

PAST STILL PRESENT

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FEBRUARY, 1870, THE JOURNEY TO AMERICA

Before they left for America, the sisters were given a blessing by the Bishop in Freiburg

We, Lotharius Kübel, by divine mercy and the favor of the Apostolic See, Bishop of Leuka, in the Archdiocese of Freiburg, the see presently vacant, and Vicar Capitular, 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 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

In faith, abundant riches! Gurtweil, February 1, 1870 Caj. Gessler

*The sisters were to need that blessing because the journey to America was perilous and exhausting as it is described in the **Chronicle** for 1870-1871.*



Sr. Benedicta



Sr. Mechtilda



Sr. Walburga



Sr. Josephine



Sr. Caroline



Sr. Emilie



Sr. Theresa



Sr. Albertine



Sr. Philippine

[Sr. Virginia Volkerding's note: "This chronicle was written in retrospect. As far as I can gather it was written for the occasion of the 1895-96 silver jubilee."]

OUR CHRONICLE 1870

"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.

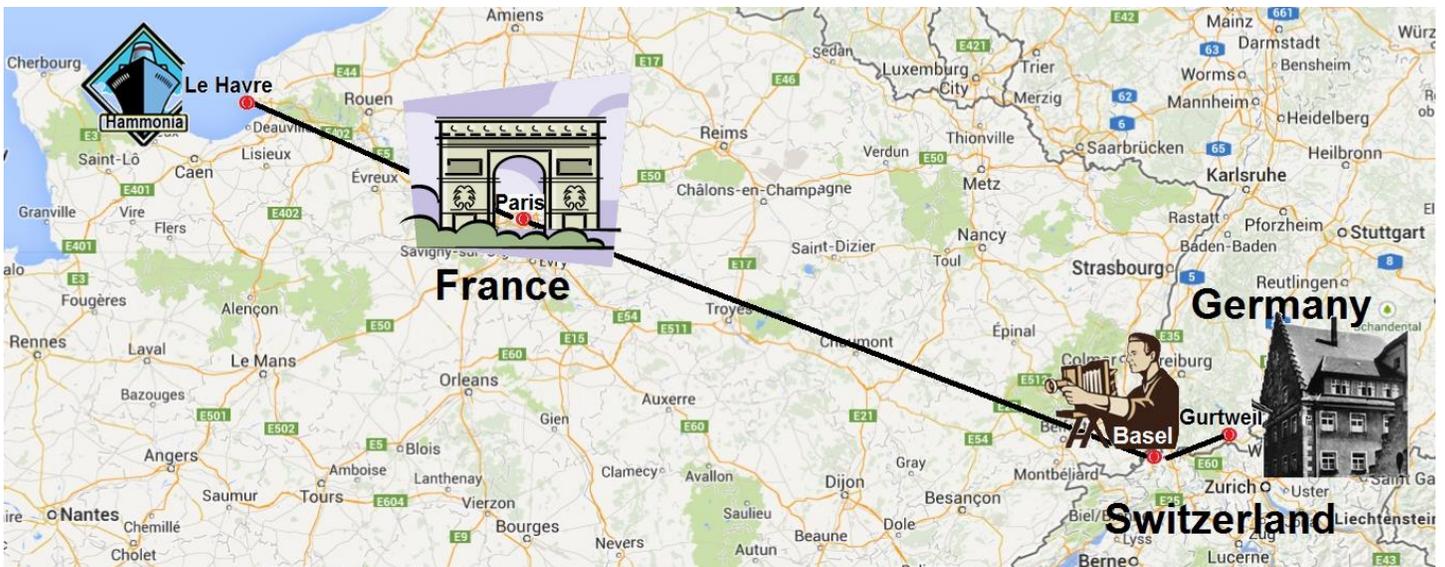


“Sr. Antonia [Albertine] Rogg, who possessed a wonderful energy and great initiative, was appointed superior for the small number of nine Sisters. Following are the names of these Sisters: Sr. Eleanor [Walburga] Schneider, 31 ; Sr. Lidwina [Theresa] Wissmann, 34; Sr. Aemilia [Emelie] Zimmermann, 22; Sr. Anna [Benedicta] Hegele, 24; Sr. Bernadine [Mechtilde] Muehlhaupt, 29; Sr. Anastasia [Philippine] Moser, 18; Sr. Josephine Dietrich, 20; and Sr. Carolina Knoerr, 23; all quite young, especially the last three who had just pronounced their vows”

“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 superior (Chaplain 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 "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 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.

