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PIONEER TEACHERS

The BENEDICTINE SISTERS *at* ST. CLOUD

SISTER GRACE McDONALD

THE ARRIVAL of a steamboat was a matter of great importance to the inhabitants of early St. Paul, and the usual large crowd was at the landing on June 25, 1857. When the boat docked, few people noted the arrival of a small group of Benedictine nuns, for they were dressed in the shawls and poke bonnets of the period. The sisters had made the long journey from Pennsylvania to Minnesota in response to an appeal for teachers to undertake the work of educating the children of the many German immigrants who had settled in Stearns

County. The nuns who stepped ashore that June day a hundred years ago were to pioneer the establishment of an institution which, through its many activities over the years, was to educate and mold the minds and hearts of thousands in the upper Mississippi Valley — St. Benedict's Convent at St. Joseph, Minnesota.¹

During the 1850s large numbers of German Catholics had been attracted to the rich valleys of the Sauk and upper Mississippi rivers through the efforts of Father Francis Pierz, an early missionary to the Indians of the region. Father Pierz had also been instrumental in bringing to St. Cloud in 1856 a group of Benedictine monks, the nucleus of the future St. John's Abbey and University at Collegeville. In the spring of 1857, Prior Demetrius di Marogna, head of the group, had requested teachers for the German community in Stearns County. The nuns who arrived at St. Paul had been sent by Mother Benedicta Riepp of St. Joseph's Convent at St. Mary's, Pennsylvania, in response to Prior Demetrius' appeal. Having immigrated to the United States from Bavaria only five years earlier, Mother Benedicta and her nuns were eager to serve their countrymen in Minnesota.²

¹ On the nuns' arrival, see Prior Demetrius di Marogna and Sister Willibalda Scherbauer to Abbot Boniface Wimmer, July 14, August 28, 1857, in the archives of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville. Unless otherwise noted, transcripts of manuscripts cited in this article are in the possession of St. John's Abbey. All letters quoted in the text are in German and were translated by the author.

² For information on the work of "Father Francis Pierz, Missionary," see the author's article in *Minnesota History*, 10:107-125 (June, 1929). The beginnings of St. John's Abbey are discussed by Colman J. Barry in *Worship and Work: Saint John's Abbey and University, 1856-1956*, 25-55 (Collegeville, 1956). On the request for teachers, see a letter from Di Marogna to Wimmer, March 10, 1857, a transcript of which is in the archives of St. John's Abbey. The convent at St. Mary's, Pennsylvania, was founded in 1852 by nuns from the ancient convent of St. Walburga at Eichstaett, Bavaria.

No one was on hand to meet the sisters when they disembarked at St. Paul, for Prior Demetrius had not expected so quick a response to his appeal. The little band of sisters had, in fact, reached Minnesota ahead of a letter announcing their coming. A citizen directed the travel-worn women to the hospital conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph, where they were cordially received.³

Fortunately, Prior Demetrius happened to visit St. Paul on the third day after the sisters arrived. He later wrote that when he reached the territorial capital at midnight on June 28, he was "welcomed and not a little surprised with the announcement 'the Sisters have arrived and are lodged at the hospital.' I was surprised and embarrassed," he commented, "and I could not suppress the cry of 'over hasty.' Moreover . . . I hardly know what to do with these women," he added, but "it was decided that I was to take them with me and care for them. This I then did." The prior noted that all the sisters "appeared pale, emaciated, and ailing."⁴

The little group of pioneering nuns was composed of four sisters and two candidates for the Order of St. Benedict. At the head of the company was Sister Willibalda Scherbauer. Born in Bavaria, she was the oldest of the group, and she had been appointed its superior by Mother Benedicta. Sisters Evangelista Kremmeter and Gertrude Capser, both of whom were born in Germany, had gone as children with their parents to Pennsylvania and had later entered the Benedictine convent at St. Mary's. Sister Gertrude's brothers had recently emigrated to Minnesota and were already settled on farms near St. Joseph. The fourth sister, Gregoria Moser, had been born in the United States. The two candidates were Mary Wolters and Prisca Meier. The sisters also brought with them to Minnesota a twelve-year-old orphan, Josephine Leshall, who had been left in their care.⁵

On July 2, 1857, the sisters began the

last lap of their journey to St. Cloud aboard the steamboat "North Star," which made two trips a week between the Falls of St. Anthony and Sauk Rapids. Two miles below St. Cloud the boat ran aground near Prior Demetrius' log monastery. The sisters remained on the "North Star" until the next day, July 4, when they were removed in a small boat and taken to the monastery.

