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Behind the Beginnings: Benedictine Women in America

M. Incarnata Girgen OSB

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BEHIND

THE BEGINNINGS

SISTER M. INCARNATA GIRGEN, O.S.B.

BEHIND THE BEGINNINGS

St. Joseph, Clinton P.C. Stearns Co. Minnesota Dez. 6. 1865.

Königlicher Majestät!

Königliche Majestät haben geruht die
Schrift der Schenkung von St. Joseph in Minne-
sota gütiglich anzunehmen, und mit einem prächtigen
Geschenke von 400 Dollar in Gold zu versetzen. Gott ver-
galt für Majestät einfluss den Geist und die Fröude der
die und bereitet haben.

Oberst amümpfen und vorbengungen Winkel, und der
Grünlis über den wir das wider und abfängigen
Zukunft der Landeinfuhr, christlichen Glauben und Civil-

BEHIND THE BEGINNINGS

Benedictine Women
in America

Sister M. Incarnata Girgen, O.S.B.

1981

SAINT BENEDICT'S CONVENT

SAINT JOSEPH, MINNESOTA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD	vii
INTRODUCTION	xi
PART I. 1840-1856	
I. EICHSTÄTT	3
II. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN AMERICA	13
PART II. 1857-1862	
III. EXPANSION IN MINNESOTA	59
IV. BEGINNINGS OF CONTROVERSY BETWEEN ABBOT BONIFACE WIMMER AND MOTHER BENEDICTA RIEPP	86
V. MOTHER BENEDICTA RIEPP IN EUROPE	102
VI. MOTHER BENEDICTA'S RETURN FROM EUROPE TO ERIE, PA.	126
VII. MOTHER BENEDICTA RIEPP IN ST. CLOUD (1858-1862)	135
PART III. 1863-1914	
VIII. MOTHER WILLIBALDA SCHERBAUER, PRIORESS: 1857-1868	171
IX. MOTHER WILLIBALDA SCHERBAUER: 1868-1914	189

APPENDIX

A. LUDWIG I, 1825-1848	205
B. BONIFACE WIMMER, O.S.B.	206
C. LUDWIG-MISSIONSVEREIN	207
D. MOTHER BENEDICTA RIEPP, O.S.B.	208
E. MOTHER WILLIBALDA SCHERBAUER, O.S.B.	210
F. MINNESOTA	212
G. DEMETRIUS DI MAROGNA, O.S.B.	212
H. TUBERCULOSIS IN EARLY CONVENTS	213
I. BENEDICTA RIEPP, O.S.B. TO ARCHBISHOP VON REISACH	213
J. EXEMPT ABBOT	215
K. CONGREGATIONS	215
L. AUGUSTINA SHORT, O.S.B.	216
M. CHRONIK, CONVENT OF ST. WALBURG, EICHSTÄTT	216
LIST OF LETTERS	220
BIBLIOGRAPHY	225

FOREWORD

Before I began this study I had for some time been interested in what Sister Grace McDonald, O.S.B., in her *With Lamps Burning* called the Baraga Collection.¹ This is, as she explained, a collection of letters found in the archives of the Convent of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minnesota. The letters had been obtained from the archives of the Ludwig-Missionsverein in Munich. A number of the letters were written by Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B. My only purpose at first was to translate the letters from German into English and so make them more available to other Benedictine sisters who claim Mother Benedicta as the foundress of convents in America which stem from St. Walburg Abbey in Eichstätt, Bavaria. But, before long, the project took on a much broader purpose.

The Baraga Collection also contains letters written by Bishop George von Oetzl of Eichstätt and Prioress Edwarda Schnitzer of St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt, and by Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, O.S.B.

Even this small Baraga Collection gives evidence of the beginnings of difficulties and misunderstandings between Mother Benedicta Riepp and Father (later abbot) Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., founder of the first Benedictine monastery of monks, St. Vincent, near Latrobe, Pennsylvania, and of the first Benedictine convent of sisters in St. Marys, Pennsylvania.

¹ Sister Grace called the collection "The Baraga Collection" because her photostatic copies were copies of those made in the archives of the Ludwig-Missionsverein in Munich, Bavaria, in 1852-53, by Mr. Joseph Gregorich of Chicago, Illinois. He was collecting the letters of Bishop Frederick Baraga, Vicar Apostolic of Northern Michigan, for the Baraga Association of the Diocese of Marquette, Michigan.

Further research in Munich and Eichstätt, and correspondence with the Procurator General in Rome of the Beuronese and Cassinese Congregations of Benedictines, opened new sources. Of special help was the suggestion by the Procurator General to make use of the archives of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. Here was found a collection of copies of the documents relating the history of the Catholic Church in America: *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives: A Calendar* by Finbar Kenneally, 7 volumes.¹ The University of Notre Dame also has archival materials of the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

My broader purpose now is to present Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B., her personality, her aims and expectations, as well as her difficulties and problems, and to do the same for Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, O.S.B., since she was a co-worker of Mother Benedicta and shared the same hardships and misunderstandings.

There were, of course, many sisters who played parts in establishing the Benedictines in America. This study is an attempt to present two: Mother Benedicta Riepp, the foundress of Eichstätt Benedictine Sisters in America, and Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, who brought them to Minnesota. To accomplish this purpose, the greater part of the study consists of letters to, by, or about Mother Benedicta and Mother Willibalda. In so far as possible, the letters and documents are in chronological order. However, this is not an exchange of letters between people carrying on a correspondence, nor a collection of letters by the same person. It is, rather, a collection of letters by various correspondents dealing with problems or persons of interest or concern to the writers.

In making this study I found that a greater effort had been made to preserve Abbot Boniface Wimmer's letters than was made to preserve Mother Benedicta's or Mother Willibalda's. Many reasons can be given for that. In the first place, Abbot Wimmer had a much wider range of correspondents and a much wider field of activity than the sisters. He also was a prolific writer of letters. However, both Mother Benedicta and Mother

¹ The University of Notre Dame archives has 69 reels of microfilm of records of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* from 1622 to 1865.

Willibalda wrote to the motherhouse in Eichstätt but none of Mother Benedicta's and only one of Mother Willibalda's was preserved. Both wrote to Abbot Wimmer but again only a few were preserved. The best source of material in the form of letters and documents was the archives of the Ludwig-Missionsverein in Munich and copies of these in archives in the United States. The result, therefore, was that the writer was able to collect many more letters of Abbot Wimmer than of the two sisters.



INTRODUCTION

To understand and appreciate the founding of the first American Benedictine convent from St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt, Bavaria, it is important to know the history of the mother-house, at least briefly. This study, therefore, speaks of Eichstätt, of Bavaria and its King Ludwig I, his interest in the restoration of religious houses after the Napoleonic period, and his support of German immigrants to America and missionary work.

The first Benedictine Convent in St. Marys, Pennsylvania, was the result of the foresight of Abbot Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., of St. Vincent Abbey in Pennsylvania. The letters deal with the early history of St. Marys, Pennsylvania, and the coming of the sisters from St. Walburg in three groups: 1852, 1853 and 1855. The letters, especially those of Mother Benedicta Riepp, who was appointed superior, give a description of the beginnings, the growth and the hardships of the sisters in St. Joseph Convent, St. Marys, Pennsylvania.

From 1852 to 1857 the life of the sisters in St. Marys was peaceful, though difficult. Mother Benedicta appreciated the people, their good will and Catholic spirit. She appreciated the opportunity she had for instructing the young German-Americans and for spreading the Order of St. Benedict in the new world with the help and direction of Abbot Boniface Wimmer. However, by 1857 misunderstandings had arisen between her and Wimmer which determined her to appeal to Rome for a decision on the extent of her power and that of the abbot in ruling the convent in St. Marys and the convents that would be founded from St. Marys.

This controversy between Mother Benedicta Riepp and Abbot Boniface Wimmer took on ever wider dimensions. It began with Riepp's points of difference between herself and the abbot which she had sent to Rome and again listed at the suggestion of the Bishop of Eichstätt. The lists concerned local and personal problems. The dispute, however, finally touched on matters dealing with the whole of religious life. The vows taken by the sisters; the relationship of the sisters to the abbot and of the sisters to the bishop; the relationship of the American sisters to the European motherhouse; the founding of new convents; the formation of religious congregations or federations — all became part of the problem. It involved, ultimately, the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, the bishops of Pittsburgh, Erie, St. Paul, and those of Munich-Freising and Eichstätt, and the priors of St. Vincent and of St. John's monasteries. All these were asked for opinions or decisions on the points of the controversy. In Rome, both the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars took part in solving the problem.

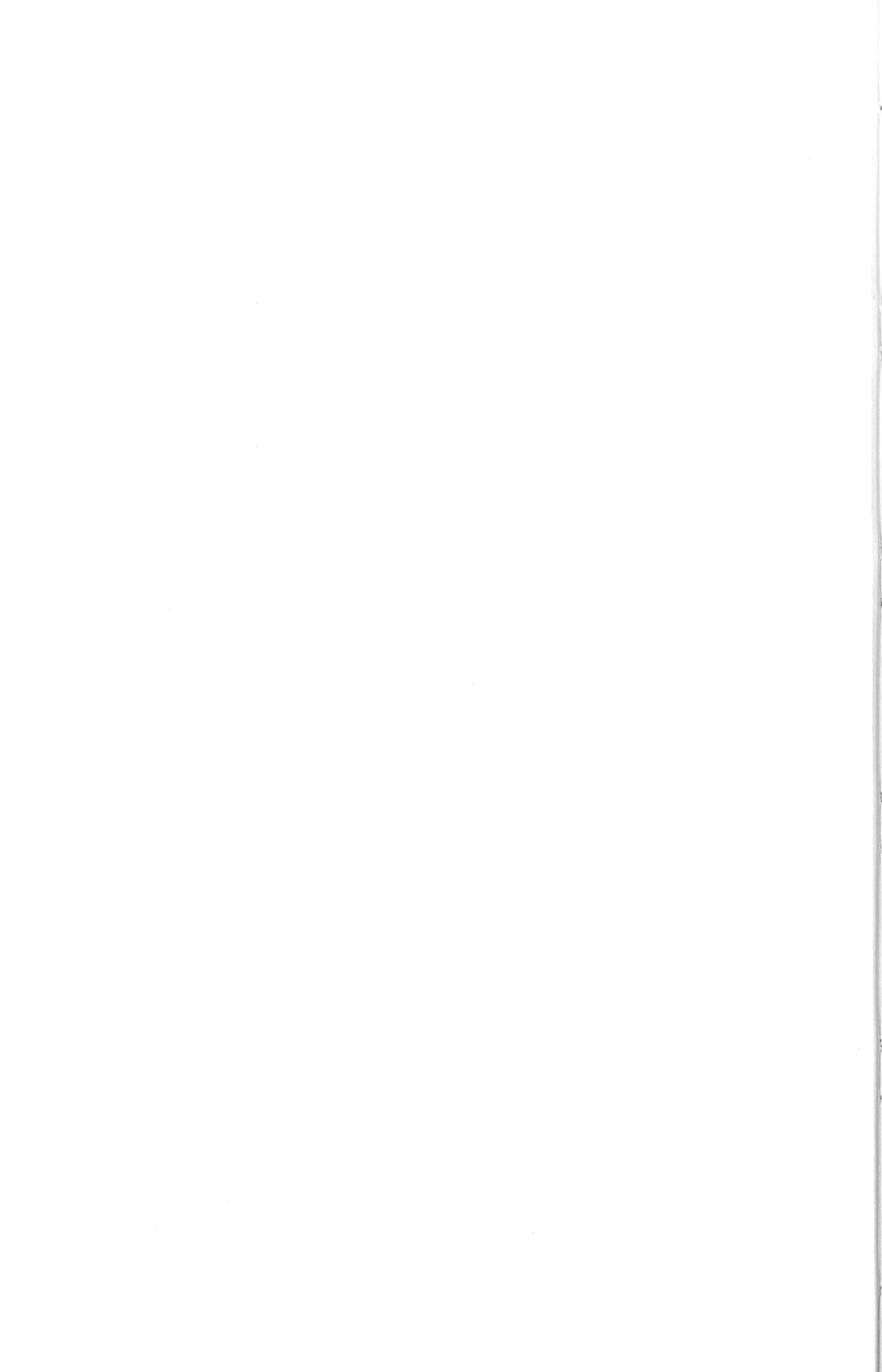
The solution of the problem brought on the separation of the American convents from the Bavarian motherhouse. The bishops who were asked favored this separation; the Roman Congregations and the Baltimore Council decreed the making of simple vows instead of solemn vows by the sisters; the sisters were to be under the jurisdiction of the bishop in whose diocese they lived or worked; and finally, the Rescript of December 6, 1859, decreed that Mother Benedicta Riepp return to St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt. By the time the Rescript was received, she was living in St. Cloud, Minnesota, where she was allowed to remain.

Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, who brought the Benedictine sisters to Minnesota, was not untouched by this controversy. In some respects her difficulties were of a more personal character both in Pennsylvania and in Minnesota. Her life as a sister, however, was affected by the changes in religious life resulting from the controversy.

In this study the pre-Vatican II titles are used for the Roman Congregations of the Catholic Church whenever references are made to them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people helped me prepare this study on Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B., and Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, O.S.B.; most of them are members of my own community or of other Benedictine communities of sisters and monks. I mention here only a few: Sister Mary Anthony Wagner, O.S.B., who found the material available in the Archives of the University of Notre Dame, and Sister Margretta Nathe, O.S.B., who helped me in the Bavarian archives — those of the Ludwig-Missionsverein, the Staatsarchiv and the Geheimes Hausarchiv, the archives of the Abbey of St. Boniface and those of the Abbey of St. Walburg in Eichstätt; Sister Nancy Hynes, O.S.B., and Sister Linnea Welter, O.S.B., who read the original manuscript critically; Sister Romaine Theisen, O.S.B., who typed it; Sister Johanna Becker, O.S.B., who planned the cover design and picture layout; Sister Olivia Forster, O.S.B., who proofread the manuscript. But to come to this final stage of my study, I depended on many more: archivists, translators, readers, proofreaders, artists, and typists. To all who helped and encouraged me in any way whatsoever, I express my deep gratitude and appreciation; I ask Mother Benedicta and Mother Walburga to continue to intercede for God's special blessings on all.



BEHIND THE BEGINNINGS



Sehr geehrter Vater Landgrafin Maria Elisabeth,
wobei Sie selbst als zugleich benachteiligt, das 1000 fl. bereits
für die neuen Gebäude liegen. Aber andererseits das habe
Gott auch schon zuwenden selbst, die selbst nur wenig aus
seinem Munde erhalten. Das ist immer noch das Beste, was
ich immer in der größten Hoffnung, was für eine die meisten
Mutter zum Leben das Kloster zu führen, in einer
neuen eine königliche Majestät zu führen, die selbst
nicht, auf die in der ersten das erste in der ersten
das Landesherrn in der ersten zu werden. Für die das
soll eine königliche Majestät immer in der ersten
in der ersten das erste für die erste an der ersten
soll selbst zu führen. Selbst soll immer in der ersten
Königlichen Gebete für die allerhöchste Majestät einer kö-
niglichen Majestät zu führen das allerhöchste an der ersten
zum ersten. Selbst wird immer in der ersten, so lange das die
für die zu führen zum ersten das erste auf der ersten
soll selbst das erste. Selbst für immer das erste in der ersten
zu führen in der ersten Gebete bleiben.
Ganz und auch mit der Zeit am ersten Kloster und
Wohl für die ersten ersten Gebete zum ersten

PART I

1840-1856



EICHSTÄTT

Restoration of St. Walburg Convent

Let us first look briefly at St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt, Bavaria, from which the first American Benedictine convent was founded. In 1035 the remains of St. Walburga were transferred from her Anglo-Saxon Abbey in Heidenheim (f. 870) to a convent of Canonesses in Eichstätt. The bishop brought Benedictine sisters from Nonnberg in Salzburg (f. 700) to Eichstätt, changing the convent from one of Canonesses to one of Benedictines under the patronage of St. Walburga. Eichstätt belonged to Austria, but the map changes made at the time of Napoleon gave Eichstätt and its diocese to Bavaria in 1805. Napoleon's Secularization Act of 1806 closed St. Walburg Abbey, as it closed many other abbeys, and confiscated all its land and other property. For supporting him in his wars and in repayment for his taking their lands, Napoleon gave the secular German rulers Church property and monastic buildings and lands. Convents and abbeys were despoiled and deprived of their means of support. Monks and nuns had to find other homes and other ways of supporting themselves. The older sisters of St. Walburg, with Abbess Maria Michaela Morasch, were permitted to live as a community in the convent building on pensions from the government. The younger sisters had to return to their families. The sisters were not allowed to accept novices. The period of secularization lasted

from 1803 to 1835. Thirteen sisters,¹ (nine choir sisters and four lay sisters), survived this period and formed the nucleus of the convent restored by Ludwig I, King of Bavaria, 1825–48.

The nine choir sisters who had survived the period of secularization directed a petition on July 10, 1834, to King Ludwig to restore the convent and to give them a school. Each of the nine sisters signed this petition in her own hand. On June 7, 1835, Ludwig permitted the acceptance of novices. Maria Michaela Morasch, Abbess, 1799–1826, who had also survived the period of imprisonment, died shortly before the restoration of the convent by King Ludwig I. The last sister of the group of thirteen survivors died November 15, 1848, when St. Walburg Convent again had 25 members.² The convent, therefore, had really never been completely destroyed but had been in continuous existence from 1035 to 1835. It was this newly restored convent that gave the first sisters to the missions in the United States in 1852.

Mother Edwarda Schnitzer, Prioress from 1849 to 1898, succeeded Abbess Maria Michaela Morasch and was in office at the time of the founding of the first daughter house in America, the Convent of St. Joseph in St. Marys, Pennsylvania.³

In 1805, Napoleon raised the Duchy of Bavaria to a Kingdom under Maximilian I of the Wittelsbach family because Bavaria had supported France during the first part of the Napoleonic wars. King Maximilian I was succeeded by his son Ludwig I in 1825, a friend of the Catholic Church and of the Benedictines and in favor of the restoration of many of the religious communities of Bavaria which had been secularized by Napoleon.⁴ Ludwig drew the disfavor of many of his Bavarian people upon

¹ The sister who made solemn vows was referred to as a choir sister and was called Mother; the one who made simple vows was considered a lay sister and was called Sister. Solemn vows bind a person more strictly than simple vows; they also impose the duty of praying the Divine Office.

² Archives of St. Walburg Abbey in Eichstätt. Hereafter citations will be given as S.W.A.A.

³ The accepted spelling of the name of the city is St. Marys. We find various forms in the letters: St. Mary's, St. Mary, Marytown, Marystown, or St. Marystown.

⁴ Ludwig I was instrumental in restoring eight Benedictine monasteries and two Benedictine convents. Among these were St. Michael's Monastery in Metten and St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt, both in Bavaria. From these two houses come the founders of the first American Benedictine monasteries and convents. See Appendix A on Ludwig I, p. 205.

himself because of his relationship with the dancer Lola Montez. The revolution of 1848, which was felt in many European states, also necessitated the abdication of King Ludwig I in favor of his son, Maximilian II, 1848–1864. After his abdication, Ludwig lived in Berchtesgaden but spent much of his time in Rome where he was of assistance to Abbot Boniface Wimmer and St. Vincent Abbey. He died in 1868 in Nice, France.⁵ Because Ludwig had helped restore the Church and Monastery of St. Boniface, his tomb, as well as the burial place of the queen, Theresa of Saxony, are in St. Boniface Church in Munich, Bavaria.

Two of King Ludwig's documents relating to the restoration of St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt follow:

KING LUDWIG TO VON SCHENK, PRES. OF CABINET

Aug. 24, 1831

The cabinet has proposed to me that the monastery of St. Walburg not be allowed to continue its existence. I am not underrating the difficulties which present themselves in the maintaining of this convent, but just the same, in consideration of its great antiquity, I desire that its continuance be made possible.⁶

June 7, 1835

Decree of King Ludwig I, Bavaria

We have felt ourselves impelled to grant the continued existence of the monastery of St. Walburg at Eichstätt, of the Order of St. Benedict.⁷

*Founding of Convent of St. Joseph
in St. Marys, Pennsylvania*

It was the German emigration to America which had increased during the early part of the nineteenth century, reaching a peak in the fourth and fifth decades of that century that aroused Wimmer's interest in missionary work. Various causes contributed to

⁵ S. K. H. Herzog Albrecht von Bayern, the present representative of the Wittelsbach family, gave permission to the writer to use the family archives in Munich and to publish the relevant letters located there.

⁶ *Die Abtei St. Walburg, 1035–1935; 900 Jahre in Wort und Bild* (Eichstätt, Germany, 1935), p. 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

this emigration: the failure of the potato crop, social unrest, desire for political and religious freedom and for constitutional government. Revolutions against the government and hatred of the Catholic Church had spread from France into the other European countries. This led to waves of emigration, especially from southern Germany, during the 1830s and 1840s. These emigrants, many of whom were Catholic, found homes in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, and other states. Father Boniface Wimmer,⁸ of the restored Benedictine monastery of Metten in Bavaria, was concerned about the lack of priests to serve the German emigrants in the United States. He saw a remedy for this in transplanting German Benedictines to America who would not only erect schools for the education of young German Americans, but would also train young Benedictines in their monasteries and continue to supply priests for the German Catholic parishes.

Father Wimmer gave expression to his thinking about Benedictine missionary work in "Ueber die Missionen," an article he wrote for the November 8, 1845, *Augsburger Postzeitung*. He wrote, in part:

WIMMER TO AUGSBURGER POSTZEITUNG

Nov. 8, 1845

. . . Do not take our countrymen to strange places by uncertain plans. Give them religious centers — they will build their homes around them. Benedictine monasteries, according to the ancient mode of Benedictine life, are the best means of preventing the degeneration of the German immigrant in national, political as well as religious respects. Let the Jesuit and the Redemptorist settle nearby; there is sufficient room for all and there will be no want of work. If every community will labor in its own sphere and in its own way, success will follow more quickly, abundantly and securely, and soon North America will no longer need the Old World to satisfy its religious demands, will probably even be able to pay back the debt, as England, converted by Benedictines in the seventh and eighth centuries, repaid the continent of Europe. . . .⁹

⁸ See Appendix B on Boniface Wimmer, p. 206.

⁹ Theodore Roemer, O.M.Cap., *The Ludwig-Missionsverein and the Church in the United States, 1838-1918* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1933), p. 72.

In a letter to Abbot Gregor Scherr of Metten, November 11, 1845, Father Boniface Wimmer states his purpose in founding Benedictine monasteries in America more specifically:

1. To set up a place of meeting where the newly-arrived Catholic Germans will live together and so preserve their nationality and their faith.

2. To build a monastic school to prepare American priests and gradually eliminate the need for European missionaries.

3. To acquire land and property in order to have the means to prepare and support a continuing number of priests when once the supply of priests and financial aid from Europe had ended.¹⁰

Wimmer's article in the November 8, 1845, *Augsburger Post-zeitung*, though published anonymously, attracted King Ludwig's attention and when he found out who the author was, he immediately offered support and encouragement. Even after his resignation in 1848, and until his death in 1868, Ludwig gave financial support either personally or through the Ludwig-Missionsverein.¹¹ In accordance with his own plans, Father Wimmer succeeded in 1846 in bringing 18 young Germans to Pennsylvania and establishing a monastery, St. Vincent, in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, with the permission of Bishop Michael O'Connor. By 1852 he had also interested the sisters of St. Walburg Priory in Eichstätt in missionary work — precisely in aiding him by supplying sisters for every place where he planted a Benedictine monastery of monks.

By 1852, though still struggling under the hardships of restoring its own religious life and increasing its membership, St. Walburg Convent was willing to accept the challenge of giving some of its sisters to the work of bringing help to the Catholic German immigrants in America.

The German American Catholics in St. Marys, Pennsylvania, whom the Benedictine monks and nuns wanted to serve, were first served by the Redemptorist Fathers and the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Neither of these religious orders, however, re-

¹⁰ J. Neuhäusler, Introduction to Willibald Mathäser, O.S.B., *Bonifaz Wimmer, O.S.B. und König Ludwig I von Bayern* (Munich, 1938), p. 1*.

¹¹ See Appendix C on the Ludwig-Missionsverein, pp. 207–208.

mained in St. Marys which, then, in the 1850s, was opened to the Benedictines.

In 1849, the School Sisters of Notre Dame withdrew from St. Marys, Elk County, Pennsylvania, with the aid and upon the advice of the Reverend John N. Neumann, Provincial of the American Redemptorist Fathers.¹² The School Sisters had come to the United States from Bavaria in July, 1847, and had taken over the small school formerly conducted by a Redemptorist brother. Within a very short time Mother Teresia Gerhardinger, foundress and first Superior General of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, upon consultation with the Redemptorists and with Mother Caroline Fries, Superior of the Notre Dame Sisters in America, decided that St. Marys was not the place for the motherhouse of their congregation and that they would not accept the land offered them. The sisters, therefore, left in November, 1849, and made foundations in Baltimore, Maryland; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and other cities. When Bishop O'Connor was not able to send a diocesan priest to St. Marys, he asked Father Wimmer to send some of his monks from St. Vincent. Father Wimmer accepted the Bishop's offer.¹³ Not long after this, and after he had failed in an attempt to bring the Dominican Sisters from Regensburg to Pennsylvania,¹⁴ Wimmer turned to Eichstätt for Benedictine sisters from St. Walburg Priory.

The description of St. Marys by Father Wimmer in the following letter to friends in Munich, one year after his arrival in America, touches on the conditions which both the School Sisters of

¹² Now St. John Neumann.

¹³ Father Wimmer hesitated about taking over the colony permanently but he did send two priests on an interim basis. These were recalled in 1850 when Wimmer suspected that Bishop O'Connor was about to send Irish Sisters of Mercy to St. Marys. Wimmer thought this unbearable. The Bishop sent Father Joseph Schafleitner to the parish, who, however, remained only one year. Bishop O'Connor finally asked Wimmer to take over the colony permanently. Three Benedictine sisters from Eichstätt came in 1852 at Wimmer's invitation. The convent in St. Marys was dedicated to St. Joseph as patron, and so is known as St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys, Pennsylvania.

¹⁴ J. Oetgen, *An American Abbot, Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., 1809-1887* (Latrobe, Pa.: Archabbey Press), pp. 95-98. On p. 96 he states that Father Wimmer had asked the Dominican Sisters of Regensburg to come to make a foundation in the United States. In 1853 they did come, not, however, to work with the Benedictines, as seemingly they themselves had expected, but to work with the Redemptorists in New York.

Notre Dame and the Benedictine Sisters found difficult. Mother Caroline Fries, S.S.N.D., and Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B., both speak of the dense forests and the cold weather, the children coming to school blue and numb from the cold and crying, carrying their scanty frozen food in paper bags. The former describes St. Marys in a letter to Father Joseph Mueller of the Ludwig-Missionsverein;¹⁵ the latter mentions it in a few of her letters but refers specifically, in her letter to Wimmer asking permission to go to Minnesota, to the fact that life in St. Marys was affecting her health.¹⁶

WIMMER TO FRIENDS IN MUNICH

Mount St. Vincent

Dec. 28, 1847

Dear Friends in Munich,

. . . In Germany, or at least in Bavaria, the opinion prevails that St. Marys is an important city, and my readers may have been confirmed in this opinion by my statement above that I asked for a guide to find the church when I first arrived. This assistance was necessary, for we were still two miles from the monastery and had to pass through another forest. This is the reason why St. Marys is called a colony in the midst of an immense forest and with forests even within the city limits.

A few years ago the territory was an immense forest, forty miles in length and the same in width and inhabited by wolves, bears, rattlesnakes and other wild animals. The hemlock trees in this region stand so close together that the sun cannot get through and hunters must use the compass to find their way. These decaying giants of the forest, moreover, render travelling extremely difficult at all seasons of the year; at times it is impossible to penetrate the dense forest. In the midst of this primeval forest lies Sancta Maria. . . .

If St. Marys had been laid out on a smaller scale, it would undoubtedly be one of the most beautiful country towns in the state. But since the plan has been conceived on a grand scale suitable for a city like New York, the streets, which radiate from a central point, separate neighbors, who live at the ends of these streets, by miles. This is the reason why there are still forests within the town limits. The rule that every colonist must build a house in the town itself

¹⁵ Fries to Mueller, *Annalen der Verbreitung des Glaubens* (Munich, Germany), 18:463-464. Hereafter *Annalen*.

¹⁶ Riepp to Wimmer, May 3, 1857, pp. 65-66, S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/20.

forced many to build a house and spend much valuable time in going from houses in town to their farms. Later arrivals disregarded this rule, and it was finally dropped by the land company. In the near future, the houses will, without doubt, be grouped more closely around the church and thus form a more compact settlement.

St. Marys will never be as large a city as had been planned, because it is not situated on a river, nor near a navigable canal; if a railroad would eventually pass through the place, it would not change conditions much. So far there is no factory here; however, everything necessary can be bought. A sawmill turns out about 2,000–3,000 boards a day. There are also lime and brick kilns. . . .

Your sincere friend,

Boniface Wimmer¹⁷

Wimmer and his eighteen young candidates for the Benedictine Order had been in America about three years when King Ludwig expressed his interest in Wimmer's work and his willingness to extend financial aid.

LUDWIG I TO WIMMER

Berchtesgaden

Aug. 30, 1849

[Lord Superior,]¹⁸

From your letter of July 23, I perceive with intense joy the steady progress of your mission, the success of the German monasteries, male as well as female, and I desire that you express to all whom you mentioned to me my lively interest in their blessed work. At present I cannot say whether I shall be able to give any assistance, because I am besieged by the needy, just as if I were still king, although my revenues were decreased considerably at my resignation and also afterwards. How many useful foundations I could have made! You remark very truly, that the education of German priests is necessary to keep the Germans in North America German, and that religious and school instruction in the German language will always be needed for the continuance of the German spirit. May the blessing of God continue to rest upon the work of the German missions.

[Ludwig]¹⁹

¹⁷ *Annalen*, 18:229–236.

¹⁸ In some cases the source did not give the salutations nor closing of letters. The ornate and involved salutations and closings of other letters written in German are simplified or omitted.

¹⁹ P. Willibald Mathäser, O.S.B., *Bonifaz Wimmer, O.S.B. und König Ludwig I von Bayern* (Munich, 1938), p. 13. Hereafter *Letters*.

WIMMER TO LUDWIG I

St. Vincent, Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania, Feb. 13, 1852

[Lord King,]

. . . My priests and brothers now live in the wooden houses once occupied by the School Sisters.²⁰ Recently they suffered much from the cold, since in December and January and at present we had a temperature ranging from 18–24 Reaumur and the American frame buildings everywhere allow freedom for wind and snow to blow through.

. . . My plan was, and still is at the present time, to build only a small church, to which later a small convent for Benedictine sisters (if I can get them) or for School Sisters of Notre Dame, would be attached, so that this church could at the same time be a convent church for the sisters and for the school children; and also serve the purpose of having Sunday services for the parish until we can build a larger and more beautiful church near our monastery that is yet to be built. . . .

Your Royal Majesty's most obedient
Boniface Wimmer, Superior²¹

WIMMER TO ARCHBISHOP KARL AUGUST VON REISACH²²

Apr. 5, 1852

. . . It was long my wish also to have Benedictine sisters here, but I could not start anything because both the opportunity and the place were wanting. With the acceptance of St. Marys, an opportunity presented itself as well as a place and I had worked on my sisters in Eichstätt and won them last year; only the Rt. Rev. Bishop (George von Oettl) did not want to hear about it at that time because he wanted to start a daughter house in Monheim.²³ I tried my good fortune, however, from here once more. The sisters had already been won over since the confessor²⁴ was also my ally. I directed at the Rt. Rev. Bishop all the "shots" that were at my disposal so cleverly that he capitulated and graciously permitted the departure of a few choir and lay sisters. For this I am heartily grateful. I believe very sincerely that Your Excellency, if you had still been bishop of

²⁰ Later the Benedictine sisters from Eichstätt occupied these same wooden houses.

²¹ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 37–38.

²² Karl August von Reisach was Bishop of Eichstätt, 1836–46, and Archbishop of Munich-Freising, 1846–55. As Archbishop of Munich he was also president of the Council of the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

²³ Some of the relics of St. Walburga had been translated to Monheim.

²⁴ Francis Anthony Schmid, S.J.

Eichstätt, would have acted in like manner, and would have been pleased, through this, to further the missionary work, and to contribute to the honor of the Benedictine Order and the Convent of St. Walburg, and to give great pleasure to the good sisters themselves.²⁵

²⁵ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 49–50, n. 7.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN AMERICA

Less than twenty years after its restoration, the Convent of St. Walburg was willing to send missionaries to America.¹ The Ludwig-Missionsverein gave 900 fl.² for the expenses of sending the first group of sisters to America.

Sisters came to America from St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt in 1852, 1853, and in 1855.

1852

- M. Benedicta Riepp, b. 1825
- M. Walburga Dietrich, b. 1804
- S. Maura Flieger, b. 1822

1853

- M. Scholastica Burkhardt, b. 1832
- S. Alexia Lechner, b. 1827
- S. Lidwina Uhl, b. 1831
- Barbara Koegel (candidate), b. 1828
(later, S. Willibalda)

1855

- M. Willibalda Scherbauer, b. 1828
- M. Emmerama Bader, b. 1829

¹ At this time St. Walburg Priory had 42 members. St. Walburg Abbey Archives. Hereafter, S.W.A.A.

² The florin was worth about \$.40 to \$.42.

S. Philomina Spiegel, b. 1833
 Aloysia Knapp (candidate), b. 1829 (later, S. Frances)
 Catherine Schoenhofer (candidate), b. 1830 (later, S.
 Anselma)

Most of them were very young. M. Benedicta Riepp³ was 27 years old and M. Willibalda Scherbauer was 24, when they came to America.⁴

SCHNITZER TO LUDWIG-MISSIONSVEREIN

Eichstätt
 May 29, 1852

Supreme Council⁵ of the Ludwig-Missionsverein

Through the zealous efforts of the Reverend Father Boniface Wimmer, Superior of the Benedictines in North America, it was brought about that women of the Order of St. Benedict also will emigrate to instruct and educate German children.

Last year he asked for some sisters from my convent for the first foundation made for this purpose. Even though I could do this only at a sacrifice for my convent which is only now beginning to flourish, I gave my consent the more gladly, convinced by the permission and the approval of our Right Reverend Lord Bishop. I saw in it the working of Divine Providence, and I hope, not without reason, that with such a sacrifice on our part, the good Lord will reward our convent and all its members and will fill them with enthusiasm for their own vocation.

Now in a few weeks two choir sisters and one lay sister will leave for this purpose to go to St. Marys in the diocese of Pittsburgh.

Since the respected directors of the Ludwig-Missionsverein have in the past graciously paid the traveling expenses of missionaries and religious women who have gone to various parts of the world in the mission field to instruct German youth, I, the undersigned, humbly beg the generous directors of the Verein to kindly grant the necessary funds to meet the traveling expenses of my sisters. Since the Convent of St. Walburg has had considerable expenses for the preparation of these sisters and now has to educate and train candi-

³ See Appendix D on Mother Benedicta Riepp, pp. 208–210.

⁴ Wimmer himself chose suitable people, according to records in the Eichstätt archives. The Prioress and the confessor of the Eichstätt community had been asked for sisters for the American mission.

⁵ The governing body of the Ludwig-Missionsverein was the Council. It is frequently referred to as the Directory or Supreme Directory in the letters. The Archbishop of Munich-Freising was always the president of the Council.

dates to make up for the loss suffered by the departure of the three missionaries, the respected directors will, I hope, not consider the above request presumptuous.

The undersigned, obediently and in consideration of the above, humbly repeating the request to the honorable directors of the Ludwig-Missionsverein, remains in deepest esteem,

Your respectful and obedient servant,

M. Edwarda Schnitzer,
Prioress of the Convent of St. Walburg⁶

Mother Benedicta Riepp, Mother Walburga Dietrich and Sister Maura Flieger left St. Walburg Priory on June 10 or 12, 1852,⁷ and arrived in New York on July 3. No one was there to meet them at their arrival. Wimmer had promised to do so himself or to have someone else meet them. The Dominican sisters from Regensburg had earlier met with the same difficulty. In both cases Wimmer had forgotten his promise and the sisters had to find their way by themselves in a strange country. The Benedictine sisters arrived unexpectedly in St. Vincent Priory on July 8. Father Boniface Wimmer had also neglected to inform Bishop Michael O'Connor of Pittsburgh of the expected arrival of the sisters from Bavaria. He, therefore, kept the sisters at St. Vincent Monastery until a document from the bishop arrived. They were finally taken to St. Marys by way of Carrolltown where some of the Benedictine brothers were living, arriving there on July 25, the feast of St. James, Apostle.

Although Bishop Michael O'Connor had given his consent to having German sisters in his diocese, he had expected Father Wimmer to treat their coming and acceptance in a more official way, as he indicates in the following document.

The Bishop's document, an important one for the American Benedictines, shows that the Bishop considered the sisters to be diocesan — therefore, neither under Father Wimmer nor directly under Rome as a Papal Institute.

The new foundation in St. Marys became known as the Convent of St. Joseph.

⁶ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/1.

⁷ The writers do not always agree on dates of arrivals and departures.

I hereby certify that it was with my permission that you took the preparatory measures to establish the community of German sisters in St. Marytown, Elk Co. I expected, though, to have the matter prepared more formally and documents accordingly issued containing everything necessary for such a purpose. Feeling confident, however, that no difficulty will arise in framing these so as to be satisfactory to all, I have no objection to see the institution commenced. At the earliest opportunity a proper document can be given. I will remark, merely, that until the community is incorporated, I will require that the property which the sisters may possess shall be held in trust for them by the bishop of the diocese so that their position here will be such as to enable the bishop to make sure of the promotion of discipline and to feel satisfied that what is commenced shall not be easily abandoned nor without proper cause.

Youngstown, July 15, 1852
(to) Rev. B. Wimmer, O.S.B.

M. O'Connor
Bishop of Pittsburgh⁸

Wimmer's letters are usually very long and often treat of many problems and events not related to this study. Only the parts of his letters that relate to the Benedictine sisters are given here.

Sometimes, as in the following, the letter is sent to the *Annalen der Verbreitung des Glaubens* by the missionary priest or sister. The *Annalen* was first published in Munich in 1848 after the report on German missions was no longer published in the French or other annals. Donations to the French Mission Society of Lyons given by the Catholics of Bavaria were sometimes thought to be distributed to other than German settlers by the Irish and French bishops of the missions. For this reason, the Ludwig-Missionsverein had been established with its own publication, the *Annalen*.

WIMMER TO ANNALEN

Aug. 9, 1852

. . . My principle is: He who cannot take advice, cannot be

⁸ Sister Regina Baska, O.S.B., *The Benedictine Congregation of St. Scholastica: Its Foundation and Development* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1935), p. 23; see also Sister Grace McDonald, O.S.B., *With Lamps Burning* (St. Benedict's Convent. St. Joseph, Minn., 1957), p. 297, n. 13.

helped, and the peculiarly American saying "Help yourself" also has its good points. In line with this I have always thought, and always and everywhere said it when I could, that the Benedictine Order must give itself to missionary work, otherwise it will cease to exist. This I also told my dear sisters in St. Walburg at my visit to Eichstätt last year and tried to encourage them in missionary affairs. The good sisters were filled with enthusiasm, as I had imagined they would be; and they told me so without encouragement from me — if I needed them in order to transplant the female branch of the Benedictine Order also to the new world and to spread it. My express request to the work of the missions was, therefore, cheerfully accepted and it required only the consent of the Right Reverend Bishop to proceed immediately to bring it about. I am very grateful to the Bishop that without hesitation he allowed two capable choir sisters and one lay sister to come as a small beginning. They arrived here on July 15 and we accommodated them in a good private home — with the music teacher, [Maurice] Schwab⁹ — so they could recover from the hardships of the journey. Then I took them to St. Marys; but first I showed them our Priory in Carrolltown which lies in just as rugged a region as does St. Marys, in order to prepare them for St. Marys. We arrived happily in the colony on the feast of St. James, the same feast on which six years before I had left Munich. They were accepted there with joy, and occupied for the time being the frame building which had served as home for my brothers but who now live in three of the houses we bought, until they can build a proper and roomy home. Next spring we will, with God's help, build a small convent attached to the new church, for our Benedictine Sisters, while our monastery will be outside the city.

Both monasteries will, I hope, contribute greatly to the temporal and eternal welfare of our fellow Germans in St. Marys. . . .¹⁰

Wimmer addressed some of his letters to the Abbots of Scheyern and Metten, who at this time were Abbots Rupert Leiss and Gregor Scherr respectively. Father Boniface Wimmer had helped in the restoration of the Abbey of Scheyern in the Diocese of Passau before coming to America. Wimmer and Scherr were among the first novices of the restored Metten monastery. Scherr, therefore, was Wimmer's superior at the

⁹ Oetgen, *An American Abbot*, p. 314, n. 9.

¹⁰ *Annalen*, 21:25–26.

time of the founding of the first Benedictine monastery in America.

To prepare the German sisters for teaching, Wimmer sent some of them to the new Academy of the Irish Sisters of Mercy located a few miles from St. Vincent. It was these sisters who had been asked to move out of Sportsman's Hall when the property was given to Wimmer and the Benedictine monks by the Bishop of Pittsburgh. The Hall had been made into a Benedictine monastery.

The later St. Joseph Convent which Wimmer refers to in his letter and which he expected to be completed soon was not built until 1860, and Mother Benedicta Riepp never lived in it.

WIMMER TO LEISS¹¹

Oct. 8, 1852

[Lord Abbot,]

. . . The Benedictine sisters in St. Marys are starting out even poorer than we ourselves — in a wretched frame building, with only \$100 in money which they brought with them. My monks furnish them with whatever flour, etc., they need. I bought them a cow. They are very cheerful, and live up to the same daily schedule that we do. At my own expense, I am having a Bavarian and an English candidate taught better English by the Sisters of Mercy, so that they will also have English teachers, because, even in the entirely German St. Marys, the children want to, and should, learn English. Next year we want to get a stone house for them, to be attached to the new (not yet completed) church, 115 feet long and 60 feet wide, which is located in the center of the city on a gently sloping hill covering five acres, part of which will then form the convent garden. . . .

