

PAST STILL PRESENT

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COMING TO AMERICA 1870

THE DEPARTURE

Before the sisters left Gurtweil they received a blessing from the Bishop:

“We, Lotharius Kübel, by divine mercy and the favor of the Apostolic See, Bishop of Leuka, in the Archdiocese of Freiburg, ... testify that the Venerable Sister Albertine Rogg and eight Sister Companions of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood which has as its principal foundation in the Archdiocese of Freiburg, specifically in Gurtweil, are about to leave [the Fatherland] for the purpose of founding a new home in North America in the Diocese of Alton. [We testify] that these young women are truly religious, sincerely pious and devout, that they are outstanding in spiritual fervor and in the most exact observance of the Constitutions and Customs, that they are imbued with integrity and other Christian virtues, that they perform the duties of their office with untiring zeal and satisfaction, that they are of unusual merit and, therefore, worthy of every praise and commendation. ... We bestow upon them as they leave, our blessing from our inmost heart and we petition all things good and favorable for them.”



Freiburg, Breisgau, January 22, 1870

+ *Lotharius Kübel.*

Bishop of Leuka and Vicar Capitular

From the COMMUNITY CHRONICLE 1870, translated by Sr. Angela Gieler

“The day designated for the departure of our first Sisters from Gurtweil to America was February 2, 1870, and truly conveyed the meaning of the feast, namely, the Offering of the Lord, for the Good of the World. No more beautiful thought could be suggested than the spirit of the feast which the Sisters were enacting in their own lives....

“The departure for America was heart-rending. It meant leaving beloved Superiors and Sister Companions, the quiet cloister, parents and the beautiful homeland—all in exchange for an uncertain future!

“The Sisters, however, displayed a joyous attitude. Assisted through God's special grace they determined that nothing would deter them, neither ocean nor wilderness. The farewell greetings of ‘*Lebewohl*’ and ‘*Auf Wiedersehen*’ whispered heartily and lovingly to one another must have shed a bright light in the future years as they turned to God for help and consolation.”



THE NINE PIONEER SISTERS



Sr. Albertine Rogg, age 24 in 1870, appointed superior for the nine Sisters. The *Chronicle* describes Sr. Albertine as possessing "a wonderful energy and great initiative."



Sr. Benedicta Hegele, age 23 in 1870, Sr. Benedicta was the last of the pioneers to die. She was still alive when *Foundation and Progress* was written in 1925. The "Last Leaf" still survives and although feeble, is well and happy at the Motherhouse." [*F & P*, page 47].



Sr. Caroline Knoerr, Age 22 in 1870, Sr. Caroline had a birthday on the journey from New York to Belle Prairie. She returned to Belle Prairie (eventually to Ruma) in June 1875.



Sr. Emilie Zimmermann, age 22 in 1870, the first to die, age 23 Sr. Emilie, the organist, lived in Belle Prairie barely 18 months. She contracted tuberculosis and was confined to bed. She suffered very much from the summer heat and lack of cool water during the last month of her life. She is buried in Belle Prairie.



Sr. Josephine Dietrich, age 19 in 1870, the second youngest pioneer. She made first profession in January, just days before the sisters left Gurtweil. She left the community, date unknown.



Sr. Mechtilda Muehlhaupt, age 29 in 1870, died at age 50. Sr. Mechtilda worked in the embroidery department as a tambourine sticher.



Gurtweil, Baden Photo in *Foundation & Progress*, p. 30, colorized



Sr. Philippine Moser, age 17 in 1870, the youngest pioneer, lived to be 66.



Sr. Theresa Wissmann, age 33 in 1870, the oldest pioneer, lived to be 72.



Sr. Walburga Schneider, age 30 in 1870, turned 31 on the journey, died at age 49.



THE JOURNEY

COMMUNITY CHRONICLE 1870 continued:

“The Superior [Fr. Anton Fraessle] accompanied the Sisters to the town of Basel where their photos were taken....

“They continued their journey, passing through Paris and Havre and boarding the ship "Harmonica" [i.e., "Hammonia"] on February 5.

“They travelled second class and received good treatment.