"We are all very happy to have had this uncalled for experience," Sister Willibalda later wrote, "otherwise we would not have been able to see the [monastery]. . . . However, after this experience we were forced not only to pass by the little monastery but also to enter it and enjoy some refreshment, since we had been on the boat for three days without food." The nuns had been unable to eat aboard the boat, said Sister Willibalda, "because the price of a meal came to half of a dollar." Later that afternoon the sisters were taken to St. Cloud.⁶

LOCATED at a point where a Red River oxcart trail between St. Paul and Fort Garry crossed the Mississippi River, St. Cloud had been settled only four years before the sisters arrived. It was not a typical river town, for it had been built not on the levee but upon the high banks of the Mississippi. The frontier village did not face the river, but looked toward the farms of the plains, suggesting that its ultimate prosperity would come from agriculture. In 1857 herds of deer and elk roamed near by, and a few adventurous ones occasionally strayed through the village. Bands of Chippewa Indians living in the area some-

³ Di Marogna to Wimmer, July 14, 1857. See also Sister Helen Angela Hurley, *On Good Ground*, 131 (Minneapolis, 1951).

⁴ Di Marogna to Wimmer, July 14, 1857.

⁵ The sisters are identified in *Catalogue of the Nuns and Convents of the Holy Order of St. Benedict in the United States*, 24 (Latrobe, Pennsylvania, 1879); Alexius Roetzer to Wimmer, August 12, 1857; and in the population schedules of the Minnesota territorial census of 1857, a photostatic copy of which is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁶ Sister Willibalda to Wimmer, August 28, 1857.

ST. CLOUD
in the 1860s



times worried the settlers with untimely visits, and their presence kept outlying farmers on the alert.⁷

At the time of the nuns' arrival, St. Cloud was made up of three distinct areas of settlement. The English-speaking Yankees, including many of the town's professional men and skilled craftsmen, lived in what was called Lower St. Cloud. In this group was Mrs. Jane Grey Swisshelm, outspoken editor of the local newspaper, and C. C. Andrews, who was later to become United States minister to Norway. Upper St. Cloud, near what is now Sauk Rapids, had been colonized by a group of slave-holding Southerners. German immigrants had settled in what was called Middle St. Cloud, on and around the present St. Germain Street, where some of their countrymen had opened places of business as early as 1854. There Joseph Edelbrock and Balthasar Rosenberger operated general stores, John W. Tenvoorde and Barney Overbeck conducted hotels, and John W. Metzroth had a tailoring shop.

VACANT HOUSES to let in the growing town were unheard of, and the sisters lived

for eight days in the unplastered, unfurnished garret of Wendelin Merz's log house, while the prior wrestled with the problem of what to do with them. Should they go on to St. Joseph where a teacher was needed, but where no house was to be had for a convent, or should they stay in St. Cloud where they might find a house but where no teachers were needed?⁸

Although they had been sent to St. Cloud to teach, no positions were available because no parochial schools existed in the community. Moreover, German Catholics were divided on the subject of public and parochial schools. Some favored a public school taught by a Catholic layman of their choice, while others wanted a parochial school. Some were willing to accept the nuns as teachers, while others were not. Before the sisters reached St. Cloud, a lay teacher had been placed under contract for the current school year. Consequently, there was no need for the nuns' services. Father Bruno Riess offered the sisters a house at near-by St. Joseph, but to teach in the public school there they would have to take examinations and acquire teachers' certificates, a process that would require time.⁹

Prior Demetrius decided to keep the nuns in St. Cloud. He reasoned that they could support themselves by teaching music and fancy needlework, for there was demand for such skills among the citizens of Lower St. Cloud, who were, in general, better able to afford them than the poorer German immigrants. "There is no want of

⁷ Descriptive material on St. Cloud in this and succeeding paragraphs may be found in *St. Cloud Democrat*, November 25, December 9, 1858; William B. Mitchell, *History of Stearns County, Minnesota*, 1: 196; 2: 1434-1446 (Chicago, 1915).