Boniface Wimmer¹²

WIMMER TO SCHERR¹³

Oct. 17, 1852

[Lord Abbot:]

. . . Two choir sisters and one lay sister came from St. Walburg in Eichstätt to St. Marys. Since then they have accepted twelve candi-

¹¹ Rupert Leiss, O.S.B., Abbot of Scheyern.

¹² Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 49–50, n. 7.

¹³ Gregor Scherr, O.S.B., Abbot of Metten.

dates, of which eleven are American born and one Bavarian. It seems that they are not pleased in St. Walburg that the superior here has, at my urging, opened a novitiate, because they are a branch house of St. Walburg, and should be directed from there. . . .

Even in danger of being separated from St. Walburg, I urged the establishing of their own novitiate, and the maintaining of their self-government, so that we could supply the crying needs of religious education for young girls as quickly as possible, and to the greatest possible extent.¹⁴ It is hoped that the ones in Eichstätt will appreciate my reasons. . . .

[Your obedient servant,]

Boniface¹⁵

The following letter of Wimmer to the Abbot of Schottenstift, Vienna, gives us a resumé of events up to 1852.¹⁶ The section dealing with the Benedictine sisters follows:

WIMMER TO ABBOT OF SCHOTTENSTIFT, VIENNA

St. Vincent

Oct. 19, 1852

[Esteemed Lord Abbot:]

. . . Since July 26 of this year we also have a community of Benedictine sisters here from St. Walburg in Eichstätt. It had long been my wish to transplant a community of the daughters of St. Benedict, without ever knowing how this could be accomplished. When I last visited Bavaria, I went to St. Walburg and told the sisters about America, seeking to inspire them to settle here — many of them declared themselves ready to follow me; but that was not enough as I knew our local bishop would not welcome it for he feared that the introduction of German sisters might work to the detriment of the English-speaking sisters¹⁷ who are already here, and that in the end neither might survive. He approached me to ask that we take over

¹⁴ The problem of the independence of the American convents from St. Walburg Priory in Eichstätt was the basis of much misunderstanding between the American Benedictine sisters and the St. Walburg motherhouse. It was also one of the causes of the controversy that arose between Abbot Wimmer and Mother Benedicta Riepp.

¹⁵ Sister M. Louis Morkin and Sister M. Theophane Seigel, O.S.B., *Wind in the Wheat* (Erie, Pa., 1956), pp. 61–62; Chapter 3, n. 17.

¹⁶ This letter, which had been misfiled, is known as Wimmer's "long lost letter." It was discovered by Father Oliver Kapsner, O.S.B., past director of the Monastic Manuscript Microfilm Library at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, and was published in *The American Benedictine Review*, St. Paul, 20:3, Sept. 1969, pp. 309–320.

¹⁷ Sisters of Mercy.

St. Marys, a place which nobody wanted and which the Redemptorists had given up because they had already lost thousands of dollars on it. It is a place which no diocesan priest was willing to accept. I agreed to take it with the stipulation that I be allowed to introduce the German sisters. That condition was accepted.

Then I wrote at once to St. Walburg and to the Bishop of Eichstätt and I received as a start one professed sister and two lay sisters.¹⁸ They brought with them a world of good will, took over the girls' school, and accepted with amazing resolution the hardship, the poverty, and the inconvenience with which they are faced here. Their convent is a small house, hastily thrown together with boards, the ground floor of which contains an anteroom, a kitchen, a dining room, and two small cells — there are two other cells in the attic which were once used by my monks. It will be their home until we are able to build a more suitable one near the church in the center of the city, where they will also have about five acres of ground for buildings and for a garden. The sisters brought with them only \$100 so that from the very beginning I have had an opportunity for giving a practical demonstration of my concern by providing them with everything they need, and this I still do. However, I am very glad to do that, and I am also paying the cost of educating two very industrious and excellent young ladies¹⁹ in an English-speaking school, so that there may be some English teachers. Six times during the past year I have made the long journey from here to St. Marys in order to make provision for the needs of the fathers²⁰ and sisters. . . .

[With respect and esteem,

Your most humble servant,]

Boniface Wimmer

In 1852, King Ludwig had asked the Ludwig-Missionsverein to send a donation of 8000 fl.²¹ to Mother Benedicta in St. Marys. The letters concerning this gift follow: one from the King to Mother Benedicta; one from Mother Edwarda Schnitzer; and a little later, Jan. 8, 1853, one from Mother Benedicta, to the King.

¹⁸ There were, in fact, two choir sisters — Mother Benedicta Riepp and Mother Walburga Dietrich — and one lay sister, Sister Maura Flieger.

¹⁹ The young ladies were postulants or candidates for the Order.

²⁰ Wimmer had a priory of priests and brothers from St. Vincent Monastery in St. Marys.

²¹ Both the florin and the gulden were worth about \$.40 to \$.42 in American money.

Finally, in July, 1853, Father Wimmer described the disposition of the 8000 fl. in his letter to King Ludwig.

LUDWIG TO RIEPP

Munich
Oct. 19, 1852

Mother Superior of the Benedictine Sisters! As another evidence of my concern for the well-being of the Germans in North America, as well as for the spread of our holy religion, I am informing you that at my request a gift of 8000 fl. (8000 gulden) is being sent by the Court Chaplain and Director of the Ludwig-Missionsverein, Mueller, to the convent dedicating itself to the education of German girls.

Assuring you of my sentiments of esteem,

Yours affectionately,
Ludwig²²

SCHNITZER²³ TO LUDWIG

Eichstätt
Oct. 27, 1852

Most Illustrious and Great King!

Gracious King and Lord!

Informed by the Reverend Court Chaplain that Your Royal Majesty found yourself moved to direct a very generous gift of 8000 fl. to the erection of the first convent of our Order in St. Marys, the undersigned and her convent respectfully wish to express to Your Royal Majesty our gratitude in the name of our daughter convent in America, and also in our own name.

In answer to the urgent request of Father Boniface, Prior of the Benedictines in St. Vincent, we sent two choir sisters and one lay sister to America last spring with the consent and help of our Most Reverend Lord Bishop [von Oettl] and trusting with confidence in Divine Providence, to found a dependent house of our Order de-

²² Willibald Mathäser, O.S.B., "König Ludwig I von Bayern und die Gründung der ersten bayerischen Benedictiner Abtei in Nordamerika" in *Studien und Mittheilungen zur Geschichte des Benedictiner Ordens und seiner Zweige* (München: Verlag Oldenbourg, 1925), 43:163. Hereafter, Mathäser, *Studien*. See also Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 48, n. 6.

²³ Prioress Edwarda Schnitzer (1826-98) lived until 1902 and carried on a regular correspondence with Mother Willibalda Scherbauer until her own death. She was followed in the office of prioress by Mother Anna Carolina Kroisz, 1898-1927. Mother Carolina continued the correspondence with Mother Willibalda (the first superior of the Minnesota foundation) until the death of the latter in 1914.

voted especially to the education and formation of young German girls. We gladly provided the departing sisters with the necessities for the first undertaking, and we will in the future support them insofar as our limited means permit. But what could our poverty accomplish in the face of the great need in America, even with the greatest self-sacrificing devotion, without extraordinary help from higher sources? We were, even now, deliberating, moved by the most recent reports and the urgent requests²⁴ of our poor sisters in St. Marys, how we, from our side could, at least in part, increase our help in the immediate difficulties, and with deep regret we had to tell ourselves that our own powers were not at all sufficient, when like a message from heaven, the news reached us of the generous gift of Your Royal Majesty. Your Royal Majesty can judge how unspeakable was our joy, and how deep our gratitude toward him, through whom the merciful God sent such great help for our beloved sisters.

Alas! We have only tears of joy and fervent prayers for the temporal and eternal welfare of our Royal benefactor by which to express our thanks. Of one heart, we at once began a novena in gratitude and a feast of thanksgiving will be observed annually in our convent as a grateful commemoration. With increased joy and self-sacrifice we will endeavor from now on to prepare sisters for the house of our Order newly established by Royal benevolence, to assist in this important mission.

In the annals of the convent in St. Marys, the name of the Royal founder will have first place and future centuries will place the founding of the first convent of the Order of St. Benedict in America among the countless works of Your Royal kindness.

All will celebrate each anniversary of the blessing of the small convent and church with devout prayers as a remembrance of this great charity.

May Your Kingly Majesty accept this poor and entirely inadequate expression of our deepest gratitude with Your wonted Royal gra-

²⁴ No letters of request for help are extant. Father Willibald Mathäser, O.S.B., St. Boniface Abbey, Munich, informed the writer that a great part of the St. Walburg Abbey archival collection was destroyed. It is perhaps for that reason that no letters by Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B., and only one by Willibalda Scherbauer, O.S.B., was located there. Prioress Edwarda Schnitzer, O.S.B., refers to begging letters having been received from the daughterhouse in St. Marys. Many of the letters from Mother Edwarda and Mother Carolina to Willibalda Scherbauer from St. Walburg were saved by Willibalda, each in answer to a letter received from Mother Willibalda.

ciousness. With the sacred promise that we remain always in deepest respect,

Your Royal Majesty's most humble
and obedient

M. Edwarda Schnitzer, Prioress,
M. Theresia Burkhard and
M. Luitgardis Frankenberger,
Assistants, and the whole Convent²⁵

St. Walburg in Eichstätt
Oct. 27, 1852

RIEPP TO VON REISACH²⁶

St. Marys in
North America
Nov. 27, 1852

Right Reverend Lord Archbishop!

Gracious Lord!

I am still deeply impressed by the fatherly concern Your Excellency showed the Convent of St. Walburg — particularly at the time it had the privilege of having you as father and bishop.

As a novice at the time, I had the great pleasure of personally experiencing your fatherly kindness. Often I had the honor of conversing with Your Excellency: you usually greeted me with the words "Here comes the Swabian" and then you added "They are honest people." I hope that was also true of me and that it still is — in a childlike way. For me the many salutary admonitions and instructions which Your Excellency gave us all are unforgettable. Daily I call them to mind; I beg the dear Lord that in His great kindness He repay Your Excellency a thousandfold for the good you have done us. Your Excellency perhaps has heard that St. Walburg Convent also has taken some part in foreign missionary work and has sent, at the request of the Reverend Father Superior Boniface Wimmer, several of its members to Marystown, Elk County, Pennsylvania, in America, to perform a two-fold mission, namely to instruct young

²⁵ Mathäser, *Studien*, 43:163–164.

²⁶ Mother Benedicta Riepp addressed some of her letters directly to the Archbishop of Munich-Freising, Karl August von Reisach (1846–1855). She knew him personally since he had been Bishop of Eichstätt, 1836–46, before going to Munich-Freising. This letter written in 1852 is the first of Mother Benedicta's letters found in the Baraga Collection. Since the Archbishop was the President of the Council of the Ludwig-Missionsverein, he could direct some of the money of the Verein to her convent in St. Marys.

girls, and to spread the Benedictine Order in this part of the world. Among the fortunate ones chosen for this mission I find myself, though unworthy of this great grace. However, in spite of my unworthiness and weakness, I am encouraged by the thought that God often calls the weak to do His work so that His Majesty and greatness will all the more shine forth.

On June 11, accompanied by some of my fellow sisters, we departed for St. Marys where we arrived safely and in good health on the 24th of July. Here, however, we had to cope with difficulties which were unknown in our Eichstätt convent. But God has called us and if we faithfully obey His call, strength and fortitude will surely be given to overcome all obstacles and to compensate for all that we left for His sake.

Our first and greatest necessity is a small convent so that we may the better observe our holy Rule and the enclosure, and at the same time have a place to receive those young women who feel themselves called to the religious life. We have at present, it is true, a small building, hardly large enough for us sisters. We cannot speak of an enclosure which for us is the most important thing, and as far as the admittance of lay people is concerned, we cannot do anything since as soon as one steps over the threshold of the doorway, one is already in the center of the house. To erect a building answering our greatest needs we require immediately a sum of \$2,500. I can hardly hope to get the whole amount from St. Walburg Convent since it has already had to carry a burden of expenses. For that reason, I humbly ask Your Excellency whether perhaps the Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein would kindly allot some money to us. In fact, I have already corresponded with the Reverend Court Chaplain Mueller about this urgent matter.²⁷

To this my first petition there is now added a second which is more pressing even than the first. This past summer this parish started building a new church because the old one burned down about two years ago.²⁸ During this time services have been held in a room which formerly served as a school. The building has progressed so far that the window frames have been set in but no further building can take place because the money for the same is wanting, and the parish is so drained of money that it cannot make any contributions at all — or any worthwhile contributions. The Reverend Father Prior, a Benedictine from St. Vincent's Abbey, who

²⁷ This letter is not extant.

²⁸ The church and rectory had been destroyed by fire, May 10, 1850.

is here as pastor of the parish, is distressed over the poor parish and when he told me of the hardships I was determined to inform Your Excellency.

This parish deserves to be praised in the face of its handicaps. The parishioners assist at the divine services with the greatest fervor, overcoming all difficulties — bad roads and inclement weather — in spite of the fact that the greater number live many miles from church. With great pleasure and sacrifice they have undertaken the work. Some have given money, others have contributed their labor in order to have a church in which divine services can be worthily celebrated; and now because of lack of money, the building cannot be completed — or must be postponed indefinitely. I wish, therefore, humbly to ask whether a small contribution could be given for this building: yes, I wish, if it has to be, that my second petition be given preference to the first, because if the parish is without a church, so are we, since our new convent is to be joined to the church. The worthy Ludwig-Missionsverein sends contributions to all parts of the Catholic world; may we not also receive a small contribution?

It is the great poverty and difficulty that give me the courage to be bold enough to burden Your Excellency with my petition. I feel relieved already when I know that your generous fatherly heart beats compassionately not only for those of your own sheepfold but also for all souls in the entire fold of Jesus Christ. We will always be grateful to Your Excellency and we will beg the loving God daily for your welfare and in particular, this parish will consider Your Excellency as its first and greatest benefactor and will place your name first on the list of its benefactors. The entire parish, mostly Bavarians, number about 300 families, all very poor but thoroughly Catholic, who settled here because of the Catholic priests who are here.

The length of the new church is 110 feet, its width is 60 feet, and its height, when completed, 32 feet.²⁹ A carpenter here has volunteered without remuneration to make the frames for the Way of the Cross — exclusive, of course, of the pictures. There are generous hearts in Bavaria, I am sure, especially among the women of Munich, who would be happy to donate these stations. Unfortunately, I do not know them, so I humbly ask Your Excellency to

²⁹ As can be seen, there is some discrepancy between Wimmer's and Benedicta's measurements of the church. See the Oct. 8, 1852, letter by Wimmer.

intercede for us in this respect. The size of the stations will be in proportion to the size of the church.

May Your Excellency forgive me for being so free in asking so much from you. In Eichstätt I could always speak freely with Your Excellency, so I thought I could do likewise here.

Both of my fellow sisters express their deepest respect for Your Excellency. They pray daily for Your welfare and all three of us beg for Your blessing and for your continued benevolence and good will towards us; I remain in deepest respect and esteem,

Your most obedient servant,

M. Benedicta Riepp, Sup. O.S.B.³⁰

May I add my address:
Miss Benedicta Riepp
via Liverpool
pr. Steamer

in St. Marystown
Benziger Post Office
Elk Co., Pa.
North America

RIEPP TO LUDWIG

St. Marys, Elk
Co., Pa.
Jan. 8, 1853

Most Illustrious King!

High and Mighty King and Lord!

It has pleased Your Majesty graciously to bequeath us the very generous sum of 8000 fl. (eight thousand gulden) for the construction of a new convent in St. Marystown in North America. The obedient undersigned has already received the very honorable Cabinet-Documents through the Most Reverend Father Boniface Wimmer, at which time he remarked that 4000 fl. were already in his hands. How wonderfully the loving God helps even those who, themselves, contribute but a little to His work. Since our arrival here, I have always been in the greatest dilemma to know from where we should draw the necessary funds to build the convent; and now Your Kingly Majesty has been designated by the great Lord God as promoter and founder of the first monastery of Benedictine women in America. May it please Your Kingly Majesty graciously to accept our humble thanks for this noble gift. Daily our prayers and those of our successors will rise to the throne of the Most High for the welfare of Your Sovereign Majesty. Every Wednesday, for as long as the con-

³⁰ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/3.

vent remains in existence, a Holy Mass will be offered by all of us for this intention; and the 25th of August³¹ will always be the annual thanksgiving day in memory of the royal donor. Certainly, in time it will be possible to do much also for Christian religious education by this convent; that I hope to do with the grace of God. It was very important for this parish to receive teachers for their daughters — the mothers acknowledge this, especially those who thought their daughters were being spoiled by a male teacher. In all, 60–80 girls can now attend our school. They attend very irregularly; the long way to school, mostly through the woods, and the great poverty may contribute to this. I am often moved to pity for the dear little ones when I see them coming, half dressed and almost numb from the cold, and then have nothing to eat the whole day except a piece of black bread. Because of the poverty of this parish, our income is also very small; we obtain only a part of the amount designated for our school by the state; but because of this the dear God will care for us so much more.

My plans perhaps are somewhat far-reaching for this time. I hope after a time to be able to buy a few acres of land so that, in a physical way, we can give some help to our good Bavarian people (the parish consists mostly of Bavarians). That is my desire. But years will pass before our gloomy, terrible region will be made somewhat brighter, and it will cost much perspiration, since at present, as far as the eye can see, there is only terrible woodland; between the trees here and there a small piece of land is cleared. Little has been done for our present location, but for us, poor sisters, it is, in spite of this, a paradise, because we find ourselves happy and peaceful in our vocation.

May Your Royal Majesty graciously accept this letter, in which I venture humbly to beg for further kindness and grace. In this comforting hope, I remain in deepest respect,

Your Gracious Majesty's most obedient servant,

M. Benedicta Riepp, Sup. of the Bavarian Benedictine Sisters in North America³²

As was his custom, King Ludwig sent the money destined for the needs of the sisters to Father Wimmer. At this time 8000

³¹ Feast of St. Ludwig.

³² Geheimes Hausarchiv, Munich, original; S.B.C.A., copy; see also Mathäser, *Studien*, 43:164–165.

gulden had been sent for the sisters but the money was used by Wimmer for another purpose. He explains his action as follows:

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

July 4, 1853

[After speaking of buildings planned, etc., Wimmer continues:]

. . . I could not have undertaken these two buildings³³ if Your Kingly Majesty had not most kindly directed that for the furnishing and building of a convent for the Benedictine Sisters in St. Marys, 8000 fl. should be stipulated. The building of the convent could, however, not be undertaken at once, since no preparations for the same had been made, and furthermore could not be made since the entire colony was busy with the building of the church which had already been started and could not be interrupted. The sisters were prepared to lend me the money, since they were not in a position to use it at once, with the condition that I care for the buying and the obtaining of the immediately necessary arrangements, and then, if time allowed, use the remaining money for building a convent. Meanwhile, they live in a frame building, which the company built originally for the School Sisters of Notre Dame who were here in St. Marys at the time of Baron v. Schrotters,³⁴ but who later left when the Redemptorists left. The company allowed me to take this building when I accepted the colony. Since then the lower story has been used as a church while the upper story and the nearby buildings are used for living quarters and school by the sisters. When the furnishings for this building were obtained, care was taken so that the sisters could use them again in the new convent. For the erection of the convent, the necessary preparation should be made in late autumn and winter in order that the actual building can be undertaken in earnest in early spring. There is no clay near St. Marys from which bricks can be made; we have, for building purposes, only field stone; also there is no good sand, but there is lime; and there is an abundance of beautiful wood for building.

The sisters' convent will be in the center of a small, well laid-out city and will be attached to the new church which will be 115 ft. long and 60 ft. wide. It will take all summer for my masons, carpenters and cabinet builders to complete the building. But then the sisters will have a convent and I will have earned for my work about 1000 fl., which otherwise I would have had to do for nothing; the poor

³³ He was building two mills at the time, one in St. Marys, and one run by steam at St. Vincent Priory.

³⁴ Land agent or leader of colonizing company.

parish, which gave its utmost for the building of the church, could not have built a convent — since it was I who brought the sisters over, that depended on me. Your Kingly Majesty, therefore, greatly helped not only the good sisters but also myself and mine by your generous gift and I do not fear that I acted contrary to Your Kingly Majesty's intention, when I, without harm to the ones concerned and with their full consent, acted as I here describe. The sisters could not have erected a convent and also paid wages with the generous donation in a land where the manual laborer, besides his board, daily gets \$1.00 (2 fl. 30 kr.) and the driver likewise gets \$1.00 per day for each horse; they could not have erected a convent with the necessary room for a motherhouse, for a school building for the girls of the colony, and for a formation institute, but because I do not have to pay wages, the thousands (of fl.) which remain for the furnishings of the convent are a real gift also for us, for which, I, in the name of all my brothers, express to Your Kingly Majesty our warmest gratitude.

Two choir sisters and one lay sister came from Eichstätt to St. Marys; since then they have already accepted twelve candidates, of whom eleven are American-born, and one came from Bavaria. In St. Walburg, they are not very happy that the superior on my advice has opened a novitiate because there they are of the opinion that the convent is to be considered a daughterhouse and is to be governed from there. . . . Even in spite of the danger that the motherhouse might withdraw help, I insisted on the erection of an independent novitiate and on the affirmation of self-government so that we here could answer the crying need for religious instruction of the young girls as early as possible and in the widest possible sphere of activity. I hope Eichstätt will honor the reasons I have proposed. Since the convent receives only \$200 from the school tax (a tax which here has to be paid by every person, married or unmarried, lay or clergy) which is about 500 fl. — the burden of supporting so many people again falls on me. It is for this reason that I build the mills, clear the land with my brothers, so that our many and ever increasing numbers may labor for God and His holy Church, for right and order in the state, and to gain followers; in this I allow myself to be led by trust in God. . . .

Your Royal Majesty's
most obedient and devoted

Fr. Boniface Wimmer, Superior
of the Bavarian Benedictine Mission³⁵

³⁵ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 48–50; see also Mathäser, *Studien*, 43:166.

[Lord Abbot,]

. . . the Superior, M. Benedicta, is a very wise and pious woman, energetic, and yet pleasant and helpful toward her subjects.³⁶ The children in the school as well as the candidates (for the Order) in the house are attached to her with deep affection. . . .

Boniface

In the same letter of July 6, 1853, Father Wimmer wrote:

"To the sisters of Eichstätt I expressed my opinion unreservedly: the sisters in Eichstätt are fools if they expect to understand better what is needed in America than I do here in the place and on the spot."

Classes had opened in St. Marys in the fall of 1852 with Mother Benedicta teaching the elementary subjects in German. A lay woman taught the English classes and a man taught the boys. Most of the pupils were German; Irish children began to attend the school after a railroad had been built to St. Marys. In all there were between 60 and 70 children. Mother Walburga Dietrich taught needlework to the girls.

With Bishop George von Oettl's permission, four additional sisters were sent to St. Marys in 1853, one of whom was Mother Scholastica Burkhardt, who became novice mistress in St. Joseph Convent, St. Marys. Later she was superior of the convent in Erie. She volunteered for the mission to Minnesota in 1857 but was detained in Erie by Bishop Josue Young. For a number of years she was a friend of Wimmer and as such was the recipient of many of his letters, some of which are quoted in this study.

SCHNITZER TO LUDWIG-MISSIONSVEREIN

Eichstätt

October 28, 1853

Esteemed Central Directory
of the
Ludwig-Missionsverein

³⁶ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 60, n. 7. Mathäser adds the note: "Of this, the newly appointed Bishop of Erie could convince himself when he spent July 12-16, 1854, in St. Marys"; see also letter by Wimmer to Archbishop Karl August von Reisach, August 7, 1854, pp. 37-38.

Trusting in the special kindness and graciousness with which the revered directors of the Ludwig-Missionsverein have in the past year granted the necessary money for traveling expenses for several of my sisters so that they could go to their new assignment, the founding of a daughter convent in St. Marys, I, at this time, again venture to ask most humbly for the same help for some other members of my convent who will soon depart for St. Marys to help the sisters there who are burdened with work.

His Grace, the Most Reverend Bishop, has already granted his consent and permission for the departure. The same is enclosed here.

The new sisters appointed by me for St. Marys from our convent are the following:

M. Scholastica Burkhardt, choir sister
 Alexia Lechner, lay sister
 Lidwina Uhl, lay sister
 Barbara Kögel, candidate

I presume to ask the Reverend Central Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein for money to defray the traveling expenses for these four new missionaries to St. Marys. Following are my reasons:

1. The limited means of our Convent of St. Walburg do not permit me to make such a considerable outlay on our own, and indeed the less so, since there are always increasingly more demands on the convent from many sides; and with the rising prices of food, I can meet the current expenses only with great difficulty.

2. The daughterhouse in St. Marys, like all daughters, often asks for more support from the motherhouse and, even though I am advised to be saving, I cannot be so hardhearted and unkind as to completely disregard these requests.

3. The four sisters going to America have in general brought very little from home and this little was used for their novitiate training or it must now be used for procuring further requirements for the journey. It is barely enough for that.

4. There is a lack of prepared teaching personnel in the motherhouse caused by the departure of trained teachers. This lack I must try to fill by the acceptance of new members and the preparation of qualified subjects. For this also the motherhouse must make new expenses.

These are the most important reasons which compel me to ask the revered directors of the Ludwig-Missionsverein for the necessary money for traveling expenses to America for the four sisters. May these reasons be given the appropriate consideration, and may the

revered Central Directory in consideration of the same, graciously grant a hearing to my humble petition. May the thousandfold blessing under which the zealous young women work for the salvation of souls in the New World, and the many fruits which they hope to reap with God's help, be the expression of deep gratitude to and the granting of God's rich reward for all our members but especially also for the directors of the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

Humbly repeating my petition and hopefully awaiting a gracious hearing, I remain respectfully,

The Revered Central Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein's
Most obedient,

M. Edwarda Schnitzer, Prioress
of the Convent of St. Walburg³⁷

Eichstätt,
October 28, 1853

VON OETTL³⁸ TO LUDWIG-MISSIONSVEREIN

October 29, 1853

The undersigned acknowledges herewith that he has granted to the choir and lay sisters of the Convent of St. Walburg in Eichstätt:

M. Scholastica Burkhardt, choir sister

Alexia Lechner, lay sister

Lidwina Uhl, lay sister, and

Barbara Kögel, candidate, upon their request, the permission to leave the Convent of St. Walburg in order to go to St. Marys in North America, to the newly erected daughter convent. I cannot but recommend these pious, and in every respect, highly commendable sisters to the benevolence of the revered Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

Eichstätt, October 29, 1853

†George, Bishop³⁹

After one year in America Mother Benedicta was still enthusiastic about her new home and work. Her description of the colony of St. Marys is much like an earlier description by Father Wimmer.⁴⁰

³⁷ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/5a.

³⁸ George von Oettl, bishop of Eichstätt.

³⁹ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/5b.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, his letter to friends in Munich, Dec. 28, 1847, one year after he arrived in America, pp. 9–10.

RIEPP TO LUDWIG-MISSIONSVEREIN

St. Marys

Dec. 15, 1853

Very Honorable Ludwig-Missionsverein

Accept my most humble thanks for the gift of 1000 fl. which I received in October 1853 through the Reverend Court Chaplain Mueller. I will take this occasion to enclose a receipt and add a brief report on this locality, on the origin of our little colony as well as on our own work and activities here in St. Marys. Eleven years ago the region here was a fearful primeval forest in which only wild animals lived. Only now and then brave hunters well armed and equipped with compass dared to penetrate these inhospitable regions; Indians also came to hunt annually. No one would have thought at that time that this would ever be an inhabited place and the center of the Catholics of northern Pennsylvania. A group of Germans decided to settle here. However, cut off from the civilized world and suffering from want and in need of the most necessary things, they lost courage and were already on the point of leaving the region to seek a better livelihood. It was just at this time that, by a special act of Divine Providence, the poor settlers were encouraged by the arrival of the Reverend Redemptorists who took over the care of their souls. Many German Catholics in the large cities of Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore felt themselves drawn by the idea of living in a completely Catholic colony in order to be able to give their children a Catholic education, and left the lawlessness of the large cities and devoted themselves to hard agricultural work. Many German settlers, especially Bavarians, joined this settlement. In Germany it is not possible to understand perfectly the hardships such a new settlement entails. The local forests consist of huge fir trees which have never been touched by an ax; pine, birch, chestnut and wild cherry trees abound. To clear these forests one must first fell the large trees, cut them into smaller logs, roll them together and burn them. One can describe this easily, but it costs much effort and time actually to do it. As a result of the persevering diligence of the Germans, a flourishing colony was established which already can supply oats and potatoes for distant places. In 1849 the colony was on the verge of breaking up when the Redemptorist Fathers left and the colonists found themselves deprived of all spiritual consolation. However, Divine Providence wisely protected the colony, which had also been placed under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Most Reverend Bishop M. O'Connor not only sent a priest to the parish, but he also took measures to establish a monas-

tery of the Order of St. Benedict. On December 23, 1849, the first Benedictine, Father Benedict Haindl from St. Vincent, arrived here in St. Marys. In 14 days he was followed by a second one who, however, could take over the parish for an indefinite time only because the Order was still too small to start a new monastery. Just as everything good must be opposed everywhere, so it is here too. Parties and divisions have arisen among the colonists which have caused some difficulty for the Catholic cause and it called for wisdom and charity on the part of the priests to win the understanding of both parties. Everything was again brought well into order by the time the Reverend Benedictines were recalled to their motherhouse [St. Vincent] and the Reverend Schafleitner, a zealous priest, came to take their place. Even though his zeal was self-sacrificing, he found it impossible, without help, to care properly for the souls of St. Marys and the surrounding districts. No sooner was the colony of St. Marys founded than Catholics grouped themselves around the colony stretching to a distance of from 15 to 30 miles. These were also to be cared for from St. Marys. In a short time three such parishes have been formed from St. Marys. One can notice everywhere the spread of the Catholic religion especially in places to which zealous missionaries come and admonish weak and partly fallen-away Catholics to adhere to their old faith. They also instruct the youth in the most important articles of faith. Ignorance of the teachings of the faith is very great in America. Then, also, there was a time about 10 or 15 years ago when cases of apostasy were very numerous. It is, however, encouraging to see that many of these unfortunate ones were won over again by the love and encouragement of the priests and they now practice the faith even more zealously. The zeal of the Catholics of St. Marys at the building of the new church must especially be emphasized. In Europe the priest would press in vain for such Catholic sacrifices, which, however, the American brings willingly. A witness to this was given by our parish. They began the building of a new church in the year 1852 — a building 127 feet long and 60 feet wide, of broken stones and decorated with a tower, 70 feet high. All costs were carried by a small group of pious Catholics; these are the ones the parish must thank. In December the church was dedicated to the service of the Almighty but, of course, not decorated as are those in Germany. The walls, inside and outside, are not yet plastered; there are no pews, nor pulpit, no Communion railing, nor baptismal font; neither pictures nor wood carvings decorate the same; only a simple altar with

a tabernacle shows that the church is a Catholic one. This our Catholics have done partly by manual work, partly through money contributions. The church is an ornament in the new colony of St. Marys, which is now quite well populated. In comparison with Germany, however, the place resembles a wilderness. One can aptly apply here the German expression: "The world here is hemmed in by trees" — insofar as the enormous forests surround the whole colony — with only three roads leading to more open and more cultivated regions. The forests are almost all pine trees, five to six feet in diameter, and when they are cut down and the soil is cultivated, the hundreds and thousands of stumps stand in freshness of life as though they meant to remain masters of the place for many more years.

Now I will permit myself to add something about our convent and our work in America. One year and six months have passed since we three sisters left our motherhouse, St. Walburg in Eichstätt, to devote our lives and work to the instruction and formation of young girls in America under the direction of the Reverend Father Boniface Wimmer, superior of the Benedictines in North America, who placed us in the colony of St. Marys, a completely German and Catholic parish, and so gave us the opportunity to work first among our compatriots. Although we live in a small house, mostly made of rough logs fastened together and covered with boards, our manner of life soon drew the attention of all, even of the unbelievers; a life style like ours, completely devoted to God's service and the welfare of others, cannot be wondered at enough, especially by unbelievers. Among Catholics, our simple life unknown to the world aroused great attention and many women soon expressed a desire for such a life and, willing to renounce all worldly pleasures, begged to be received into our holy Order without regard to our evident poverty and the lowliness of our house. After many trials and often even with great sacrifices and their own complete self-surrender, twelve young women have been accepted into the convent; twelve have already received the holy habit and four others will receive it in a short time. Many of these young women are native Americans and speak German and English. Both languages are indispensable in America; without them no institute in America can accomplish its purpose. It is, therefore, of great importance for us to accept girls for our Order who are thoroughly conversant in both languages. May the dear God permit it that soon we can move into a more spacious convent so that we will be able to accept more candi-

dates into our Order and more pupils into our institute. The limited space of our house did not, until now, permit us to accept more than ten to twelve pupils. The pupils entrusted to our care at present are, with a few exceptions, all orphans, who already found themselves in danger of losing the light of the true faith and of falling into the arms of unbelief. The danger of falling away from the faith is a threat in this country, especially for young women who, being the weaker sex, are easily led astray by the flattery of the Americans. Our greatest sphere of action, at present, is in the elementary school, which is attended by about 80 girls, all of them from the parish. I cannot omit here the observation that two atheistic families send their children to our school. And since these children hear the instruction given the rest of the children, I was surprised to notice that one of them even answered well and correctly more difficult questions from our Catechism which she learned just by hearing since she does not know the German language enough in order to learn the answers from the catechism. Even if there is no hope that these girls, so long as they are under the misguided influence of their parents, can be won for the Catholic religion, it is not to be doubted that they, when they have reached the years of discretion and are no longer under this influence, will accept the faith when a beam of the true light enlightens them and they recall the teachings of the true faith which they have unconsciously assimilated. Moreover, the Americans (especially those who do not profess any religion, and do not have the prejudices of non-Catholics) look with approval on the growth of orders of women, because in the vicinity of every convent there arises a school for the higher education of young women. These arouse the special good will of Americans. May the dear God allow it that these institutes for women may instruct their students how to open the way to the true faith to unbelievers. I pray in a particular way that the loving God will bless our Order and our work with rich grace because I believe through this we can best express our gratitude for the charity which we have received from the highly esteemed Ludwig-Missionsverein.

The money received was used to furnish our house and Institute. A piano, books, maps, etc., and some furniture which was necessary for furnishing the house were bought. Should we have the good fortune to receive some more support from the esteemed Ludwig-Missionsverein, I will certainly see to it that the entire sum will be spent only for the good of the convent and the Institute. We will certainly pray daily for our respected benefactors.

Again expressing my deepest gratitude, and most humbly begging

for continued help and good will, I remain most humbly in deepest reverence and respect,

[Your] grateful and obedient servant,

M. Benedicta Riepp, Superior in
North America⁴¹

In 1853 the Diocese of Pittsburgh was divided. A new diocese was formed in western Pennsylvania with the city of Erie as the center and See city. This placed St. Marys into the Diocese of Erie with the Right Reverend Josue Young as bishop.

Bishop Josue Young was in St. Marys on July 12, 1854, for visitation and Confirmation. At this time he visited the Benedictine Sisters of St. Joseph Convent. Wimmer's letters of July and August speak of this occasion, and of the Bishop's appreciation of the work of the sisters. The Bishop indicated to Wimmer his desire for having the Benedictine Sisters in his diocese.

It was at the time of this visit that Bishop Young also asked Mother Benedicta to send sisters to open a school in Erie. Two years later, on June 21, 1856, she complied with this request by sending four sisters to Erie, apparently without Wimmer's express permission. Erie was the first Benedictine daughterhouse in America. The sisters whom she took to Erie were Scholastica Burkhardt, Luitgarda Butsch, Anselma Schoenhofer, and Ruperta Albert. Scholastica had been the novice mistress in St. Marys and was shortly after this appointed superior of the Erie convent by Wimmer.

WIMMER TO VON REISACH

Aug. 7, 1854

[Your Lordship:]

The bishop of the new diocese of Erie on Lake Erie, Josue Young, a convert, was in St. Marys from July 12 to 16 inclusive for visitation and Confirmation. He "boarded" with the sisters and "roomed" with the brothers. The Lady Superior did her utmost to show him hospitality and to entertain him. Brother Armand Krammer (from Linz) had written a charming song for his reception; Brother Leonhard Mayer (from Würtemberg) set it to music and the novices — Benedicta Burkert (*sic*), Bonifacia Cassidy, Josepha Barkle, Luit-

⁴¹ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/6.

garde Butz (*sic*), Bernarda Weidenberner and Hildegard Renner — presented it very successfully in the refectory. He accepted it all very graciously, although he is neither a musician nor a lover of music. In the evening, twelve of my students serenaded him with a wind instrument band which pleased him so much that he himself finally asked to have a Yankee Doodler (*sic*) played, which he thought was very beautiful. He also accompanied me and two other priests on a two-hour ride through the settlement, to see all the marvels of St. Marys. On the 15th the sisters held an exhibit, at which he awarded the prizes to the girls and addressed them very fittingly and convincingly in English and German. He is a very amiable and pious man, perhaps 50 years old, very tall and strong, and, for an American, is without prejudice toward Germans. . . . He would like to have our Benedictine sisters also in Erie because he was very pleased with their achievements, especially in the arts and crafts. . . .

[With respect and esteem,
Your humble servant,
Boniface Wimmer]⁴²

On January 7, 1855, Mother Benedicta wrote two letters to Archbishop Karl August of Munich. The first was a personal letter containing New Year's wishes, etc.; the other was of a more businesslike character, and was sent either by the Bishop or by Mother Benedicta herself to the *Annalen* to be published.

RIEPP TO VON REISACH

North America, St. Marystown
Jan. 7, 1855

Most Worthy Lord Archbishop!

Most Gracious Lord!

Kindly permit me, Your Lordship, to take advantage of the departure (for Bavaria) of the Reverend Boniface Wimmer, Superior, to thank Your Excellency for the many favors which have so often come to me through you, and also to extend to you my best wishes for a happy New Year.

May Your Excellency live to see many more New Years and enjoy good health and success under the protection of the Most High, so that you may continue to accomplish much good in the Lord's vineyard. I also pray that our Blessed Savior, who found Your Excel-

⁴² Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 60, n. 7.

lency worthy to be His representative, will give you the strength and fortitude to overcome all difficulties and obstacles, which are so many in such an important and holy office. After having happily overcome obstacles, and all suffering is ended, may you and all your flock be called to His Right Hand. Surely then your sacrifices and heroic efforts will be richly rewarded. Our prayers will rise daily in your behalf to the Most High to ask Him to reward you for the many favors Your Excellency has conferred on us in the past. On our side we can do nothing, but I am convinced that it will be pleasing and agreeable to Your Excellency that we pray daily for the welfare of our gracious benefactors.

To these best wishes and promises I wish most humbly to add the petition that you will continue your kindness and good will towards us, especially by supporting our petition for help from the Ludwig-Missionsverein. We will endeavor to continue by our zealous work in the mission field in accord with the wishes and expectations of our highly respected benefactor. Two years have passed during which we here in America gave our time to the education and instruction of youth. Our German compatriots are very satisfied and happy that their daughters are receiving this instruction and education from religious women, and in spite of the fact that there are public schools nearby, they send their daughters a distance of five or six miles to us. From all sides the little ones come to school in groups from the woods in the winter time, poorly clad and half frozen, carrying their breakfast and lunch in little paper bags.

Since it is the Rev. Boniface Wimmer's aim to spread the Order of St. Benedict here, I did not hesitate to accept novices at once to acquaint them with the Holy Rule. The school grew quickly; at present we have twenty-one novices, of whom eleven have already made simple vows for one year. There are also seven candidates. Many of them are Americans, the others are German, but with the exception of a few, all speak both English and German. St. Marys is a very suitable place for a novitiate because it is so secluded and remote from the noisy bustle of life in the city. Although the American moneyseeker looks with scorn and disdain upon St. Marys, because here he does not find what he is looking for, that is money, but only poverty and simplicity, it is not the least of the settlements since almost all are Catholic. Your Excellency will not, therefore, disdain it when I, as a token of my respect and gratitude, send you, through the courtesy of Rev. Boniface Wimmer, a photograph of St. Marys. May the Reverend Superior arrive safely in Germany and soon deliver to Your Excellency both the photo and the letter.

Repeating again my best wishes and my petition, I humbly beg Your Excellency's blessing for myself and my dear fellow sisters, who all promise obedience to Your Excellency, I remain in sincerest sentiments of respect and esteem,

Your obedient and most grateful servant,

M. Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B.⁴³

The *Directory of the Catholic Church in the United States* informed King Ludwig of the increase in numbers of Benedictines. By 1855, there were about 40 sisters belonging to the St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys.

The letter which refers to the *Directory* follows:

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

Feb. 19, 1855

Gracious King and Lord!

. . . I, therefore, take the freedom again respectfully to send to Your Kingly Majesty the *Directory of the Catholic Church in the United States* — "the Catholic Almanac" — from which Your Majesty will recognize a new and very important growth in the number of priests, laymen and churches, as well as church institutes, in every state.

In like manner I can happily assure Your Majesty that, following the example of all religious groups, the Benedictines have also had good results from their endeavors to move forward both in spiritual and material ways. . . .

Under the headings "Diocese of Pittsburgh" and "Diocese of Erie" Your Majesty will find the statement concerning the general status of our Order. A note is also given on the Benedictine Sisters showing that they have increased in number, which has placed them in a position where they can extend their good work of educating young girls. . . .

Your Royal Majesty's Most obedient and submissive

P. Boniface Wimmer

Superior of the Bavarian Benedictine Mission⁴⁴

The year 1855 brought the third group of sisters from Eichstätt to St. Marys. One of the choir sisters of this group was Mother

⁴³ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/10. See Appendix I for the second letter, p. 213 f.

⁴⁴ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 59–60.

