton. In the foreground underneath is a posed photograph showing a group of lay brothers in brown habits, as opposed to choir monks with their black and white habits, engaged in recreational activities at Centocow. This photograph was probably taken around the beginning of the 20th century.

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