⁸ See "Memoirs" of Sister Willibalda, and "Annals" of St. Benedict's Convent. Both manuscripts are in the archives of the convent at St. Joseph.

⁹ Di Marogna to Wimmer, March 10, 1857; Riess to Wimmer, April 1, May 22, 1857.

work for the Sisters," the prior declared, "and the Americans pay better than the Germans."¹⁰

HOUSING was found for the nuns in Tenvoorde's entertainment hall on what is now St. Germain Street and Fifth Avenue. The owner was persuaded to let his boarders go and rent the house to the nuns. This building, the first Benedictine convent in Minnesota and in the upper Midwest, was a plain frame and log structure. The prior recorded that it had "two rooms and a spacious refectory with a built-on kitchen. On the second floor there is a large room, a small one, and, above the refectory, a long attic room where ten or twelve school childrens' beds can easily be placed. Well, garden, and cellar are there in the enclosure. But the rent for the year is \$250.00. . . . That price is cheap for here. The garden and yard are to be enclosed with a high board fence and will serve as enclosure."¹¹

Eagerly the nuns scrubbed and scoured the hall to make it serviceable as a convent. Their furnishings were meager indeed, for besides some clothes, the sisters' trunks contained mainly books, sheet music, and religious articles. The windows of the house were neatly covered with paper in lieu of curtains, a grate or grill was erected across the door of the room facing the street, a few treasured religious pictures were hung on the walls, and Benedictine convent life for women was planted on Minnesota soil.¹²

Crowded as they were in these quarters, the sisters took in some six boarding pupils. To others they gave religious instruction, apparently a very necessary work, for Sister Evangelista declared, "there are girls here fifteen years old who still do not know the alphabet nor the Ten Commandments, much less the Our Father. . . . In this land where everything is still primitive and the people unlearned, much good can be done."¹³

Sister Willibalda gave instructions in

singing, drawing, and painting; Mary Wolters taught English; Sister Evangelista gave German lessons; and Sisters Gregoria and Gertrude offered instruction in needlework and sewing. For German or English lessons or for instruction in sewing or knitting, the charge was a dollar a month. The fee for lessons in finer needlework was two dollars a month. Some Yankee settlers gave the sisters orders for fancy needlework and plain sewing. Others asked for music lessons.

At the suggestion of the prior, and in spite of their poverty, the sisters sent for a piano. The prior wrote that a "piano had to be purchased because the Yankees are especially set on taking up music. The piano cost \$330 with freight and shipping. It bears the name of a firm in Pittsburgh, 'Charlotte Blum.' Sister Willibalda likes it very well and praises it highly."¹⁴

THE MONEY received from the six boarding pupils, from music lessons, and from fine needlework was not sufficient for the sisters' support, but the people often brought food from their own scanty stores. Sometimes it was vegetables, and sometimes it was that very scarce article, milk. One morning, on opening the kitchen door, the sisters found that someone had presented them with a young pig. Once in a while they received wild pigeons.¹⁵

Such gifts in the year 1857 were precious, coming as they did from settlers whose fields and gardens had been stripped so completely by grasshoppers that there was not even seed left for the coming spring. The district had been ravaged by a grasshopper plague the year before, and from the eggs laid by these invaders had come

¹⁰ Di Marogna to Wimmer, August 20, 1857.

¹¹ Di Marogna to Wimmer, July 14, 1857.

¹² Elizabeth Tenvoorde, "Memoirs," in St. Benedict's Convent archives; Di Marogna to Wimmer, July 14, 1857.

¹³ Sister Evangelista to Wimmer, August 22, 1857.

¹⁴ Di Marogna to Wimmer, August 12, 1857. See also Clement Staub to Wimmer, August 19, 1857.