Willibalda Scherbauer, music teacher, and later foundress and superior, 1857–68, of the Minnesota Benedictines in St. Cloud and St. Joseph, Minnesota. As such, and because she was a co-worker with Mother Benedicta, her letters will also find place in this study. The following quotation describes the journey of the sisters leaving for America.

CHRONICLE

St. Walburg, Eichstätt

In 1855, on November 27, four more sisters of our convent left for America in the company of the Reverend Father Boniface, now Abbot.⁴⁵ A young woman from the Ursuline Convent of Landshut, and a 60-year-old nun from the Ursuline Convent of Gratz in Steuermark — who had already lived 40 years in this convent and was accompanied by her niece — joined our sisters. The first-named young woman went to the Ursulines in Newark; the other two went to St. Louis. The Very Reverend Confessor,⁴⁶ Mother Fridolin and I accompanied them to Kleinfeld. We had to have two vehicles. In the coach were the young lady, Luisa Knapp, and Emmerama Bader, Willibalda Scherbauer, Philomina Spiegel, Catherine Schoenhofer, the young woman from Gratz, Mother Fridolin, and I myself, as companion.

In our own chaise, were the Lord Abbot Boniface Wimmer, the Reverend Confessor, the 60-year-old nun from Gratz and the young lady from Landshut.

On our return trip we had dinner in Ellingen with the Reverend parish priest Zipfel. We came home again at about seven-thirty in the evening.

The young nuns are: M. Willibalda Scherbauer,⁴⁷ music teacher; M. Emmerama Bader for housework; Philomina Spiegel, lay sister, from Eichstätt.

The young ladies:

Aloisia Knapp, candidate, for music and housework

Catherine Schoenhofer, from here — teacher of clarinet.⁴⁸

With the consent of Bishop George von Oetzl this third, and last, group of sisters from the Convent of St. Walburg, Eichstätt,

⁴⁵ Appointed Abbot for three years by the Holy See in September, 1855.

⁴⁶ Francis Anthony Schmid, S.J.

⁴⁷ See Appendix E on Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, pp. 210–211.

⁴⁸ *Chronicle* MS, 9a, S.W.A.A.

came to St. Marys in Pennsylvania in 1855. By this time the motherhouse was aware that Wimmer was working for independence, but in spite of this, Mother Edwarda was willing to send help to the young foundation.

SCHNITZER TO LUDWIG-MISSIONSVEREIN

March 2, 1855

Honored Directory
of the Ludwig-Missionsverein

Petition for help to defray traveling expenses

Following the example of many other superiors of religious orders, I am making my third appeal to the Ludwig-Missionsverein for financial aid. This time I am begging for a donation to help pay the traveling expenses of the third group of sisters of St. Walburg who are destined for our newly founded dependent convent, St. Marys in America. These sisters are:

Willibalda Scherbauer
Emmerama Bader
Philomina Spiegel
Katharina Schoenhofer
Aloisia Knapp

So that we may not appear unreasonable in our plea for help, I make the following statements:

1. Since my last petition for help, the income of our Convent of St. Walburg has diminished rather than increased. In order to meet our current living expenses here, I have been forced to draw on the real estate of the convent. Due to the continued high cost of living and the poverty of so many of our people at the present time, a financial status such as ours is readily understandable for any household — despite conscientious management and frugality. I was, therefore, more than once forced to use, besides the current income from rent, the dowries of the young sisters for the daily expenses.

2. The dependent convent founded in St. Marys still comes to us, as in the past, for support. I cannot close my heart to these, my fellow sisters. I must make some contributions there.

3. That is now again the case, when I must properly furnish clothing and other necessities for the sisters who are now emigrating. Many of these sisters at their entrance brought nothing or but very little to the convent; the burden of the expenses, therefore, falls upon this convent.

4. As in the past, so now, I must again replace the departing sisters by new candidates; at their entrance, I must consider not only the dowries they bring along but also their fitness and ability for religious life. On account of St. Marys, we must again form new members for our convent.

5. The kind directors of the Ludwig-Missionsverein who gave such generous and loving support to the first foundation by sisters of the Order of St. Benedict and until now have continued their gracious support will, I am confident, not deny their love and favor to this new convent. This young foundation, so visibly made with God's blessing, can be considered the work of the Ludwig-Missionsverein and just like a mother does not forsake her child, so the kind Directory cannot forsake this its colony — for that reason I dare to beg with deep confidence.

Furthermore, since individual monasteries of monks of the Order of St. Benedict have always graciously been given support by the Ludwig-Missionsverein, so most certainly the first convent of the sisters of the Order in America will not be looked upon as a step-child and forsaken by the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

I can state two reasons why I dare to hope with certainty that my petition will not fall on deaf ears, namely, the loving concern of the Ludwig-Missionsverein for the formation of German girls by this foundation and its concern also for the difficulties faced by the German settlers.

Finally, this petition is not made in my name nor that of the Convent of St. Walburg, but in the name of the Reverend Mother Benedicta, superior of the convent in St. Marys. Two of my letters to her were lost, so she herself could not make an appeal for help. Taking all this into consideration, the worthy Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein will, I am sure, take an active interest in this, its young foundation.

Our Very Reverend Lord Bishop has given his permission for the undertaking by these sisters and novices, as is shown in the postscript. Begging you again to send me the guarantee of money for the traveling expenses of my sisters who this time will be accompanied by the Reverend Father Boniface Wimmer, I remain with sentiments of respect and reverence,

Your obedient servant,

[The Bishop's approval follows.]

M. Edwarda Schnitzer, Prioress of St. Walburg⁴⁹

⁴⁹ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/12.

That the facts and circumstances in the above petition are founded on perfect truth, and that this request is highly deserving of your kindest regard, is factually stated by this recommendation.

Eichstätt, March 8, 1855

† George, Bishop

There are two letters of Mother Benedicta to Mr. Ignatius Garner, land agent for the landowners, Benziger and Eschbach.⁵⁰ No further information about Garner nor about Dr. Early, who is mentioned, was found.

RIEPP TO GARNER

St. Marys, Pa.

March 15, 1855

To Ignatius Garner

Sir:

Having heard that it was your intention to visit us tomorrow, as confirmed by Dr. Early, I shall feel greatly obliged by your kindness in postponing it to some future period, it being the Doctor's first visit and since Father Prior is not at home. It will, however, afford me great pleasure to see the Doctor at any other time it may suit his convenience. Father Prior will return on Friday or Saturday. Having heard so much of the respectability of Doctor Early, I have no objection to his coming tomorrow, only the absence of Father Prior would make it inconvenient. I feel much your kindness in making us a visit and have full confidence in your generosity that you will not think that I am trespassing too much on your time by asking you to comply with my request. This will be kindly remembered by me.

I can accept \$15.00 if our organ is tuned. I shall accept it as a favor if you are so good as to let me have it.

Remaining yours respectfully,

M. Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B., Sup.⁵¹

The Know Nothing Party was opposed to foreigners, especially those from southern and eastern Europe, many of whom were Catholic and did not speak English. The party was very active during the first half of the nineteenth century. It stood for Native Americanism, and wanted to deny political and religious free-

⁵⁰ Albert G. Brehm, *History of St. Marys Parish* (St. Marys, 1960); see also Baska, *Benedictine Congregation*, p. 16.

⁵¹ S.B.C.A., copy.

dom to the many immigrants who were seeking the freedoms denied them in their mother countries. A political candidate had to be able to show that he descended from at least two generations of American ancestors.⁵² Mother Benedicta met with some difficulties because of the Know Nothing Party.

RIEPP TO VON REISACH

North America, St. Marys
May 20, 1855

Very Reverend Lord Archbishop!

Gracious Lord!

In complete confidence in the great kindness and graciousness, and relying on the generous and charitable heart of Your Excellency, I do not hesitate again humbly to state our need for support from the worthy directors of the Ludwig-Missionsverein. I have already in general placed my petition before them but I wish in particular to beg Your Excellency for support. My petition is so much the more urgent in that now even the small support from the school, which till now was really our only income, has been withdrawn. The cause of this is that I hesitated to have the sisters examined by a member of the Know Nothing Party who has been appointed school superintendent by the state. I could not, at least immediately, permit this, since other religious women have not so far consented to it, and the Reverend Superior [Wimmer] had earlier disregarded it. I wanted first to get the advice of a few bishops, but even this delay greatly offended the gentleman. This is a serious matter, especially here in a free country, that we Catholics, and in particular we sisters, should have to submit to examination by such a man who is a member of an organization considered the worst in the whole world and what is most sad is that this society has the upper hand in this country and many of its members are at the top in all matters of state. The superintendent also has the right to decide on textbooks — and most likely the more dangerous ones will be chosen. In this situation, it is hardly possible for us to remain here any longer unless we get support from the outside or from generous benefactors. Our convent is too young to be divided. The people here do what they can because they fear we might leave them, as did the School Sisters, but they are themselves too poor to give us much financial support; furthermore,

⁵² George M. Stephenson, *A History of American Immigration, 1820–1924* (Chicago: Ginn and Company, 1926), pp. 100 f.

there is a rise here in the cost of living. I trust in God and in the kindness of Your Excellency who has a great influence in the Central Directory. We will remain here as long as we can because we love our little Germans very much and they would grow up without instruction and schooling like the Indians in the forest.

We respect Your Excellency as our greatest benefactor to whom we cannot be grateful enough and we will not let a day pass without praying for your welfare. May I beg Your Excellency to remember us also at the Holy Mass?

In conclusion, we humbly beg Your Excellency's blessing and your continued kindness and good will; I sign myself in deep respect and esteem,

Your Excellency's
Most grateful servant,

M. Benedicta Riepp, Superioress O.S.B.⁵³

RIEPP TO LUDWIG-MISSIONSVEREIN

St. Marys, North America
May 21, 1855

Most Esteemed Directory!

The Esteemed Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein has through its generous support bestowed on us such a great benefit that I feel myself solemnly obliged to express my sincerest gratitude. Since this support will have a great influence on the general well-being of the young convent, God will certainly repay this good gift with His richest blessing. I spent the money⁵⁴ in part for foodstuff, in part for the extension, improvement and furnishing of our house. The building of the new convent could, to date, not be undertaken because this year there prevails especially great need in this country. Living expenses are at their highest and many of the well-to-do in our county are going bankrupt, since they must sell lumber — the only thing here that brings in money — below cost; through this our people in St. Marys also suffer because they lose their wages. Without doubt, our material needs would be better provided for in larger cities, but I feel sorry for the poor children who would grow up like the Indians in the forest as soon as we would leave this place. The School Sisters (of Notre Dame) did leave; and if I did not consider it the special dispensation of God that directed us to this place to erect our first convent, I, too, would prefer to transfer to a city; but for

⁵³ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/17.

⁵⁴ The 1000 fl. received earlier.

the sake of the dear youth we must make a sacrifice. The poor people are not in a position to pay for good teachers out of their own funds, even though they do everything in their power to maintain good schools. At present our schools are subject to state laws so that we do receive some support from the state. According to earlier school laws, this was easily possible since even by state laws religious schools were allowed; but within the last year school laws began to be a danger to our holy religion because every teacher, man or woman, has to submit to a public examination. This is conducted by the county superintendent who could be the greatest enemy of our holy religion, and almost always has to be because Catholics in general are hated. Therefore, a Catholic, yes, even a friend of Catholics, cannot easily be permitted in a public office in the state. This last year the superintendent was a Know Nothing, a member of a society considered one of the worst of the societies existing in America, and known naturally to seek the harm of Catholics and really through lies and deceit has brought it about that our poor parish lost part of the money from the state fund. He also has the right with the school board to choose the textbooks, by which he could have an adverse influence on our schools. Even now it is very unpleasant for us to submit to an examination by a heretic or an unbeliever, and until now I have always refused to submit to it, even though our school board pressed me hard to do so, because I feared prejudice towards our Order; also I had no precedent of religious women in America doing so; neither do I know whether the Bishop here and the Very Reverend Superior [Wimmer], who at present is in Europe, would advise it; if they should advise this, then I can do it without further thought. This refusal of the examination had the result that for the last four months the support of \$100 has been withheld, the loss of which was for us very difficult, since this was practically our only income. We have 90–100 children in school. For instructing these we receive \$250 annually. That is our entire income. Even if we accept pupils, we must take them practically free of charge or at a very low rate of tuition. We now have 12 boarders and of these only three pay board; the others are orphans whom we have to feed and clothe. It is the same when we accept young women for the Order; we may accept four who have no property before we get one who brings a little money to the convent. There is no lack of young women in this country who have a vocation to the religious life, if only they could be given the opportunity. We are now 27 in number and if space and means allowed, we could be twice as many. I do not trust accepting more at present except those

who bring some money. Furthermore, I do not know what will happen to our school. It could easily happen that we no longer receive the \$250, and then we would be entirely dependent on the volunteer donations of good people. However, in all this I will not lose courage but only trust the more in the Providence of God which until now has so kindly directed us; and I continue to trust especially in the charitable support of the very esteemed Central Directory, whom I again in full confidence beg for support for this year. Hoping for this kind help, I have the honor to assure the esteemed Directory, that my gratitude will not diminish. In deepest respect and regard, I am,

Very Esteemed Central Directory,
Your grateful servant,

M. Benedicta Riepp, Superior, O.S.B.⁵⁵

In 1855 Father Boniface Wimmer spent many months in Rome awaiting the decision of Pope Pius IX and of the Sacred Congregation on the question of raising the Priory of St. Vincent to the rank of abbey. Another matter of concern to him was that of having St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys officially declared independent of the Convent of St. Walburg in Eichstätt. He was successful in the first; St. Vincent became an abbey on September 17, 1855. The second problem was not definitely solved at this time. The official Decree of Separation was not published until 1859. In a letter of Mother Edwarda Schnitzer to Mother Scholastica Burkhardt of the Erie convent, dated November 15, 1859, she refers to the separation as being expected, perhaps with the "written agreement of Mother Benedicta in the name of all Benedictine sisters in America."⁵⁶ This letter of agreement has not been located. Mother Benedicta may have given her consent to Wimmer personally. From 1855 on, the Eichstätt motherhouse was no longer asked for help, though Mother Edwarda was willing to send more sisters. It is clear that from 1855 on, changes were made in the religious life of the sisters that indicate a break from the religious life the sisters were accustomed to when they were members of the Eichstätt motherhouse.

⁵⁵ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/16.

⁵⁶ Baska, *Benedictine Congregation*, p. 36; p. 40, n. 38.

The year 1855 was an important one in the unfolding of the history of the Benedictine sisters in America as well as in the pursuance here of the cause of the difficulties between Abbot Boniface Wimmer and Mother Benedicta Riepp. It was in that year that the third and last group of sisters was sent from St. Walburg to St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys. In this group we find Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, whom the Abbot later considered to be, with Mother Benedicta Riepp, the cause of his difficulties with the sisters. As stated above, in 1855 he asked Pius IX to declare St. Marys independent of the Eichstätt motherhouse. It was also the year in which he was appointed abbot for three years by Pope Pius IX, and the year St. Vincent Priory was raised to the status of independent abbey. Ten years later Wimmer was named abbot for life as well as president for life of the American Cassinese Congregation of Benedictines. Wimmer interpreted his position of president of this Congregation as giving him power over all Benedictines, men and women, in the United States.

The problem of Wimmer's jurisdiction over the sisters is not an easy one to solve. Father Willibald Mathäser, O.S.B., gives an explanation which is perhaps the most acceptable. He writes:

The right to govern the Benedictine sisters was really not conceded to Wimmer by Rome. He was, in fact, President of the Benedictines of the Cassinese Congregation, but as such he was not the superior of the sisters. With the confused situation in relation to ruling power in the quickly developing Catholic Church in North America, and because Wimmer had brought the Benedictine sisters from Europe and was financially responsible for them, the Abbot of St. Vincent took it for granted that he was also the superior of the sisters. In the uncertainty of governing rights lay the cause of the difficulties between Wimmer and Riepp in the first place.⁵⁷

Regarding the American Benedictine sisters, Mathäser continues:

The Benedictine Sisters of North America, as demanded by the times and conditions of the country, had to develop in a way which, the longer it took, the more it differed from the Benedictine sisters

⁵⁷ See Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 119, n. 12.

in Europe. They developed a system, not based on the old monastic principle of stability of place but on the congregational or provincial system. As a result, they resembled the regular Third Orders, which did not profess solemn but only simple perpetual vows.⁵⁸

If this is true, then Mother Benedicta Riepp and Mother Willibalda Scherbauer must have seen the change coming but were not in a position to stem it. One after the other of the essentials of the enclosed life they had experienced in Eichstätt had to be relinquished in the mission field of America: enclosure, solitude, quiet and silence, the Divine Office, solemn vows. Abbot Boniface Wimmer took these changes for granted and appealed to Rome to have them approved.

In August 1855, Abbot Wimmer wrote to the Sacred Congregation stating his reasons for desiring the separation of St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys from the Priory in Eichstätt. His letter is supported by Bishop Josue Young of Erie in a letter dated October 1, 1855.

This separation from the European motherhouse would give the abbot more direct jurisdiction over the sisters.

WIMMER TO BARNABO⁵⁹

San Callisto [Rome]

1 August 1855

Most Reverend Excellency!

Recently I presented to the Sacred Congregation documents from the monastery of St. Vincent in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The thirteenth of these indicated that with the consent of the Most Reverend D. Bishop O'Connor I established a convent of Benedictine nuns in St. Marystown. According to the witness of the Most Reverend D. Young, Bishop of Erie, in whose diocese St. Marystown is located, the convent numbered six professed nuns and sixteen novices a year ago.

The convent, indeed, is already independent of the monastery of nuns of St. Walburg in Bavaria, but only *in fact*, not *formally*. It mattered little to the nuns whether or not they were formally separated from their monastery of origin. However, in cases of this kind the American bishops are wont to require that nuns transferred

⁵⁸ Mathäser, *ibid.*, p. 135, n. 4.

⁵⁹ Cardinal Barnabo of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

from Europe to America be independent of their European superiors.

But something other than this requires that this convent of nuns in St. Marystown be acknowledged and declared formally as a convent, independent of the monastery of St. Walburg in Bavaria, namely this: the American sisters asked for their money or dowry which they sought on their entrance brought to the monastery of St. Walburg; they sought it for the new monastery in St. Marystown. But the Prioress at St. Walburg refused to surrender the dowry before the new monastery in America is *formally* recognized as a monastery of nuns, independent of the monastery of St. Walburg.

Since, however, the dowries of these six American nuns are rather large sums of money,⁶⁰ and at the same time very desirable and indeed necessary because of the buildings to be constructed, these nuns asked me to approach the Sacred Congregation and humbly to petition for them the following:⁶¹

That this convent of nuns in St. Marystown, Elk County, Pennsylvania, Diocese of Erie, be recognized as a convent of nuns, independent of its convent of origin, St. Walburg, Diocese of Eichstätt in Bavaria, and that it be declared a Benedictine nuns' Priory in its own right.

The response of the Sacred Congregation should be sent to the Most Reverend D. George de Oetl, Bishop of Eichstätt in Bavaria.

With the profoundest reverence and submission,
Your Reverend Excellency's most humble servant,
P. Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B.⁶²

On August 8, 1855, Cardinal Barnabo, before responding to Abbot Wimmer's petition for the independence of St. Marys and the transference of dowries, asked for the opinion of the bishops of Eichstätt, Pittsburgh, and Erie. Bishop O'Connor's answer indicated that the sisters were no longer in his diocese so he could not give an opinion; the bishop of Eichstätt did not answer but from other documents it can be inferred that he favored the separation; the response of the Bishop of Erie follows.

⁶⁰ Figures given in Appendix M quoting the *Chronicles* of St. Walburg Abbey do not show that the sisters' dowries consisted of a great amount of money.

⁶¹ No letters or documents have been located that indicate the desire of the sisters to be independent of the Eichstätt motherhouse.

⁶² Archives of the University of Notre Dame (Hereafter A.U.N.D.). Fol. 385 rv. Trans. Jerome Theisen, O.S.B. Also S.B.C.A., copy.

YOUNG TO BARNABO

Erie

October 1, 1855

Most Eminent Lord!

Your Eminence directed a request to me dated August 8 of the current year. After a most careful examination of the matter, I am able to report as follows on the state of the monastery of nuns of the Order of St. Benedict located in the city of Marystown in the Diocese of Erie:

This monastery possesses seven plots of sandy land which lie next to the monastery itself; otherwise, it has no property which could support the nuns. From the time of their arrival in America to the present day, the nuns received help from the German Society of the missions located in the Kingdom of Bavaria. Chiefly, however, the nuns are ordinarily supported, and for the future will have to be supported, by the free will offerings of the faithful and by teaching in a school for girls. There is no hope that the nuns can find a sufficient income for the monastery from any other source.

At the present time the religious community of nuns of the Order of Saint Benedict in the city of Marystown numbers thirty-six persons, namely:

1. Professed sisters bound by choir: 13. Novices: 9.
2. Professed ministering or lay sisters: 6. Novices: 3.
3. Postulants admitted to the first probation: 5.

As far as these nuns are concerned, it is truly in no way other than with praise that I can report to Your Eminence about their manner of acting and way of living. Therefore, I give my consent to another request, that of their dowry from the Monastery of St. Walburg in Germany and its transfer here. For it seems to me most equitable that this be done rather soon since the nuns are in extreme need of the money for the establishment and the advancement of their monastery.

Most humble servant of Your Eminence,

Joshua Marie Young

Erie, October 1, 1855

Bishop of Erie⁶³

It will be recalled that on March 2, 1855, Mother Edwarda Schnitzer of St. Walburg Convent, with the permission of the Bishop of Eichstätt, had asked the Ludwig-Missionsverein to pay

⁶³ A.U.N.D., Fol. 431 r. Trans. Jerome Theisen, O.S.B. Also S.B.C.A., copy.

the traveling expenses of the third group of sisters to leave for America. By October 6, 1855, the five sisters were ready to leave.

VON OETTL TO YOUNG

Oct. 6, 1855

George, by divine commiseration and grace of the Apostolic See, Bishop of Eichstätt.

Greetings in the Lord!

When our beloved daughters in Christ, Willibalda Scherbauer and Emmerama Bader, professed, Aloysia Knapp and Catherine Schoenhofer, novices, and Philomina Spiegel, lay sister of the monastery of St. Walburg, made known to us their plan of emigrating to North America in order that there they may be associated with the convent of nuns of St. Benedict in Marytown, lately instituted as an aid for the education of girls, and when they supplicated earnestly that We send them for this purpose, We, granting their petitions, having held a council with the prioress and conventuals of our monastery, and after proper examination of the above-named religious, are sending them in the Lord, nevertheless on these conditions: that they cease not to observe their sacred vows of religion strictly and that they fulfill especially their vow of obedience most religiously to the new superior, which they had vowed to the prioress.

We, therefore, earnestly commend these religious whose excellent fervor for the promotion of the honor of God and the salvation of souls we have acknowledged to the Most Reverend and Illustrious Lord Ordinary of the diocese, to whose jurisdiction they have been transferred, asking that he vouchsafe to receive them as daughters in his paternal heart and cherish them with apostolic charity.

Given at Eichstätt in the kingdom of Bavaria, October 6, 1855.⁶⁴

The Ludwig-Missionsverein stipulated a yearly amount of financial aid to individuals and to institutions of whom the Council of the Verein had approved. In this letter of February 14, 1856, Mother Benedicta expresses her gratitude for 1000 fl. as

⁶⁴ Baska, *Benedictine Congregation*, pp. 31-32, n. 11; see also McDonald, *With Lamps Burning*, p. 13. Perhaps attention should be called to the fact that Bishop von Oettl gave jurisdiction over the sisters to Bishop Young to whose diocese they were being transferred.

she had done for a previous donation in December of 1853. This seems to imply that these two donations by the Verein to the convent in St. Marys were not sent to Wimmer to be used for the convent but were sent directly to the sisters.

RIEPP TO LUDWIG-MISSIONSVEREIN

North America, St. Marys, Elk Co.
Feb. 14, 1856

To the Very Reverend Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein

The recent kindness which was shown to me and at the same time to our whole convent by the gift of 1000 fl. from the Very Esteemed Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein this year obliges me and all my sisters again to express heartfelt gratitude. As a confirmation of our thanks we will, in addition to remembering our benefactors, among whom in the first place we name the Highly Esteemed Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein, in our daily prayers, offer special prayers for the welfare of this blessed Verein and its very honorable members. Since the Directory, at the distribution of the money, takes consideration, in the first place, of the poorer missions, I dare to place myself with this poorer class of beggars, and lay my petition for support for the coming year before the Esteemed Directory. I do not hesitate to say that among all the missions in America there really is no poorer institute than ours. With the cost of living always rising, our small income of \$250 from the school and the few dollars from some paying boarders this last year was not sufficient to cover the needs of the house; furthermore, this rise in costs had the result also that we got fewer pupils who could pay; this year we have little hope for an income from our Institute. We now number 42 in our convent, including the novices. I would not have accepted so many, if I had not realized daily more and more the great need for schools and institutes for girls. So I found it difficult to refuse acceptance into our Order to young women who showed signs of a vocation to the religious life and in whom I also recognized abilities for teaching. Thus, I would also then deny them the opportunity of devoting themselves to a higher calling. Most of our novices have good talents, and a few have very many talents, so I can hope after a short time to be able to do much good for young girls. I also had in mind when accepting them that we should spread out farther as soon as possible. For St. Marys, 10-15 sisters would have been sufficient, considering the condition the colony finds itself in at present. I can assure you that the support coming to us from the Esteemed Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein will be well spent.

There are so many poor girls who are very much in need of instruction, but are too far away to attend the day school. If I had the means, I would like to show them the charity at least of instructing them in the most important religious truths. I hear so often that girls from 15 to 20 years of age, because of want of instruction, are lost to our holy religion. Until now, however, it was not possible for me to show this kindness to these poor young people. I always have to use even the Missionsverein's money for maintenance, and for the most pressing domestic needs in our small Institute and in the convent itself. May the loving God grant that very soon we will be put into a position to support many towards their spiritual and physical well-being through the kind gifts from our benefactors.

I repeat, therefore, my request that the honorable Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein will, in the future also, direct to us this charitable support. It can be helpful to many in attaining their eternal salvation. With the assurance that we will always make the best use of the money received, I sign myself in deepest respect and esteem,

The Very Honorable Central Directory's
most obedient servant,

M. Benedicta Riepp,
Superior of the Benedictine Sisters of
North America⁶⁵

My address:

Miss Benedicta Riepp
in
Marystown
Benziger Post Office
Elk County, Pennsylvania
North America

Mother Benedicta did not find occasion to send sisters to Erie until June, 1856. She did this, it seems, without informing either Bishop Young, or the pastor, Father Francis J. Hartman. At first Abbot Wimmer did not approve of the Erie convent but later he considered it a praiseworthy foundation — “very good and very poor.”⁶⁶ The convent in Erie was the first daughterhouse of the American Benedictine sisters of St. Marys. It is now known as Mount St. Benedict.

⁶⁵ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/18.

⁶⁶ See Baska, *Benedictine Congregation*, Chap. IV.

Mr. Garner:

When in Erie, I purchased a melodeon agreeing with the man to pay for it in 6 months, and I have just heard by letter to my surprise that he demands the money now — immediately, although it is only due in a few weeks. I will be obliged to pay \$10 interest at the expiration of six months if I do not pay now.

As I have not at present the means to meet his demand, I ask as a most particular favor for the sum of \$86, or if not that much, then \$50 will suffice, and I will return it with many thanks the moment I get the money that I expect daily from Germany. A grant of this favor will be a very great accommodation.

Yours respectfully,

M. Benedicta Riepp,
Sup. OSB

P.S. The Mass in Erie is at 10 in the morning; I must send the money with the priest. Will you oblige me by letting me have it before that time? I should like much to see you if you can come.⁶⁷

In 1856, at the request of Bishop Joseph Cretin [1851–57] of St. Paul, Minnesota, Abbot Wimmer sent monks from St. Vincent Abbey to St. Cloud to serve the German Catholic immigrants of the Minnesota Territory. When St. Cloud was later not found satisfactory, the monks moved their monastery to St. Joseph, about 12 miles west of St. Cloud and later to Collegeville, Minnesota. In 1858 the monastery became a Conventual Priory and in 1866 an Abbey, with Father Rupert Seidenbusch from St. Vincent Abbey elected as first abbot. When the monastery was still in St. Cloud, a request came to St. Marys, Pennsylvania, for sisters to come to St. Cloud and to St. Joseph to conduct schools.

⁶⁷ S.B.C.A., copy.

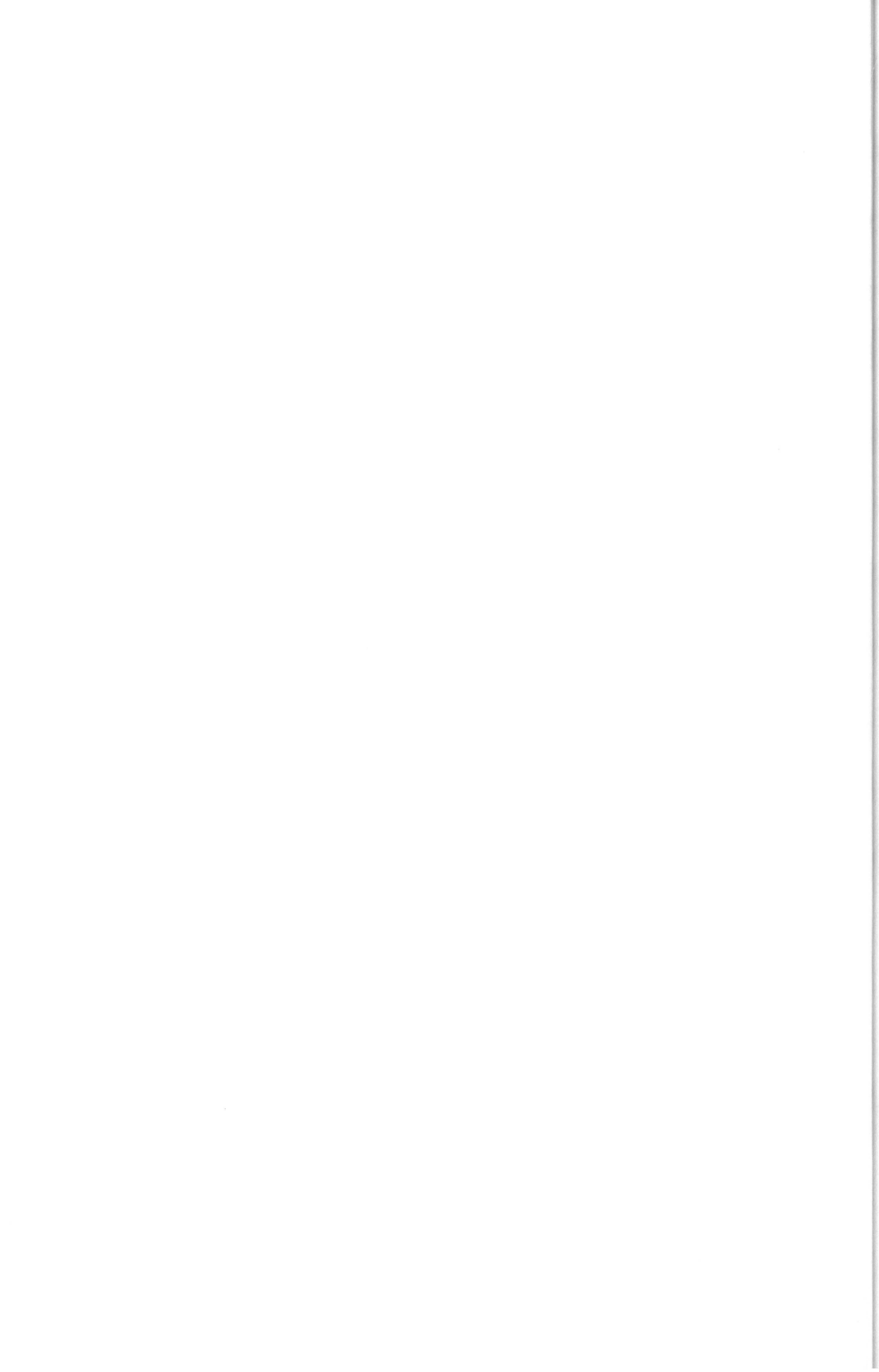
in Jüriem Maria Willibalden! Auf Ihren Namen,
meiner Fräulein Scherbauer ist Mir mit Ihrem Briefe
18^{ten} Aug. m. J. auf die Briefe zu kommen gekommen,
um geliebten Kindern ein und den Mitten von Pils-
Wangungen sein Ich das Ihre Freundschaft danken
müssen, gegen Mir unter dem, das ich Ihnen
Mir übermündete Gastfreundschaft, das ich Ihnen, als der
Kaufschiffen Familien, die ich Ihnen, das zu
den, da ich selbst keine derlei Familien besitze.
Ich ganzem wünsche Ich Ihnen das Beste, das
den Augen das Allmüßigste, das den in Ihnen
Wahrungen, was ich nicht warfen wird.
Mit aufrichtiger Hochachtung ist Ihnen zugewandt.

PART II

1857-1862

Eschen, den 31^{ten} May 1866.

Ludwig I



CHAPTER III

EXPANSION IN MINNESOTA

Two events took place in the history of St. Marys in 1857 which change the direction of this story and also emphasize the growing lack of sympathy and understanding between the principal personalities: Abbot Boniface Wimmer on the one side, and Mother Benedicta Riepp and Mother Willibalda Scherbauer on the other. In the summer of that year, Mother Benedicta — without the consent and knowledge of the Abbot — sent a group of sisters to Minnesota. She herself then sailed to Europe. Both of these actions brought the difficulty between herself and the Abbot into the open.

A petition had come earlier to Abbot Wimmer from the Prior of the Minnesota monastery, asking him to send sisters to St. Cloud to teach in the school which until then had been taught by a layman. The Abbot had responded in the affirmative and had asked for volunteers. He chose a group of sisters (a number of whom were dissatisfied at St. Marys) and took them to Indiana, Pennsylvania, instead of allowing them to go to Minnesota immediately.¹

The letter from the Benedictine Prior Demetrius di Marogna in St. Cloud to Mother Benedicta has not been located. From Mother Benedicta's letter, April 13, 1857, to the Ludwig-Missionsverein, it seems unmistakable that she sent sisters to

¹ Oetgen, *An American Abbot*, p. 154.

Minnesota and assumed that the Prior had discussed the matter with Abbot Wimmer. The sisters whom the Abbot had earlier sent to Indiana, Pennsylvania, to be prepared by Prior Ulric Spoettl for the work in Minnesota were sent to teach in Newark, New Jersey, in July 1857. Mother Benedicta, therefore, wrote to the Minnesota Prior that she herself was sending sisters to St. Cloud.²

DI MAROGNA TO WIMMER

St. Cloud

March 10, 1857

Rt. Reverend Abbot,

A few days ago I wrote to you that things are getting complicated. The contents of this letter are evidence of this. Yesterday men came from St. Cloud and emphatically requested to have sisters take over the school, etc. The parish in St. Joseph, too, is clamoring for sisters since people are dissatisfied with their lay schoolteacher. He wishes to leave if he can sell his [land] claim. You will perhaps shake your head over this plan and will consider it an impracticable idea. If the conditions were not so pressing, you might be right. However, in St. Cloud there are two factions; the one would like to hire a German teacher from Cumberland with whom they are corresponding. He is supposed to be the principal of the public school to be opened here, which at the same time is to be Catholic. Two incompatible ideas! Moreover, this school would be withdrawn from my supervision and direction — a thing to which I could never subscribe. They inveigled Father Cornelius [Wittmann] into these negotiations, cleverly circumvented me, and are capitalizing on his inexperienced youthfulness in order to deceive the people. The other faction wants nothing to do with this public school, and rightly prefers the sisters. Financial considerations may be the bugbear in both factions. That doesn't bother me. Sisters will be the better proposition in any case. If the sisters are promised us, then a few lots will be fenced in for the proper observance of enclosure, and the upper story of the so-called church will be plastered and made habitable. Free labor is promised. We could sacrifice the price of a building lot. The French are also asking when the sisters are coming. In St. Joseph it will, I think, go more easily if we do not let the competition between these two parishes grow cold. I also must let you know that the School Sisters [of Notre Dame] in Milwaukee are

² This letter is not extant. Demetrius di Marogna, however, informed Abbot Wimmer on March 10, 1857, that he had received the letter. See Appendix F on Minnesota, p. 212.

occupied with the idea of expansion and colonization in this part of the country. These could be given the preference, all the more, since they are enjoying a good reputation. Two sisters would suffice for the present. A pious lady in St. Paul is waiting to enter the Order as a lay sister.

Your obedient son,

Demetrius³

RIEPP TO COUNCIL OF LUDWIG-MISSIONSVEREIN

St. Marytown,

Elk Co., Pa.

April 13, 1857

Most Honorable Central Directory!

I have happily received the \$408 for the year 1856 which the honorable Central Directory of the Ludwig-Missionsverein has allotted to our convent as a kind support. I had already given up hope of receiving any money at this time and now it came unexpectedly at a time when I most urgently need it. On Holy Saturday when I received the bill of exchange, I also received a letter from Minnesota written by the Prior of the Benedictines asking for sisters for two stations to which at least six or eight sisters must be sent.⁴ The fare for each sister will be at least \$40 to \$50. We cannot adequately express our gratitude to the Worthy Directory through whom we receive this financial support. All the money, which until now we have received from the Directory, was used to defray the most necessary expenses. (There was also a "Koladicum" purchased.) Our income at St. Marys is too small to cover our support, and so if we did not receive help from other kind hands we would not be able to continue here. Our entire income is still not more than \$25 a month and this for only six months, because the school term may not be longer. We do have 20 pupils this year, but of these only five pay; and of these five, only two pay the entire tuition. The other fifteen of these pupils are orphans we had to accept so that they can be raised as Catholics and will not fall under the influence of those not of our faith. In our community we now number 49, of whom five

³ S.J.A.A.; S.B.C.A., copy. See Appendix G on Demetrius di Marogna, O.S.B., pp. 212-213.

⁴ This letter is not extant. None of the letters sent to Mother Benedicta are extant. If, as is believed, Mother Benedicta died of consumption in 1862, then the statement by Mother Willibalda in a letter written in 1898 that "many important things were burned years ago" in the St. Cloud convent, would help to solve the problem of the missing letters.

sisters were transferred to Erie last summer to teach the German and English classes in the German parish there and where they receive a salary on which they can live very comfortably. Our novitiate is still quite strong, and we have to make do with little, especially so since the land here is not very fertile and most of the inhabitants all around us are poor; by the time the necessities of life are brought from the big cities, they cost a great amount of money. I would gladly comply with the wish of the Honorable Directory and give a longer account of the progress of St. Marys, but the fact is, that as long as I have been here, life has been very monotonous. The colony is and will remain a poor one, unless a special favor from heaven intervenes — either through the building of a railroad or the erection of several iron-smelteries, for which the land itself could furnish the metal. Its only treasures are the monastery for men and the convent for women, both of which lie in the center of the colony and furnish all its attraction and from which our Bavarian settlers get their spiritual and in part their physical help insofar as the two religious houses can contact them; these are very willing to share with their countrymen what they themselves receive in alms from charitable benefactors and organizations. The neighborhood of our colony is made up entirely of Protestants: Methodists, Know Nothing and other sects who pride themselves in belittling and berating our German fellow citizens and whose greatest pleasure would be preventing people from buying land here — and in this they have already succeeded here and there. A few times I was on the verge of losing courage when I considered the want and poverty in which we have often found ourselves; but I always found hope again in the thought that God does not forsake His own; He will also not forsake us; and so it was; as a Father, He always helped us out of our misery. Eternal thanks be to Him! Others have often advised me to move from here into a large city where we could build the best institutions; but the cities already have too many institutions and then, what would become of our dear Bavarians in St. Marys who also have 200 girls to send to school? Besides, I am very happy to have our novitiate in a solidly Catholic settlement from which our Order can spread; this I hope to accomplish very soon with the help of God's grace, the more so as a beginning has already been made. We are convinced that the Worthy Central Directory will not cease to support us with helpful donations so that we may the more quickly reach our goal. There is in this country such a great need to have Catholic schools and Christian houses of formation. This was also made clear to me in the letter from the Prior of the Benedictines

in Minnesota, to whom I referred above, when he said that if I could send no sisters or did not want to, the parishes in St. Joseph and St. Cloud — as the two missions are called — would have to have lay teachers and a public school and this against the wish of the pastor. We will all ask the good God daily to bless the Honorable Ludwig-Missionsverein that it may always continue to expand and accomplish a great deal of good. May the good Lord so direct it that the honorable directors will not forget us and will allow something of their charity to flow to our house.

I well know that I should have presented my petition earlier; it was not out of carelessness or negligence that I did not obey the established regulation of the Central Directory to submit my petition at a set time, but lack of enough courage in that I did not trust myself to ask for money again. Only after I received the bill of exchange did my courage rise again to ask and to beg. I would also gladly have gotten the recommendation and the signature of the Reverend Lord Bishop of Erie, but I feared the petition would then be too late since it takes at least fourteen days for letters to go to and from Erie. If, however, this is necessary, I will not hesitate to secure the same from the Reverend Lord Bishop. He knows how much we are in need of money and for what purpose we spend it — and so does the Reverend Lord Abbot Boniface Wimmer.

Again expressing our gratitude for all that has come to us through the Honorable Central Directory, and begging for continued support, I sign in deepest reverence and esteem,

The Very Honorable Central Directory of the
Ludwig-Missionsverein's most obedient servant,
M. Benedicta Riepp, Superior of the Benedictine
Sisters in North America⁵

The Prior of the monks in St. Marys, Father Rupert Seidenbusch, informed Abbot Wimmer of what he suspected were Mother Benedicta Riepp's preparations for the move of the sister-volunteers to Minnesota.

SEIDENBUSCH TO WIMMER

St. Marys
April 24, 1857

Right Reverend and Respected Father!

Enclosed please find a letter of Mother Walburga Dietrich which

⁵ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/20.

she has written according to my advice, for she said she could not stand it here any longer and I, therefore, told her to write to you.