The voyage was not a pleasant one because of the raging storm which lasted several days and threatened to sink the ship. The captain tied a rope around himself and fastened it to a post. The sailors were kept busy and no one



Wooden Bridge over the Rhine—Basel, Switzerland, old photo 1870

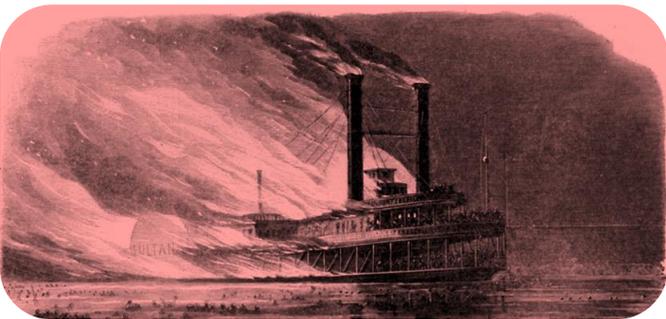
was allowed on deck during those hectic days. One evening, especially, the ship's workers were very restless, tried to quiet the people, even though they themselves were frightened. Next morning they discovered that the ship had escaped from a dangerous situation.

“After a twelve-day voyage they arrived in New York. With great joy and gratitude the Sisters welcomed the long-awaited coast of the new world on February 16, 1870. ...



Photograph--16103HAMMONIA1866.tif --Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. Used with permission

“The captain of the ship was so kind as to take the Sisters to a German hotel, where in their great joy and gratitude all sang the Te Deum and then rested for some time to recuperate. After completion of their trip incidents, the Sisters continued westward, first to Philadelphia where Sr. Albertine conducted some business affairs. The conductor did not give them instructions where to get off so they travelled a little further and finally became doubtful and restless. A German came to their rescue. They left the car immediately and were told to board another car; a locomotive brought this car back to Philadelphia where someone awaited their arrival and gave them a warm welcome. Later on the Sisters arrived on a Saturday at Cincinnati, Ohio, at the river bearing



the same name. Travelling was easier after this and they had no difficulty with their baggage reaching Shawneetown, Illinois, where they had to go, but they preferred to continue their voyage on land since they wished to attend Holy Mass on Sunday. Fortunately for them, all agreed to this. They were told that the steamer which they were to take had burned up.

“On Sunday morning the Sisters reached Vincennes, Indiana [where] a bitter cold wind was blowing. The Sisters were so cold they could hardly carry their baggage. ... They arrived at the priest's house but were not welcome. [The priest there was hostile and critical of their intention to go to Belle Prairie. But the Sisters of Divine Providence] gave them a hearty welcome and helped them forget the harsh words of the pastor.”

“The Sisters left Vincennes and came to Evansville, Indiana, on the Ohio River, where they were received by the Sisters of the same order (Divine Providence), in a friendly manner. The Sister Superior urged [them to stay and rest, which they did.]

“The Sisters next left Evansville and arrived at Shawneetown, Illinois at 4:00 a.m. [Catholics here] greeted the Sisters heartily and invited them to their homes.



“A message was sent to Belle Prairie and after four days, on a Saturday, a number of farmers with wagons appeared to take the Sisters to their new home. They were simple, modest people and were overjoyed at the Sisters' arrival. ... [They rode] through bush and prairie. The roads were bad... Horses and wagons often stood in deep water ... The trip lasted two days and about fifty miles were covered. They stayed in a small house the first night and on the following morning the men started a fire in a better location and a dinner was prepared.



The Sisters were in a happy mood as they sat on tree stumps.”

THE DESTINATION

“... As twilight fell they reached their destination. The men pointed to a light seen in the home they were to occupy. The hearts of the Sisters beat rapidly. Finally they left the conveyance and, to their surprise, saw before them a new two-story house. Reverend Father Winter-halter and the neighbors greeted the Sisters joyfully and they enjoyed the good meal prepared for them. Reverend Father [Blaise] Winterhalter kept reiterating that the house was not ready for occupancy yet, but promised to have it completed in the near future. Even the most necessary items were missing. There was a table in the living room, two chairs and a stove, one dormitory with five beds. However, the Sisters did not wish to look around; they were fatigued after such a long journey of four weeks and needed rest. This was February 28, 1870 ...” The following day Sr. Emily played the organ and the Sisters sang for the wedding of Carl Anton Kaufman and his bride. And the day after that was Ash Wednesday.



Convent at Belle Prairie at dusk

And so the journey that took 26 days and covered about 5000 miles was ended.



Sr. Albertine Rogg

Later Sr. Albertine was able to write to Mother Augusta, *“The signs of good will and the loving kindness on the part of these good people at Belle Prairie are innumerable.”*

But they certainly experienced the truth of this German proverb:



[All beginnings are difficult]



Mother Augusta Volk