¹⁵ Di Marogna and Sister Willibalda to Wimmer, August 12, 28, 1857.

a second plague. The grasshoppers had completed their destructive work just before the nuns arrived. Some potatoes and a bit of corn had been saved, but the half-dozen cows in the area, left without proper forage, did not give their usual supply of milk. Almost all the chickens had died.¹⁶

The settlers' diet consisted of potatoes, cooked in their jackets so that nothing would be wasted, alternated regularly with corn-meal mush served without milk or butter. The small box-shaped coffee mills, common in homes of the period, ground no coffee that year but were used instead to grind precious kernels of corn for mush and bread. Roasted corn took the place of the coffee beans. The settlers could add to their diet by hunting wild game, but this means was not open to the cloistered nuns.

Although the Benedictines no doubt

fares more poorly than did the settlers, they were probably better fitted to stand the shortage of food than were the other inhabitants, for these women were accustomed to a life of frugal abstinence. Their rules and statutes, brought from Bavaria, did not permit breakfast, and meat was allowed them but three times a week. Even in times of plenty their noon and evening meals were to consist only of soup, bread, and one other dish.¹⁷

They were accustomed to cold rooms in winter, for their rules permitted stoves and fireplaces only in workrooms and classrooms. To save their woolen habits the nuns wore them only for morning chapel services, donning calico dresses for the manual labor of the day. In sharing the privations of other early settlers, the sisters not only endeared themselves to the people but were better able to understand their needs.¹⁸

¹⁶ Effects of the grasshopper plagues are described in Mitchell, *History of Stearns County*, 2:1318, 1410; Bruno Riess, "First Beginnings of St. John's Abbey," in *St. John's University Record*, 2:63, 74 (June, July, 1889); *St. Cloud Visiter*, December 10, 1857; and P. Willibald Mathäser, *Bonifaz Wimmer, O.S.B. und König Ludwig I. von Bayern*, 99 (Munich, 1938).

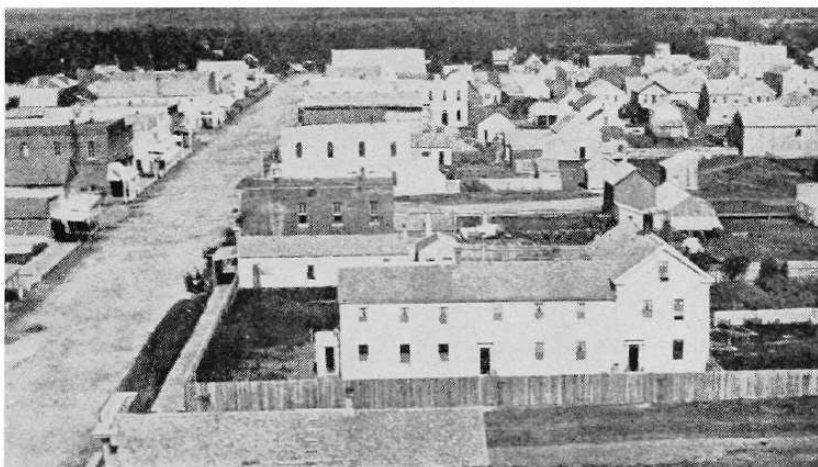
¹⁷ The rules are set forth in "Statuten des Klosters St. Walburg nach der Regel unsers heiligen Vaters Benediktus," a manuscript copy of which is in the archives of St. Benedict's Convent.

¹⁸ See Ten Voorde, "Memoirs."

DURING the nine months the Benedictines lived in the rented Ten Voorde house, they had no opportunity to take part in parochial activities or to widen their influence among the people. Their only contacts with the settlers were through private lessons in music, needlework, and religion. But the lay teacher's contract with the

ST. BENEDICT'S CONVENT ARCHIVES

FIRST Catholic
church at
St. Cloud, 1859





RED River carts
near St. Cloud
in 1868

parish school would soon expire, and the sisters hoped that the parishioners would then accept them as teachers. Both the nuns and Prior Demetrius counted the days until this plan could be put into operation.