Mother Superior appears to have changed a little outwardly, but inwardly she is the same. She hides everything very well, so that you cannot get at her, but she has her own plans. She appears to have great confidence in Fr. Aegidius, but she does not trust me, because I am too much on your side. The rule is still not observed very strictly, as far as I can find out, but I only know from the confessional and, therefore, cannot speak. I do not know what is to be done, but I think you cannot change her mind, for she said already she would act this way just because you do not like it. I guess a visitation would not do any harm. She is now, as it appears, trying to win over those who were opposed to her and, I am afraid, trying to spoil them only so as to keep the upper hand.

She wanted to send some sisters to the West, right after Father Demetrius' letter came, so as to act before you; they were already packing their trunks and going away when they were stopped by some person's advice, but not mine, because they would not have told me if they had started; she only told me afterwards that she had received a letter from Father Demetrius and was going to write to you. Some of the sisters whom she wanted to send would not go without your permission, as they have told me. If you would not write approving of the plan, they would plainly say that they would not go without your consent.

Please, therefore, inform me whether I have some right to tell them so or not.

That Mother Superior is acting falsely towards me, there is no doubt and therefore I hate the whole story, but what shall I do? I cannot attack her nor tell her anything, because she does not allow me to look into her cards. Whatever I know, I know in such a way that she would at once see who told me. Please, advise me and give me patience again. I am sorry I always have to trouble you whenever I write, but I think you ought to know. I hope she has written to you whom she intends to send to the West and also that she received \$400 from Munich.

I have come home safely, without broken bones, and with a whole wagon, but I had to make some debts in Indiana for 125 pounds of tallow, which I am afraid I cannot pay soon; if you would have the great kindness to pay for it, as you had already promised us some tallow last winter, you would confer a great favor upon us. Father Erhard started last Tuesday for Bellefonte. The weather up here is real wintry. We had about half a foot of snow this week but it

is changing now. Hoping that you are not offended by these lines, I send you the compliments of all. We are well.

Asking your paternal blessing and recommending us all to your holy prayer and sacrifices, I remain,

With profoundest respect,
Your most obedient son,

P. Rupert, O.S.B.⁶

Abbot Wimmer went to Newark, New Jersey, to open the school for which he had moved the original group of volunteer sisters for Minnesota from Indiana, Pennsylvania, to Newark. Mother Benedicta wrote the following letter asking permission to go to Minnesota and stating the reasons moving her to make this request. There is no letter of Wimmer extant giving Mother Benedicta this permission.

In one of the later letters written by Mother Willibalda Scherbauer to the Abbot explaining her position in Minnesota, she mentions that she, too, had asked permission to go to Minnesota but that the Abbot had not acknowledged her letter.

The letter of May 3, 1857, is the only extant letter of Mother Benedicta to Abbot Wimmer. Here we find, for the first time, a reference to her health. The symptoms she mentions seem to manifest an incipient case of tuberculosis,⁷ which by 1862 will have become severe enough to cause her death.

Abbot Wimmer's letters gave no indication that he understood the situation, nor Mother Benedicta's condition of health.

RIEPP TO WIMMER

St. Marys
May 3, 1857

Very Reverend Father!

Honorable Lord Abbot!

You will forgive me for bothering you with my letter when you are in Newark. I cannot have peace of mind until I express my thoughts to you. I beg you to listen graciously to my earnest request and grant me your kind permission. It would be much easier here at St. Marys if there were fewer sisters. I ask you not to lose patience with me

⁶ S.V.A.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

⁷ See Appendix H, p. 213.

and kindly to keep this matter confidential until I receive an answer from you. I have not spoken a word of it to anyone; perhaps now you can guess my thought. I myself would very much like to go to the West and that very soon, otherwise I feel my health will be considerably impaired. I feel very disturbed and under a strain here, so much the more since I never was very happy at St. Marys and never had a desire to be here. You will be more pleased with me in the West than here; there, I shall do and work as they tell and advise me. It is not possible for me to remain here since contentment and inner peace are lacking, as well as happiness. I have tried to force myself in every respect, but I find that it is useless and impossible to do so; I can accomplish little good under these circumstances. You will perhaps smile when I say that I have become very shy and even do not wish to be among my own sisters. Here I feel inert and uninterested, I who in the past was so lively and full of zest. In the West I hope to regain this, be it from the right or from the left, on the land. There are eight or ten sisters here who would like to go with me. They can hardly restrain themselves. All of them think we should have the closing exercises here as soon as possible and leave after that. I hope to be able to pay my debts without spending the \$400⁸ for them since in connection with the closing exercises about the middle of May we want to have a small fair which would certainly bring in a few hundred dollars.

Repeating once again the above request, I remain with all respect and esteem,

Your Reverence's and Grace's grateful servant,

Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B.

P.S. One thing I must not fail to write, namely, that Sister Luitgardis⁹ died on April 29, at two o'clock in the afternoon; she had received Extreme Unction the previous day and made her perpetual vows. For several hours before her death she was unconscious.¹⁰

During the early months of 1857, Abbot Wimmer was planning

⁸ The amount received from the Ludwig-Missionsverein and mentioned in the April 13, 1857, letter.

⁹ Sister Luitgardis Butsch was born in Bavaria, August 24, 1839. She made her profession of vows on her deathbed April 30, 1857, age 18. Mother Benedicta had sent her to Erie in 1856 to teach English but had to bring her back to St. Marys because of illness. The young sister died of tuberculosis.

¹⁰ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/21.

on answering Bishop James Bailey's request for sisters in Newark. He moved the sisters (earlier volunteers for Minnesota, whom he had placed in Indiana to be prepared for the mission) from Indiana to Newark. He was expected to be in Newark for this purpose when Father Rupert informed him again about St. Marys.

SEIDENBUSCH TO WIMMER

Benziger P.O., Elk Co., PA.

May 22, 1857

B + D

Rt. Rev. and Beloved F. Abbot!

If these lines should yet reach you at home, please come as soon after receiving them as you possibly can, for they are already packing up for Minnesota and I think are intending to send their boxes away; they are, I heard, packing up all good clothes, linen, etc., even of those sisters who do not wish to go along and use, as it were, a moral thumbscrew to force the sisters to go along. You should, I think, stop this injustice by coming soon and deciding that all those who have professed in St. Marys should stay here. The rest can go to Indiana or Minnesota as they choose. Mother Walburga has declared herself ready to go to Indiana. Sister [name not clear] will either stay here or go to Indiana, as you may desire her to do, but she does not want to go West, nor to Erie.

Hoping to see you soon, and that you settle all the trouble at once, by telling her [Mother Benedicta] that she has nothing to say here anymore, I ask your paternal blessing and remain,

Your obedient son,

F. Rupert, O.S.B.

P.S. She thinks that she could tell the sisters here what they have to do and where they have to go even when she is in Minnesota.

Please, excuse my bad writing. I was in a hurry.

P.R.¹¹

Demetrius di Marogna was the prior of the monks sent to Minnesota by Wimmer in 1856. Mother Benedicta's letter¹² to him announcing the sisters' arrival took him by surprise.

¹¹ S.V.A.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

¹² Letter is not extant.

DI MAROGNA TO WIMMER

St. Cloud

June 15, 1857

Lord Abbot,

Yesterday I received a letter from Mother Superior, in which she notifies me: "The Most Reverend Abbot is now fully agreed to our journey and wishes me to write to you." She will arrive with ten sisters at the end of June or the beginning of July. This is truly too hasty. The things you have asked me to do are far from being completed and can not easily be carried out now since the people are so discouraged on account of the grasshoppers. I had not planned on doing them before next spring. Your letter gave me to understand that you, too, were not in a great hurry, as prudence demands. I hope, though, to be able to rent a house in St. Cloud. But, where to get the money? where to get foodstuffs — which may have been planted but are not as yet ripe?

Your obedient son,

Demetrius¹³

In 1857, when the move to Minnesota planned by Mother Benedicta was to take place, she accompanied the group of volunteers as far as Erie from where they were to continue to Minnesota. She wrote to Prior Demetrius di Marogna but seemingly neglected to inform Bishop Thomas Grace of St. Paul. In her letter to the Prior, Mother Benedicta stated that Abbot Wimmer fully agreed to the St. Cloud foundation. After only a few months in Indiana, he had moved the sisters originally destined for Minnesota to the new foundation he was making in Newark, New Jersey, at the request of Bishop James Bayley. Prior Demetrius' letter asked that Wimmer detain the sisters; that, because of the poverty of the St. Cloud people and because of the "grasshopper plague," the sisters would not find support in St. Cloud, nor could a home be prepared for them. Mother Benedicta must not have been informed of this by the Abbot. She herself had not received a reply from Prior Demetrius. The move was, therefore, precipitous, and was appreciated neither by Prior Demetrius nor by Abbot Wimmer. Three sisters, two candidates, a fourteen-year-old girl, and Mother Willibalda Scherbauer as superior appointed by Mother Benedicta, continued on the way to Minnesota.

¹³ S.B.C.A., copy.

Mother Benedicta did not accompany the sisters to Minnesota. Instead, with Bishop Young's permission and encouragement, she proceeded to Europe for the purpose of collecting funds for the American Benedictine Sisters and to ascertain the extent of her authority and that of Abbot Wimmer in the American foundations from Eichstätt.

The group of seven referred to above arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota, towards the end of June, 1857.¹⁴ Father Demetrius di Marogna, Prior of the Benedictines in St. Cloud, unexpectedly met them there and arranged for settling them in St. Cloud. The Prior's description of the arrival, housing, and care of the sisters in St. Cloud is given in the following letter of July, 14, 1857, to Abbot Wimmer. Father Demetrius' kindness to the sisters was negated by the Abbot's reaction to the St. Cloud affair.

When Abbot Wimmer was informed of Mother Benedicta's leaving St. Marys, accompanied by the volunteers for Minnesota, he asked Bishop Josue Young of Erie to detain them. By the time the Bishop could act, a part of the group destined for St. Cloud was already on the way. The rest of the volunteers remained in Erie forming part of that convent. Mother Scholastica Burkhardt was among the volunteers for Minnesota who remained in Erie.

YOUNG TO WIMMER

Erie

July 4, 1857

Rt. Rev. Dear Friend!

Your letter came while I was absent on a portion of the visitation. There were only four or five bound for Minnesota, and they had taken their departure hence, as had also Sister Benedicta and her companion, Sister Augustine, for Europe, before your letter arrived. This departure for Europe had been decided upon, as I perceived, and Sister Benedicta was not to be turned from it. As she had spoken last year of this journey for the purpose of collecting funds and other means, I gave her a short testimonial¹⁵ to that effect, saying nothing of her proposed appeal to some authority to discover

¹⁴ The fourteen-year-old girl was Miss Lejal, sometimes spelled *Leshell*. She became Sister Adelaide and later joined the Mt. St. Scholastica Convent in Atchison, Kansas, but eventually left religious life.

¹⁵ The bishop's letter of approval of Mother Benedicta's going to Europe mentioned in his letter appears later with the January 4, 1859, letter of Mother Benedicta to Cardinal Barnabo.

the extent mutually of her authority and yours. Till she arrived here, I was unaware of the existence of any difficulty of the kind; and I should have been better *prepared to treat it scientifically* if you had availed yourself of an earlier opportunity to apprise me of it. If she is gone, however, you can dispose things to your liking in accordance with your powers as superior — without the embarrassment of her presence and opposition, and at the same time by letters to Europe put things into train [sic] so that this shall all turn out for the advantage of this particular community, and of religion in general.

It is fair to say, however, that while Sister Benedicta expressed a great deal of obstinate determination in the course she had resolved on, she was at the same time profuse in the expression of her devotion to you and in the acknowledgement of your kindness. She seemed willing to be deposed for the sake of peace and discipline; but I suppose you have ample opportunities to judge of the worth of all this.

I have not studied exactly the extent of my own powers and duties in the matter, in the case of a needed intervention of episcopal authority, having heretofore conceded (and am still conceding) all my powers to you as my vicar general. I trust your wisdom and moderation to bring things about with no danger of scandal to the people, or prejudice to the souls of these nuns. Praying God to guide you and them, for His own greater honor and glory and to their best interests. I remain,

Faithfully and affectionately,
Yours in Domino,

Rt. Rev. B. Wimmer

† I.M. Bishop of Erie

[P.S.] Sister Scholastica [Burkhardt] told me yesterday that she was to follow those who have gone to Minnesota. Do you wish her detained here?¹⁶

From St. Paul the sisters were taken to St. Cloud by Prior Demetrius di Marogna. How the story of Mother Willibalda Scherbauer and the mission in St. Cloud unfolded itself can be seen from the exchange of letters between St. Cloud and St. Vincent Monastery. Meanwhile, Mother Benedicta Riepp was spending ten months in Europe in an attempt to find a solution to the problems facing her in St. Marys.

¹⁶ S.B.C.A., copy.

DI MAROGNA TO WIMMER

St. Cloud
July 14, 1857

Most Reverend Father Abbot:

When I and Fr. Cornelius [Wittman] arrived at midnight of the 28th [June] in St. Paul, where we went to get the citizenship papers for Fr. Cornelius, we were welcomed with not a little surprise by the announcement "The sisters have arrived and are lodged at the hospital."¹⁷ An hour later Fr. Benedict [Haindl], who had been thinking of visiting us in St. Cloud and in St. Joseph, also arrived. The less prepared I was for this unexpected arrival of the sisters, the more surprised and embarrassed I felt, and I could not check the outcry "Overhasty." Moreover, the whole affair is enveloped in a mysterious obscurity so that I honestly hardly know what to do with these poor women. Neither by you nor by the superior have they been announced; neither from you nor from the superior have they documents with them, etc., etc. I spoke with the administrator of the St. Paul Diocese;¹⁸ he was no less surprised than I, and, more than that, was unwilling to accept them; I was to take them with me and care for them. This I then did. In St. Cloud I had to rent a house which was vacated for me. The house has two rooms on the ground floor and a spacious refectory with a built-on kitchen. On the second story are found a large room, a smaller one, and a long attic room above the refectory where easily ten or twelve children's beds can be placed. A well, garden and cellar are also there, but the rent for the year is \$250. I rented it for one year. I hope our dear God will pay the rent! There are four sisters and two candidates, besides Fini Leshall; Willibalda Scherbauer, Gregoria Moser, Evangelista Kremer, Gertrude Capser, Marianne Wolters, and Priska Maier. A few days ago I received at last a very short announcement from the Superior [Benedicta Riepp] from Erie, that Sister Willibalda is the superior of this first group. Last Friday's post brought me your appreciated letter of the 28th of last month, which asks information as to how things are shaping themselves. I can only write you how things are at present; there can be no talk about the shaping of things at this time and under the existing circumstances. Things are thus: Six sisters and Fini Leshall are here supplied with a trunk wherein are mostly books, so I hear. A whole house on Main Street besides a garden are rented for \$250 — cheap for here. The garden and yard are to be enclosed with a high board fence and is to serve

¹⁷ The hospital of the Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Paul.

¹⁸ Very Reverend Augustine Ravoux.

as enclosure. The sisters wish to remain together, and are right in this. Fr. Cornelius is their weekly confessor. The direction of the sisters, I myself am taking at present because one cannot leave them to themselves. To whom should these poor children with but little money turn, and to whom cling here in this distant and strange country? What I did till now, I did because I regard it as a Christian duty, and because it seems more prudent that an *older* priest deal with the sisters who are so young, rather than our young Fathers whose heads are full of commanding words. As soon as you or the superior again take charge of them I shall very gladly retreat. Yes, I must even beg you that something definite be arranged; in the long run things cannot go on thus. All the sisters appeared pale, emaciated and ailing. The choir sisters are of the opinion that the superior has gone to Germany. Should another group come, we should have to transplant them to St. Joseph, where a house could be rented which, however, we would be obliged to remodel at the cost of no less than \$300. The owner is not able to do so. In St. Joseph a parish house is being built; when it is finished the sisters could live in it till they can build their own little convent.

At our place, as well as at the sisters', candidates announce their intention of entering the Order. What shall be done? . . . If applicants can be received by us, where are they to make their novitiate? Here or in St. Joseph? Who of us are the novices-to-be to regard as their superior? Not any of us really know how things stand. All act on their own and according to their own mind; but when one needs something, then we in St. Cloud must supply the demands. This is also very detrimental from the financial viewpoint. I hope for a good potato crop. The grasshoppers spared them, as well as the corn. But we are in need of rain. Seedlings cannot sprout now, but much could be replanted. The grasshoppers are leaving us now; they apparently are going northeast. The sale of lots is very slow. Fr. Cornel has up to the present sold only two, one for cash — the other for \$112.50, half to be paid about St. Martin's day and half to be paid for in carpenter work.

The claiming of land is stopped till the railroads have been definitely laid out. Probably the land office will also remain closed till then. Crow River should have a stationary priest for the winter. That mission, which numbers at least 120 families, cannot be administered from here. The cold is too severe and the distance too great. I go to this mission and also attend at the same time Marseilles in Sherburne Co., a "paper town" near Clear Lake, Minnesota. . . .

Would you be so kind, when you write to Rome, to weave in the

petition that we may very soon get a bishop for St. Paul? Under existing circumstances, especially those related to church property, a bishop is very much in demand. Wherever I go, I am asked: "Isn't a bishop coming soon?" It is rumored that Vivaldi¹⁹ is living in great hopes of this bishop's cap.

With deepest esteem, most reverend Lord,

Your obedient,

Fr. Demetrius²⁰

The sisters' arrival in Minnesota in June, 1857, was not only unexpected, it was also unwelcome, especially to some of the monks in St. Cloud. The Prior, Demetrius di Marogna, seems to be the only person who showed sympathy and willingness to understand their situation and to help them. The letter of August 18 below by Mother Willibalda implies that it was the second letter she had written to the Abbot. Written, of course, before the Abbot's later letter of disapproval was read to the sisters by the Prior, it is cheerful and full of hope. The sisters are satisfied with the living conditions and the St. Cloud people are friendly and understanding — contrary to other information.

It seems of advantage here to interrupt the chronological order of the letters, and to follow the St. Cloud story in August of 1857, before returning to the Abbot's letter of July, 1857, which deals with other problems.

Prior di Marogna's July 14 letter to the Abbot did not fully appease the latter. In his letter of August 12, the Prior again supported the sisters.

The Prior's statement of the purpose of Mother Benedicta Riepp's trip to Europe, namely, "to petition for definite norms and rules which are to govern the relationship between the Priest Superior and the Mother Superior," is very clear and should have helped to bring about an understanding between the Abbot and Mother Benedicta.

In St. Cloud the two candidates, Priska Meier (later Sister Amanda) and Marianne Wolters (later Sister Ehrentrude) were under the direction of Sister Gertrude Capser. In 1863 both joined Mt. St. Scholastica Convent in Atchison.

¹⁹ Francis de Vivaldi, missionary among the Indians.

²⁰ S.B.C.A., copy.

Right Reverend Father Abbot!

The sisters are well and happy. Six or seven girls, English as well as German, are attending the sisters' school. A piano had to be bought because the Yankees are especially set on taking 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 much and praises it highly.

I have read to Sister Willibalda the conditions mentioned in your letter. She assured me that the Mother Superior, as well as herself and the other sisters, are agreed that they had no one else in mind as superior for their Minnesota foundation than myself, or if need be, yourself or your successor. The Mother Superior and the sisters are very willing to have a superior in accordance with the prescriptions of their statutes. It seems to be the purpose and intention of Mother Superior to petition for definite norms and rules of conduct, which are to govern the relations between a superior (priest) and the sisters' convent with its Mother Superior.

The other points or conditions have so far been observed and complied with in relation to myself, on the part of Sister Willibalda and the sisters. I had not made any demands on them to do so, because I intended first to await word and suggestions from you. The same conditions shall continue to be observed in the future.

I informed Maryanna Wolters concerning what you wrote about her. She expressed her fear of returning to the world, and begged to be allowed to remain with the sisters. The confidential information, with which she furnished me, is of such a nature that I now ask you to permit her to remain in the convent. Besides, it would be manifestly quite impossible now to find a place for her to stay, or to find a suitable husband for her. And even if the right kind of man could be found for her, because looked for, would we not have to fear the jibes and mockery of the Yankees and the bad Catholics? What a sorrow for the good Catholics and for Maryanna herself! She as well as Priska earnestly asked the permission of Gertrude Capser to be admitted to profession. I gave them the answer that I would first write to you. And in your letter you wrote that I, in the first place, and you, if necessary, had the right to decide in the reception of novices and their profession. I understand it in this way: the sisters here may, with the knowledge and consent of the local superior, accept candidates and allow novices to make profession. This is in accordance with the law of the Church, the Holy Rule, and the Statutes; in

case of necessity and where there is doubt, your advice and orders must be sought and abided by.

The sisters are honored, respected and loved; they edify the people by their decorous behavior. The Americans are surprised and wonder how it is possible to live so mortified a life. They are in admiration of the sisters and cannot help respecting them.

The sisters have now six girls in school and under their supervision. Needlework is sent to their convent. People bring them food. Sometimes when the sisters get up in the morning, they find vegetables, etc. at the kitchen door. Chickens and young pigs have been brought to them. It seems to me that, humanly speaking, this overhasty coming of the sisters was in reality (referring it to the goodness of the Heavenly Father) by special permission and providence of God, which likes to transcend and cross the ideas and plans of man. (Sisters are certainly much needed in St. Cloud.) As soon as the contract of the lay teacher expires, the sisters will take over the Girls' School. May God grant that the sisters will always remain in union and love among themselves, as they are now. Here in Minnesota good, model sisters are indeed necessary. May God spare us from persons and events which may give occasion for scandal or derision.

Your obedient son,

Demetrius²¹

Father Alexius Roetzer, O.S.B., a member of the Priory in St. Cloud, who wrote the following letter to Abbot Wimmer, came to Minnesota in 1856 to assist the Germans and the Irish. He had a better command of the English language than some of the other Benedictine fathers in Minnesota.²² He was not in favor of having sisters come to Minnesota at this time.

ROETZER TO WIMMER

Aug. 12, 1857

Rt. Rev. Fr. Abbot,

As soon as one trouble is over another shows up. Now the sisters have come. . . . They came here as though sent, one after the other, before the time appointed for them and according to their own sweet pleasure; and I think they were deceived by some culpable

²¹ S.B.C.A. copy.

²² *The Scriptorium*, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Mn., 15, No. 1: June, 1956, p. 10.

persuasion to come out here. Be that as it may, it has now happened, and I do not doubt that they will be sorry for it sooner or later. It may possibly be that they are now somewhat apprehensive and unwilling to go back home, although this might be the best punishment, apart from the scandal that might be occasioned. They are very active here now and, I must say, very pious and devout. Indeed, I was very much edified at their devotion in church. They are also very anxious to work as I was able to gather from their conversation. Likewise, they are solicitous in keeping proper monastic discipline, which in some points might be a little bit more exacting. They might perhaps get up a quarter of an hour earlier and retire a half hour sooner. Likewise, they might put more time to meditation as we do. . . . Anyway, all this will be properly ordered according to their directions.

As quasi-superior, Sister Willibalda was appointed. It was urged that another one should be chosen in her stead because of her distinct accent. However, in order to prevent scandal and because no other suitable person could be found, an agreement was reached to notify you immediately and in this way to bring about a satisfactory solution in amicable fashion. All the regulations to be observed and which we decided on in our conference will be forwarded to you. The names of the sisters are the following: Willibalda, Gregoria, Evangelista, Gertrude, Mariana and Prisca. As far as the little Leshall is concerned, I do not know anything about her. I could not find out anything concerning her from Fr. Cornelius because he himself didn't know anything. . . .

Up to now I had nothing to do with the sisters, and I only accidentally learned their names. Apparently their income must now be very meager. They have six children in the school and are presumably earning something by giving piano lessons in which they should be very active. . . . How many pupils they have, and what payment they are receiving I do not know. I recall very vaguely that a short time ago I heard that they were receiving eight to ten dollars every month. Whether they are receiving this from the school children alone, I do not know. In any case there is, and must be, hope that they will get more to do and consequently also have better employment. We can help them out by providing them with potatoes and wood and perhaps also with some vegetables. . . . The sisters seem to be very industrious in everything and also satisfied with their condition. They might feel a little disconcerted over the stubborn attitude which was shown at the time of their departure for

here. At any rate, their good will in everything will merit the blessing of God and a successful outcome.²³

Alexius, O.S.B.

On August 19, Abbot Wimmer's disapproval of the Minnesota foundation was announced to the sisters by Prior Demetrius. The sisters were to promise submission to him, the Abbot; Mother Willibalda Scherbauer was commanded to resign and be dismissed from the religious life; Mother Evangelista Kremeter was to act as superior. Only when these conditions were met would the Benedictine Fathers be allowed to treat them as religious and to help them in their spiritual and material needs. The Abbot here was acting under the pretext that he had complete jurisdiction over all Benedictine Sisters in America.

The reaction of the sisters, especially of Mother Willibalda, to these demands can be discerned from the letters following.

Because the letters of Mother Willibalda to Abbot Wimmer after the sisters arrived in St. Cloud are not clearly dated, they are arranged here not chronologically but according to content. The first letter seems to have been written earlier, but not sent until after August 19, which date appears within the body of the letter. The third letter [of August 27] is a follow-up when she received no answer from the Abbot.

SCHERBAUER TO WIMMER

St. Cloud

August [18], 1857

Very Reverend Father!

I must, first of all, beg your pardon for taking the liberty of burdening you with a letter. We are now six in number and are well and happy. We arrived in St. Paul on time and stayed with the sisters four days. On the third day we had the happiness of meeting and greeting the Reverend Fathers Demetrius, Benedict, and Cornelius in St. Paul. On July 2 we went with Father Demetrius to see the Vicar General. He, as well as Mr. Keller, were determined to keep us in St. Paul. By the 4th of this month [July] we were in St. Cloud.

But I must tell you that our boat, the *Nordstern*, got stuck two or three miles from St. Cloud for four or five days. The Reverend Prior

²³ S.B.C.A., copy.

and all the passengers at once got into a small boat; we also, on the next day, went to land since there was no thought of getting help soon; we were all happy to have this unexpected respite, otherwise we would not have seen the Benedictine College [later moved to Collegetown]. Father Prior had told us nothing about it nor had he shown it to us. Now we could not only pass by the small monastery, but we ourselves could enter it and partake of some food. We had been on the ship for three days but had eaten only one meal at table because a meal at table would have cost us \$.50, a half dollar. We enjoyed the monastery meal very much.

On July 4, at three o'clock in the afternoon we went to St. Cloud in the company of the Reverend Fathers Demetrius, Benedict, and Bruno [Riess] and to our home which consisted of only one large room in which there was neither chair nor bench, nor table, nor anything else but the four, unplastered walls.²⁴ To remain here for the winter would not have been possible; therefore, Father Demetrius on that same day looked for another house to rent; he found one at once, but the rent is very high; he has to pay \$250 annually. The house really is very attractive and large enough for the time being, but the school can no longer be there, because the classroom was also to be our refectory. The parlor, which our landlord himself had ordered to be prepared, is very nice and large; right off it is the choir which is ready for use; on the feast of the Assumption we had the pleasure of assisting at the first holy Mass in our little chapel. You, Reverend Father, will know the house and the people at once when I give you the name: it belongs to Mr. Tenvoorde;²⁵ the house is very desirable, but the garden is not enclosed by a fence and that is difficult. The sisters will not be able to go into the garden often. We have not many school children yet; the parents do not want to dismiss the teacher who, in any case, will give up his position next spring. When winter is past, many English-speaking people want to bring their children to us. Those that we have now are also English, but only three are Catholic.

For German and English instruction we charge \$1.00 a month; for sewing and knitting lessons, \$1.00; for lessons in fancy needlework, \$2.00 per month; drawing, \$1.00. For one girl taking a meal here we decided on \$80 for a year; however, room is not included. For this year we must charge somewhat less, because the people have hardly any money since the grasshoppers have destroyed everything.

²⁴ The Wendel Maertz home where they lived for eight days.

²⁵ The sisters lived here for six years, then got a small frame house. Colman Barry, *Worship and Work* (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Company, 1956), pp. 53-54.

Neither man nor fruit was spared. And in spite of the great expenses, the people do whatever they can. They bring us butter, eggs, chickens; we even received two young pigs, a hen with 8 little chicks, etc. The good people can give nothing else. Next year, they say, will again be good. We made butter twice, but have no cow. They laugh at us because of this. We cannot buy meat; it is too expensive; once in a while we get wild pigeons. If we only had rye bread! We have to bake and cook with wheat flour which is very expensive and is not so satisfying.

August 19. After Mass this morning the Rev. Father Prior informed me that you, Very Reverend Father, are very angry with me and no longer in any way want to consider me a member of the Order. Reverend Father, can you imagine that hearing this and some other things, I could remain without feeling? I do not know what I felt; I could not speak and later could only weep, and still do not know what I should say. What should I think? I can only suppose that this rejection is brought on by my many former and grievous sins. Reverend Father! Why are you so angry with me and want to put me out of the Order? Even if I have much to accuse myself of, and really do reproach myself, I do not know of anything. I believe I can say before God — no, I really do not know anything that could offend you personally; even if much has been reported to you that I should have said about your Reverence — I say it to you today and under the seal of confession: it is not true. Ask the sisters, and if they speak the truth, they can say what I often said: the Lord Abbot is too good; he should in many things be less indulgent, especially with the younger sisters. That I should not have said, I know, but to have said more, I cannot remember. I would have to be so hardened and so abandoned by God that I cannot see my own faults.

Oh, Reverend Father, I beg you very urgently, do tell me what I have done. *Tell me everything.* I will certainly accept it, even if it saddens me deeply. If I could only this one time put an end to your righteous anger and soften it! I beg you, do not remember the former mistakes anymore, forget what has happened. Punish me if you wish, only, please, do not dismiss me from the Order. I have promised you that I will be more careful and I will be different. I will never forget this, my promise. I, and all of us, we speak of it often, want to give you pleasure in the future. Remember the spiritual son of St. Bernard, who caused him so much trouble and pain that he frequently shed bitter tears. In spite of this St. Bernard forgave him and with motherly love reaccepted him, and you know, Reverend

Father, the loving God also forgives the greatest sinner — should you not do the same? Should you be able to forsake a poor nun entirely? No. I do not think that you could do that. Again, forgive; I beg for forgiveness; Reverend Father, please, hear me.

Reverend Father, perhaps you think that I wanted to be superior here or that I wanted to present myself as such. No, *certainly not*. Neither I, nor anyone else, placed me in this position. The Mother Superior alone told me in Erie that the Bishop (Young) suggested to her that, because of certain circumstances and to get some money, she was going to Germany and that meanwhile I should go to St. Cloud with the five sisters. She told the sisters to be good and to obey me until she herself would return. That was all that was said; nothing in this speaks of a superior, and I have never taken it upon myself to act as superior; I would be ashamed to desire to do it. It is true that the Reverend Prior calls me superior, and for that reason the people and the sisters also want to call me superior, but I certainly have not permitted it. However, Reverend Father, appoint as superior whomever you think able. I can and will comply.

Sister Scholastica [Burkhardt] is unfortunately not here yet; I was asked by the Reverend Father Prior to write to her asking her to delay leaving Erie because she and the other two sisters were destined to go to St. Joseph and the Rev. Prior thought there was not yet a proper place arranged for them, and the money is lacking for renting a house; and here the place is too small for three more sisters. I know well that Father Bruno [Riess] and Father Clement [Staub] are not pleased that they do not have sisters, especially since they now have to close the school because the teacher has left. They, therefore, need the sisters. I cannot send sisters to St. Joseph because Father Prior has not, until now, found it advisable to order me to do so; I would be happy if you were here. I told Sister Evangelista [Kremeter] what you wanted and how you wanted it to be. I also told her that I would be willing and yes, with pleasure, to leave everything to her: I had not yet finished speaking when she became excited and completely confused. She has been crying now for five days. I do not know why. She only says she is worried about something but cannot speak of it to anyone. And she really has not spoken of it to anyone; she also begged me for permission to write to you; and so I said nothing more to her. What should I do in this case? Do tell me what to do! The best thing would be, and I wish it *earnestly*, that you yourself come soon, Rev. Father, even before winter. It would be easier to talk and to tell you more than the

unfeeling written words can. Do come very soon; it is not yet cold, and here it is still very warm; we want also to give you pleasure.

Write soon and tell us what and how you want things done. Write to me just once and really from your heart and sincerely mention what it is in me that displeases and offends you, I beg you. I can then be again open, as I once was; you must certainly know that yourself. I always had much confidence in you. I believe I am not the only one at fault that this confidence, for some time, though not lost completely, did diminish. However, Father, please forget it all. Do not think of it anymore even if the pain is deep. My pain is also deep to realize that you are so upset and so saddened. If I only knew what I should say — what I should do — to give you confidence in me again. One thing I can do: namely, to improve myself. When you come, I will be very sincere and tell you all.

What should we do for Marian and Priska? I was never very much for accepting the former because of her being so sickly. But I do not think she will take it unless perhaps you speak to her yourself. However, she does very well in English as well as in music. But Priska, I know for certain, you cannot get her to leave again. All of us would like to speak for her. She is a good child and does nothing to displease anyone. I would like to write much more, but I do not trust myself until you forgive me, dear Father! Pardon, penance, advice, and help!

Do not say anything about this letter — it comes from my heart.

Your suffering and most submissive child,
M. Willibalda, O.S.B.

P.S. We are really expecting you and will do nothing until you come yourself for *this is very important*, or at least until you write to me.²⁶

DI MAROGNA TO WIMMER

St. Cloud

Aug. 20, 1857; cont. Aug. 27

Rt. Rev. dear Father Abbot,

. . . In my last letter I spoke about the sisters. Meanwhile Father Clement [Staub] informed me about your letter to him; I received your letter of July 31. Father Alexius did not show me his letter. He merely told me that you had asked him several questions which he was supposed to answer.

²⁶ S.V.A.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

I told the sisters about your orders and demanded that they submit and that they themselves write to you. In the meantime I had to go to my mission and returned the day before yesterday. I will be able to see the sisters this afternoon in order to find out what their intentions are and what they have done. I had demanded of Willibalda, before I left, that she should resign as superior and beg your pardon. The dismissal of Willibalda would be a loss for the sisters from the financial standpoint, because she is the only music teacher and has a number of English pupils. I ask you, therefore, to prescribe a penance for her, to pardon her, and to permit her to remain.

Things are going pretty well for the present, as I wrote you some time ago. From Crow River there will probably be three girls to enter. Those sisters who remained behind at Erie, especially Mother Scholastica, whom you wish for superior, may naturally come as soon as you allow it. This year there is no lack of wood and potatoes.

In the whole sad affair the sisters were very wrong; but there may have been fault and mistakes on the other side, too. I did not say much about it to the sisters; many questions and much talking merely confuse. What hurts the sisters most, as they say, is the often repeated accusation on the part of the brothers that the sisters live at the expense of the monks, as if they were lazy women afraid of work. The more strictly they can keep the enclosure, the less they have to come in contact with the fathers and brothers, the more they like it, and the more peace and order is to be found in the convent.

Father Bruno Riess²⁷ is of the opinion that we ought to wait until spring before we send sisters to St. Joseph. The parish there has enough to do with the parish building which alone costs at least \$600 in cash. The parish can hardly do anything for the sisters at this time. And also, the sisters can neither build nor buy. St. Cloud seems a more apt place; there is no want of work for the sisters, and besides, the Americans pay better than the Germans! . . .

The Reverend Lord's most obedient son,
Demetrius²⁸

²⁷ Father Bruno Riess had come from St. Vincent Monastery to St. Cloud in May, 1856. Most of his time was given to missions and parishes conducted by the St. Cloud Benedictines. He later returned to St. Vincent Abbey. *Scriptorium*, 15: No. 1, June, 1956, pp. 8-9.

²⁸ S.B.C.A., copy.

SCHERBAUER TO WIMMER

St. Cloud

August 27, 1857

Very Reverend Father!

I cannot help but trouble you with another letter. Eight days have passed since I received the sad message from the Reverend Prior that you, Very Reverend Father, were so angry that you do not want to tolerate me here anymore. But it is also eight days since I have had no rest day or night. If you cannot believe me, ask the sisters. I was very sick for five or six days so that both the sisters and I thought it was my last. The illness, however, was not so much dangerous as it was painful; there were convulsions which lasted quite long. It was suggested that I be bled, but I did not dare, since it seemed to be more the result of my excitement than an illness. Today, however, it seems quite tolerable. I am able to be up for a short time and am writing this letter. I do not wish to burden you much, but only to renew more strongly the entreaties in my last letter and to repeat them. Reverend Father! do not let yourself be so deeply disturbed; do not give yourself so much trouble and unhappy hours. Not you, but I, am the cause of this, but certainly not out of spite. I can do nothing but weep and be sorry. Dear Father, I beg you to forget and forgive all!

I will certainly be an obedient and sincere child from now on. Only one other thing I would like to remark. The Reverend Prior told me that you had definitely forbidden me, after I had written to you, to come to the West. It is true, I did beg you in my letter to permit me to come here, but Reverend Father, you gave me no answer, neither written nor spoken. You did not even say the least thing about it, so that I finally said to the Mother Superior: I believe the Lord Abbot does not want to know anything about me anymore since he does not speak to me. I should perhaps not have said this, but you will remember that you said nothing to me, neither about going nor about not going. However, I beg you, dear Father, do *not* think of anything that has happened and, please, forgive me. Do write soon. Just a few lines will bring peace. It would even be better than writing if you were to come personally. Do come soon; now is the best time to travel, and the trip does not cost so much. I would be sincere and have much to discuss. We have much to do: just now we have to make two banners and four white and four red cassocks for St. Joseph.

I must close; my head aches too much. Forgive! Mercy! On my side, reform and faithfulness. Asking especially for a few lines, sincere,

even if sternly severe, and begging also for your fatherly love and blessing, I remain in deepest respect,

Your Very Reverend's grateful and grieving
Mother Willibalda, O.S.B.

Do not close your heart, I beg;
remember that you are a father.
I wrote two letters to St. Mary's
and one to Erie, but have not
received any answers.

I beg you not to let anyone
read my letters, nor to
speak about them.²⁹

A few months later, when the Abbot was on a tour of his missions in late summer and fall of 1857, he stopped in St. Cloud, and, after giving Mother Willibalda "a piece of his mind," he accepted her apology, and reappointed her superior.

Mother Evangelista Kremeter, one of Mother Willibalda's companions in St. Cloud, was not afraid to answer Abbot Wimmer's letter in which he had stated the demands the sisters were to accept before he would regard them as "good" religious.

KREETER TO WIMMER

St. Cloud

Aug. 22, 1857

[Dear Father Abbot,]

. . . Since we have received from Fr. Prior the various points according to which you, Father Abbot, want to regulate our lives, a different feeling has taken possession of me. In the first place, I feel incapable of the tasks which you have assigned me; and secondly, it is impossible for me not to associate with Rev. Mother Superior and Mother Willibalda without any reason on my part for such conduct; and thirdly, since I do not possess the required knowledge and experience necessary to maintain order and discipline in a cloister, I believe these will be sufficient reasons for you to spare me from such a responsibility. If they must be complied with, I feel constrained to leave and seek my salvation in a stricter order. . . .

Concerning the other points, it will be our endeavor to comply. Forgive our past faults. Then the Lord will bless our missionary

²⁹ S.V.A.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

efforts. In this region, where everything is still primitive and people uncultured, much good can be done.

We now have a number of children who pay in full. Sister Willibalda is giving instruction to the little ones in singing, drawing and painting. Marian Wolters teaches English and music; and I teach grammar, and over and above, have been entrusted with the arduous task of directing the novices. Sisters Gertrude and Gregoria are teaching in the industrial school. The former is choir mistress and has charge of the laundry. The latter is portress and is preparing herself for the industrial school. How much the sisters are needed here! There are girls here 15 years old who still do not know the alphabet nor the Ten Commandments, not even the Our Father. Mother Superior [Benedicta] is not here since I heard the Most Rev. Bishop of Erie granted her leave to go to Germany for the benefit of all of us and to collect money for our new foundation.

Again I want to ask your pardon and beg that you persuade yourself to visit us soon.

M. Evangelista Kremeter³⁰

With these letters of 1857, we leave the Benedictine Sisters of Minnesota in St. Cloud with Mother Willibalda Scherbauer as Prioress. The following two chapters present the letters of Abbot Wimmer which shed light on his side of the controversy beginning to arise between him and Mother Benedicta Riepp. At about this same time (July, 1857) Mother Benedicta and her companion, Mother Augustine Short, were on their way to Europe to present her side of the problem.

³⁰ S.B.C.A., MS copy.

CHAPTER IV

BEGINNING OF CONTROVERSY BETWEEN ABBOT BONIFACE WIMMER AND MOTHER BENEDICTA RIEPP

In the following letter sent to the Court Chaplain Mueller in July of 1857, Abbot Wimmer states the facts upon which he had based his right to be the highest superior of the Benedictine sisters he brought to America, and described the system of government he envisioned for the sisters. He also listed his complaints against Mother Benedicta Riepp and Mother Willibalda Scherbauer.