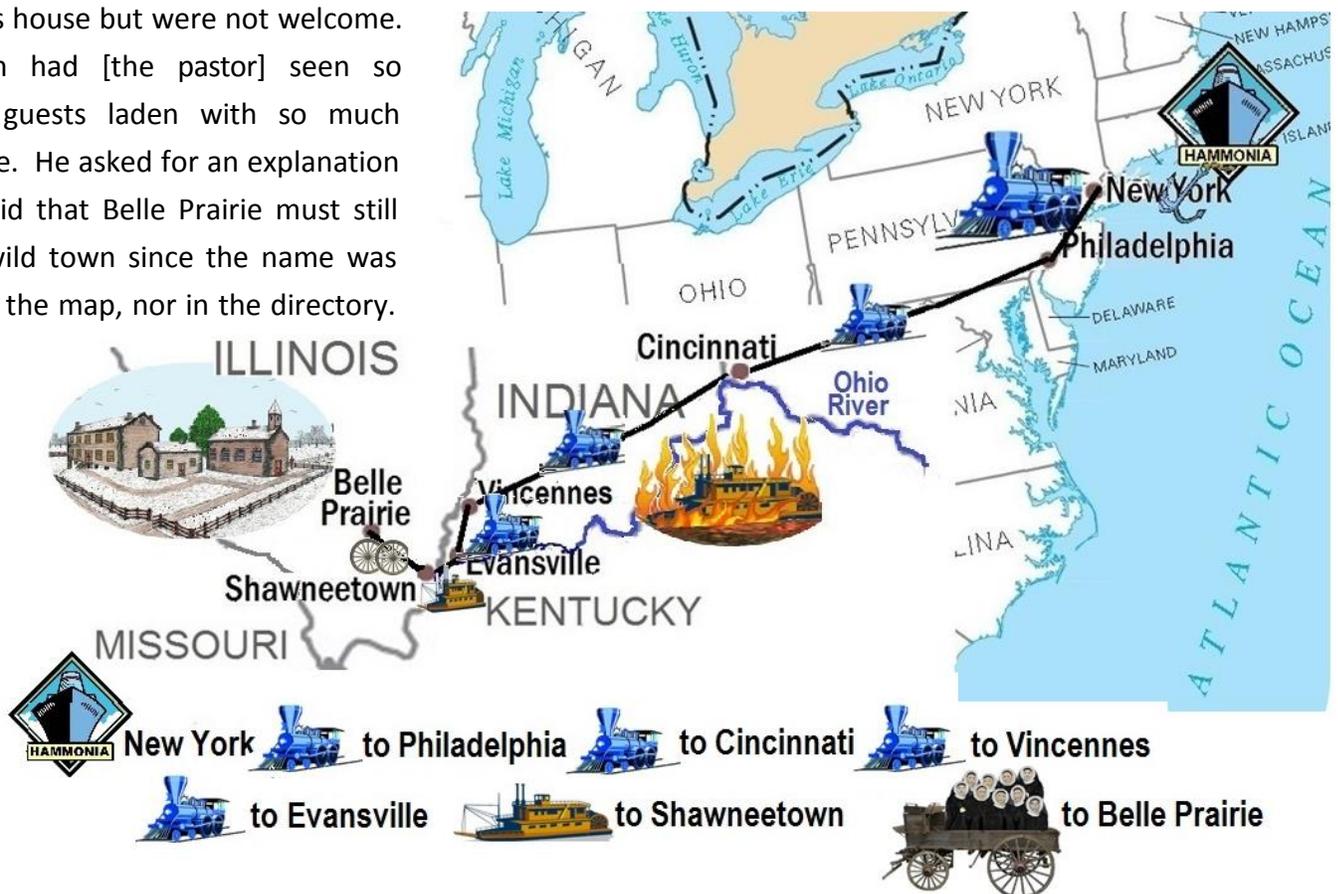
“Many of the Sisters had prepared for death but the situation changed for the better. **After a twelve-day voyage they arrived in New York.** With great joy and gratitude the Sisters welcomed the long-awaited coast of the New World on **February 16, 1870.**