In preparation, the parish plastered the church and the classroom, laid a floor, and placed a high board fence around the building. The upper story of the church was made habitable as a home for the sisters by the addition of a bit of plaster and the erection of a partition or two. But the building was poorly constructed. On the outside, clapboard siding had been nailed directly to the studding, which was faced on the inside only by a coat of plaster. No system of ventilation was needed; every joint and seam admitted the cold prairie winds. The floors, made of rough planks with wide cracks, were a sore trial to the nuns during the winter months. Their feet became so frostbitten and swollen that they could not wear shoes and were forced to bind their feet in straw, a measure originally adopted to prevent frostbite.¹⁹

In the early spring of 1858 when it was announced that the Benedictines were ready to open school in St. Cloud, parents called to inquire about textbooks and slates

and tuition. Although the records have been destroyed, the names of some of those who attended that first year are known. Among them were Mary, Anton, Barney, and Joseph Edelbrock, Lizzie and Henry Rosenberger, Catherine Felders, Mary Brown, John Niebler, Joseph Reichert, and Louis Emmel. The sisters continued to give music lessons, and among the non-Catholic pupils taking private instruction in this field were Jennie and Mary Mitchell, Mary and Jennie Cramsie, Sophia and Cecilia Corbett, and Nettie Swisshelm.²⁰

Writing in the *St. Cloud Visiter* for May 27, 1858, Mrs. Swisshelm listed among the town's many advantages "a school kept by a company of Benedictine Nuns where music, drawing, needlework, and German are well taught by ladies of polished manners and unusual proficiency." A few months later, in the *St. Cloud Democrat* of December 9, 1858, she reported, "The

¹⁹ Information on the building is drawn from "Sunday Announcement Book," St. Mary's Parish, St. Cloud, for the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, 1857, in St. Cloud Diocesan Archives; "Annals" of St. Benedict's Convent; Riess, in *St. John's Record*, 2:16, 93 (February, September, 1889).

²⁰ Some of the pupils' names are listed in the *St. Cloud Democrat*, July 21, 1859.

school is in much favor with our citizens and is in a flourishing condition."

Although Mrs. Swisshelm was well known for her caustic remarks, she spoke of the Benedictine sisters with unfailing admiration and respect. Apparently she felt a bond of friendship between herself and the sisters, for in the *Democrat* of September 26, 1861, she declared: "Up street stands the first church going bell on the march of civilization. It hangs in a pyramidal shed, in the yard of a convent kept by a company of Benedictine Nuns; and is regularly rung for matins and vespers, by the Lady Abbess, who is small, slight, delicate, graceful, and accomplished a lady as you could meet in any circle. From her waking the first echoes of these broad prairies in a call to bow regularly at an altar of Christian worship and my wielding the advance press, I am inclined to dispute with the lords of creation the palm of always holding the flagstaff as westward the star of empire takes its way."

TEACHING in a frontier school was anything but monotonous. Rumors of Indian outbreaks, the arrival of river boats, and the passing of noisy Red River caravans broke the routine. In the summer of 1858, for example, a caravan of a hundred and forty carts made its way across the prairie to St. Cloud. During the sisters' first school term, a band of Sioux Indians took advantage of the absence of Chippewa warriors from their camp near St. Cloud and killed eleven old and defenseless Chippewa. In retaliation the Chippewa chief, Hole-in-the-Day, and two attendants pursued the Sioux, returning triumphantly with several scalps which they proudly showed off in the streets of St. Cloud. These periodic Indian troubles enticed the children away from school, and frightened the nuns until the veteran Indian missionary, Father Pierz, told them that the Indians would never harm the sisters or the blackrobes.²¹

²¹ *Visiter*, May 27, June 24, 1858; *Democrat*, December 9, 1858, November 10, 1859.

All schools of that day considered it necessary to put on a program at the close of the term. In fact, the public often judged a teacher by her ability to put on programs, and the Benedictines adapted themselves to the custom. Because it was usual to give each child in the school a chance to appear on the program, these exhibitions were frequently lengthy affairs. The public's willingness to sit through such long programs may be ascribed not only to parental pride, but to the scarcity of other cultural entertainment in certain frontier areas.