WIMMER TO MUELLER [COURT CHAPLAIN TO LUDWIG I]

Pittsburgh

July 24, 1857

Reverend and very dear Friend:

. . . I already wrote to you that I am no longer pleased with the superior, because she is too self-willed, does not take advice, and still does not perform her duty satisfactorily. I never took it upon myself to rule the sisters. I have neither the wish nor the time for that, but I thought myself *justified* and *obliged* to see to it that they obey the Holy Rule properly, and follow it according to our own Statutes as much as possible, so that they will be trained to become

good nuns and teachers and that they also support themselves in the temporal sphere by a well-ordered domestic economy. My wish and plan was to introduce them in most of the places where we have established ourselves, and where it would, because of the school, be helpful or necessary. According to the *jus canonicum*, the sisters always enjoy the same privileges as the monks do; they would, therefore, be exempt here¹ and the President of the Congregation at the time would be their highest superior, as I have considered myself to be. The bishop is 130 miles away; often for two or three years, he does not come to St. Marys and does not understand much about our Order. The Prioress of St. Walburg cannot be their superior either because she is too far away and does not understand American conditions. She would not be recognized by the Bishop, and in a different convent, would have no power or rights. Furthermore, the sisters were invited by and were sent to me; I provided a place for a convent for them, gave them the necessary buildings, made many long and expensive trips, spent very much money for them, brought many of the sisters to the convent, supplied confessors for them, and am also, in many respects, the head of the Order, as founder or co-founder, as advocate, as promoter of vocations for the sisters; and because of their proximity to my brothers, I am *justified* and *obliged* to be solicitous that they be genuine, good Benedictines and also good teachers. Otherwise, the sisters could bring prejudice, disgrace and scandal upon my priests and brothers, the children of my parishes, the sisters themselves, and the Order, and in the end I would have to support a crowd of womenfolk, who would be good-for-nothing and would be for me a means of annoyance without my being able to remedy matters. Benedictine women religious always belonged to the Congregation (at least in early times) — that I can demonstrate from history.²

I, therefore, desired that there be a motherhouse for the Benedictine women, i.e., a common house as novitiate and school, and a close union among the individual convents and with at least *one* abbess under the leadership of the president and General Chapter, for which I hoped to get approval from Rome easily, since naturally the right of visitation would have remained with the bishops, *juxta canones*. Without such a system of government I cannot bring into being here an authentic monastery for women; Rome demands at least 13–14 members with an adequate foundation as basis for a proper monastery. That cannot be obtained here if we do not contrib-

¹ Exempt from the bishop of the diocese. See Appendix J on Exemption, p. 215.

² See Appendix K on Congregations, pp. 215–216.

ute to it; and even if it could be, each convent would be independent from every other; one convent could not help the other; each bishop would change the Statutes; discipline would vary and be weakened, and the Order would be destroyed.

Therefore, we accepted so many novices that, at present, the number of choir and lay sisters has reached 40. The income from the school amounts to only \$150, and from the training school, where there are about 20 students, mostly poor girls, the income at the highest was about \$300. That amounts to around 1100 gulden for the support of 40 sisters and 20 girls. In fact, the good sisters live very frugally; however, not from the air. I delivered the rye flour, some wheat and corn flour, tallow for candles, and hay for five cows and a few calves, and arranged for a vegetable garden; I also sent about \$125 for dress goods. In return for this, the sisters did the washing, mending and baking for three priests and seventeen brothers at St. Marys; the brothers provided firewood and coal, drove the cattle to pasture and back, and plowed the land; the Prior was the confessor. In this way, both were helped, but the number is too great; the cost of flour alone was \$600 this year. I would not have hesitated at any sacrifice for the general good, but for some time now things are not going so well.

The first matter of complaint for me was that the Superior [Riepp] sent five sisters to Erie to conduct a school there. I was opposed to this: first, because the young sisters were not well enough prepared, neither for teaching nor for living the religious life; second, because they acquired no property; third, no agreement of any kind had been entered into with the Bishop or the parish; fourth, no superior could be sent there except Sister Scholastica [Burkhardt], who was needed at home as novice mistress and teacher for the candidates, etc. *But nothing helped.* At once she sent Sister Scholastica, Sister Luitgardis, two novices (Catherine and Louise) and Sister Alberta to Erie, went along herself, had to spend three weeks in private homes, and Sister Josepha, very unwillingly, had to take her place (at home). This was done in the hope that all would be successful in Erie, so that the superior could have her residence there and would no longer be under my authority. However, conditions were very bad; they were barely able to exist; the Reverend Pastor Hartmann, of course, did everything he could for the sisters, but he too is not a hen-pecked hero, and so Erie remained (and still is) a burdensome branch of St. Marys, and the Lady Superior remained at St. Marys.

The second matter of complaint arose when Fr. Demetrius went to

Minnesota, and I was in need of another prior. I chose the Prior of St. Marys, Fr. Benedict Haindl. He was, until then, the confessor for the sisters, and was loved by all (he is also a very worthy and excellent man), but a good gentleman without will power over against a willful woman who never said "No" when the Lady Superior said "Yes." He felt uneasy in his position, wanted to get away, and so I called him home. To replace him, I sent Fr. Rupert Seidenbusch, a good, younger priest who was far superior to Fr. Benedict in ability and learning but who had already had some disagreement with the superior which he settled independently. I did this not out of malice, but because circumstances demanded it and I was able to depend completely on Fr. Rupert. But that was a bad choice: good things and bad things were tried. Entreaties, letters, etc. came to keep Fr. Benedict, and not to have Fr. Rupert, all to no purpose! Fr. Rupert was appointed prior and confessor and that he was in the strict sense of the word: he came or had to come only for confession. Apart from this, he was not called for the whole year. While Fr. Benedict had taught pedagogy and asceticism, and was asked for advice five or six times a day, poor Rupert had complete leisure; the sisters never needed him. However, for a long time Fr. Benedict was pursued with letters which contained secrets of confession about the Superior and Willibalda until I put an end to it.

I came every three months as extraordinary confessor. I permitted the Superior and Willibalda to go to confession to Fr. Aegid or Fr. Roman [two other Benedictines] as often as they wanted, all in vain. The Abbot and Fr. Rupert were in disgrace, and that's where it stayed! He and I were spoken of only with contempt. Sister Willibalda used only nicknames when speaking of him. Any of the nuns or sisters who allowed themselves to show confidence or attachment to the Abbot or Prior, fell out of favor, and soon it was strictly forbidden and even the use of our names was punished.

Sister Scholastica was now in Erie; Willibalda was appointed to take her place (as novice mistress) and was very soon the boss in the house; whatever she wanted came to pass; without her permission no one could speak to the Superior. Nothing was done for the novices any more; the instructions were omitted; even music was neglected though she [Willibalda] was well qualified to teach; the Superior and novice mistress bantered with each other like children, took their meals together, and neglected the spiritual exercises more and more until finally — from March to the end of May — prayers in choir, and all order of the day stopped.

The others were all satisfied with the confessor [Rupert, O.S.B.];

they became indignant when contemptuous conversation was carried on about him and me; they deplored the fact that there was no order, especially when (without any necessity) the Superior took in a one-year-old girl who screamed day and night and disturbed the sleep, spiritual reading, and the choir. She was given one sister to care for her. The two nuns fondled the child, carried her around in the house and even took her to the choir. Time was wasted unscrupulously before Christmas, with childish preparations for *Krist-kindl*; then, likewise, for the Superior's nameday; again with work for a so-called fair (the sale of women's handwork, etc., the profit to go to the convent). The fair was to take place at the end of the school year, and the poor sisters had to work until midnight and later, and then, of course, got up only at six o'clock; and, as I said above, finally neglected choir completely. The Superior and Willibalda sometimes did not pray the breviary at all, found no time even for praying the rosary and *appointed another* sister to do this!! I really knew this because in the confessional there was general complaint about this as well as in reports by letters. I used the confessional and conferences to bring the Superior to a change of mind, all in vain. Those who were suspected of giving information were hated so much more and persecuted.

Then I tried another method: I urged that the young sisters be allowed to make solemn vows in order to form a conventual chapter, and in this way to bring the Superior to insist on the better observance of order, the distribution of duties, etc. The celebration of profession was to be on February 10, the feast of St. Scholastica, but when I arrived, nothing was prepared. I had to return on July 11, the feast of St. Benedict. How surprised I was that only five sisters were permitted to pronounce vows, and the more capable ones, namely, the English-speaking sisters, were not allowed to make vows (at this time)! Those who were accepted (for solemn vows) with the exception of Sister Nepomucene [Ludwig],³ concerning whom the Superior was mistaken, were all timid (women). Two very sickly young women, who would not trust themselves to say a word, were accepted. Sisters Walburg [Dietrich] and Emmerama [Bader]⁴ reported to me at the same time that they would not and could not

³ Later superior of the Chicago foundation.

⁴ Sister Emmerama Bader, O.S.B., whose name appears frequently in these letters, found religious life in America very difficult. She had some support from Abbot Wimmer in her complaints against Mother Benedicta Riepp. In 1892 she left America to return to St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt. When she found no acceptance there, she joined the Chiemsee Convent where she died in 1902. S.W.A.A.

remain any longer, and they asked that I transfer them, for God's sake, to another place. Emmerama had already spoken, by letter, of the disorder to Fr. Prior [Rupert Seidenbusch]; he had come to the convent to assist a dying sister, and had lost the letter. The Superior got it; so now Emmerama could not bear it any longer.

I deliberated with my priests and as a result of this I informed the Superior, after the profession of vows was over, that I was choosing Sister Emmerama and four or five other nuns and sisters to send them, in time, to the West [Minnesota]. For the present, and since I just then had a carriage there, I would take them to Indiana immediately, where we have a roomy house and a beautiful garden, and where Fr. Ulrich Spöttl, a very good and wise man, would prepare them for the mission; I would have to do this in any case because I could no longer provide food for sixty people. Besides, Emmerama, I suggested Philomina, who likewise did not want to stay any longer and four others who had not been allowed to make solemn vows; but I took good care that the St. Marys teaching staff remained strong enough. As reasonable as my desire was in every respect (it cost her nothing), so unreasonable she became about it, and *rejected it flatly and firmly*, especially regarding Emmerama. Now I demanded that the question be brought before the whole convent. The meeting took place at 2:40 p.m. in the refectory. I myself attended with Fr. Prior and presented the case dispassionately, and left it to their judgment, with the statement that I wished to hear the result after dinner, and that if they absolutely did not want to take into consideration my advice and wish, then I would not bother myself with them anymore. *Naturally*, I received a "Yes," a unanimous one, from the Chapter. Now there was an attack on poor Emmerama! Two English-speaking sisters whom I had asked for, had to hear so much that they really could not trust themselves to go with her; but many others offered themselves and from these, I took two at once, and later three more. We parted, nevertheless (on my part, at least), in peace; Fr. Prior and I and the four sisters arrived safely in the town of Indiana on the 26th of March. But on the way we soon heard from our companion that the Superior spoke hateful words about all of them.

In Indiana they taught in the girls' school until soon after the question of Newark came up unexpectedly. The Bishop [James Bayley] and the parish asked me for sisters; I decided to send the sisters from Indiana to Newark and to send others to the West from St. Marys. When that became known in St. Marys, Mother Willibalda contended that she could go there with a few sisters, because Prior

Demetrius had written to the superior for a few sisters. According to the unanimous witness of all the sisters, Willibalda (and Sister Maura, the uncouth cook) were the cause of the changes which the Superior began to undertake. I, therefore, did *not* give her (Willibalda) permission, and merely wrote the superior⁵ telling her not to be hasty about the trip to Minnesota, but to wait until Fr. Demetrius, to whom I had written, could come to a decision that he could support six sisters (that was the number he wanted) and properly house them.

When I traveled to Newark after this, I received a letter from the Superior⁶ in which she confessed that *she* wanted to go to Minnesota; she had never wanted to be in St. Marys and that now she felt so ashamed that she could hardly trust herself to face the sisters. (Why? I cannot imagine because I never spoke disdainfully of her in the presence of the sisters.) And in two months, March to May, she really went to the parish only once but in Minnesota she wanted to begin anew and would take pains to give satisfaction in every way. I should, therefore, allow her, also, to go there with eight or ten sisters and that, immediately; she would use the 400 gulden received from the Missionsverein for traveling expenses. She could pay the debts with the profits made from the "fair." I was simple enough to believe her and gave the permission, with the repeated warning against haste, because I feared Fr. Demetrius might not yet have a house for them, and to go with six rather than with eight to ten, because my priests could not support so many of them. In any case, they should wait until I came to St. Marys.

I arrived there on June 4 when they were having examinations. Then I found out that all means were tried to influence all capable and strong sisters to emigrate to the West. After Mass on July 6, I sent the brothers and students out of the church or chapel, and then spoke to the sisters in a fatherly and kindly manner, presented the difficulties of the journey, and of the first beginnings in so cold a land as Minnesota, etc., and repeated: If you arrive there too early, before preparations are completed, or if too many come at once, you will necessarily meet with the greatest inconveniences. Such a step must be undertaken with mature consideration, not under great emotion or excitement, and with the best intention, in holy obedience, etc. Everything seemed all right. The Superior spoke kindly to me.

I left St. Marys a few days later, after I had ordered Fr. Rupert to

⁵ The letter is not extant.

⁶ Riepp to Wimmer, May 3, 1857.



MOTHER WILLIBALDA SCHERBAUER, O.S.B.
FIRST SUPERIOR IN MINNESOTA

GRAVE MARKER OF
MOTHER BENEDICTA RIEPP, O.S.B.
FIRST SUPERIOR (SUP. PRIMA) OF
BENEDICTINE SISTERS IN AMERICA



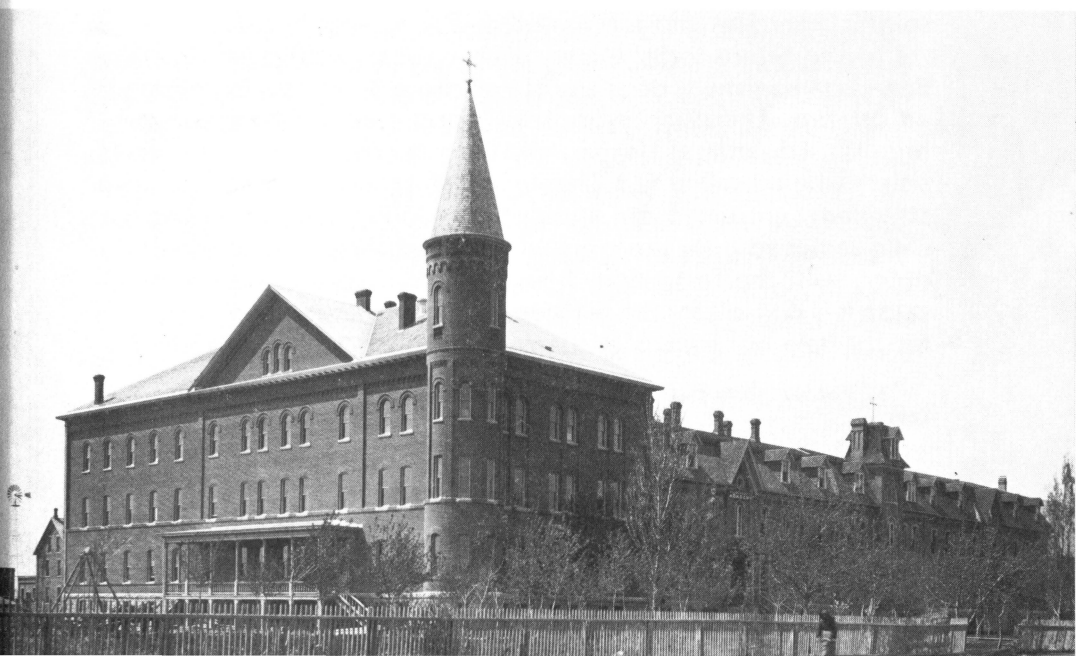


SAINT WALBURG ABBEY
EICHSTÄTT, BAVARIA
AN EARLY PHOTO

SAINT BENEDICT'S CONVENT
SAINT JOSEPH, MINNESOTA
1905



SAINT JOSEPH CONVENT
SAINT MARYS, PENNSYLVANIA
1980



Newark and installed Fr. Roman as prior and confessor; I, myself, a few days later, arrived at St. Vincent's and then went to Newark. There I heard that a few days after my departure, the Superior and 13 sisters left St. Marys, and took along not only the 400 gulden, mission money, but also the income (\$400) from the fair and whatever money they still had, all the linens, the chalice, the Mass book, yes, even all the eggs and candles (made from tallow that I gave them) and left only 25 cents (36 Kr.) in the safe; those sisters who remained were still more disturbed, because she did not appoint a superior, but only ordered Mother Theresia to look out for the others without presenting her to the convent as their superior.⁷ Those who remained, nuns and lay sisters (only one lay sister went along), were called traitors, etc.

Now it was clear that she wanted to destroy St. Marys because she realized that I would no longer permit the evil goings-on to continue. There were left only Sisters Walburg, Theresia, Nepomucene, Edwarda, Boniface, three novices, two candidates and one lay sister. She wanted, by all means, to take along Bonifacia (the music teacher) and Nepomucene (the principal and teacher) because then the school would have to be closed. However, they did not go along. The lay sisters unanimously declared they would not go along where Willibalda was. To Sister Hermenia (sister of Alexia) she [Mother Benedicta] had positively said that she wanted to break up St. Marys and, at the same time, that she was not going to Minnesota, but to Europe taking Sister Augustina [Short] along. This sister is English-speaking, native-born and a very good child. She was formerly persecuted by Sister Willibalda but since the departure of Emmerama, she was flattered in every way so that she became willing "to carry the gracious Lady's train." No time was allowed her for spiritual exercises and prayer until her good spirit was lost.

I had to return to St. Marys, restore order, and declare Mother Benedicta banished, once and for all, from St. Marys. I confirmed, *ad interim*, Theresia as prioress, appointed Walburga as subprioress, Edwarda as novice mistress (unanimous, with the choir sisters whom I called to a Chapter which Fr. Prior, confessor, and I attended), entrusted the students to Mother Walburga, had the child removed from the convent, restored the choir and the daily order, with the restriction, however, that Matins be omitted because it is difficult for the teachers, brought along some money (\$62 for the sale of chances at the fair) and then left on July 14. The

⁷ Mother Benedicta gave her version of this in a letter to Cardinal Barnabo, Jan. 4, 1859.

brothers and sisters were again in good order and mutually trusting. The Superior [Benedicta] was impertinent enough to direct to me those who wanted something, and even the drivers who brought to the train those I was taking came with the demand of \$47. The joy to be rid of these two guests [Benedicta and Willibalda] is worth a few \$100. She dug the pit herself. When after six months she returns from Europe, as she said, she will find no open door at St. Marys.

But just as she deceived me, so she deceived the nuns, sisters and candidates whom she sent to Minnesota. According to a letter from there, five of them⁸ and a fourteen-year-old child arrived in St. Cloud on June 30. The child, an orphan from the Institute, who had a knowledge of music, was taken along without letting her relatives know, thus causing much ill-feeling. The group, still awaiting three or four more, were received coldly. There was nothing prepared for them: no house and no provisions. Recently, as in previous years, grasshoppers had completely destroyed all grains and vegetables. And so their misery started. My people have nothing themselves but black coffee, bacon and potatoes; a pound of bacon costs 25¢ (37 Kr.), a bushel of potatoes, \$3.00 (7.50 G). Many of the fathers wanted to send them home at once, but for this, too, money was lacking. To send one person from there by train costs \$40.

In order not to act precipitously, I took my time and at first wrote only about separate problems: a probable estimate of the cost of living for the winter (the rent of a house comes to \$250 a year). Then gradually, I sent directions for procedure. In any case, I eventually wrote that I would not tolerate Benedicta nor Willibalda, and that I would probably recall some of the ten who went there. How much trouble, annoyance, traveling, writing, money and time these two women cost me, and then, they also want to go to Rome to complain about me — that I assume sovereign authority over them to which I have no right! I should be good enough to pay, but I should not say anything? We will see who is master! Just now, I still am. For well-behaved sisters I am prepared to do almost anything for the Order, but for such tramps as Benedicta and Willibalda I will not do anything. The Right Reverend Bishop Young of Erie let himself be trapped by giving her [Benedicta] a permit to collect money. I have to warn everyone, especially the venerable Central Committee of the Mission Society, not to give her money. If she had gone to Minnesota according to my advice and in conformity to our agreement, with fewer sisters, I would support them there as I did, until now, those

⁸ Three sisters, two candidates and a young girl under Mother Willibalda Scherbauer.

in St. Marys. But after such behavior, as just described, I want nothing more to do with her, and I cannot trust her. For her to question whether the Abbot-President of our Congregation is also the Superior of the sisters, before the forum of Bishops and of the Pope, is not only unwise and inopportune, it is also prejudicial to the peaceful development of the Order. We are unanimously determined not to tolerate any sisters of our Order near us who want to be independent of us, since we are their confessors and have troubles, vexations, and expenses enough with them, until they are able to help themselves. Bishop Young of Erie, to whom I had to report the recent events, also seems to question my rights. However, because I am his Vicar General, he gave me full authority for this purpose. I wrote him, though, thanking him and informing him that I wanted to handle this affair as head of the Order, not as Vicar General; I will not endure disobedient, undisciplined sisters near my people. There is, moreover, no sister who would not be satisfied and grateful for this, except Mother Benedicta, Mother Willibalda and the "uncouth" Maura who was left behind so that we would have our cross! However, I will either train her or dismiss her, if she accepts no discipline. I have long — too long — practiced patience and forbearance, always expecting improvement, advising those who complained to pray; trying better means; and only in the end, did I proceed to deposition. However, all at once things took a turn, which was very much desired, but which also scandalized many. It was not my fault. There are still 20 choir and lay sisters at St. Marys — too many! — but in Minnesota there is great need. There was too much haste and at best, \$1000 was lost.

I wanted to share this with you so that you will know how to act when you hear about it. I beg you to give this letter also to the Very Reverend Archbishop and to the Reverend Oberkamp [director of the Ludwig-Missionsverein] as well as to the Confessor Schmid, S.J. [confessor of sisters]. I cannot decide to write to each, and really have not the time to write twaddle two or three times, but those concerned should know about it; also Sister Benedicta, so she can act accordingly. At first she was very good. I can easily forgive her a little stubbornness because it is helpful for a superior, provided she does not go too far. Animosity towards the confessor under the influence of the quick-tongued Willibalda, however, and the neglect of her religious duties led her to a fall. For a long time she was loved by almost all the other sisters. Later, however, through her own fault she was feared, frequently even scorned. In America, she

can now hardly start anything worthwhile. I do not fear her appeal to Rome. That I am in the right is clear enough.

I am well.

Boniface Wimmer⁹

In Wimmer's letter of August 10, 1857, to King Ludwig, he spoke of the sisters in Minnesota but no longer showed any disapproval of the foundation nor of the conduct of the sisters. Instead, he saw for them a future mission to the Indians.

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

Aug. 10, 1857

[Gracious Lord and King!]

. . . I also took sisters to Newark at the wish of the Bishop and of the parish to give religious instruction to the young girls. Five choir sisters and two lay sisters went from St. Marys to Newark at the end of June. Another colony of our sisters went to Minnesota around the same time to take over the education of girls and later, when we will take over the Indians who live near our settlements, the sisters can work along in their conversion and civilization. . . .¹⁰

Your Majesty's most obedient and grateful

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot

In October, 1857, Abbot Wimmer visited the St. Cloud Convent and recognized it as in good standing. At the suggestion of Prior Demetrius di Marogna, he reappointed Mother Willibalda prioress. He wrote to Mother Scholastica Burkhardt of Erie [Nov. 15, 1857] about his visit to St. Cloud. Wimmer had appointed Mother Scholastica, one of the volunteers for Minnesota, superior of St. Benedict Convent in Erie.

WIMMER TO BURKHARDT

Nov. 15, 1857

St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Venerable Mother Prioress,

Most likely you have received my letter which I wrote you shortly

⁹ St. Boniface Abbey Archives, Munich (hereafter S.B.A.A. [Munich]), original; S.B.C.A., copy.

¹⁰ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 93.

before my trip to Minnesota. I left October 6 and arrived safe on the 10th in St. Paul. I visited Father Benedict Haindl in Shakopee and then went to St. Cloud, where I was not at all expected. I saw the sisters on the second day, only for a few minutes. After I had seen and arranged everything in St. Paul, St. Joseph, and Richmond, I returned to St. Cloud. They urged me to dine at the convent. The sisters were all well except Gertrude who had a very swollen face. They live in a little frame house surrounded by a large vegetable garden which, however, is not enclosed.

Naturally, the different situations were talked over. Sister Willibalda joined in as well as she could, and when she couldn't, she admitted her lack of knowledge and tearfully asked to have her ignorance excused. The sisters had only one and a half barrels of flour; they live mostly on potatoes. They earned little from their school work — from music quite a bit, mostly from the practicing of music by children and even women. You should continue acquiring a higher education. . . . Sister Willibalda requested me earnestly to regard her and her fellow sisters as I do the other sisters. I did not want to consent to it; but after I had convinced myself that they could get along (the monks give them wood), I gave in. I recognized her as prioress, gave the habit to Prisca and Marianne, and permitted the new prior, Father Cornelius, to read Holy Mass in the convent on Sundays and Communion days. I also had the brothers bring them firewood and help them to get their own home.

I gave Sister Willibalda a piece of my mind and spoke the plain truth. If she will be truthful and prudent, things will go well. Josephina Legal likes it there; I had left her there before. Peace reigns once more. From Minnesota I went to St. Louis, and from there to Kansas to visit my brother. I remained with him for three days. Tomorrow I'll return to St. Vincent's. Write me soon, telling me how you are getting along, if you are well, if anything has been built, if I am able to, or must, help in any way. As soon as I can, I will visit you again. Greetings in Christ to all the sisters, and pray for your brother,

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot¹¹

The St. Cloud foundation and Mother Benedicta Riepp were again the subjects of the Abbot's letter to the King in December, 1857.

¹¹ Morkin and Seigel, *Wind in the Wheat*, pp. 106–107.

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

Carrolltown, Cambria Co., Pa.

Dec. 7, 1857

[Lord and King,]

. . . In St. Cloud itself a few Benedictine sisters from St. Marys have settled. They were sent there by the Superior [Benedicta Riepp] against my wishes. Since we ourselves are still beginners there, and since grasshoppers destroyed all field crops excepting potatoes, turnips and corn the last two years, the sisters are in no better situation than we are. They have to subsist mostly on potatoes and live in a house in this new town where they have to pay \$250 rent annually! I really could do nothing for them, except to order my brothers to furnish wood for their needs, and to see to it that they received some school money so that they will be protected from the direst needs until conditions change for the better. I also arranged for everything in respect to their spiritual affairs. Moreover, they do much good for the Catholic and even for the Protestant young ladies, and they bear the privations cheerfully. . . .

Your Royal Majesty's
Most submissive and obedient

Boniface Wimmer
Abbot of St. Vincent¹²

¹² Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 99.

MOTHER BENEDICTA RIEPP IN EUROPE

After the departure of the sisters for the mission in Minnesota under Mother Willibalda Scherbauer as superior, Mother Benedicta Riepp and her companion, Mother Augustina Short, O.S.B.,¹ with a testimonial from Bishop Josue Young, proceeded to Europe.

According to reports, during her ten months² in Europe, Mother Benedicta was not welcome at her former convent in Eichstätt. One reason for this non-acceptance was most likely that Mother Edwarda had forbidden the trip, at Bishop von Oettl's insistence.

Bishop George von Oettl was the spiritual superior of the Convent of St. Walburg, and although the convent was diocesan, the Bishop insisted on strict papal enclosure.³ That would mean that a sister who was not a member of the community of St. Walburg could not be permitted within the enclosure. In 1857–58 St. Marys was considered an independent house because Abbot Wimmer had asked Pope Pius IX to declare St. Marys independent of the Eichstätt motherhouse in 1855. The

¹ See Appendix L on Mother Augustina Short, p. 216.

² July 1857 to May 1858.

³ Interview with the community of St. Walburg, June 1977, by the writer and her companion, Sister Margretta Nathe, O.S.B.

Prioress and the Convent of St. Walburg were aware of this. (The formal decree of independence was not received until Dec. 6, 1859.) Mother Benedicta, at the time she was in Europe, was no longer considered a member of the community of St. Walburg and was, therefore, not allowed to live within the enclosure. She was, however, permitted to live in the guest house and had some contact with the Prioress, as the Eichstätt Chronicle shows.⁴

Another fact which may have contributed to this difficulty was the illness of Mother Edwarda Schnitzer at the time of Mother Benedicta's arrival in Eichstätt. This illness was serious enough, according to the Bishop's letter of Aug. 31, 1857, to forbid any visitors.

The archival numbers of the next two letters by the Bishop of Eichstätt indicate that the undated and unsigned letter should precede the signed letter. The two letters are in the same handwriting. Both letters indicate the difficult position in which Mother Benedicta Riepp found herself in relation to Bishop George von Oettl.

VON OETTL TO MUELLER

No date

Most Gracious Lord Court Chaplain!

I owe you sincere thanks for the information about America you kindly sent, because it places me in a position, perhaps, to meet a certain person and prevent greater harm. From the beginning already, Benedicta inspired in me a deep mistrust by her opposition to the suggestions of Fr. Boniface [Wimmer]. She wanted to continue such ties with St. Walburg that she would be subject only to the Prioress of that place, even though I had decided against such impossible dependence and had advised her to be guided in all important matters by Fr. Boniface. My mistrust of her increased with every one of her letters. It became always clearer to me why she preferred the Jesuit custom of being subject to a distant authority rather than to a nearer one, in fact, really to be completely independent.

About a year ago she wrote a woeful letter⁵ in which she urgently begged that she be allowed to come here to state her problems

⁴ See Appendix M, Excerpts from the St. Walburg Abbey *Chronicle*, pp. 216-219.

⁵ This letter is not available.

personally and receive advice. In reply I had the Prioress forbid the trip absolutely and commanded her [Mother Benedicta] to state her difficulties, desires and proposals precisely in writing and she would then receive appropriate instructions. Imagine to yourself my most unpleasant surprise when, against my express prohibition and without previous notice, Benedicta suddenly appeared at the convent. Instead of reprimanding her personally, I ordered her to write her grievances, petitions and proposals briefly and conscientiously and submit them to me; otherwise I could give them no consideration. That she seemed not to wish to do. Then on a beautiful morning, I heard that Mother Benedicta had left to go to Waal, to Ulm, and to Munich. Not a word of it was said to me. It is unfortunate that Mother Prioress is so very ill that I cannot give her the necessary instructions before my departure for Rome. But I would like to ask you, dear friend, to see to it that Benedicta does not get to see His Majesty, King Ludwig. It would distress me very much if she would annoy him with her unfounded complaints. She will not presume to go to Rome, at least not while I am there. When you write to the Lord Abbot Boniface, I beg you to give him my cordial greetings. May he never tire of caring for the young Order.

(No signature)⁶

VON OETTL TO MUELLER

August 31, 1857

In the great press of work, visits, and demands which usually present themselves during the last hours before setting out on a journey, I cannot refrain from thanking you sincerely for the interesting information from America. Now all is clear to me. Unfortunately Mother Prioress Edwarda [Schnitzer] is so seriously ill that we are not permitted to speak of any serious things to her. I have, therefore, given to the Dean of my Cathedral the special care of the Convent of St. Walburg besides his usual duties and have instructed him fully regarding Mother Benedicta. He will, therefore, also take it upon himself to report everything to the Mother Prioress as soon as the doctor allows it. I beg you, therefore, to consult him first. The reports of Abbot Boniface and of Fr. Rupert⁷ have strengthened still more my opinion of the conditions in the women's branch of our (Benedictine) colony in America, and in particular, of the character of Mother Benedicta. Concerning the relationship of the young convent of sisters with the Abbot, I fully agree with the opinion of the

⁶ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/23.

⁷ Rupert Seidenbusch, O.S.B.

local superior [Benedicta], and wish that the problem of subjection and jurisdiction were authoritatively settled and confirmed. Perhaps His Excellency, the Archbishop [of Munich-Freising], will bring it about with the Holy See. Without such authoritative ruling it is to be feared that scandalous frictions will recur. I will refer to His Excellency Mother Benedicta's points of complaint⁸ for his consideration. They are quite well explained in the reports of the Lord Abbot, and could even be influential in the settling of the relationship between the two parties since the excesses of Mother Benedicta seem to make this necessary. I expect you to notify me, if I can do anything regarding this in Rome. Otherwise, I shall make no mention of it, since the problem really by right lies in the jurisdiction of the Lord Archbishop as Director of the Missionsverein and I have no jurisdiction at all since I have definitely dismissed Mother Benedicta.

You see! Even my pen refuses to serve, and the vestibule is again becoming alive.

And so, may God be with you till we happily meet again.

The kindest greetings to your Society, one that is very dear to me!

†George, Bishop⁹

WIMMER TO OBERKAMP¹⁰

St. Vincent, Westmoreland Co., Pa.

September 18, 1857

Reverend Sir and Friend,

For a long time I have heard nothing from you, but I myself have not reported anything special to you either. You received news some four weeks ago, I hope, about a joust, however, unbloody, between me and the former venerable superior in Saint Marys, Benedicta Riepp. She defeated herself and cleared the field. By this time the Prioress of St. Walburg has also received letters and reports from various authentic sources, so that I had to intervene to show that Benedicta is a good nun but not, therefore, a good superior.¹¹ The confusion which meanwhile arose among the sisters because of the stupid actions of Benedicta I quickly removed by establishing suitable prioresses everywhere: Theresa Vogel in St. Marys, Scholastica Burkhardt in Erie, and Emmerama Bader in Newark.

⁸ Mother Benedicta's points of difference appear later.

⁹ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/24.

¹⁰ Baron Rudolph von Oberkamp had succeeded Fr. Joseph Ferdinand Mueller in 1855 as business manager of the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

¹¹ This letter is not extant.

Our missions in Minnesota and Kansas are prospering splendidly. True, the Fathers must suffer much want and discomfort, but they have a very beautiful and blessed field of labor which is constantly expanding. Three priests are in Atchison, Kansas: P. Augustine Wirth, Henry Lemke and Casimir Seitz, with Fr. Paul in Doniphan on the Missouri. There are also our Indian missions which have been commissioned to us by Bishop Miede of Denver. I will have to go there myself to see if we are able to accept them. Our affairs in St. Cloud, Minnesota, are not proceeding well, but nevertheless, the Fathers are respected and sought wherever they show themselves. In fact, almost half of the huge territory is under our care. Fr. Demetrius is prior; Fathers Benedict Haindl, Cornelius Wittmann, Clemens Staub, Bruno Riess and Alexius Roetzer are his assistants and there are eight brothers. Recently six sisters from St. Marys also went there, but this affair is premature. They will have a hard winter.

Nine priests were ordained this year for our Order: Fr. Casimir in Kansas, Fr. Eberhard Gahr in Newark; and seven others will be ordained at home on May 28, namely, Fathers Wendelin Mayer, Alphons Heimler, Magnus Meyer, Othmar Wirtz, Otto Kopf, Leo Rau and Ludwig Fink. They are all good, worthy, and able men. I have already written to you, I think, that I took over the German St. Mary's Parish in Newark. It happened around the middle of April through Fr. Valentin Felder and Fr. Eberhard Gahr. Unfortunately, Fr. Valentin died miserably through a very sad accident in New York on May 28; he was run over by a train. Fr. Rupert Seidenbusch is now in his place. I have also taken over Bellefonte in the diocese of Philadelphia. Fr. Odilo Vandergreen and Fr. Ludwig Fink are there.

Newark, only nine miles from New York and on a *băy*, will become a very important place. As we now see it, it is, for me, only a heavy burden. It must be entirely rebuilt. The cemetery was filled; there was no house for the priest. The church, now almost finished, cost over \$24,000; a new cemetery, \$2,000; three small houses, close to the church, which we bought, one for the rectory for the priest and another for the nuns, cost \$8,000. The last \$10,000 goes onto the bill of the Benedictines. The parish is building the church. The expenses of the trip of seven sisters from St. Marys to Newark, their setting up house there, one piano, etc., comes to almost \$400.

In Erie the sisters had to teach classes in the old Church of Our Lady. That would certainly have killed them on account of the elevation and cold in winter. I pressed the bishop to give them this church; he promised to do so; then I made arrangements that be-

fore winter the church would be rebuilt, i.e., in such a way that it will be a two-story building. The cost of this, \$500 to \$600. Who will pay for it? And in St. Marys, Benedicta left behind nothing but debts and ran off with the money. In Minnesota there are six sisters and one child; twelve wanted to go there, according to the wish of the superior; and half of them would certainly have starved or frozen to death, had I not hindered their going through Bishop Young. It is not possible to live on the income from the school there, and my fathers have nothing themselves because the grasshoppers destroyed everything again. If you from the Missionsverein do not help either, things will be difficult.

I am very anxious to hear how much will be allotted us again this year. My Abbey is *really* a child of the Missionsverein, and the Verein must not be ashamed of it. I hope it will also care for it in a special way and continue to support it strongly.

Please, kindly pay the Court Chaplain 427 florin, and Mr. Unkraut in (Bremen?) \$46 for the wine he sent me, because we do not know where we can procure any reliable Mass wine here.

Our school has more students than last year. That includes several paying students who do not want to become priests. There are 11 novices, 11 professed clerics, 13 scholastics or postulants. B. Brundner finished his novitiate, but he almost died of chest cramps; he was sick for three months. He wanted to make profession now. However, I am still anxious that all is not yet all right. I promised to help him to become a priest since he wishes it in any case. If he is a Benedictine, that can also happen. We would have more novices but our novice master, Fr. Peter Baunach, Redemptorist, is extremely strict and observant with his novices, so that it irritates quite a few. However, I wish all things according to the Holy Rule; therefore, better to have fewer and these few good.

We have a very blessed year for crops, but costs are high. And we are all well, with few exceptions. Among the brothers there arose a spirit of mistrust and dissatisfaction, which caused many to leave or forced me to dismiss them. I lost \$2,000 because of it. By far, most stood firm and true, as always. The devil tries all kinds of ways to harm us. Yet the material loss in such cases is always replaced by spiritual gain, in that the proven ones show themselves, and the chaff is separated from the wheat. I have now too few brothers. In Minnesota I could use as many as I have at home; cooks are especially needed.

Once the budget of the Missionsverein is planned and the treasury finds itself in a healthy condition, may I ask you to send a good

part of our portion? And the poor Benedictine sisters will surely not come off with nothing. They are, in fact, in great want at all four stations where they are now.

If I travel to Kansas this fall, you will receive a long letter as soon as my business allows it. I have, in fact, very much to do and to travel for my priests and my sisters. The best thing about this is that I am still not supported and must, therefore, fight over the fact that I am deprived of money, time, and health to help them! But that is the way it goes — and it is proper, too.

Recommending myself most humbly to your friendly benevolence and to your pious prayers, I sign myself with special devotion,

Your most humble

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot¹²

When problems arose regarding the grants of the Missionsverein to America, the King referred them to Mueller who was close to him as his court chaplain.

MUELLER TO WIMMER

Nov. 6, 1857

[Lord Abbot,]

An appeal to His Majesty, King Ludwig was sent by him to me for consideration. In it she (Benedicta Riepp) begs for support in the erection of a house of formation and a school for Erie. You may believe that I did not favor this, but I suggested something else which was accepted. After His Majesty showed me your letter [of Aug. 10, 1857] and I saw from your letter to me what sacrifices you made in Newark, I begged His Majesty to donate 3000 fl. for the Benedictine monks and the Benedictine sisters in Newark, which I begged off the 8000 fl. destined for the erection of a Capuchin monastery in Mount Carmel, in the Diocese of Milwaukee. You will, therefore, divide honestly with the sisters. . . . One point which she (Benedicta Riepp in her petition to Ludwig I for help) brought forward as a complaint caused bad blood [with the King], namely, that you kept back the 8000 fl. [of the 1852 donation] and did not permit the building. I excused you with the explanation that unforeseen obstacles had arisen, which did not allow the erection of the building, but that you would complete what you promised. And so carry out your promises first before starting something new. You know

¹² S.B.A.A. (Munich), original; S.B.C.A., copy.

that I do everything for you; but *ad impossibilia nemo tenetur*. Even if your heart is large, you cannot help everyone. You cannot rely on the Central Direction (of the Ludwig-Missionsverein).

[Mueller]¹³

Mother Benedicta Riepp had left St. Marys in July 1857. Earlier that year she had sent a list of points on which she did not agree with Abbot Wimmer to Pope Pius IX. Cardinal Barnabo informed Wimmer and sent him a list of articles Riepp had referred to Rome. Wimmer was asked to respond.

BARNABO TO WIMMER

March 17, 1858

To Abbot Boniface Wimmer

The religious woman, Benedicta Riepp, who is in charge of the monastery of St. Mary in Pennsylvania, has written to His Holiness, Our Lord Pius IX, to obtain certain solutions about some articles expressed on the adjoining page, about which she cannot agree with your Reverence.¹⁴ Furthermore, the aforesaid nun makes a summary of the reasons on account of which she differs from you, which I do not think need to be related here because I think you have clearly understood them. But, truly, since the matter concerns these differences between her and your Reverence, it is wholly fitting that, before any decision is made in regard to the matter, the pertinent information be sought from you. Wherefore, I shall expect that you will reply to me in regard to this matter, and in the meantime I am asking God that He may bestow on your Reverence all success and blessing.

(Given) at Rome from the Palace of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, March 17, 1858.

Al. C. Barnabo, Prefect¹⁵

This same letter contained the following list of articles:

Articles

about which the religious woman, Benedicta Riepp,
asks the Holy See that some decision be made:

¹³ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 96, n. 1.

¹⁴ The reply to a request to the Procurator for the Beuronese and Bavarian Congregations in Rome for this letter of Mother Benedicta to Pius IX (April 18, 1980) indicated that no letters from her could be found in any of the archives he checked.

¹⁵ A.U.N.D., *Prop. Fide*, Fol. 171 rv.; S.B.C.A., copy. Trans. Sister Luanne Meagher, O.S.B.

1. The admission of aspirants into the convent, the taking of the habit, and the solemn profession of the novices.
2. The nature of cloister and the claustral discipline.
3. Transfer of the sisters and the election of the Superior.
4. Affairs of the economy.
5. Accusations made by the sisters against the Superior of the Convent in St. Marys immediately before her departure from St. Marys as well as after her departure.¹⁶

The bishops of Pittsburgh, Erie, and Eichstätt and the Prior of the Minnesota foundation were asked to express their views on the questions arising from the controversy, the "points" of disagreement, Wimmer's petition to Rome to have the convent in St. Marys declared independent of the Eichstätt motherhouse, and his petition to have the sisters' dowries transferred from St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt to the American foundation. Bishop O'Connor hesitated to answer because the sisters were no longer in the Pittsburgh diocese. In general, the others who were asked favored Wimmer on all issues.