“On that same eventful day the Sisters were told that a new bishop had been appointed for the diocese of Alton, Illinois, their destination. After the death of the blessed Bishop Henry D. Juncker, the Reverend Peter J. Baltes was appointed administrator of the diocese of Alton and on January 23, 1870, he was consecrated bishop for that diocese.

“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 eventful trip, **the Sisters continued westward (by train), first to Philadelphia** where Sr. Albertine [handled] 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 man 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 at Cincinnati, Ohio**, on 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** [i.e., by train from Cincinnati to Vincennes] 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 [and sank with no survivors].

“On Sunday morning **the Sisters reached Vincennes, Indiana**. However, they would have to walk a great distance to church and a bitter cold wind was blowing. The Sisters were so cold they could hardly carry their baggage. They resolved to knock at the next house and ask for shelter. Just then a gentleman and his son appeared on the scene, relieved the Sisters of their baggage and asked them to follow. They arrived at the priest's house but were not welcome. Seldom had [the pastor] seen so many guests laden with so much luggage. He asked for an explanation and said that Belle Prairie must still be a wild town since the name was not on the map, nor in the directory.



He was puzzled as to how the people of Belle Prairie could engage such a large number of Sisters since they themselves were not yet in a position to establish a regular parish; neither could he understand how the Sisters could resolve to live in such a place.... In short, they were to be pitied if they did not desist from their purpose of going to Belle Prairie.... Upon this information the Sisters left the parsonage with anxious hearts and repaired to the Sisters of Divine Providence who 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 the travelers to remain a day longer and rest from the trip since many of the Sisters, especially the weaker ones, suffered from the effects of the journey. The offer was gratefully accepted.

“The Sisters next left Evansville and arrived [by boat] at Shawneetown, Illinois, at 4:00 a.m. where a black steward took them to a hotel. A number of Catholic natives greeted the Sisters heartily and invited them to their homes. They divided into four parties. Although many of the men were Freemasons but had Catholic wives, the Sisters were greeted with reverence and love. The people did their best to make the Sisters' coming a pleasant one and help them overcome their homesickness. Such generosity made a deep impression on the Sisters.

“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. The farmers were simple, modest people and were overjoyed at the Sisters' arrival. [T]he Sisters could see and feel that they were in a foreign country and saw no bright prospects ahead. Despite this the sisters were happy to have reached their final destination.”



“The last fifty miles of that journey was made over bumpy roads in open wagons. Their initial view of mid-western America was depressing. The winter wind howled across bleak plains dotted with occasional dwellings which appeared to be little more than dirty, bare huts. They arrived at Belle Prairie after nightfall on February 28, and were taken to their convent. The building, though not completely furnished (there were five beds for nine Sisters) was a well-built two-story frame dwelling which promised to be very comfortable. The people of this tiny farming community welcomed the Sisters and offered them every possible aid.” *A Time to Sow*, p 83].

And so, after four weeks of travel the sisters reached their new home in a land whose customs and language were foreign to them, but whose people were warm and generous.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 The first group of nine Sisters left Gurtweil	3	4	5 Srs. boarded the ship Hammonia to America
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16 Srs. arrived in New York	17 Srs. in Philadelphia no date/day given	18	19 Srs. in Cincinnati
20 Srs. in Vincennes, IN	21 Srs. in Evansville, IN no date/day given	22 Srs. in Shawneetown, IL no date/day given	23	24	25	26 Farmers come to take Sisters to Belle Prairie
27	28 Sisters arrived in Belle Prairie, IL	NOTE a discrepancy: If the trip "lasted two days" and "the next day [after they arrived in Belle Prairie] was Ash Wednesday," then did they perhaps actually arrive on March 1st?				