What was doubtless the sisters' first venture of this sort was made on July 7, 1859. The *Democrat* of June 30, 1859, announced: "The School under the charge of the Sisters, will give an exhibition on Thursday evening the 7th, at 8 O'clock. . . . There will likely be a small admission fee for the benefit of the School. It will be in the chapel, and those who want seats will need to go early."

Mrs. Swisshelm was present at this entertainment to watch the performance of her daughter. Pleased with the sisters' work, she wrote a detailed account of the affair in the issue of the *Democrat* for July 21, in which she commented that the program "gave great satisfaction to a large audience, notwithstanding the performance was rather long."

She then described each item on the program, occasionally commenting on the quality of the performance. "The Exhibition opened," she wrote, "with piano music, 'The Vienna March,' played by Miss Cramsie," followed by two comic dialogues. One of these, "The Egg Thief," given in German, was "capitally performed and exceedingly amusing," according to Mrs. Swisshelm. A piano solo entitled "Phantasm" was "played by the Lady Superior in masterly style." Apparently the one failure of the evening was a playlet given "by Stephen Miller, Jr., J. B. Marvin, William and J. Mitchell, and W. F. Miller." It was "not well done," said Mrs. Swiss-

helm, "as the performers were weary having walked from Grand Lake that day."

DESPITE the satisfactory work performed by the nuns, the income from their small school was not sufficient to keep them in clothing and food, for the tuition of two dollars per child per semester—which the parish paid—brought them only sixty dollars. Nor was this meager sum always contributed regularly. A line in the old parish Sunday announcement book reads: "Nothing has been paid toward the school for the last five months. Since the Sisters opened the school, almost nothing has been paid."²²

A fair or bazaar, the sisters decided, would be the best means of raising the needed funds, and they immediately got out their crochet, knitting, and fillet needles, and their tatting bobbins. The first fair was held in conjunction with the program at the close of the school year in 1859, and it proved a success. After that, the bazaar became an annual event, and from the proceeds the sisters were able to make some improvements in the school and convent building.²³

By 1862, an advertisement in the *Democrat* of January 23 informed residents of St. Cloud that three hundred and twenty-five articles made by the sisters would be offered for sale and raffle. Tickets could be purchased "at C. Grandelmyer's store and at the convent" for one dollar each. Many of the items listed for sale were simple, utilitarian garments or household accessories upon which the sisters had put lace, trimmings, and embroidery. There were "embroidered linen bosoms" for men and white embroidered pantalets for the ladies, baby clothes, crocheted suspenders and lamp nets, fancy feather flower baskets, snuffer plates, embroidered penwipers, laces, and scented cushions.

FROM TIME TO TIME the sisters entertained such visitors as a group of Grey Nuns, traveling by oxcart from St. Paul

to St. Boniface, Canada, in 1859, and Bishop Thomas Grace of St. Paul, who stopped at the convent that year and again in 1861 when he was returning from Pembina with Father Joseph Goiffon, an aged and crippled missionary to the Indians.²⁴

Mother Benedicta Riepp, foundress of the Benedictine sisterhood in America, arrived at St. Cloud in the early autumn of 1858. Broken in health, she remained with the nuns until her death in 1862.²⁵ Her presence and influence tended to strengthen the observance of Benedictine customs and spirit, but the nuns had found that in many things the statutes and customs of the mother house in Germany could not be followed. This was true in the matter of food, for frontier conditions made the nuns' provisions at St. Cloud uncertain. The sisters learned, too, that the rule of strict enclosure was hardly compatible with teaching in a parochial school. Playground supervision from a window or doorway was a failure. Neither was the proper perfecting of pupils during chapel services possible. Moreover, such aloofness from the people of the settlement was foreign to the western frontier spirit of neighborliness, and it tended to alienate some of the parishioners.

Hovering over the Minnesota frontier during this period of struggle to establish and adapt cloistered Benedictine life was the restlessness and dissatisfaction of the Indians, who in the summer of 1862 suddenly

²² "Announcement Book," St. Mary's Parish, October 10, 1858.

²³ A report of the fair appears in the *Democrat*, July 21, 1859.