Later in the same year, 1857, when Mother Benedicta was in Europe she made a list of six points on which she could not agree with Wimmer. This list was composed at the "ordering" of Bishop von Oettl and was sent by him to Archbishop von Reisach of Munich. It was also sent to Oberkamp of the Ludwig-Missionsverein and by him to Wimmer. Wimmer answered the complaints point by point in his usual forthright manner in a letter written to Oberkamp on November 23, 1857. He asked Oberkamp to inform the Bishop and the Archbishop of his reaction to the "Points." His opinion was that, as an "exempt abbot," he owed the bishops no explanation, but he did want them to know his point of view.

RIEPP — POINTS OF DIFFERENCE

No date

Points

on which I cannot agree with the Right Reverend
Lord Abbot Boniface Wimmer

a. Acceptance of Postulants

He brought girls and invested them whether they had a vocation or

¹⁶ S.B.C.A., copy; Baska. *Benedictine Congregation*, p. 39.

not; it was all the same to him. We had about 30 sisters in the house and according to my judgment and that of others, only about 18 had a true vocation.

b. Investiture and Profession

He expected all the novices to whom he had given the habit to be allowed to make profession; neither the superior nor the convent could say a word. For example, when the sisters proceeded according to Church laws and the novices did not receive favorable votes, he took them away by force and permitted them to make vows in another convent. He has already done this.

c. Removing and Changing of Sisters to Daughterhouses

He always wanted sisters from St. Marys to be moved [to his new foundation] because we were in want and suffered from hunger. Every time he came to St. Marys there was quarreling, especially in the brothers' house, over the fact that he could not support more people. In spite of this, every time he came, which was not seldom, he brought at least one or two postulants or students, who had neither money nor clothes. One of his priors set off once in the middle of the night and did not stay in the house when the Very Reverend Lord Abbot was there. Others complained because they were tired of all the quarreling. Things could not continue if they were not able to get money, etc.

After I had sent sisters to Erie and seven others to the West, where they certainly will not suffer as much want as in St. Marys, he was angry and disturbed because I, and not he, had transferred them. He did not consider that I had written and told him. For a time the sisters, especially the teachers, had to work at night to prepare for a small fair to provide money for the traveling expenses of the sisters going to the West and to buy a few pounds of white flour, coffee, etc., for the convent in St. Marys. Within the last year four very young sisters died as a result of the heavy diet. More than two-thirds of the others were ailing because for the entire year, day after day, we had nothing but cornbread, black soup and noodles made of rye flour, or salted and half-spoiled beef, and all of this very sparingly.

d. Money Difficulties

When I spoke to the Reverend Abbot about the money which we received from King Ludwig, he said that he, not we, received the 8000 fl.

e. When I wanted to arrange a proper parlor, which would have cost but little, he did not permit it. Instead we had to use a real wood-

shed where I was forced to bring respectable people — a room in the inner part of the house. He expected the brothers to be with the sisters and work with them; the sisters should wash, sew, bake, etc., for the brothers; the brothers, again, should work for the sisters and this in every place where he would put sisters. Often quarrels and disunity arose, and finally even scuffles happened among the brothers. Dissatisfied and discontented sisters were allowed to send notes and letters through pupils and lay brothers to him and he freely accepted them and supported them [these sisters], or even took them away from the convent and placed them elsewhere.

f. Confessors

Recently he placed even more confessors at St. Marys who agree with him. These gave the sisters many false ideas of religious life. He also demanded that every novice should hold a position in the convent.

Since the Lord Abbot and I disagreed on these points, I spoke to him about it a few times, but he became very upset and twice he turned away when I asked to speak to him.

He tried to win the novices over to him and against me. The older sisters were often scandalized when he led the young sisters by the arm in the garden and told them everything. He did the same with students. Yes, even his lay brothers had to know everything that happened in the convent.

When he found out that I had gone to Europe, he was very disturbed. The confessors who sided with him had to speak against me, as did the sisters, especially the dissatisfied ones, almost all of whom he had brought into the convent and so are easily influenced by flattery and compliments, because they well knew they could have greater freedom and would find help and support in their complaints.

The Superior, therefore, especially during the last half year, could do nothing any more, because, not she, but the Rt. Reverend Abbot ruled.

I kindly beg your Lordship to read these points, to see whether I can leave them as they are or not. I could really call attention to more, but I believe this is enough. May the dear God direct all to the good of the Order and may He lead your Gracious Lordship in every way. May He not take from us our good Mother Prioress.¹⁷

¹⁷ Referring to the illness of Prioress Edwarda Schnitzer.

Begging humbly for your holy blessing,

Your Gracious Lordship's
obedient servant,

Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B.¹⁸

Wimmer answered Mother Benedicta's six points of difference in a letter to Baron von Oberkamp, business manager and treasurer of the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

WIMMER TO OBERKAMP

Nov. 23, 1857

Rev. and dearest Friend,

I recently sent you a short letter which I composed on my trip back from Kansas. However, since you were so kind as to share with me Sister Benedicta's points of complaint, I must again bother you with a letter and request that you also kindly communicate it to His Excellency the Archbishop, and the Bishop. It is impossible for me to find the time to write to everyone. Yet I do wish that you, as well as the two prelates, know how the affair stands. However, I also consider it not a *legal* but a private affair, for both princes of the Church will certainly agree *that they have no jurisdiction over me*, and therefore I am not obliged to defend myself before their tribunals. The whole business should really be brought before the tribunal of the Bishop of Erie, in whose diocese St. Marys lies. It will naturally get there, if the plaintiff is courageous enough to turn to Rome. I have already informed our Procurator General there, so that he will know what to do if something should happen. Then perhaps the Bishop would be commissioned, if any significance is attributed to the affair, to investigate it. This investigation will show that I am right *on all points*, and that Benedicta can never again be admitted into our priories. Therefore, I write only to give my opinion, not as guilty and not as if I admit that the two prelates have the right to make a judgment in this affair, nor even to ask a hearing, except insofar as the Mission is concerned. Personally, I greatly revere both the Archbishop and the Bishop because both have given support to the monks and nuns of the Order and would gladly offer a hand to remove the abuses which have arisen and to put an end to the ruinous dissensions. I am prepared to give them a calm and correct explanation of the circumstances.

¹⁸ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/22.

First, I want to touch upon the complaints which have been advanced, in order:

- a. I did *not* bring a *single girl* without having obtained the permission for admittance from Sister Benedicta. But she, without my knowledge and a few times against my formally expressed wish, admitted eight or nine sisters. Also, in spite of my prohibition, she had one invested, namely Sister Gonzaga. Besides Prioress Benedicta, there is only Chiliana who, according to the opinion of wise people, has no true vocation. However, I did not recommend her and counseled many times that she be dismissed, but it did not happen.
- b. It is an untruth and as much of a lie as the one above that I expect all to make profession. After a year novitiate, one makes profession in our Order, and without a good reason, this may not be postponed. However, I have never insisted that it must be made right after one year, much less that all who had received the habit be allowed to make profession, and again much less, that this happen without the superior and community being allowed to say anything. Abduction through force can not happen in America. Only once did I take nuns and sisters from St. Marys, as I mentioned earlier in a letter: namely, Sister Emmerama, who originally came from St. Walburg, because she could no longer bear the tyranny; the simple professed Sisters Benedicta Burkhard and Adelgund Leschak; and the lay sister Philomina from St. Walburg. That happened, indeed, with the defiant opposition of Sister Superior at first, but afterwards with the unanimous approval of her and the entire community. In fact, I could produce all 40 sisters and Fr. Prior Rupert Seidenbusch as eye and ear witnesses.
- c. But this removal of sisters from St. Marys occurred not from my arbitrariness, but because Sister Superior and I would have been foolish had we accepted 40 sisters for St. Marys without transferring some to other places at the first opportunity. Four school sisters and two candidates take care of the girls' school in Newark with 600 children; three could, therefore, easily have taken care of the 100 girls in St. Marys and also have supported themselves. Why should I feed forty Benedictine sisters when four would be enough? How can anyone reproach me for working for the spread of the Order!

However, it is not true that I always spoke of it. But I did often speak of the duty to train them well so that we could send them out.

It is also *not true* that the sisters had to suffer from hunger. It is a wicked lie that they always had only salty and rancid beef. Last year alone I delivered over 400 bushels, i.e., baskets of rye, and some forty bushels of wheat — which makes ten bushels per person. The sisters themselves fattened and killed hogs, and bought meat from the butcher. I can easily prove that; besides this, I sent lard; and of the four sisters who died, two were already sickly; two were received into the Order by the superior as girls of 14 years and they died of consumption, which they probably contracted through much praying and singing in choir! But if they became sick because of the rough fare, was not my proposal for the foundation of a daughterhouse the more justified?

It is false to say that I always brought along one or two candidates or pupils when I came to St. Marys. Moreover, when I travel to St. Marys, I do so by horseback. My saddle cloth is not wide enough to stick a postulant into it! In all I brought only two pupils, one 12, one 14 years old, and they were both paid for. If I brought postulants, there were three or four; in fact, it really was three; and only once two at the same time, since I do not care to ride a horse alone with a female. I may have delivered 13 or 14. Sister Augustina [Short] is one of them. Therefore, in five years I may have delivered five or six. In the first year I was in Saint Marys eight times, the other years at least four or five times. Yet I am supposed to have always brought at least one or two each time. Even if I had done this, I would not have to be ashamed of it. It is no sin to enter a monastery. How can the venerable Sister know *what I said in the house of my brothers*? Whether I quarreled there or praised? Did she have spies who wrote her notes or carried secrets to her? It would be none of her business, anyway. But it is again untrue that a prior rode away and did not stay in the house when the abbot was there. No priest forgets himself so far, least of all Fr. Benedict, that he would not come into the house when I was there. Certainly, I do not deny that I can quarrel sometimes; and disobedient brothers and sisters have a good chapter read to them. I soon grab runaways by the coat, if they do not flee across the sea like Benedicta, or I am otherwise happy to see them far away from me.

That sisters went to Erie was disagreeable to me; it happened at the wrong time and it was against all regulations: they had no home of their own and no certain income; there were also two novices with them, who in this way had no novitiate; Sister Scholastica [Burkhardt], who was made superior in Erie, was needed at

home as novice mistress and teacher of the young sisters and candidates; and finally, Sister Superior has *no right* to found a daughterhouse on her own.

She could have sent seven sisters to Minnesota with my fullest consent, but she took away thirteen in spite of the agreement. She wanted to take away all who were useful for anything so that we would have to break up St. Marys. That I can prove to her through *sworn* statements if she wants to deny it. However, in fact, I never let the sisters *suffer necessity* anywhere. As in St. Marys, I also support those in Erie because there are now twelve sisters, while before there were only six. The additional ones destined for Minnesota remained in Erie because the bishop, as a result of my letter, forbade them to travel further.

Sister *Superior* had not taken care that they got property and a cloister in Erie. But since then *I have* done so in that I moved the bishop to give them the old church and the land which belongs to it. She had left them without a designated superior. I have given them a good prioress in the person of Sister Scholastica and have reestablished confidence, harmony, and trust.

And even in Minnesota, after Sister Willibalda and the rest of the sisters humbly apologized and urgently begged that I again take them on as my children and consider them in the same way as I do the rest of the sisters in St. Marys, Erie, and Newark, I appointed Sister Willibalda as prioress, because someone must be superior there. I have asked my prior there, although we ourselves are poor, to support them in every way possible, especially to deliver all firewood for the long and raw winter and to assist them in obtaining property. Whether I will receive the same kind of thanks for this as I did from Sister Benedicta remains to be seen.

As far as I am concerned, the sisters could have arranged a fair or lottery of female crafts, as they wanted, *but with moderation and limits, and without completely disturbing the order of the monastery*. I did not find fault with the fair, but rather with the fact that the choir, prayers and reading ceased for almost two or three months, and, as it later became apparent, with the real intent of raising the means for flight and for the unnecessary trip to Germany.

- d. This is again a *partial lie*; I said this publicly before the community, that the King had given the money not to them but to me, but with the order to *construct a monastery for them*. If I wanted, I could say that the monastery is already built. *Forty sisters and 30*

charges live in it. Is that not a monastery? If it stood on the right spot, I would let it be. But I always said I would build them a monastery attached to the new parish church; and I will do it and also give seven acres of land surrounding it, more beautiful land than any other monastery has. But where the church now stands there was a terrible pine forest two or three years ago. The pines are now gone but the stumps are still there. The church is finished except for the oratory and the sacristy which has only a provisional roof. The oratory over the sacristy is to become the sisters' choir. When that is built, I will build the monastery onto it, clear the land around it, and have fruit trees planted. I have it fenced in already, etc. Is that not enough? If I wanted to make out my bill against the sisters, there would be little left of the 8,000 florin. Moreover, I *communicated this* to his Majesty two years ago; *and the king had no complaints about it.* Who then can demand that I establish a new convent almost every year or spend considerable sums of money for the sisters? Because I viewed them all as children of one house, could I not rightfully take something where it was not needed, to give where it was needed? I let the sisters have the house which they now have, and my brothers had to leave it and move into two miserable, widely separated, poor houses. They had to live there for two years until I could give them a better, although already old, house in which they could now live together. Who would do the same, that he give over his good house to his neighbor — without interest — and then move into a worse one himself? Have these sisters no feelings at all, that for all these sacrifices and benefits they can offer only false suspicions and calumnies?

- e. The house in which the sisters live was built for the School Sisters of Notre Dame. The present parlor was also their parlor. If it was good enough for the one, why is it not for the other? It is a wooden room because it is built of wood; otherwise it is roomy, friendly, and large enough. Sister Benedicta liked it only too much and gossiped only too much in it with the village women, to the great annoyance of her sisters.

It is also an *infamous lie* that I said the brothers should work with the sisters and be together — *for* one another, yes, but not *with* one another. In America brothers and sisters work for each other in the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood, in the Congregation of St. Joseph, even the Jesuits do so; in Kansas the Sisters of the Sacred Heart and the mission priests and brothers support one another, etc. There is nothing wrong in this, but I

always insisted strongly on enclosure and separation of the sexes, and this was also strictly observed. Even if some quarrels have arisen where 40 sisters and 20 brothers are next to one another, that is no wonder. Even fights would be no wonder. On the contrary, the people, and even the Rt. Rev. Bishop himself, have often wondered that none have occurred!! And it is again a lie, the bold statement that brawls have occurred among the brothers. It could be that when they hear this slander, they will give Sister Superior a sound beating, if she should dare to return to St. Marys. Yet the brothers are too magnanimous even for that!

Subjects may always bring complaints to their superiors, but it is sad when they *must* employ the way of *secrecy* to do so, when it is not possible for them in lawful ways. That happened, however, only two or three times and not through pupils and lay brothers but personally after confession in the confessional, where they handed over the complaints in writing. There I encouraged them to patience and to prayer. When there were many complaints last year I always told them they should suffer and pray. Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica would not have allowed one or several persons to ruin the monastery. Through her proud, obstinate conduct contrary to the Rule, Sister Superior will dig a pit for herself and fall in, and so it has happened!

- f. I have no priest who does not agree with me, that is, who does not obey me; and if I had one, then I would be a real jackass if I made him prior. Moreover, each of my priests is naturally better schooled in monastic life than Sister Benedicta. Yes, there is the difficulty. *She thought herself smarter than I and all my brothers.* For that reason, after Fr. Benedict's removal, Fr. Prior Rupert Seidenbusch was not allowed in the house except to hear confession. Why does one need a priest when one is so smart oneself?

Who would *believe the nonsense that I ever demanded that each novice should receive an office in the monastery?* How I would like to be able to write down such simple lies! Now it's getting even better — "He tries to win the novices for himself against me! And frequently leads them arm in arm around in the garden," etc. Terrible! It is just too bad that it is again not true. I have never spoken alone with a nun nor with a novice. When I wanted to speak with one, Sister Superior had naturally to be asked for permission, and when this was given, I gave them audience. I never went into the monastery without, at the same time, asking for and sending for Sister Superior. In the last years all

avoided me who saw me, because it had been most strongly forbidden them to approach me or the confessor and because it was a crime to show me a sign of respect or childlike gratitude.

I said I *never* spoke to any sister except once, on the day of examination, June 5, 1857. The sewing and embroidery work was exhibited for view in the refectory, and in the schoolroom next to it the children were busy giving a little play. The Benedictine candidates were acting, too, in part dressed in men's clothing, which did not please me at all. Professed nuns sang and played the piano for the public, which also did not please me. And in the *garden* a happy and drunken shoemaker by the name of Weidenherner had set up a stand and sold beer, cigars, bread, etc., for the benefit of the sisters. The house and garden were full of strangers, but not in the actual enclosure. The nuns were in the middle of the crowd with the sewing work and also in the garden. That was at the time when Sister Benedicta had disturbed everyone with the envisioned trip to Minnesota! I spoke a few words to *Sister Augustina* [Short] in the refectory among the people. Then I went back and forth for a few minutes in front of the kitchen windows with Sister Chiliana Eger, whom I reprimanded for the obstinacy in wanting not to make simple vows but solemn profession immediately. Then I spoke in the garden to a couple of novices who wanted to go to Minnesota, and to two young sisters who also wanted to go there. To all I spoke only very little, and in no way did I stir them up! I only said that they should not be overhasty. If too many would go, more than seven, then it would have to turn out badly. The good Sister [Benedicta] presents this in such a fashion as if in the *most suspicious* intimacy, rather regularly, even "often," I fostered familiarity with the sisters. I must describe such nonsense as a defamation of honor which one should not expect from the tongue of a religious against a clergyman.

The saying holds true: Lying is done easily at a distance. She admits that the confessors were on my side. Therefore, the confessors and I are of the same stamp. The sisters are also for me. And who is for her? Sister Augustina! Look, the entire clergy is against her! The sisters are against her. All the prioresses and nuns of the four convents are against her. Even her confederate Willibalda has fallen away from her and has most humbly asked for forgiveness (I can produce her letter upon request), and has let herself be made prioress. Only the poor Augustina is for her, or rather, is with her. Because she certainly reported far more lies to

Augustina than to the two prelates; and she [Augustina] will soon recognize her mistake, because she is a good child. The pit is completely finished. Sister Benedicta is stuck in it and will remain stuck in it and *do penance for her* haughtiness. In America there is no longer any place for her.

Why did she not bring these complaints to Bishop Young? She was in Erie with him herself; she had a convent there over which I had exercised my authority until recently. But there *she feared the proximity of the witness, the investigation of the bishop*, the discovery of her guilt! There, as the bishop assured me orally and by letter, she spoke *most friendly of me*, and *only wanted to go to Europe in order to learn the boundaries of our respective rights!*

I rely so much on the well-known intelligence and wisdom of Bishop Oettl, that he will not again place such persons on my neck to cause new scandal, but that he instruct the prioress of St. Walburg to keep her in the monastery and have her restore the money which she appropriated. If Augustina wants to remain outside, we have nothing against it. If she wants to return, it should happen soon or we will not let her in anymore. Moreover, she must humble herself and both *recognize and confess* her guilt.

And now just a little more: The Lord Bishop and the Prioress [of Eichstätt] sent the nuns Benedicta, Walburga and Maura to me, to use them for the founding of a monastery. She was superior of these two, certainly only for a time and conditionally, i.e., if she did well. Nuns cannot be without clerical superiors. Who was to be theirs? Certainly first it was the prior of St. Marys, that is, myself; and if we desire it, the Bishop of Erie,¹⁹ and in the highest instance, the Pope. This position is no benefice but a burden. Only love for the Order and zeal for its expansion can determine me to hold it. I do not usurp anything for myself, but I hold fast whatever regard for the welfare of the Order requires.

The Bishop of Erie (and all bishops here) do not interest themselves in the sisters and cannot do so because of the great distance, ignorance of the language and of the Rule. Does not love demand it, if the law does not, that I interest myself in the sisters of the Order, after I summoned them? Certainly. I acted and now act correctly when I do it out of love for the sisters.

¹⁹ The Diocese of Pittsburgh had been divided into the Erie and the Pittsburgh dioceses in 1853, and after some difficulties had been settled, Bishop Michael O'Connor remained in Pittsburgh and Josue M. Young was named the first Bishop of Erie. Some of Wimmer's missions then came into the Erie Diocese, among them St. Marys.

But concern for my priests and brothers also requires that I have guarantees for their good behavior. I cannot consent to an independence from me as president of the Benedictines, on the part of either the sisters or the brothers. Otherwise, on account of our security, I could not tolerate the sisters in our proximity.

I have exercised my authority only through counsel or agreement, which almost never was followed. Not only did I not want to circumvent or ignore the convent, but I wanted a convent and, therefore, insisted on profession. The convent consisted until then of the superior, Sisters Walburga, Willibalda, Emmerama and Scholastica. The last one was in Erie; Emmerama was persecuted and suppressed; Willibalda is a clever rascal, or as Confessor Schmid of Eichstätt said, a right crafty student. Walburga is strangely and entirely set to one side by these two. Consequently, the whole convent consists of the superior and Willibalda.

My attempt to get a convent chapter failed in that only five of the current 15 were permitted to make profession, and these five were, with one single exception, weak-willed creatures who had no power to remove the disorders. Therefore, and because I can no longer support the crowd, I suggested a new foundation in order to create something more successful with a more tractable superior. Then the fire broke out brightly; the superior glowed with envy and jealousy; St. Marys should go to pieces because of it. She ran away, and 12 sisters with her; she sailed to Germany. Everything is in confusion; I must help put things in order; I established prioresses everywhere for three years; out of one monastery three are made; we have now four prioresses: in St. Marys, Erie, Newark, and St. Cloud. All posts are filled; for Benedicta there is none left, through her own fault. *Sic transit*, etc.

With all respect and love,

Your most humble

Abbot Boniface Wimmer

P.S. . . . Bishop John Neumann is my guest today. Tomorrow Bishop Michael O'Connor is also coming.²⁰

The first answer from Rome relating to Mother Benedicta's problem was sent by Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, on March 17, 1858, one month before Mother Benedicta's return to Amer-

²⁰ S.B.A.A. (Munich), original; S.B.C.A., copy.

ica from Europe. The letter was sent to Abbot Wimmer. His answer added "Propositions" of his own regarding the future organization of the Benedictine Sisters in America.²¹

The following Propositions or Proposals were added by Abbot Wimmer in his letter to Cardinal Barnabo answering Mother Benedicta's "Points of Difference," July 11, 1858.²² He asked that:

1. The convents of St. Marys, Erie and Newark be recognized as priories and be incorporated into the Congregation of monks and placed under the jurisdiction of the Abbot President of that Congregation.
2. That the American Benedictines be allowed to make solemn vows without being enclosed.
3. That they be permitted to teach in public and private schools.
4. That they be allowed to pray the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin instead of the Divine Office.²³

An answer from Barnabo to this document of Wimmer arrived on November 11, 1858. The final answer to "Points of Difference" and the "Propositions" came in the Cardinal *Genga Document*, December 6, 1859;²⁴ therefore, twelve months later. By that time Mother Benedicta had returned to America.

The Congregation of Bishops and Regulars finally decided that the case of Abbot Wimmer should be joined to the general question of sisters in America so that the Congregation would be able to give proper instructions to Wimmer. The Congregation mentioned the special case of Wimmer bringing sisters to America and admitting them to solemn profession in a convent which had not been formally recognized or given proper (canonical) status by the Holy See.

On November 27, 1858, the Congregation informed Wimmer that his letter, as well as those of Benedicta Riepp, of Bishops O'Connor and Young, had been forwarded to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, since the controversy concerned not

²¹ Oetgen, *An American Abbot*, p. 165. According to Oetgen, the Abbot's reply to Rome on the five points listed by Riepp was, in general, about the same as that given above in his November 13, 1857, letter to Oberkamp on Benedicta's points.

²² McDonald, *With Lamps Burning*, p. 18.

²³ Wimmer had earlier dispensed the sisters from praying Matins.

²⁴ This document appears later in chronological order.

only the points of difference, but also the question of solemn vows taken by the Benedictine sisters in America.²⁵

Many of the problems that arose from the controversy between Abbot Wimmer and Mother Benedicta Riepp were brought to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. One of these problems was that of solemn vows without proper enclosure, which Wimmer favored. Wimmer had brought the sisters to St. Marys from Eichstätt where they, until 1835, had made solemn vows, and he continued to desire that young women joining St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys and in his new foundations profess solemn vows. Many of the new convents had no proper enclosure. In Rome the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars asked whether the approbation of the Holy See had been requested in any instance for the establishment of American convents or if any dispensations from Pope Pius V's constitution²⁶ had been granted on behalf of the United States. Evidently no special permission had been granted to Wimmer. The outcome was that the problem was finally settled for America by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and by the 1866 Council of Baltimore. Abbot Wimmer, as stated above, returned too late to the United States to have his problems put on the agenda of this Council. The Council of Baltimore forbade the profession of solemn vows by sisters except by special permission and under special circumstances.

The following document is out of chronological order but it brings to a close the problems here discussed.

BARNABO TO WIMMER

Nov. 11, 1858

Very Reverend Father!

As to what Sister Mary Benedicta Riepp thought ought to be referred to this Holy See at the beginning of the present year, I have not only written to your Reverence about these matters so that you might inform me about the state of affairs, but I also asked the Bishops of Pittsburgh and Erie to take care to relate to me whatever they know that pertains to this controversy. Furthermore, very recently, the replies of the bishops, whom I highly approve of, have

²⁵ A.U.N.D., *Prop. Fide*, Fol. 968 rv.

²⁶ A.U.N.D., *Prop. Fide*, Fol. 479 rv.

come to me, and since the question concerning the quality of the vows which may be pronounced by nuns in the United States of North America is now pending, having been brought up in the business before the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, for that reason I thought that the controversy, which has arisen between you and Sister Riepp, should not be separated from the weighty matter (of vows). Since this is the situation, I have passed on the petition of the aforesaid nun, your reply, and also the replies of the bishops to this congregation, from which, therefore, an opportune decision is to be expected.

Again, I shall make use of this opportunity to add that there has come to my notice the action of the Chapter by which the monks have wished to confirm your Reverence in your office of abbot. In truth, since this is concerned with the question which you had referred to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in the month of April of this year, there is no answer which I can now give except that within a few days that business will be put before the General Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Whatever the most eminent Fathers will decree, I shall take care to communicate to your Reverence. In the meantime, I pray God that He may bestow on your Reverence all success and blessing.

Rome. Palace of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, Nov. 11, 1858.

To Your Reverence,

Rev. Father Boniface Wimmer
Abbot of the Order of St. Benedict

Most devotedly,

Al C. Barnabo, Prefect
Cajetan, Archbishop of Thebes,
secretary²⁷

Contrary to the opinion held by many that Mother Benedicta Riepp had no contact with the Priory of St. Walburg during her stay in Eichstätt, documents show that at least on a business level she did meet with the Prioress, Mother Edwarda Schnitzer, in arranging for the return trip to America for herself and her companion, Mother Augustina Short.

Mother Edwarda Schnitzer, in the early part of January 1858, presented to Mother Benedicta and Augustina Short 600 gulden for travel money on their return to the United States. During June of the same year, traveling passes were obtained. In one of

²⁷ S.V.A.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

her later letters Mother Benedicta implies that Bishop Oetli helped pay the traveling expense of her return to America.²⁸

Because of the worry and anxiety caused by Mother Benedicta's coming to Eichstätt against the Bishop's and her own directions, Mother Edwarda closed the Convent of St. Walburg to all American sisters. She could also suspect an unfavorable reaction from Abbot Wimmer, who until then had been well disposed towards her and her convent.

The *Chronicle of 1858*, written by Mother Edwarda Schnitzer, reflects the attitude of the European motherhouse at that time:

At the same time I announced to the two Americans, likewise in the presence of all the Chapter members, that no sister from America should expect hospitality with us again, and that we greatly desire that no further demands be made on our convent by the Americans, and that we, in fact, desire to have nothing more to do with America.²⁹

The letters later received by Mother Willibalda from Prioress Edwarda, as well as from Prioress Carolina Kroisz, show a complete reversal of attitude towards the American Benedictine sisters.

²⁸ See Appendix M for parts of the *Chronicle* relating to traveling expenses.

²⁹ S.W.A.A., original: *Chronicle of 1858* in St. Walburg Abbey Archives.

MOTHER BENEDICTA'S RETURN FROM EUROPE TO ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA

Mother Benedicta Riepp and Mother Augustina Short returned from Europe in May, 1858. Abbot Wimmer referred to their return in a letter of June 1 to Mother Scholastica Burkhardt. He mentioned having received a letter from Mother Benedicta "which," as he supposes, "should be a justification for her behavior." It was perhaps Mother Benedicta's attempt to have some communication with the Abbot. In a letter written to Mother Scholastica he enclosed a letter to be read first by Mother Scholastica and then sealed and given to Mother Benedicta.

From Erie, Mother Benedicta went to St. Cloud upon Wimmer's command and Mother Willibalda's invitation. Mother Augustina Short returned to St. Marys. From there she later went to Atchison where she was directress of the Academy for 14 years. She died in Covington, Kentucky, in 1902.¹

Mother Scholastica Burkhardt had made profession of vows in September, 1853, had been trained as an elementary school

¹ Sister Mary Faith Schuster, O.S.B., *The Meaning of the Mountain* (St. Paul, 1963), pp. 47; 70-75.

teacher and had been appointed novice mistress in St. Marys by Mother Benedicta Riepp. She was one of the group of sisters from St. Marys who founded the Erie Convent in 1856 and had volunteered to go to Minnesota but was detained by Bishop Young at the request of Abbot Wimmer. The latter appointed her superior of the Erie Convent during Mother Benedicta's absence in Europe. He recognized in her a fervent religious and made her the recipient of many friendly letters in which he clarified his own thinking and action.

WIMMER TO BURKHARDT

St. Vincent's Abbey

June 1, 1858

Reverend Mother Prioress!

Hearty thanks for your pious wishes which you so kindly sent me on the occasion of my nameday, but especially for the promise of your powerful prayers. Our Good Jesus will certainly hear the supplication of His innocent, pure bride. I surely am in need of them in the many disturbances and cares to which my position exposes me. Sisters Benedicta and Augustina were expected in Blairsville already in the beginning of May, but Fr. Hartmann brought me the first news of their arrival in Erie. She herself [Benedicta] wrote me a letter — which is enclosed — as well as a verbatim copy of a letter which I received recently from Mother Prioress in St. Walburg. You may convey the latter to your sisters, and the former, but sealed, to Sister Benedicta.² If I could get away, I would go to Erie myself in order that there will be no further disturbance and confusion in the convent. Just be firm, then nothing will be wanting. Scandals must necessarily come so that the faithful and calumniated ones can prove themselves.

At the time the Rev. Procurator General³ wrote me from Rome, her complaint about me had not yet arrived there. Whatever she wrote, I do not know. Nevertheless, I shall easily learn that through the Rev. Procurator General because this affair also has to be placed before the reporter. In the main, however, it seemed to be the same content as that sent to the Rt. Rev. Archbishop, of which you have a copy. However, it did not seem to be a real complaint, but rather a question because His Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect, wished to

² Whether this was Mother Benedicta's own letter returned to her or Wimmer's answer to her letter is not clear in the original. This letter of Mother Benedicta, as well as Mother Willibalda's invitation mentioned later in the letter, are not extant.

³ Abbot Angelo Pescetelli, O.S.B.

hear my view of the case presented before he could give a decision on it. I did not have time as yet to answer it. The decision cannot turn out different from the one which has already been given by the Procurator General. But it is to be feared very much that the former vows [solemn] were forbidden as I conclude from the procedures of the Council of Baltimore. According to my view, I am glad that things went as they did, because I now have a motive for definite petitions with respect to our sisters' convent, which, on the whole, will bring greater security and certainty. I am getting at this work this week. Commend it to God in your prayer. I hope He will turn everything to the general good and not permit the fellowship of the whole Order to suffer through the selfish pride of one member.

Sister Benedicta received for herself and Augustina 600 fl., traveling money, from Mother Prioress. She received nothing from the Mission Society. The \$400 which the Missionsverein paid again this year has already been sent to America and I can pick it up in a short time. I'll not forget you and your little convent. The account of Mother Prioress of St. Walburg figures thus: 1721 f. 14 Kr., which she spent for America for 1852. Again 1759 f. 8 Kr. for 1853, and 1242 f. 8 Kr. for 1855; i.e., 4722 f. 30 Kr., while from the sisters she took in only 3800 f. Therefore, 922 f. 30 Kr. more have been given out than taken in, which, with the traveling money of 600 f., makes over 1500 f. Of course, not all of this money came to America because the traveling fare and equipment are included, but Sister Benedicta surely received the larger amount. Sister Benedicta cannot do anything in the East nor in Erie. You cannot, on account of the German school, move away from the church, and two convents in one city will not be good; rather give up the place (Erie) entirely. We'll find open arms everywhere. The Rev. Bishop has not written me about this; nor I, him. He surely will not do anything in this matter without giving me some information.

According to the letter from St. Walburg, you see that Sister Augustina just let herself be influenced and dragged into taking part in the plans of Sister Benedicta. Most likely she does not trust herself to write to me. Tell her to consider well the further steps she wants to take, so that she will not regret it. Nowhere is clique-forming meritorious, least of all in a convent or Order. Send me information soon. If my presence should be necessary, I shall not hesitate to come in person, although my time is extremely precious because I have no procurator.

Sister Willibalda wrote recently that Sister Benedicta wants to come to her [Willibalda] in Minnesota. That is the place where she

belongs. Therefore, just trust in God and act calmly, yet firmly and resolutely.

With best regards and blessing for all the good sisters. With special esteem,

Your devoted

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot⁴

WIMMER TO LANG⁵

St. Vincent

July 27, 1858

[Dear Abbot Utto,]

. . . Their former prioress [Riepp] had for some time caused me much disappointment, . . . but the greatest anguish is over. The tooth is pulled out. She laid the snare for herself by deserting her position without being forced to. I was thus given the convenient opportunity to take action *propria auctoritate* and to appoint prioresses as I saw fit for the four new priories.⁶ She returned in the beginning of May after being absent for eleven months in Europe. I did not permit her to return to St. Marys anymore, nor to Erie. She didn't have the courage to go to Newark, so she was ordered to go immediately to St. Cloud and stay there under obedience to the prioress [Mother Willibalda] whom she is already starting to annoy. She is also causing trouble for the prior, Father Cornelius Wittmann. The only thing for her to do is either to submit herself or to leave the Order entirely.

She had made accusations against me in Rome from Erie and from Eichstätt. I was notified from Rome of this and told to explain any actions against her. I had already informed our Procurator General [Abbot Angelo Pescetelli] who had approved all steps taken by me. I wrote Cardinal Barnabo, our Procurator and at present the Prefect of the *Propaganda*, and defended my claim of jurisdiction over the sisters of our Order as *praeses congregationis*. I hope that it cannot be denied. (Naturally it is not a *beneficium* but an *onus gravissimum*.) I made the statement [to Cardinal Barnabo] that in the places where I have our fathers stationed I would not permit the nuns of our Order without having jurisdiction over them. And I said that I would not consent to allow the obstinate mother superior to return to the convent. Having been given the opportunity to write Cardinal Barnabo, I made certain propositions regarding the matters of disci-

⁴ Mt. St. Benedict Convent Archives, original; S.B.C.A., copy.

⁵ Abbot Utto Lang of Metten.

⁶ St. Marys, Erie, Newark, St. Cloud.

pline for our sisters, concerning their exemption and incorporation into our congregation. It would not be good to shrink from difficulties if something for the better is to be done. The sisters are all on my side because they know too well that without my assistance they cannot achieve their purpose and in that I am not mistaken. I do not mix in their affairs, but I had to take steps against Benedicta since she has acted wrongly for some time and would not listen to any well-considered counsel. . . .

[Boniface Wimmer]⁷

SCHNITZER TO BURKHARDT

St. Walburg Convent

Oct. 20, 1858

Very venerable Prioress!

My dear unforgettable Sister!

I cannot hide from you what pleasure you and Sister Aloysia gave me by your letters. Dear Sisters! Gratitude is balsam to a wounded heart. I thank you, as well as Sister Anselma, for the prayers and good wishes for my nameday feast from my whole heart. *I will always remember you before God.* Now, my dear Prioress, we will speak to each other in a *childlike* and *motherly* way. It is true, also, as you write, that conditions have changed much in five years. But, my Sister! Love has not changed. It is always the same. I have often thought of the tears we both shed on your Profession Day at the kiss of peace without suspecting the reason. But God already knew. Dear Sister, God's holy will be praised in everything. Is that not true? When we consider the heavy burden which God has placed on our shoulders in being superiors over others and to be a living rule for our subjects, then we are especially in need of humility and submission for the good of our monastic community.

No one has more need of humility, obedience and of self-denial than those in command. As long as I have been superior I have never been sorry to have asked the advice of my superior or confessor and to have acted on this advice. I can assure you that acting in this manner brings its own blessing from God. Do you, my dear Sister, keep close to God, to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, to your holy rule, and to your loving and venerable superiors, who here take the place of father and mother. That is the way I understand the Most Reverend Lord Abbot and the confessor, whom you also, I am sure, always accept with love and to whom you listen. If you always meet your superiors with an open and childlike heart, then you will,

⁷ Oetgen, *An American Abbot*, pp. 165-166.

in the first place, have a peaceful conscience, and in the second place, God will always give you more grace. The Sister Superior, since her departure from Eichstätt, has not once written to her one-time motherhouse where she spent, for us also, ten very sorrowful months separated, for most of the time, from my sisters. I hoped, at least, to receive a letter of gratitude from her and Sister Augustina. Such want of gratitude hurts the Convent of St. Walburg very much. Just like you, I begged Mother Benedicta to beg pardon in humility of the Very Reverend Lord Abbot and fulfill her duty of obedience. A superior of a convent must, even more than others, I say, be faithful to the holy vow of obedience. How dangerous is a superior when she allows herself to be swayed by the thought that she alone now understands everything and wants to know nothing of the advice of a higher superior or of a well-meaning confessor. My dear Sister, you see how far astray the following of our own insight without humility can lead us.

Superiors are also weak and erring persons. They must be willing to humiliate themselves because for that reason God has placed people over us, and because God will assist us with His holy grace when we do humiliate ourselves. May you carry the cross which the cross-bearing Bridegroom has placed upon you with persevering love until He again withdraws it. Carry it after Him; He supports you with His holy grace.

Be for your sisters and your subjects a good, caring mother. Hold yourself, as to a wall, to the holy rule and the statutes; then you will not err. Again, I assure you, that in love we are not separated. If I am able to do anything for you, write to me freely and it will be done very willingly. You will have heard from the Sister Superior that the Very Reverend Father Schmit, the confessor, has been recalled by his reverend superiors. The loving God has again cared for us in a most fatherly way. He again gave us a very interested and spiritual Father, the Reverend Eder, whom you know well.

When you have the occasion, extend my highest esteem to the Very Reverend Lord Abbot.

Sister Bonifacia, your sister in profession, greets you a thousand times in the Lord with the promise that she will continue to pray for you. Sister Seraphim thanks you for the sisterly greeting. She is enclosing a short note for you.

Extend to Sisters Aloysius, Anselmina, and Francisca many greetings with the petition that they continue to pray.

You see, my dear Sister, I must close my letter. Again, I thank you for your frank information; I will greet Sister Walburga very specially

for you. Do you ever remain my sincere child and so give me happiness and consolation.

Be in peace, my Sister, and remember in happiness and intimacy, your

Mother Edwarda Schnitzer, Prioress

P.S. If you consider it all right, it would give me comfort if you would let me know how Sister Superior [Benedicta] is faring and what answer she received to her appeal to the Holy See. You will do this, won't you?

Mother Edwarda⁸

MUELLER TO WIMMER

Oct. 21, 1858

[Dear Abbot,]

On October 17, His Kingly Majesty asked me to see him after he had delivered to me a large number of begging letters. Among these there was one from Fr. Augustin Wirth and one from Benedicta Riepp. I spoke only in favor of your mission stations and suggested 2000 fl. for Doniphan (Fr. Augustin Wirth), 2000 fl. for St. Cloud for the Benedictine Sisters, and also 2000 fl. for those in Erie. But His Majesty was not in favor of this division and so I directed 3000 fl. for the Benedictine Sisters in Minnesota and 3000 fl. for Kansas. The latter will be sent directly to Fr. Augustin Wirth who wants to take care of the receipt. The former will come to you with the request that the receipt of the Mother Prioress be sent directly to His Majesty, King Ludwig. Now, do you very nicely give the money to the sisters so no new complaint will be brought against you. . . .

[Mueller]⁹

Two letters — the one referred to here, written by Mother Benedicta Riepp, October 21, 1858, the other by Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, June 1, 1859 — are described by Mueller as being letters of complaint against Abbot Wimmer.¹⁰ Neither of these letters was located by Mathäser when he was doing research for his book in 1938.¹¹

⁸ Mt. S.B.C.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

⁹ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 106, n. 1.

¹⁰ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 106, n. 1; p. 124, n. 1.

¹¹ Personal research in Missio: the Ludwig-Missionsverein Archives, and in the Geheimes Hausarchiv in Munich met with the same result. The letters cannot be located. It is of interest to note that these two letters of complaint were sent from St. Cloud where Mother Benedicta Riepp was living with Mother Willibalda Scherbauer as superior.

On December 12, 1858, Wimmer wrote to King Ludwig regarding the gift of 3,000 fl. sent for the sisters in Minnesota. He justifies his disposal of the money and the reasons for his action in the letter that follows.

Abbot Boniface Wimmer had not yet, in 1858, accepted the sisters in St. Cloud as worthy of his esteem and kindness.

WIMMER TO LUDWIG I

Dec. 12, 1858

[Most Beloved Protector of the Benedictines,]

A short letter from the Court Chaplain brought me the pleasant news that Your Kingly Majesty, at the distribution of the customary alms for the missions, again thought of the Benedictine Order by designating 3000 fl. for the Kansas Priory, namely, Doniphan in Kansas, and another 3000 for the Benedictine Sisters in Minnesota. The latter 3000 fl. I received a few days later. Kindly accept, Your Majesty, my deepest gratitude for this new evidence of Your Royal kindness and attachment to the Benedictine Order. . . .