²⁴ Sister Mary Murphy, "The Grey Nuns Travel West," in *Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, Papers*, 11 (Winnipeg, 1945); Bishop Grace, "Diary of Trip to the Red River," August 16, September 27, 1861, owned by the St. Paul Seminary; *Der Wahrheitsfreund* (Cincinnati), September 19, 1859; *Western Banner* (St. Louis), November 26, 1859. Files of these two papers are in the archives of St. John's Abbey.

²⁵ Mother Benedicta's arrival is discussed in *Wimmer to Mother Scholastica*, July 14, 1858, a copy of which is in St. Benedict's Convent Archives. Her death is noted in the *Democrat*, March 20, 1862.

arose and overran the western and central portions of the state, killing hundreds of whites and burning farms and small settlements. Stockades were built, and although St. Cloud was not actually attacked, the town was filled with frightened refugees, many separated from their families and possessions. The sisters extended hospitality to as many women and children as could be crowded into their building and did their best to alleviate fears and sufferings. They were very worried about three of their number who shortly before the uprising had been sent to care for the school at St. Joseph, a few miles west of St. Cloud. They later learned that the sisters were safe. At St. Joseph, too, elaborate preparations had been made for an attack that never came.²⁶

EARLY IN 1863, after the sisters had spent five years in parochial school work in Minnesota, a group of Catholics in Middle St. Cloud decided to erect a public school in that part of town. Some of them felt that their tax money should be used to support a public school nearer their homes, since the only public school that existed in St. Cloud was located in the lower part of town, too far from the German settlement. This group reasoned that with a public school in their midst they could dispense with the parish school and save the expense of supporting two school systems. In reality, these German immigrants, used to the system of state-supported schools that existed in their native land, preferred a school that the church did not

control. To their pastor these people tried to justify their wish to exchange the parish school for a public school by charging that the sisters did not have a complete mastery of the English language.²⁷

This trouble with the people of St. Cloud caused the sisters to look about them for a more congenial environment. Most of them wanted to leave Minnesota, for they felt that after five years of struggle they had not yet taken root. Late in the summer of 1863 the parish at St. Joseph, then the largest and most prosperous in Stearns County, offered the sisters a home if they would take over the school there. At about the same time, Benedictine priests at Atchison, Kansas, asked for sisters to teach in their school. Since the convent at St. Cloud had fourteen members, it was decided to split the group and accept both invitations.²⁸

Sister Evangelista and six other older nuns left for Kansas in the fall of 1863. Seven sisters—Mother Willibalda, Sisters Antonia Streitz, Gertrude Capser, Bernarda Augé, Johanna Reser, Boniface Bantle, Theresa Marthaler, and two candidates, Walburga Muelken and Gertrude Petit—remained in Minnesota. With the exception of Mother Willibalda and Sister Gertrude, all were very young and had entered the order during the previous five years.²⁹

It had been decided that the sisters were to go to St. Joseph as soon as possible. Though there is no record of the exact date of their removal, it was probably soon after the group departed for Kansas on November 2, 1863.³⁰ At St. Joseph, the sisters' numbers and works were destined to flourish. Within fifty years the little group grew to be the largest community of Benedictine sisters in the world, a distinction the convent still holds. A hundred years after their arrival in Minnesota, the sisters' work has expanded to include the operation of hospitals and homes for the aged as well as elementary and secondary schools, and a liberal arts college for women—the College of St. Benedict at St. Joseph.

²⁶ Riess, in *St. John's Record*, 3:27 (March, 1890).

²⁷ The sisters' difficulties are discussed in a letter by Bishop Grace to Prior Othmar Wirtz, April 27, 1863.

²⁸ On the invitation to St. Joseph, see *Der Nordstern* (St. Cloud), July 3, 1884, a file of which is owned by St. Benedict's Convent Archives. The founding of the convent in Kansas is discussed by Sister Regina Baska. *The Benedictine Congregation of Saint Scholastica*, 87 (Washington, D.C., 1935).

²⁹ See *Catalogue of Nuns and Convents*, 25, 42.

³⁰ See *Northwestern Chronicle* (St. Paul), February 21, 1884, in the files of the Minnesota Historical Society.



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