In regard to the gracious donation to the Benedictine Sisters in Minnesota, I must, however, report that the Reverend Court Chaplain was mistaken. There are, indeed, Benedictine sisters there; but it is very uncertain whether they can remain there. A report has been directed to the Apostolic See and the answer from there is still awaited. Under these circumstances, I thought it unwise to send them the 3000 fl., fearing that they would be squandered foolishly. And since I did not want them to be idle, I bought eight so-called land warrants, that is, government patents which were given to the soldiers who fought in the 1812 War, by which each one who had such a warrant or promise of land was entitled to 160 acres. Many of these land warrants were sold by the soldiers and came into other hands as state papers or government securities. Depending upon demand, the price of these may be high or low. Their true worth is \$200 because one receives for one warrant 160 acres of Congress land, for which otherwise one pays \$1.25 per acre, or \$200 in all. At this rate of exchange, they sell for from \$.85 to \$1.15 per acre, namely, one warrant for \$137.60, and all eight for \$1100.80. These eight land warrants I sent immediately to Fr. Benedict Haindl, the first prior of the independent priory in St. Cloud, with the request that the land held by the brothers, but not yet paid for, be paid with the money, and so give the Monastery of St. Ludwig a solid foundation. For these eight warrants the prior gets 1280 acres of land or 2 sq. mi. in one piece — a magnificent estate! . . . Gratitude and love

for your Majesty greatly urged me to build a lasting monument to your name and memory in the far West, not far from the banks of the Mississippi. . . . I could not raise the money to buy the land. . . . Then came the precious \$1200 (3000 fl.) from Your Majesty. Naturally, I took for granted that Your Majesty would want such a significant sum of money to be spent carefully and with precaution. Since at the time I could not give it conscientiously to the sisters, I acted as I stated above. With the warrants I also sent the prior \$118, which was left from the money. I explained all the circumstances, stating at the same time that I would report to Your Majesty, and that, in case Your Majesty were not pleased with this transaction, and also that when conditions concerning the Benedictine Sisters would so improve that there could be no doubt about their continuing (in St. Cloud), he should be prepared to repay the \$1218 or 3000 fl. to you. . . . There is nothing lost because the land is worth ten times more, and the existence of the monastery is assured. Meanwhile, we will also do what we can for the sisters. . . .

Your kingly Majesty's
most obedient servant,
Boniface Wimmer, Abbot¹²

¹² Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 106–110.

CHAPTER VII

MOTHER BENEDICTA RIEPP IN ST. CLOUD (1858–1862)

Mother Benedicta had been in St. Cloud about six months when she wrote the following letter describing her experiences after her return from Europe in the spring of 1858. She enclosed in this letter the June 25, 1857, document she received from Bishop Josue Young of Erie giving her permission to go to Europe.

RIEPP TO BARNABO

St. Cloud, Minnesota
Jan. 4, 1859

Your Eminence!

I have so often heard of Your Eminence's goodness and kindness that I feel encouraged to turn to you, even if somewhat timidly, in my distress, and to call on this kindheartedness for help. If a special trouble did not press me to do this, I would not have the courage to appeal to Your Eminence. By this time you must certainly have been informed of the misunderstandings relating to difficulties within the Order, between the Reverend Prelate, Boniface Wimmer, and me that have already existed for two years. Your Eminence will have read the petitions concerning this which I have presented to the Sacred Congregation and in particular to our Holy Father Pius IX for decision. The affair is taking very long and the Reverend Prelate uses every opportunity to harass me and to make me appear contemptible to all.

It is too painful for me to say much about this; I will, therefore,

mention only a few of the incidents in passing. The Reverend Prelate not only used every method to prevent my return to America from Europe last year, but after I had returned, he did not permit me to go to the sisters in the Convent in St. Marys. God provided for my return. Without my asking for it, the Right Reverend Bishop Oettl of Eichstätt took care of the necessary traveling expenses. He told me to return as soon as possible so that, in case the Sacred Congregation required a visitation, which would probably happen, I would be present as a witness. When I was excluded from the convent in St. Marys, I had recourse to the Right Reverend Bishop of Erie, but notwithstanding that, the Reverend Prelate commanded me to leave Erie and to go to Minnesota, which I did. However, in this convent I felt as though I were in a place of banishment since no sister was allowed to associate with me. Then, because the sisters in St. Cloud did not obey this command, he withheld the 3000 fl. which King Ludwig of Bavaria had recently granted the sisters for making the new foundation in St. Cloud. He also has my letters intercepted, not allowing them to be forwarded.

I want to cry out, "Oh, my God! Why does the Lord Prelate use such methods to oppress me? One fling of a stone, if God said 'Yes' to it, would be sufficient"; but as long as God does not permit it, no attempts of this kind will succeed.

I do not regret having had recourse to the Sacred Congregation. I intended only the common good of the Order and that each sister be secure in this as a result of everything being put in order and confirmed by the Holy See. We could then also proceed with assurance, not only insofar as each individual convent is concerned, but also in what especially concerns the spread of the women's branch of our holy Order. For this I hope and I depend wholly on the mercy of God. He, namely God, will look more graciously and more favorably upon our entire Order, once the blessing of the Apostolic See rests on it.

I readily agree that the Reverend Prelate in every respect understands better than I do how to direct our whole Order. In respect to our sisters, however, Your Eminence will agree with me, I am sure, that much, and especially what concerns the internal direction of the convent, should not always be left to men.

It would be my consolation and joy if our new foundations in America, of which there are four at present, were to remain united and have a common novitiate so that one spirit and one life could be preserved in the hearts of all the sisters. I believe that in America especially, the unity of the Order, particularly in what pertains to the

Holy Rule and the Statutes, could by a common bonding together be more securely and more easily guaranteed, fostered and preserved. Then one way of life and one love would obtain among all.

Unfortunately, I already see only too soon and too clearly that in our whole Order this spirit is gradually disappearing. This happens because each convent judges itself even now to be strong enough to stand alone and there arises among our sisters, in general, a coldness and strangeness to each other. The life of unity in love will slowly dissolve and be completely destroyed unless the Holy See again restores it.

I would like very humbly and in a childlike manner to beg Your Eminence to have concern for us and for our sad situation and to speak in our behalf to the Sacred Congregation. I am convinced of the powerful influence your intercession for us would have on the Holy See.

At the same time, I also make bold to ask that Your Eminence hand over to the Holy Father the enclosed letter.¹ Meanwhile, I will increase my prayers that the will of God may be done regarding us. We will also not cease praying daily for Your Eminence's welfare.

May I, please, be allowed to enclose here the written permission of the Right Reverend Bishop of Erie for my trip to Europe, if that should be required by the Sacred Congregation, since the chief complaint the Lord Prelate has against me is that I undertook the trip secretly and without permission, leaving the sisters in St. Marys without help and in the greatest confusion. I had this permission in writing. That I did not forsake the sisters, but instead, desired to bring them help, is proven by my petitions to the Holy See. Before I left St. Marys, I promised that I would bring them help.

Kindly forgive me if, in the course of my letter, I expressed myself too frankly. I knew that, in the letter, I was speaking to one of the noblest of fatherly hearts.

May all of us experience Your Eminence's favor and fatherly benevolence, but especially she who signs herself in deepest humility,

Your Eminence's most obedient
and submissive servant,

St. Cloud, Minnesota Terr.,
North America
January 4, 1859

Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B.²

¹ This letter could not be located.

² A.U.N.D., *Prop. Fide*, Fol. 739 rv.; S.B.C.A., copy.

We, Josue Mary Young,
through the mercy of God
and the grace of the Apostolic See
Bishop of Erie

in the United States of America, through this, attest that We approve of the decision by the present Superior, Benedicta Riepp, of the Benedictine Convent in St. Marys-town in our diocese, and a companion, Sister Augustina Short, of the same Order and convent, to travel to Europe in order to mediate personally in the affairs of the above Order which are of concern to Us since the pertinent grounds have been disclosed and are known to Us. We, therefore, recommend the same most earnestly.

Our Beloved, Most Worthy Brothers in the Spirit, as well as all to whom the enclosure applies, conformable to the Rule of the Order and in accordance with Canon Law, We request each one of you to give whatever defense and intercession for assistance is needed, and with word and deed be willing to help bring about a result favorable to the sisters as well as to the Order as a whole.

Given in Erie
June 25, 1857

† Josue Maria Young
Bishop of Erie³

On April 13, 1859, Mother Benedicta Riepp was informed that her letter of January 4 had been received and that the matter had been referred to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and her letter to the Holy Father had been forwarded.

In an attempt to locate Mother Benedicta's letter to the Holy Father, the writer was informed on April 8, 1980, by the Procurator General in Rome for the Cassinese and Beuronese Congregations that he was not able to find the letter, since the materials in the Vatican Archives of that period have not yet been sorted and arranged.

LUDWIG TO WIMMER

Munich

Jan. 5, 1859

Lord Abbot Wimmer!

I received your letter of the 12th of last month and read with pleasure its contents, and I can only acknowledge and commend your actions. That you, Lord Abbot, are willing to use the 3000 fl.

³ A.U.N.D., *Prop. Fide*, Fol. 740 r.; S.B.C.A., copy.

which were directed by me to Doniphan for the erection of a school for Catholics, is very acceptable to me. Likewise is the expenditure of the other 3000 fl. which I had destined for the Benedictine Sisters (in St. Cloud), under the conditions presently existing and which you described — for the purchase of necessary land for the purpose of erecting the monastery of St. Ludwig in St. Cloud.

[Ludwig]⁴

Although Abbot Boniface Wimmer was greatly displeased when Mother Benedicta Riepp founded a convent in Erie in 1856, he later did appreciate and favor this convent and its prioress, Mother Scholastica Burkhardt.

Some years later the Abbot accepted the parish in Erie and was able, through the Benedictine priests he placed there as pastors, to help the sisters.

WIMMER TO ABBOT OF SCHEYERN

St. Vincent Archabbey
Latrobe, Pa.
Feb. 25, 1859

[Dear Abbot,]

. . . Now we have sisters of our Order in Erie. There are 15 of them: one of these took her final vows; four, first vows; and one received the habit. They are very good children under Mother Scholastica Burkhardt who came from St. Walburg. But how poor they are! They live in a little, one-story frame house which the pastor formerly occupied. It is only 41 ft. wide and 190 ft. long, next to the church, from which, however, they are separated by a space of about 25 ft. The livelihood comes from school money, because they have a girls' school; from music lessons, and from fine needlework. Occasionally I send them a small container of lard and am also allowed to send habit goods. It is a whole year since I have been there.

Their greatest sorrow is that they do not have an Order priest as confessor, because they do not get proper advice and help from the secular priests. I cannot help that. The former superior in St. Marys, Sister Benedicta Riepp, sent the first sisters there, as it were, out of spite. Therefore, I was not concerned about them [the sisters in Erie] until they pressingly begged me to be their father and protector also, as I am to the other sisters of our Order [St. Marys].

⁴ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 110–111.

Since they have no property at all, I threatened the pastor and the Rev. Bishop a year ago to remove the [Erie] sisters if they would not give them at least the small lot on which they are now living as their own. They promised to do so, but nothing happened. This time, however, it did happen. The Rev. Bishop gave me the deed, and I, in turn, gave it to the [Erie] sisters in trust; that is, the Abbot at St. Vincent's is the legal owner thereof but the sisters have the use of it. But now a house has to be built, and in such a way that the space between their present house and the church will be used for the erection of a three-story house on the first floor of which there will be school rooms; at the present time they have to go to school across the street, heavily veiled. Only then when they can move into the new building can the old house be torn down and replaced by a new one. I can donate \$600 which I received from the Mission Society for building. The construction will most likely cost almost \$2500, part of which debt, however, the parish will assume; the remainder, nevertheless, will be the burden of the sisters. But they can take in pupils and, little by little, pay off the debt. They are doing much good. God will bless and protect His spouses. I was in Erie from Monday until Saturday, but then I hastened to Covington, where I arrived at 12 o'clock midnight. . . .

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot⁵

MUELLER TO WIMMER

Mar. 15, 1859

[Dear Abbot,]

His Majesty, King Ludwig asked me to inform you about the following: Mother Willibalda Scherbauer from St. Cloud appealed to His Majesty complaining about you that she found out from papers and from the Father Prior that he [the King] had designated 3000 fl. for the Benedictine Sisters in St. Cloud but that the money had been withheld by you because you needed it. I had already been informed by you about this, so I could give His Majesty an explanation when he sent for me. That this happened is not my, but your fault. You wrote to me asking why the [Benedictine] sisters were receiving so little maintenance while the Ursulines, etc., always received more than your sisters. I wanted to direct, through His Majesty, something to the sisters, so when he offered 6000 fl. to be given out, I suggested 2000 for Erie, 2000 for St. Cloud, and 2000 for Doniphan. He did not allow this and asked which convent of Benedictines was

⁵ Morkin and Seigel, *Wind in the Wheat*, pp. 103–105.

the newest and the poorest. I had to say St. Cloud, as you yourself had so described it, not knowing that it was there that the obstinate clique lived. (Why did you not inform me secretly?) So the money was divided between St. Cloud and Kansas.

Had I known that Benedicta was there, I would certainly have opposed it and fought against it. But now follows the question: Did you have the right to withhold the money from the sisters? I consider it an injustice. This is the third time: 1) in St. Marys; 2) in Newark. The sisters had sent a petition to His Majesty and should have received half of the amount sent the year before last, as His Majesty had directed, and now St. Cloud. You will lose the good will of His Majesty. I succeeded in excusing your action because of your great need and of the great advantage that accrued to you, but you must repay the sum of 3000 fl. by September 1, 1859. I have already had to inform Mother Willibalda about this. The Missionsverein was informed by the King to withhold 3000 fl. from the amount allotted to you in case you do not repay. This is how things stand now. I advise you not to do the same in the future. The women are too demanding. I do believe that you are in need of money and that you could take advantage of great opportunities. This does not, however, give you the right to take what was allotted to others, no matter how honestly you mean it.

[Mueller]⁶

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

St. Vincent, Westmoreland Co., Pa.

Apr. 5, 1859

[Gracious King!]

Enclosed, Your Kingly Majesty, is the receipt from Prior Benedict Haindl of St. Ludwig (Monastery) in Minnesota for the 3000 fl. which I sent him for his monastery with the understanding that it depended on Your Majesty's consent.

Even if I am both priest and religious, I am not so unsympathetic to the other sex that I would want to enrich the men at the expense of the women and, under ordinary circumstances, I would have preferred to place privations upon my brothers in order to bring relief to our sisters. However, in this case where, on the one hand, without doubt, extraordinary benefits would come to the brothers, which would never again or only through the sacrifice of the sisters be attained; and, on the other hand, it was very probable that little or nothing of lasting worth would have come from Your Highness'

⁶ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 115-116, n. 1.

gift. I believed that I could not act otherwise than I did, and I am very happy that Your Majesty approved of my procedure. Had Your Kingly Majesty, however, decided to judge otherwise, then I, as well as Fr. Prior, would have hastened to carry out your wishes, as is shown also in the receipt. . . . The 1280 acres of land are now already worth \$12,800, and will, after a few years, be worth ten times as much. St. Ludwig has now a foundation like that of (the Monastery) of Scheyern but, of course, without the buildings. . . .

Your Royal Majesty's
most obedient Boniface Wimmer,
Abbot and President of the
American Benedictine Congregation⁷

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

St. Vincent near Latrobe,
Westmoreland Co., Pa.
April 9, 1859

Most Worthy and Most Mighty King!
Most Gracious King and Protector!

A few days ago I had the honor, Your Majesty, of sending you the receipt which Prior Benedict Haindl of St. Ludwig Priory made out for the 3000 fl. which Your Majesty was pleased to send to me for the Benedictine Sisters, which, however, for very good reasons I believed should not be given to them but to the Benedictine Fathers, with the understanding and under the condition that Your Majesty would graciously sanction my procedure. Your kind consent followed and I did not hesitate to send a copy of the same to Fr. Prior so he could justify himself to the women to whom, as well as to the prior, I had explained my reasons for so acting.

But now I find out through a letter from the Court Chaplain that, as a result of a letter from Mother Willibalda Scherbauer from St. Cloud, Your Majesty has changed your mind regarding my action and has ordered that I must return the 3000 fl. to the Benedictine Sisters by the first of September and that for this reason the Missionsverein has been ordered to keep back 3000 fl. from my next allotment.

Naturally, this can result only through the singular misfortune of my falling from the good graces of Your Royal Majesty because of this letter of Willibalda Scherbauer. It causes me great pain. If this is

⁷ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 112–115.

the reason, I humbly beg pardon a thousand times if I have deserved the loss of Your Majesty's favor because of my action. I do not care much for what common people think of me, but I am not at all indifferent to what good and noble people think of me, and since I place Your Majesty as the highest among these, I would again very respectfully beg Your Majesty kindly to hear once more a vindication of my action.

1. I did not use the money for the founding of St. Ludwig Monastery out of selfishness. St. Ludwig Priory does not belong to St. Vincent, any more than Weltenburg belongs to Metten. It is an independent priory since September 19, 1858, and as such formally acknowledged by the Holy Father (Papal Decree of Dec. 15, 1858). I, therefore, received no part of the 3000 fl. In fact, I spent about 100 fl. for the trip to New York and my stay there in order to buy the warrants by which St. Ludwig Priory got 1280 acres of land.
2. I did not keep my action secret. I informed the women as well as the brothers because I thought I was in the right.
3. Least of all did I act autocratically in opposition to higher orders because I well knew I was dealing with a gift meant for a second person, not a third, and could not, without the will of the donor, act on my own. It would be unjust on both sides! And I do not want to be unjust!
4. I acted, as I had the honor to mention most humbly in my letter of Dec. 12, out of conscientiousness and love for Your Kingly Majesty. At that time, I did not say everything in order to spare the women, but now I must do it to save my own honor. Morally I was convinced and certain that the 3000 fl. would be used in an evil way and, so to say, thrown away, if they fell into the hands of the women. Naturally, I had to think that Your Majesty would not want the money thrown away, nor spent needlessly or used in an evil way, but would want to know that it was well spent. Furthermore, Your Majesty would consider it very wrong if I could have prevented the misuse and had not done so but, by handing out the money, had helped along in the abuse. That was my conviction then and still is, and it is the conviction of all who know the situation, and I will now explain my reasons more fully.

First, however, I must confess that I did make a mistake. I should have left the money alone and should have asked Your Majesty for directions after giving my reasons for deciding on my actions! I

knew that well enough and, under ordinary circumstances, I would have done so. But there were extraordinary circumstances present which let me hope — hope with confidence — that Your Majesty would forgive my sin since I was committing it out of love for you. I wanted by all means to found a monastery (not a small priory, but a formal monastery that could become an abbey) which would carry the name St. Ludwig, and which should be a memorial of the everlasting gratitude of the American Benedictines towards the great donor, King Ludwig of Bavaria, for all times. With this intention, two years in succession I traveled 2000 miles in late autumn to Minnesota and brought great sacrifices in money and personnel.

In the beginning all seemed to go well: a beautiful piece of land had been acquired but an oversight in making the deal, on the part of the prior of that time, and other disagreeable conditions caused the loss of all that land except a small piece. I then had my brothers occupy the 1280 acres which is now ours; but these also would have been lost if I had not been able to pay and, for a second time, nothing would have become of St. Ludwig's. Then came the 3000 fl., just at the right time, when we must either pay and secure possession, or give up everything. Now the decision was easily reached: we must, for the honor of our good King, have a monastery. If we do not want to lose this land forever, we must pay for it now. The money for that is here; it is the King's own donation. It is really meant for the Benedictine Sisters, but surely only under the condition that it will be well spent, but this is certainly not the case. His Majesty would, therefore, not oppose it if it were used for St. Ludwig's, provided the proper explanations were made. But by the time an answer can be received from Munich, the time will pass when payment must be made. Therefore, I may reasonably presume that I act according to the mind and spirit of the Kingly Donor if, here and now, I pay for the land with reservation and the later approval of His Majesty, or find some other means.

Love of Your Majesty inspired this reasoning. The temptation was strong. I submitted and committed the sin, in that with Your Majesty's own money I bought a capital tract of land for a Benedictine abbey in Your Majesty's honor! I am not sorry that I cannot repent; and moreover, it pleases me now still more because otherwise we would not have obtained a monastery in honor of St. Ludwig. . . . To me the outcome was assured, the gain was certain, the opportunity was there but once. On the other hand, the loss was sure, and so I dare to hope that good judgment, conscience, and love for Your Majesty's person will justify my behavior.

But I must explain why the money would have been spent needlessly or even in an evil way if the women had received it. I am not happy doing this. I hate speaking ill of others even when it is well founded. I cannot help but bring up something to justify my actions, but I will limit myself to the most necessary.

There are in St. Cloud seven Benedictine sisters and one orphan. The superior, *de facto*, is Mother Benedicta Riepp;⁸ by right, however, it is Mother Willibalda Scherbauer. Both came from St. Walburg in Eichstätt where they pronounced their perpetual vows. Benedicta Riepp came [to America] in 1852 with two companions, sent by Bishop v. Oettl and the prioress of the convent, upon my request, since on account of love for my Order I wanted to introduce the female branch of the same here. St. Marys was to be the motherhouse. For a few years all went well. Mother Benedicta was a good superior and had in Mother Scholastica Burkhardt an excellent support and novice mistress.

After a time, however, St. Marys no longer pleased her. She wanted to live in a larger city. She tried it first in Newark⁹ and, when that did not work out, in Erie. Without listening to my arguments and without first consulting at least the Rt. Rev. Bishop and the priests living there concerning the advisability of the move, or about the means of subsistence, or the acquisition of property, she left [St. Marys] with five nuns and lay sisters in the summer of 1856. No one expected her in Erie. No preparations had been made because no arrangements had previously taken place. So she was forced to live in a guest house for three weeks and then in a private home until a small house near the church was prepared for them. This is where they live now without any property of their own.

I was very displeased with this behavior of Mother Benedicta; for one reason, because without my knowledge and consent she could not take this step, but also because I foresaw that after the departure of Mother Scholastica, the conditions in St. Marys itself would grow worse.

And so it happened. When Mother Scholastica became superior in Erie, Mother Willibalda Scherbauer took her place [in St. Marys], but she could not successfully fill the position. The novices were neglected; the candidates and young ladies received no further instruction. Benedicta and Willibalda did only what pleased them. The other older sisters, who were concerned about this, were perse-

⁸ Mother Benedicta Riepp was not *de facto* superior; she was a member of the St. Cloud convent.

⁹ No evidence was found to indicate that Riepp ever lived in the Newark convent.

cuted and oppressed in every way; cliques arose in the convent. Even women of the town were drawn into the gossiping and great scandal was given. I advised, I warned, I threatened — all in vain. Benedicta and Willibalda denied me the right of jurisdiction over them, which according to Canon Law is without doubt mine, because I am known by the American bishops and by Rome as the superior of the Benedictine Order here. When I, nevertheless, made use of my rights and found ways to put an end to this "tyranny of women," by deposing Benedicta as superior and allowing someone else to be elected in her place, she begged me to allow her and 13 choir and lay sisters to emigrate to Minnesota. I permitted it but only under the condition that she obtain the permission of the Rt. Reverend Bishop of St. Paul, and furthermore, that she wait until my prior in St. Cloud could make arrangements for their reception, and finally that she take only six or seven sisters along because it was impossible to find proper housing for more.

But she listened to nothing. She oppressed the oppressed still more. She worked on all those who were capable of teaching in order to influence them to emigrate to Minnesota and to make it impossible for us to continue the day school and the boarding school and so broke up the whole convent. She allowed conventual order and discipline to be disturbed and then, when the \$400 came from the Missionsverein, she, with 13 choir and lay sisters, set out for Minnesota and even took along an orphan girl whose relatives live in St. Marys, but whom the girl was not permitted to see. Whatever she could pack up, she took along. In the safe remained 36 kr. and a \$300 debt. When she arrived in Erie, she sent Mother Willibalda and six sister companions ahead to Minnesota. The others were to follow with Mother Scholastica. She herself and a young American (sister) whom she knew how to persuade for the time being, went to Bavaria. Naturally this caused great scandal and hopeless confusion.

If they had all gone to Minnesota, half of them would have had to go into service or would have died of hunger. It was just at that time that the grasshoppers for two years in succession had destroyed all field and garden crops and great need and famine prevailed. Therefore, when I was made aware of this strange emigration by the prior of St. Marys, I wrote to the Bishop of Erie that he should not allow those sisters who were still in Erie to leave. The Rt. Rev. Bishop, at my suggestion, kept back those of the sisters who were destined for Minnesota but who were still in Erie because he, too, saw how senseless and venturesome it was. The rest arrived safely in St. Cloud and were accepted because they said I sent them. Naturally, great need

awaited them; they had to rent a private house a distance from the church for \$250 annually, and lived miserably supporting themselves by teaching, giving music lessons, and teaching household arts. The Prior there, however, did not recognize them as real sisters because they acted so very much against the rules of etiquette and justice. When I myself came to St. Cloud, they begged pardon and my protection. The young sisters were really all innocent and had only allowed themselves to be led astray. Willibalda Scherbauer, however, was the chief factor in all this angry rebellion. She received a well-deserved reprimand and, since no one among them was the real superior, I appointed Willibalda for three years, but forbade them to receive novices.

Meanwhile, Mother Benedicta accused me in Munich to the Lord Archbishop, and when he dismissed her and her former Lord Bishop v. Oettl did the same, she turned to Rome with a truly libelous slander of the most disgraceful kind, the groundlessness of which I could easily demonstrate when I asked the Rt. Rev. Bishop of Erie to come personally to St. Marys and there to find out the true state of affairs by interviewing each of the sisters remaining and sending the report to Rome. I myself took the occasion to draw up fitting regulations for the future organization of the affairs of the sisters of our Order in America to present them to the Apostolic See so that in the future, like cases of insubordination can be prevented. This affair is so far not yet settled and, depending upon the outcome, the sisters in St. Cloud will stand or fall. We are firmly determined not to tolerate them in our midst, i.e., to give them no spiritual help if they do not accept the jurisdiction of the president of the Congregation (who is myself at this time) as the sisters do in Erie, St. Marys and Newark, because a convent which has two such subjects to rule would be more of a small hell than a convent, if there is not someone who can teach them right conduct.

This is the reason why, in conscience, I believed myself bound not to give them the 3000 fl. as directed by Your Majesty, until the situation has been remedied and also why Prior Benedict Haindl made the same remark in his receipt. He, as well as I, would gladly encourage and support a good convent, but our common interest, the honor of our holy Order, and the concern about the eternal salvation of the sisters themselves, as well as of the faithful, oblige us to prevent the growth of an undisciplined convent. *That* I cannot accept — that I would support a crowd of insubordinate nuns near my young priests and brothers! No, Your Majesty, that I will not do. If the conduct of these nuns is not regulated by Rome to our satis-

faction and security, and until that happens, I give them no money; my conscience forbids that and my honor. But if Your Majesty considers it good to hold back and send the 3000 fl. destined for me from Munich directly to the sisters in St. Cloud, I would be completely satisfied, since I then would not be responsible. But it is very probable that the money will be uselessly spent in travelling and employed in a wrong way.

However, I am certain Your Majesty does not have the intention of giving to a group of undisciplined and adventurous nuns the means to settle permanently near my good brothers, or to encourage them by your support and to strengthen them indirectly in their disorderly conduct. Also, I do not believe that Your Majesty doubts my sincerity and my honesty. I am not one of those who accept the principle "The end justifies the means." If I were able to found a hundred monasteries, I would not do it with someone else's money. But as the general superior of our Order in America, I have in any event the duty to prevent individual members of the Order, on their own responsibility and contrary to the Holy Rule and the regulations of Canon Law, from establishing a monastery which can be seen beforehand to bring forth only bad fruit. For that reason I withheld the 3000 fl. from the runaway nuns and for the time being spent them for something better, always, however, with the reservation that Your Majesty approve and with the understanding that Prior Benedict Haindl will repay the nuns when their state of affairs has been regulated, i.e., when the decision has arrived from Rome and there is a moral certainty that a good Benedictine convent can be established in St. Cloud, because, I repeat, I will not tolerate a disorderly convent near my brothers.

I am fully convinced that this is in the spirit and according to the will of Your Royal Majesty yourself, and I, therefore, permit myself to direct a most respectful request to Your Majesty that you authorize the Reverend Court Chaplain that he again inform Mother Willibalda Scherbauer of this understanding so that a new encouragement for further insubordination is not given them by an undeserved Royal favor. As for the poverty of these religious, it is in the first place their own fault. I told them in advance; I warned them against it; they paid no attention. Then, again, they are not more important than the good sisters in Erie who, 15 in number, had to live from August 1858 to the middle of January 1859 on \$64.00 tuition and are really in need and worthy of support.

The Rev. Court Chaplain in his letter seems to suppose that I must also have withheld money from the sisters in Newark, because they

sent a petition to Your Majesty when only the previous year they should have received half of what Your Majesty graciously sent for Newark.

In the most worthy Cabinet document sent to me (Oct. 22, 1857) there is this statement "that . . . for the erection of a Benedictine priory in Newark . . . 3000 fl. are to be forwarded to you"; there is no mention of a division of money between my brothers and the sisters. The Rev. Court Chaplain did write that half belonged to the sisters; I answered him that this was right and I gladly looked upon it as such. I have bought three houses near the church for \$8000 or 20,000 fl. which I had to have to protect the church against fire and for living places for my brothers and sisters and enough space for a future monastery. One of these three houses I gave to the sisters, who gave me not a farthing for it. It cost me \$2500 or 6120 fl. Was it then an injustice when I took 1500 fl., the part that belonged to the sisters, from the 3000 fl. which Your Majesty gave as a payment to me and to consider it as a repayment for the 6120 fl. or \$2500? They still owe me 4620 fl. which I probably will never receive. Yes, I suspect I will have to spend much more very soon because the house has to be rebuilt and changed into a convent! . . . It is only just that the sisters, if they can, pay their own debts. I did not deprive them of anything.

My dear friend goes even further and brings up St. Marys also, as though there, too, I had spent Your Majesty's gift of 8000 fl. for myself and not for the sisters. Your Majesty, it is true, I did not at once build the convent, and at that time I informed Your Majesty of the reasons why I could not do so. The convent must be attached to the church so that the sisters will not need their own Mass, sermon, etc. But the church was not yet there; it took three years to build it. And the mill also had to be built. It was absolutely necessary. Otherwise my brothers and so also the sisters could not have supported themselves. I built it [the church] for \$5000. It was destroyed by fire. I rebuilt it and this time more massively with stone so that it could not again be burnt down. Meanwhile I allowed the sisters to live in our own house and bought another for my brothers. Their home is roomy and hygienic. I also built a new school so that they can teach the day school without leaving the enclosure. With this I really have done my duty. But I will also build a convent for them attached to the now completed parish church. Over the sacristy right and left there will be an oratory for a choir for the sisters, and there will then also be space outside of the choir 80' long and 40' wide, three stories high, with separate laundry and workhouse. . . .

It is really an injustice to me when in these circumstances my honesty is doubted; especially when this is done by the sisters themselves. They really do not deserve that I concern myself further about them. I believe I can best judge the needs of my brothers and sisters according to time and circumstances, and also the ways and means, how and when they should be helped. I am in debt myself. Everywhere are debts, but the heart of the Order is in St. Vincent. Should the pulse stop here, it will stop everywhere. I must be concerned about that first. May these lines attain what they are meant to: Your Majesty's conviction that at all times I acted rightly, unselfishly and far-seeingly, and that I will always be concerned about the trust Your Majesty so kindly places in me. In deepest respect and humility,

Your Royal Majesty's
Most obedient and humble

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot and President¹⁰

The following two letters, one by King Ludwig to Abbot Wimmer and one by the Court Chaplain Mueller to Wimmer, clear Abbot Wimmer completely of misappropriation of the 3000 fl. sent for the sisters in Minnesota as far as the King is concerned. King Ludwig gratefully accepted the Abbot's point of view, but he reserved the final decision about the 3000 fl. for himself.

LUDWIG TO WIMMER

May 29, 1859
Munich

Lord Abbot Boniface Wimmer! I have received your letter of the 19th [9th] of April and noted its contents with satisfaction, but also with great astonishment about the disorderly and disloyal behavior of the Superior Riepp; I wish to state that you are not to return the 3000 fl. in question which I directed to be sent to the Benedictines in St. Cloud for the founding of a convent until the internal affairs of the same have been resolved and the establishment of a convent for the aforementioned Benedictines in St. Cloud does in fact take place; but should the founding of a convent not take place, I reserve for myself the right to decide regarding the disposition of the aforementioned 3000 fl. I have already expressed my desire to the

¹⁰ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 115–124.

Court Chaplain Mueller, at his own request, to inform Willibalda of this my decision. . . .¹¹

[Ludwig]¹²

MUELLER TO WIMMER

June 1, 1859

[Dear Abbot,]

His Majesty, King Ludwig, sent me the enclosed letter¹³ to be forwarded to you. It contains the order that you are not to pay the 3000 fl. to Mother Willibalda until the decision comes from Rome as to whether a convent of Benedictines, independent of you, may be erected or not in St. Cloud. If no convent is allowed to be erected, His Majesty has directed me to tell you that he reserves for himself the right to decide about the 3000 fl. His Majesty has further authorized me to inform Mother Willibalda that you are not obliged to pay the 3000 fl. to her before the decision comes from Rome, and if that is in her favor. So now you have accomplished, by your explanation, everything that you wanted. . . . As to the sisters in Newark, I do not doubt that you give them twice as much as you receive, but this should be done with the understanding of the superior because she is really the proprietor; but if she knows nothing at all about it, and mentions it in her petition to the king that she has received nothing, it would strike him as strange. His Majesty has ordered me to allocate 1500 fl. to the Benedictine Sisters (of Newark). The letter is here, even though he did not inform you. Now, I think, we can await further developments. At this time the letter to St. Cloud is also being sent.

[Mueller]¹⁴

Covington, Kentucky, spoken of in the Abbot's letter below, followed as another foundation made by Abbot Wimmer; this time he moved sisters from Erie to the new convent.

It had been one of Mother Benedicta's complaints that the Abbot selected the best prepared sisters for his many new foundations, leaving the school in St. Marys without well prepared teachers.

¹¹ This letter is not extant.

¹² Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 124, n. 1.

¹³ The letter of May 29, 1859.

¹⁴ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 124, n. 1.

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

St. Vincent near Latrobe
Westmoreland Co., Pa.
July 25, 1859

[Gracious King!]

. . . It grieved me very much that I was obliged to write as I did, but I had to do so in self-defense. However, it is not necessary to remark that our Benedictine sisters in general are not responsible for the disloyal and undutiful behavior of their former superior. It is always difficult to find good superiors, even for monasteries, and an audacious energetic woman, if she does not possess the discretion becoming to the female sex, can cause more inconvenience than an unruly man.

God be thanked that in Erie, in St. Marys, and in Newark we have excellent convents. The one in Erie especially deserves to be commended because the sisters living there are good and also very poor. Without having discussed the matter with the pastor or with the bishop, the Superior Benedicta Riepp originally sent five choir and lay sisters there, not only without my advice, but even against my expressed will. She left them, then, to their fate which in fact was severe enough. I need only to remark that their income from August 1858 to the end of January 1859 was only \$87.00, and that from this 13 persons had to make a living in a wretched wooden house. Peculiar relations with the parish prevented both the bishop and the pastor from doing something in order to get some property for them. I, too, could not help them really, so I finally accepted the offer of the bishop and placed two of my priests in the parish. Then, as incumbent in the parish, I could alleviate their needs and build a suitable house and provide for a better income for them. . . .

On June 5 I introduced three sisters in Covington who had come there a few days before with the prioress from Erie.

And so while I was at war with a few rebellious and self-willed religious women, I was at the same time trying to build homes for others and to open ways for further expansion. Ingratitude must not prevent one from doing as much good as one can. And the innocent must not suffer with the guilty.

Your Majesty's order regarding the 3000 fl. will be conscientiously obeyed. . . .

Your Kingly Majesty's
Most obedient

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot¹⁵

¹⁵ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 125–128 (*passim*).

Mother Edwarda Schnitzer of Eichstätt wrote of the separation of St. Marys from Eichstätt with "most likely, the consent" of Mother Benedicta. No letter of Mother Benedicta giving consent to the separation of the American Benedictine Sisters from the Eichstätt convent has been located.

The decree of separation was received in 1859. This effected the real separation, although from 1855 on, when Wimmer had asked Pope Pius IX for a decree of separation, everything was done as though the decree had already been published.

The bishops of Eichstätt, Pittsburgh, and Erie had been asked for their opinions on the separation. As later letters show, the bishops favored the separation. There is no letter extant indicating that Mother Benedicta herself favored it, but in one of Wimmer's letters it is implied that the sisters supported him in his plans.

SCHNITZER TO BURKHARDT

St. Walburg in Eichstätt
Nov. 15, 1859

Reverend Mother Superior!

It makes me very happy that you still remember me in childlike love and I thank you sincerely for the kind congratulations. It causes me deep sadness, as you say in your letter, and since I understand your heart I can imagine it, that the mothers and sisters who went to America from St. Walburg no longer want to be called my children. I want to write to you very candidly about this and I hope and desire to calm you completely. The Papal Chair itself has, upon the request of the Very Reverend Lord Abbot, who, to be sure, had his reasons, and upon the written consent of Mother Benedicta in the name of all the Benedictine Sisters in America, separated the American Benedictine convents from the former motherhouse, St. Walburg, and has caused the decree to be sent to our Most Reverend Bishop for him to share with me.

Therefore, the convents in America are separated from the Convent of St. Walburg, separated by the Holy See, so I cannot and dare not ever call myself the mother of those whom I allowed to leave as my children. That is the will of God! Now, Mother Scholastica, you will be at peace and will not look upon it as though I, on my own impulse, had deserted my children; but what Catholic would not humbly and faithfully submit to Rome! Good Mother Scholastica! even if I can no longer call you my child, I do with real affection call

you *my sister*; for we have one father, St. Benedict, and one mother, St. Scholastica. Moreover, there is nothing at all for which I should forgive you. What happened, I believe, did not happen with your consent. Whoever brought it about is forgiven sincerely.

I was very sorry to hear of the death of good Sister Lidwina. We offered for her the same prayers offered for one from our own convent. But for you, dear Mother Scholastica! Not so many prayers will be offered, but may God, for the good of your spiritual children, whom I greet sincerely and whom I commend to St. Walburga, may that be far in the future. The week before last, on November 14, Mother Freedolina died, but you must know that. It seems to me I mentioned it in my last letter. Did you receive that? It was the answer to your letter to me which you wrote a short time after the return of Mother Benedicta. In that letter I placed one also from Mother Leodegaris and one from Mother Luitgardis to you. Our Most Reverend Bishop had an operation on one eye the year before last, and on the other, a few weeks ago; the first operation was not very successful; there is hope, however, that he will at least be able to see again after the second operation. Pray for him!

I send kind greetings to Mother Aloysia and to Mother Augustina and I thank the latter for her kind letter. It pleased me very much, especially because she followed my well-meant admonition. That is certainly for her welfare.

Assure your Most Reverend Bishop and the Right Reverend Lord Abbot of my deepest respects. Assure the latter that I and mine always speak of him very respectfully and with gratitude. It would give me pain if he thought otherwise.

Many greetings to all who still wish to hear about me. Greetings to you and to Mother Aloysia, Mother Augustina and the others! To Mother Adelgundis, Mother Luitgardis greetings from their one-time sister novices, and all the mothers and sisters here.

May you be happy, protected by Divine Providence, by the Most Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, by our holy Father Benedict and by St. Scholastica, etc. — that is the wish of your

Sincere, loving
Mother Edwarda Schnitzer,
Prioress, O.S.B.¹⁶

The Abbot now promised to repay the sisters in St. Cloud, under certain conditions, for the loss of the 3,000 gulden. He

¹⁶ Mt. S.B.C.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

stated in a letter of December 1, 1859, to Benedict Haindl of St. John's Monastery:

If the matter regarding the sisters turns out well and if they turn out well, I shall not neglect at some time to do something for them which will reconcile them with this, my present action, which, however, I had to do.¹⁷

Father Benedict Haindl, to whom the letter is addressed, was prior of the Benedictine monks at the time the land was acquired for the new Abbey of St. Ludwig, which was to be built to honor the King. Wimmer himself did not make restitution, as he promised in this letter, but the later St. John's Abbey has, in many ways, made restitution for the same. Among other things, the monks built the first convent in St. Joseph in 1863 and remitted heavy debts owed by the sisters.

The Decree of December 6, 1859, concerning the convents founded by Abbot Wimmer and the Rescript of the same date were sent to Bishop Josue Young of Erie, Pennsylvania, because at this time St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys was in the Diocese of Erie. He sent copies of the same to Wimmer. Bishop Thomas Grace of St. Paul and Bishop James Bayley of Newark also received copies of these documents from Rome.¹⁸ The Abbot sent a copy of the same to King Ludwig in his letter of February 22, 1860.

YOUNG TO WIMMER

Erie, Pa.

Jan. 25, 1860

Right Rev. Dear Friend!

Since I wrote you yesterday, I have received from Rome documents that interest you. I believe that instead of sending you the originals, less space will be needed for copies. You can suggest to me, if you please, what ulterior steps I may have to take to carry out the wishes of the Sovereign Pontiff and the Congregation, if there are any. I think you can dispose of Sister Benedicta without further interference on my part, since she is not, as I am advised, in this diocese, but I know not where. I suppose, perhaps, I should have to

¹⁷ S.J.A.A.; S.B.C.A., copy.

¹⁸ S.V.A.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy of the original.

communicate this matter to her, unless you think it best to take the whole care of it upon yourself.

Affectionately yours in Domino,

† J. M. Young, Bishop of Erie¹⁹

Right Rev. Abbot Wimmer

Following are the Decree and the Rescript received from Rome by Bishop Young. These are the final decisions arrived at in response to Abbot Wimmer's requests.

DECREE

Illustrious and Reverend Brother:

The priest, Boniface Wimmer, Abbot of the American Benedictine Congregation, has humbly explained to our Holy Lord, Pope Pius IX, that three convents of sisters of this same Order have been erected by him in the cities of Erie, Newark, and Marystown, which are especially in need of a Christian institution for girls. And he has urgently requested that they be approved by Apostolic authority, and after having been raised to the status of priories, that they be subject to the congregation. His Holiness, having weighed the whole proposal diligently and carefully, thinks that he should not by any means consent to the aforesaid petitions, but wishing to attend these same convents with some favors, he has especially commended their institution [founding], granting to the ordinaries of the places in whose dioceses they are found, the faculty of approving them with profession of simple vows and under the jurisdiction of the bishops of the same places who by a special apostolic concession will be able to use the abbot spokesman as a founder to choose their rule [way of life] and even to depute as confessors monks of the aforesaid congregation, provided there are no opposing obstacles.

Rome, December 6, 1859

G. Card. della Genga²⁰

RESCRIPT

Your Grace already knows the way of life of the holy virgin Benedicta Riepp, professed in the monastery of Eichstätt of the Order of St. Benedict, and the discontent which she arouses in those con-

¹⁹ S.B.C.A., copy.

²⁰ A.U.N.D., *Prop. Fide*, Fol. 1072; see also Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 134. Trans. Wilfred Theisen, O.S.B.

vents erected by Abbot Wimmer and also the necessity of making provisions as soon as possible that no greater divisions follow.

Desiring to offset these, His Holiness, Pope Pius IX, commands that she return to her own monastery of Eichstätt, and so commissions you, with that prudence with which you are eminently endowed, to communicate this to the aforesaid abbot as well as to the nun named above, and that you urge the execution of the pontifical request, taking care that due caution be preserved on the journey.

Since, however, the same abbot has urgently requested that the three monasteries founded by him be approved by the Apostolic See, you will find annexed to these letters a Decree of this Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars by which some approbation is granted with the profession of simple vows according to the tenor of this same Decree, about which you are to inform the abbot himself.

Card. della Genga, Cardinal Prefect
of the Congregation of Bishops and
Religious²¹

Wimmer forwarded copies of the same documents to King Ludwig, enclosing them in the February 22, 1860, letter.

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

St. Vincent Abbey

Feb. 22, 1860

Most worthy King!
Gracious King and Lord!

I hasten, at your request, to respectfully share with you the Papal Rescript and Decree which recently reached me through the Bishop of Erie. . . .

From this [the enclosures], Your Majesty, you see how the struggle of Sister Benedicta Riepp, former superior in St. Marys, against me has ended. The Pope has ordered her to return to her mother-house in Eichstätt!

My petition to have the three convents erected by me in St. Marys, Erie and Newark . . . raised to formal priories joined to our exempt Congregation, and subject them, therefore, to our jurisdiction [Abbot Wimmer's jurisdiction as president of the Congregation] was not entirely granted. They did, however, receive in a certain way the approbation of the Apostolic See insofar as the Holy Father

²¹ A.U.N.D. *Prop. Fide*, Fol. 1073; see also Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 134. Trans. Wilfred Theisen, O.S.B.

earnestly commended them to the respective bishops and gave the bishops the power to ratify them. And so, on the one hand, these convents were placed under the jurisdiction of the bishops; on the other hand, the bishops were empowered to return them to my jurisdiction — that is, they wanted to grant my petition but feared overstepping the rights of the bishops and, therefore, I should come to an agreement with the bishops.

About the convent in St. Cloud there is not a word, although in my report to Rome I had mentioned that Mother Benedicta was there. This silence speaks loudly enough, especially since it is known in Rome that Mother Benedicta considers herself superior there.²² The whole matter was undertaken in a spirit of stubbornness and of the grossest misinterpretation of the Holy Rule and the Canons, and could, of course, not be sanctioned. As I had the honor to state in an earlier letter, I could not permit a crowd of so-called religious women to settle near my priests and brothers, if I did not have the power to insure good discipline and to prevent rebellion or punish it; I must repeat that here again.

I really do not yet know what we will do or should do with these nuns, nor what they themselves want to do or become. Since from now on their vows are only simple, they could, if they wish, return to the world, or if they prefer, enter another convent; or perhaps when newly reorganized, if I get the proper guarantee, to make an attempt at a permanent convent. Much depends on how they, especially Mother Benedicta, will behave who, I very much fear, will not be submissive.

I respectfully mention this to Your Royal Majesty so that you will graciously come to a decision about the 3000 fl. My most humble suggestion would be that Your Majesty would deign to let them come to St. Ludwig Priory in St. Cloud because this is of far greater importance than a women's convent, because without this money, it [the Priory] is in fact nothing; it has at present eight priests and is the only support of the bishop²³ and of the Catholic population in Minnesota; it already has a good seminary, in which at present are eleven candidates for the priesthood, and the bishop wishes to send his candidates there; it will soon become a beautiful abbey named after Your Royal Majesty. Therefore, I would rather have

²² Indications are that Mother Benedicta Riepp accepted Mother Willibalda Scherbauer as superior in St. Cloud. Mother Willibalda had been appointed first by Mother Benedicta and then by Abbot Wimmer in 1857 and remained in office until Abbot Rupert Seidenbusch deposed her in 1868.

²³ Bishop Thomas Grace, O.P., Diocese of St. Paul, Minnesota.

more added than something taken away. Not for anything would I want the gracious name Ludwig attached to an unimportant little monastic institute. The monastery that carries that name must represent something, at least in time, and St. Cloud is such a place.

But let Your Majesty command what should be done. We will conscientiously carry it out.

Your Majesty's most obedient

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot²⁴

Father Willibald Mathäser does not agree with Wimmer's interpretation of the control over the Benedictine Sisters in America. He says:

The right to govern the Benedictine Sisters was really not conceded to Wimmer by Rome. He was, in fact, President of the Benedictines of the Cassinese Congregation, but as such he was not the superior of the sisters. With the confused situation in relation to ruling power in the quickly developing Catholic Church in North America, and because Wimmer had brought the Benedictine Sisters from Europe and was financially responsible for them, the abbot of St. Vincent took it for granted that he was also the superior of the sisters. In the uncertainty of governing rights lay the cause of the difficulties between Wimmer and Riepp in the first place.²⁵

The December 6, 1859, document indicates that the Erie, Newark and Marystown convents, all in the Diocese of Erie, were placed under the jurisdiction of Bishop Josue Young. Wimmer's petition for independence of the American Benedictines from the St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt (August 1, 1855) had succeeded with the support of Bishop Oettl of Eichstätt and Bishop Young of Erie, August 8, 1855. Bishop O'Connor of Pittsburgh gave no information, since no Benedictine convent remained in his diocese.

Wimmer's letter of February 22, 1860, brought an answer from King Ludwig. He gave final consent to Abbot Wimmer's using the October, 1858 gift of 3,000 fl. for founding the Priory of St. Ludwig [later St. John's] in Minnesota since, according to

²⁴ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 134-135.

²⁵ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 119, n. 12.

Wimmer, no convent of sisters was being erected in St. Cloud with his consent.

LUDWIG TO WIMMER

Mar. 22, 1860

Munich

Lord Abbot Wimmer!

I have received your letter of the 22 of last month and am answering you, after having read its contents: that under existing circumstances, and since the founding of a Benedictine convent in Minnesota in the Diocese of St. Paul did not materialize, the 3000 fl. sent in October 1858 by me for that purpose should now be used for the founding of a Priory of St. Ludwig in St. Cloud. . . .

Yours benevolently,

Ludwig²⁶

WIMMER TO BURKHARDT

Carrolltown

April 25, 1860

Dear Reverend Mother Prioress:

Only now can I write a few lines in answer to your note of Feb. 19. I am not displeased with my good sisters, and am not grieved on account of the decision from Rome. I have just so much to do that I can hardly find time to write a letter unless I simply *have* to. The decision from Rome is *not* unfavorable. I won out in the dispute with Sister Benedicta and obtained everything I asked for the sisters except the *exemption*.²⁷ If that dispute had not come up, we surely would have obtained that, too. I held to the papal confirmation of the three convents — St. Marys, Erie, and Newark — and to their recognition as priories, and then on that account, you remain under me and my successors in office, the parish priests.

And now, the exemption. You have not yet, formally, been recognized by Rome, but it was given some thought (as it is expressly stated) and was earnestly recommended to the Rev. Bishops to acknowledge it. Naturally, because the sisters, under Sister Benedicta, did such mischief, one did not really trust them anymore and kept a little aloof. Furthermore, because Sister Benedicta had accused me of the greatest arbitrariness in the treatment of the sisters, and here was guilty of the rudest disobedience toward me, the Rev. Cardinals thought that most likely we might get angry again, and

²⁶ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 136–137.

²⁷ Wimmer wanted the sisters to be subject to himself and so be exempt, as he was, from the bishop of the diocese in which they live or work.

[the sisters] should, therefore, be under the jurisdiction of the bishops. But, because [the cardinals] knew that I, as the founder, according to canon law, should really have jurisdiction over you, they gave the bishops to understand that they should leave it to me so that I will receive you from them, but they could interfere in disputed matters.

However, I cannot do that, for, as an exempt abbot, I am under no bishop but, instead, directly under Rome. But if I do not want to have jurisdiction over you, I would have to acknowledge the bishop as arbiter over me in controversies, and in that way I myself would lose the exemption. I cannot do that even if the bishop would gladly give it. However, I am not afraid that you and I, or Sister Teresa and I, will quarrel with each other, but I cannot and will not give up my freedom. That does not say that I do not want to do anything for the sisters anymore. My priors, who are your confessors and spiritual guides and also your spiritual messengers, are subject to me, and can, and will, act for you according to my wish and your interest.

A beautiful idea — a community, a novitiate, a common cultural school for the whole Order — will surely go to the grave with this. Yet, if you do what is right, and live and work in the spirit of our holy Order, the Lord will make everything right. Indeed, I believe it is better this way because Rome has determined it to be so. If an opportunity presents itself, I'll surely visit you when I make my visitation trip. Should anything be wanting, or should you need something, write me. In such a case, an answer will not be so long coming.

This time I need something, your prayer for my particular affair. Do, please, offer it, together with all your Holy Communion, for a week, according to my intention. Tell Sister Emmerama she should, by all means, persevere in Erie. That is the place where God wants her. If Sister Augustina, in a letter to Fr. Prior, would state exactly all circumstances of her illness, I hope he'll be able to cure her.

Now you will soon be able to move into your new building. I was very sorry that you had to spend another winter in the old house. In St. Marys, too, we were finished with the basement only last fall, but everything is ready now to finish a very nice and spacious convent for you this summer, where you can house the grade school and the pupils. In Newark, all is well in the convent and in the school; in Covington also, everything is well, but the parish is quite stingy toward the sisters. I do not know what Sister Benedicta is doing. I have heard nothing from her for a long time. I expect no yielding. If pride has gone so far, it does not stop midway. Yet, let us pray for

her so that she will not forsake the only safe road, that of obedience. . . .

In Newark the English Ladies are giving a fair for our sisters.

How is your health? Do you still eat so little? You are the first one I know of who became stout from fasting. Do not forget me in your prayer, especially on account of the above affair. I'll remember you and yours also. With special esteem,

Your devoted brother in Christ,

(Signed)

Boniface Wimmer²⁸

Mother Edwarda Schnitzer, speaking of the convent in St. Marys, states in the Eichstätt *Chronicle*:

The first convent of Benedictines founded from Eichstätt, as a result of the hasty separation from the motherhouse, had to overcome many difficulties. There were all manner of misunderstandings which the good sisters must have experienced as a heavy burden. The mission flower could open only among many thorns.²⁹

Since Mother Benedicta Riepp was now living in St. Cloud, she was no longer under the jurisdiction of Bishop Josue Young of Erie but under that of Bishop Thomas Grace, O.P., of St. Paul. Therefore, the enforcement of the Rescript of December 6, 1859, which related to the return of Mother Benedicta to the motherhouse in Eichstätt, fell upon Bishop Grace.

YOUNG TO GRACE

Jan. 28, 1861

Erie, Pa.

Rt. Rev. Dear Friend,

The annexed copy is all I have in response to your question about the *jurisdictione*. Along with it came a document mandatory to Sister Benedicta Riepp (of which I certainly furnished you a copy) from the same Congregation "of Bishops and Regulars," but all sent to me under cover of a letter from Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*. I suppose, therefore, you can address the other Congregation through him. I presume, should you procure the intervention of Abbot Wimmer with the Congregation of Bishops and Regu-

²⁸ Mt. S.B.C.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

²⁹ Baska, *Benedictine Congregation*, p. 40, n. 41.

lars, there would be no trouble about permitting Sister Benedicta to finish her days in Minnesota.³⁰ Such appears at least to be the opinion of the Rev. Fathers here. You will pardon me some unavoidable delay in responding to your request, and believe me, sincerely,

Yours in Christ,

† Josue M. Young
Bp. of Erie³¹

To Rt. Rev. Dr. Grace

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

St. Vincent

Feb. 9, 1861

Royal Majesty!

Most worthy King and Lord!

A thousand thanks for the magnanimous Christmas gift (2,000 fl.) with which Your Majesty again very graciously thought of St. Vincent! I just returned from a trip to St. Marys where I experienced much comfort and joy, because now at last the convent has come to completion and the sisters have moved in.³² They cannot thank God and Your Majesty enough because they now have such a beautiful, practical and spacious convent. . . .³³

Your Majesty's
Most obedient

Boniface Wimmer

In his letter to King Ludwig in August, 1861, Abbot Wimmer praises all the convents founded from the motherhouse in St. Marys, Pennsylvania, except the St. Cloud convent in Minnesota. By this time, Mother Benedicta and Mother Willibalda were both living in St. Cloud.

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

St. Vincent's College, Latrobe,
Westmoreland Co., Pa.

Aug. 17, 1861

I received Your Majesty's letter in which a royal support is promised me for next October for our Benedictine institutes in America. I

³⁰ This intervention by Bishops Young and Grace resulted in Mother Benedicta's remaining in St. Cloud.

³¹ S.B.C.A., copy.

³² This is the convent Mother Benedicta Riepp wanted to build with King Ludwig's gift of 8000 florin in 1852.

³³ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 140.

hope Your Majesty has also received my second letter dated from Chicago in which I mentioned that I really accepted the St. Joseph parish there. Recently three sisters from Erie Priory went there, after a small frame building for their use was hastily erected; cost: \$400. I wanted the girls' school to come into good hands at once, because in a large city there is nothing more necessary for the public morality than the religious formation of the female youth. Our Benedictine sisters are now, beside St. Marys, also in Erie, Newark, Covington and Chicago, and prove themselves excellent teachers everywhere and at the same time devout religious. The blessing of God is with them. We began in every place with very meager means, yes, at the beginning with no means. But in a short time the tender sprout of the first planting will grow and soon develop into beautiful blossom. Nowhere, of course, is opposition lacking, and many an obstacle has to be removed or overcome. But with God's assistance things are always getting better, as one can expect. . . .

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot³⁴

The following two quotations, one from the Diary of Bishop Thomas Grace of St. Paul, written in the third person, and one taken from an article in the *St. Cloud Democrat* by the editor, Mrs. Jane Swisshelm, present a picture of the convent in St. Cloud which differs considerably from that given by Abbot Boniface Wimmer.

TAKEN FROM THE DIARY OF BISHOP THOMAS GRACE, O.P.

Sept. 16, 1861

Left Crow Wing at 6 o'clock a.m. for St. Cloud. When the bishop arrived at 7 p.m., he put up at the convent of the good sisters of St. Benedict. The sisters' place in Minnesota is improved since the bishop's last visit. They have a good school.

Sept. 17, 1861

At 6 o'clock in the morning started by Burbank's line of coaches for the Red River. Arrived St. Joe about 9 o'clock. This town is made up exclusively of German Catholics. It is the most flourishing town in the Sauk Valley, and the land is unsurpassed in the state. A large addition has been made to the church which is used also for a school at which over 100 children are in attendance. The schools are taught by the Benedictine brothers. Seven and a half miles further, [we]³⁵ passed St. James Church which is really a handsome edifice

³⁴ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 148.

³⁵ The bishop and his priest companions.

built with regard to style and neatly painted. It is to be hoped it will mark a new era in the respect of church building in Minnesota. After another 7 1/2 miles [we] passed the new church in ----[part missing]. Reached St. Cloud on Friday evening, Sept. 27. Frs. Ravoux and Goiffon continued on to St. Paul the next day. The bishop remained in St. Cloud until after Sunday when he received the profession of four sisters of St. Benedict and gave the habit to two novices.

The bishop's stay among these good sisters, which gave him occasion to witness their piety, their innocence, their heavenly mindedness and rare spiritual happiness, was one of the brief periods granted but seldom to man in which a foretaste is had and a conception obtained of the felicity of heaven. He will never forget it, or the disposition of soul at the time which made him receptive of such enjoyment for which he will be ever thankful to God and will regard it always as a special grace intended for some purpose of His providence which it is hoped will be met with due fulfillment, through His most unworthy servant.

On Monday, the 30th of September, started for St. Paul. . . .³⁶

Mrs. Jane Swisshelm published the following in her *St. Cloud Democrat* September 26, 1861. After four years the people of St. Cloud were beginning to accept the sisters. One of Mrs. Swisshelm's daughters, Nettie, attended the sisters' school in St. Cloud, known later as St. Agnes Academy.³⁷ Mother Willibalda taught music in this school. She was the "Lady Abbess" referred to in the article.

Mrs. Swisshelm, speaking of the convent in St. Cloud, says:

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, [Mother Willibalda] who is small, slight, delicate, graceful, and as 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.³⁸

³⁶ S.B.C.A., copy.

³⁷ McDonald, *With Lamps Burning*, pp. 37, 40.

³⁸ *St. Cloud Democrat*, Sept. 26, 1861, quoted in McDonald, *Minnesota History*, June 1957, p. 269.

By December 30, 1861, when she wrote the following letter, Mother Benedicta Riepp had only three months to live. The illness,³⁹ the symptoms of which she seems to have experienced earlier in St. Marys, Pennsylvania,⁴⁰ was now taking her life. She wrote this letter to a Reverend Father, perhaps her confessor in St. Cloud. Only the signature was written in her own hand.

Mother Benedicta died in St. Cloud on March 15, 1862.

St. Cloud, Minnesota

December 30, 1861

Reverend Father!

With a weak hand I would like to write you a few lines to thank you for the information contained in your esteemed letter. I can only be amazed and be grateful to God and the most blessed Virgin Mary that they show me so much mercy. I at once wrote to Rome and not only withdrew my opposition, but asked that the convents of Benedictine sisters be admitted into the Congregation. I consider myself fortunate, and the dear Lord may let me live or die. I am able to look into the future in peace.

I have one great favor to ask of you, namely, that you be so kind and in my stead beg the Right Reverend Lord Abbot to forgive me for the displeasures I caused him.

Now I must close; I feel too weak to write more. Do remember me in your good prayers.

In deep respect, I remain

Your most grateful sister in Christ,

Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B.⁴¹

Sister Regina Baska writes:

Although the founder, Abbot Wimmer, considered jurisdiction over the nuns as his right, his authority, according to Propaganda, rested upon the consent of the bishops. Abbot Wimmer did not conceal his disappointment, but he urged the nuns to accept the decision because it was the wish of the Holy See.⁴²

³⁹ It is generally accepted that Riepp died of tuberculosis. See Oetgen, *An American Abbot*, p. 168; Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 156, n. 11; MSS: Life of Benedicta Riepp, S.B.C.A. (author unknown); Morkin and Seigel, *Wind in the Wheat*, p. 92; Sister Hildegard O'Keefe, Oral History of Mt. St. Scholastica, Atchison, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Riepp to Wimmer, May 3, 1857.

⁴¹ S.B.C.A., copy.

⁴² See letter of April 25, 1860, Wimmer to Burkhardt, pp. 160-162, from which Baska quotes.

That Mother Benedicta was later also favorable to the Congregation suggested by Abbot Wimmer is shown in the letter of December 30, 1861.

Father Willibald Mathäser, O.S.B., speaks of Benedicta Riepp's death as follows:

[Benedicta Riepp] — died of consumption when only 36 years old in St. Cloud on March 15, 1862. Her suffering certainly explains many of the difficulties the energetic and enterprising woman had with Wimmer.⁴³

At her death the *St. Cloud Democrat* of March 20, 1862, stated:

The Mother Superior of the Sisters of the Benedictine Order died at the convent in this place on last Saturday morning. She was buried next forenoon with the usual service and rites of the Roman Catholic Church. The funeral was largely attended.⁴⁴

In 1884 her remains were moved to the cemetery of the motherhouse in St. Joseph, Minnesota. At Benedicta Riepp's death, after ten years of activity in the U.S., there were seven independent Benedictine convents in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Minnesota, Kentucky, and Illinois — all founded from St. Joseph's Convent in St. Marys, Pennsylvania.

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

Dec. 2, 1862

Most Gracious King and Lord,

. . . At this time I also founded in the little city of Shakopee on the St. Peter River a small establishment for our Benedictine sisters by taking two choir sisters and one lay sister with me from St. Marys and bringing them there to the great joy of the English and German Catholics in order to give them a school. The new convent has its own history. First, it was a cowbarn, then a horse barn, later a priest's residence, and now the embryo of a new convent for sisters. In emergency, however, it serves the purpose.

I also saw the older Benedictine convent in St. Cloud, whose former superior was Benedicta Riepp who had caused so much

⁴³ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 156, n. 11.

⁴⁴ Baska, *Benedictine Congregation*, p. 83, n. 32.

annoyance. She died last spring, and since then everything there has been put in order again. I really was able to come to an agreement and make arrangements with the present Prioress [Mother Willibalda] so that from there a small convent of Benedictine sisters can be erected in St. Joseph. . . .

Your Kingly Majesty's

Most obedient and grateful servant,

Boniface Wimmer, Abbot⁴⁵

Father Willibald Mathäser, O.S.B., makes the following observation about the Benedictine Sisters in the United States who came from St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt, Bavaria:

The Benedictine Sisters of North America, insofar as time and circumstances demanded, took on a form of development which differed from the Benedictines of the old world, the more the longer they have been separated. They have received a structure built upon the principle of a congregation or a province, not upon the old monastic principle of stability of place. With this they came to resemble the Third Orders which do not profess solemn, but only simple vows.⁴⁶

At present most Benedictine Sisters in the United States have formed federations under Pontifical Jurisdiction. This includes the early foundation from St. Walburg Abbey in Eichstätt and those founded from St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys, Pennsylvania.⁴⁷ Since 1835, when St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt was restored, the sisters are under simple vows but by special Papal rescript are accounted *moniales* (nuns).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Mathäser, *Letters*, pp. 156–157.

⁴⁶ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 135, n. 4.

⁴⁷ The Official Catholic Directory (1979), pp. 1077–78; See "Foundations from Eichstätt," p. 224.

⁴⁸ *Catalogus Monasteriorum* (Rome, 1980), p. 481.

Georgius

divina miseratione, et sedis apostolicae gratia

Episcopus Eichstettensis

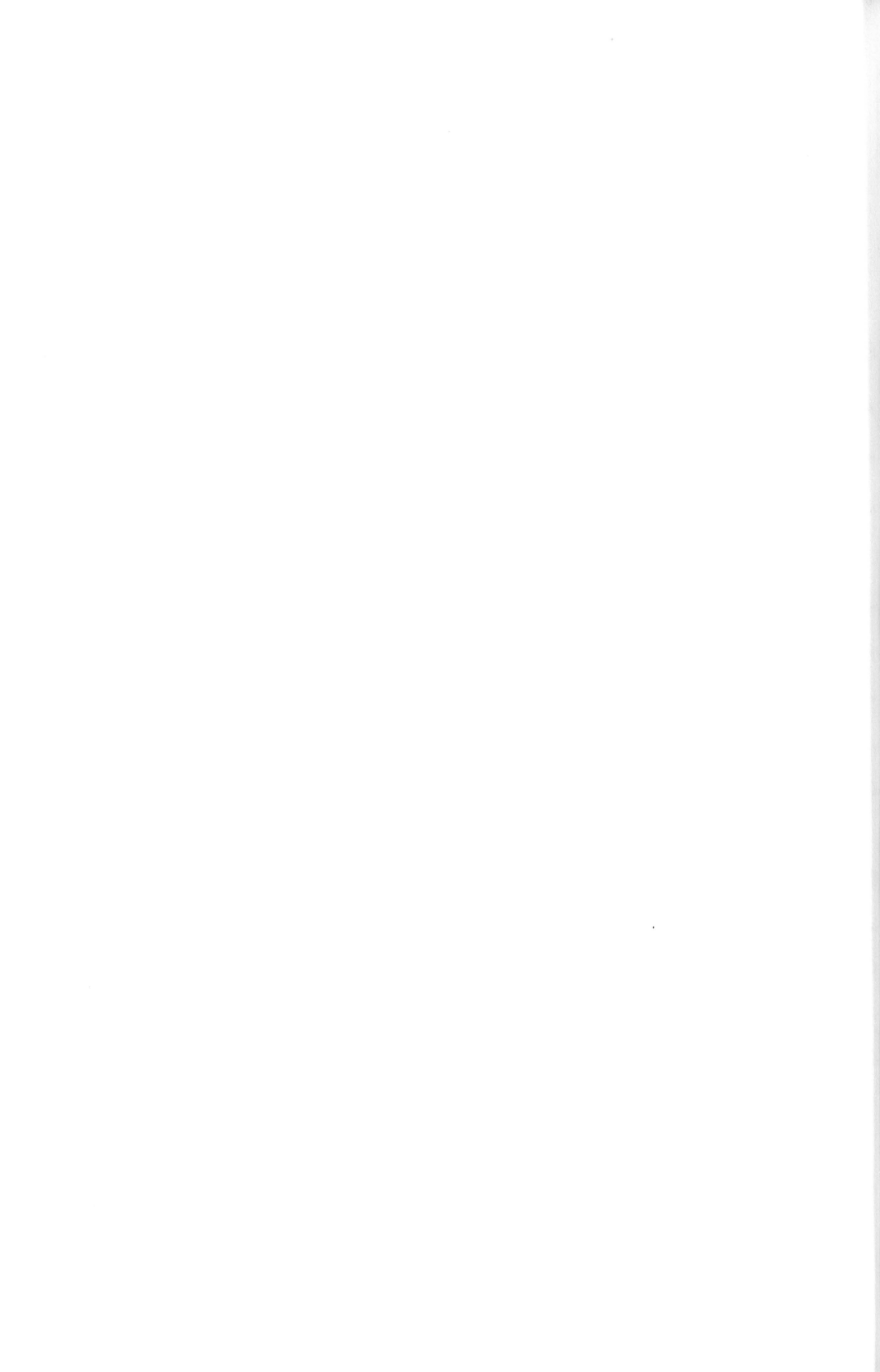
Unnibus has litteras lecturis salutem in Domino

Cum dilectae Nobis in Christo filiae Willibaldae Scherbauer et Emmeramiae Riader,
prospae, Aloisia Knapp et Catharina Schoenthofer monachae, et Philomena Siegel,
soror laica Monasterii ad Holthurgam Nobis personarum pervenirent a Americam
ad intentionem emigrandi, et ibidem conventui Marialium s. Benedicti in
Harigstamm, impetrare ad educandas puellas institute in adiutorium apostolicae,
enique supplicarent, ut eas huic in fine destinationis. Obsequiis earum
annuas, habitum cum Priores et Conventuales monasterii Nollati consilio,
praemissaque dictarum Virginum maturo examine, illas in Domino dimittimus, ea tan-
quam conductione, et sacra religionis suae vota strictè observare nare censerent, et imprimis
obedientiam, quam Priores nunciant, novae Superiori religiosissime praestarent.

Has igitur Virgines, quarum eximium ad promovendam Dei honorem et salutem
animarum fervorem agnovimus. Reverendissimo ac Illustrissimo Domino
Patriarchae illius Linciacensis, cuius jurisdictioni subiectae erant, esse commendamus,
rogantis, ut eas, paternis animo in filias recipere, et apostolica charitate fovere
dignetur.

Datum Eichstadii in regno Bavariae die 6^{ta} Octob. 1855.

+ Georgius Episc.



CHAPTER VIII

MOTHER WILLIBALDA SCHERBAUER, prioress: 1857–1868

Although Mother Benedicta Riepp had, at the time of her death, lived in St. Cloud for about four years, it was not she but Mother Willibalda Scherbauer who was superior and acknowledged as such by Abbot Boniface Wimmer, since he had appointed her in 1857. At this time, then, we return to Mother Willibalda and the St. Cloud Convent.

In accordance with the 1859 Roman Decree, which placed the sisters under the bishop, Prior Othmar Wirtz¹ asked Bishop Grace to grant permission to the sisters in St. Cloud to have midnight Mass in their chapel on Christmas, 1862. Similarly, in 1863 when Mother Willibalda planned to go to Chicago, the prior asked the bishop for permission.

GRACE TO WIRTZ

St. Paul

Dec. 21, 1862

Very Rev. Dear Father,

In regard to the chapel at St. Cloud, it certainly cannot be regarded as a private chapel, being used as the parish church and open to the

¹ Wirtz was prior of St. John's from 1862 to 1865; it was he who was responsible for moving the monastery of monks from St. Cloud to Collegeville and helping to bring the sisters from St. Cloud to St. Joseph in 1863. *Scriptorium*, 15: No. 1, June 1956, pp. 9–10.

public. The reasons for prohibiting the midnight Mass at Christmas are of such character and weight that I would be sorry to have any exception in any church in the diocese. As you will not have time or occasion to give due notice to the people, you can this Christmas follow the custom which was usual in all the churches in past years. It will not be long, I hope, before the good sisters will have a community chapel of their own, strictly private; and until then they will be willing, I trust, to make a sacrifice in favor of the general rule of the diocese; their devotion will be none the less, as in this consideration, it will be equally pleasing and acceptable to God, in assisting at the Holy Sacrifice at five instead of twelve o'clock. . . .

Father Thomas
Bishop of St. Paul²

When the sisters had been in St. Cloud for six years, a group of Catholics there were looking for land on which to build a district school and thus to receive school aid. They intended to engage Catholic laymen instead of sisters to conduct the school. Bishop Grace stated his reasons for not supporting this proposal in a letter to Prior Othmar Wirtz. The school was not built.

GRACE TO WIRTZ

April 27, 1863

Father Demetrius has already spoken to me in regard to the proposition for leasing a portion of the churchground in St. Cloud for a public school edifice. We cannot be too cautious in yielding to other claims and privileges over the property of the Church, especially in such cases as the one in question in which there is reason to suspect that the congregation demands as a kind of right that such lease shall be made. The probability that a Catholic teacher may be appointed does not change the character of the school which remains essentially a school in which no religion is allowed to be recognized; and it would seem strange that a school system which the Church has denounced as Godless should have a local habitation on ground dedicated to church purposes. I am sorry to hear that the congregation is giving the good sisters more trouble. These people are not worthy of having sisters to draw down blessing upon them.

† Thomas³

² S.B.C.A., copy.

³ McDonald, *With Lamps Burning*, p. 54.

GRACE TO WIRTZ

St. Paul

June 1, 1863

. . . As to Sister Willibalda, you can use your discretion about permitting her to go on a visit to Chicago, though in candor I must say I think the precedent a bad one. If the motive of health is once admitted as a sufficient reason for a sister to be allowed to leave the monastery and travel to a distant state, there will be no end to the trouble which the future will bring forth. Besides, experience fully shows that the more retired the sisters are and the less they see of things outside the monastery, the more content and happy they are. . . .

†Thomas⁴

GRACE TO WIRTZ

St. Paul

June 18, 1863

. . . I am perfectly satisfied with your explanation in regard to Sister Willibalda going to Chicago. I was not aware that you had a regular community of sisters of your Order in that city. . . .

†Thomas⁵

With the permission of Bishop Grace, Mother Willibalda and Sister Dominica Massoth spent most of July, 1863, visiting with the Benedictine sisters in Chicago. The Chicago convent had been founded from Erie in 1861. The two sisters also went to the convent in Covington, Kentucky, an 1859 foundation from Erie. The sisters in both of these convents had originally come from St. Marys, Pa., and so were known by Mother Willibalda. Sister Dominica had entered the convent in St. Cloud and had been professed in March, 1863. Later she joined the convent in Atchison, Kansas, where she died in 1880.

From Chicago Mother Willibalda sent three letters: one to the novices in St. Cloud; one to Mother Antonia Streitz, acting superior in St. Cloud during Mother Willibalda's absence; and one to the sisters in both St. Cloud and St. Joseph, a mission from St. Cloud, where Mother Evangelista Kremeter was then living.

⁴ S.J.A.A., original.

⁵ S.J.A.A., original.

My dear Children!

May Jesus and Mary be near you and with you!

What are you all doing in the novitiate? Are you obedient, cheerful and happy together? Each one of you may write me a letter answering these questions and send the letter to Chicago. I am happy to be here, am at peace and very well. I do not know when I will return. They do not want us ever to leave here, yes, they treat us as though we were glass figurines. Next week Mother Nepomucene [Ludwig] and I will go to Covington for eight days to visit Mother Alexia [Lechner]. I am happy to see my old fellow sisters again. Sister Dominica greets all of you. She is very homesick. I dispel mine by playing the piano. Mother Antonia [Streitz], deliver my love and greetings, especially to Sisters Gregoria [Moser], Gertrude [Capser], Boniface [Bantle], and Bernarda [Auge] — all together. Sister Gertrude must study English diligently. I do not have time to write to each one individually since we both have two habits to make because ours wore out on the trip. I would also like to do some other work and prepare for the trip to Covington. All of you, be kind and loving to each other and obedient, and so give me great joy. Sister Adelheid [Lejal], be so kind and send me a white feather-flower in your letter. It does not matter if it does get crushed. Also send the small song book which contains the songs: *Auf dem Meer*, etc.; *O nimm mich auf erwählte, Zelle*, etc.; also Buhler's *Messe* and the song to the Mother of God written in pencil which ends with the words: "Nimm dein Kindlein auf," etc.; the piece for four hands by Miss Palmer; the duet *Im Flitterbusch*; and any other beautiful song or small piece for four hands. Mother Nepomucene would like to have these.

Be obedient and good. Then I will bring you something beautiful, all kinds of things to embroider. Sister Gertrude, send me the names of the two glues, or whatever they are, that one uses to make the screen frame and also of the two oils in which the material is dissolved. Mother Antonia, do not neglect to preserve many, many raspberries for me, and also many other berries. Sister Boniface should make a lot of butter. How is our Reverend Father? He has most likely been ill? Do not cause any troubles for him.

Write, all of you; it will make me happy. The Rev. Father Prior will take care of mailing the music and the letters. Write me very candidly about everything.

Many greetings to you from Mother Nepomucene, Sister Adelbert

[Glatt] and from all. I, too, greet you a hundred thousand times and beg for prayers.

Greetings to Martin.

In the Heart of Jesus,

In great haste.

Your sincerely loving spiritual mother,
Maria Willibalda, O.S.B.⁶

SCHERBAUER TO STREITZ

Chicago

July 20, 1863

In great haste

Dear Sister Antonia,

Well, if everybody is sick, and there is so much work to do, you must, in God's name be both Mary and Martha, but not more than necessary. You understand what I mean, don't you? Take good care of the sick. Do not let them suffer any want; that is my sincere wish. Sister Boniface, also, whom I greet heartily, should provide lovingly for everything they need in all patience. She should include me generously in her work; I would like to write to each one of you but do not have any time since I am helping the sisters with their fair. I also send sincere greetings to Sister Theresia [Marthaler]. Tell her to write to her family and send the letter through Father Prior.

A thousand greetings to each sister and all the children, especially Sophie, Marie and Betty. Why does Sister Benedicta [Kump] never write? That does not please me.

Do you and the sisters write to me frequently, even if I do not answer at once. It is a great comfort for me when I know how everything is going.

A friendly greeting to Fathers Wolfgang and Martin.

When I return, the garden will very likely be most beautiful. That gives me joy. Here it is very warm and stormy most of the time.

I would prefer being in beloved St. Joseph and have desired it for a long time but Father Prior has not let the word "Come"⁷ appear in

⁶ S.B.C.A., original.

⁷ We may presume that the person who would say "Come" was Prior Othmar Wirtz since he had arranged the trip for M. Willibalda. She had expected him to come to Chicago and had met him after his arrival. Her next letter announced her return to St. Cloud. This might also have been a business trip for both M. Willibalda and the prior. In November of 1863 the convent in St. Cloud made a new foundation in Atchison, Kansas. According to the history of this foundation, *The Meaning of the Mountain* by Sister Mary Faith Schuster, the convent in Atchison was planned at a meeting in Chicago of Prior Augustine Wirth, OSB, and M. Willibalda Scherbauer [and Prior Othmar Wirtz?]. There is no indication in any of the letters of a second trip to Chicago by M. Willibalda to plan the Atchison foundation.

any of his letters, so it is not my fault that I am not at home. Sincere greetings from the sisters here to all of you. Sister Bernarda is very homesick. The sisters here wish they had a jar of lard from Minnesota since it can hardly be bought here. All food stuffs are very expensive. Pray for me that I may soon return home.

In the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

Your spiritual mother,

Willibalda, O.S.B.⁸

SCHERBAUER TO SISTERS

Chicago

July 20, 1863

Venerable Sisters,

Now I will soon return. Tomorrow or the day after we set out on our journey. I will be very happy to get to see the friendly Mississippi once again. Then I will know that St. Cloud also is no longer beyond this world and that soon our little happy convent will again enclose me. Oh! how happy I am; how I long for the hour of reunion!

I am well and happy, and so is Sister Dominica. On the eve of my nameday I went to Covington with Mother Nepomucene. However, the journey was not very agreeable. We had a number of difficulties but all turned out well. What pleased me especially about this trip is that I saw Sister Anselma [Schoenhofer]. Though she was sick unto death, I was able to please her especially by my visit. She could not express her joy enough. On Sunday, July 12, she died a beautiful death. May she rest in peace! Pray *very especially* for her. How are you all? I hope well in body and soul. I hear all of you are striving to outdo each other in obedience, in humility, in sisterly love and in good example — so I read in every letter from our Reverend Father, but I am even happier when I hear it from you. Do not cease, not even for a moment, to love Jesus and Mary very fervently and in them, all our sisters.

Last Friday I very unexpectedly met our Rev. Father. You can imagine the joy I felt, and what consolation! I had begged the Sorrowful Mother to obtain this favor for me and she granted me this grace. How good God is! But now pray very fervently for a safe journey. It is a hardship to travel by steamboat at this time.

Everything went well for both of us but our Rev. Father had a very troublesome journey. Therefore, do pray very fervently to the dear Lord and to the Sorrowful Mother.

⁸ S.B.C.A., original.

Our Rev. Father sends sincere greetings to all of you and says you must keep your promises to be good.

The sisters here and in Covington send kindest greetings to all, especially to Sister Evangelista, Sister Gregoria and Sister Gertrude.

I must close. This was written in haste. From St. Paul I shall again send a few lines. Remember me in your prayers and especially in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and recommend me to the prayer of the Rev. Fr. Benedict [Haindl], the Rev. Mathew [Stuerenberg], Rev. Bruno [Riess], Rev. Wolfgang [Northman], and all who know me.

Will you send this letter also to St. Joseph, to Mother Evangelista [Kremeter]? I do not have time to write more. Our Rev. Father is very sick; pray for him. Today he is a little better.

In the hearts of Jesus and Mary,
Your sincere spiritual Mother,

In haste.

Maria Willibalda, O.S.B.⁹

The motherhouse of the first Benedictine sisters in Minnesota was in St. Cloud from 1857 to 1863 when it was moved to St. Joseph. There were six receptions of novices in St. Cloud: in the fall of 1857; in September of 1859; in September, 1861; in July, 1862, December, 1862 and in August, 1863.¹⁰ These receptions brought the number of sisters belonging to the convent in St. Cloud to fourteen members.

In 1863 two events took place: the first was the sending of seven of the fourteen sisters to open a foundation in Atchison, Kansas; the second, the moving of the other seven sisters to St. Joseph, the new motherhouse. By drawing "slips of paper" it was decided who was to leave for Atchison.¹¹ Some of the seven sisters chosen by this method were the more experienced members. Mother Evangelista Kremeter was appointed superior by Mother Willibalda. They left St. Cloud in early November, 1863, before the seven remaining sisters moved to St. Joseph. The school in St. Cloud continued to be staffed from St. Joseph.

In St. Joseph from 1864 on there was a continuous increase in the number of novices making profession of vows until the com-

⁹ S.B.C.A., original.

¹⁰ Henry Borgerding, O.S.B., *Chronicle of St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota*, pp. 5-6.

¹¹ Schuster, *The Meaning of the Mountain*, p. 45.

munity was the largest Benedictine community in the world, reaching 1,278 in 1946.¹²

WIMMER TO SCHERR¹³

Feb. 16, 1864

[Dear Lord Abbot,]

. . . In Minnesota our priests are practically alone in caring for a very large territory between the Mississippi and St. Peter on the Minnesota River with the capital city in St. Paul [the capital and the See of the Bishop], Shakopee, St. Cloud and St. Joseph. In Shakopee and St. Joseph are our Benedictine Sisters who came from St. Marys and, as mentioned above, from here [St. Joseph] they sent a colony to Atchison. . . .

[Respectfully,

Boniface Wimmer]¹⁴

At the head of the following letter from Mother Willibalda, the King wrote a note to the Missionsverein to grant her 1,000 gulden. Mother Willibalda opened her letter with a reference to the earlier gift of 3,000 gulden for the sisters, but which they had not received.

SCHERBAUER TO LUDWIG

St. Joseph, Minn.

Dec. 4, 1864

[Note added by the King to the following letter]

To the Ludwig-Missionsverein!

Grant 1000 gulden, which are to be taken from the interest on my Ludwig's foundation, and let them be accounted for there.

Munich, May 10, 1865

Ludwig

[Gracious Lord and King!]

It is now six years since the charity of Your Kingly Majesty was directed so generously to the Benedictine Sisters of Minnesota, even though your kind and liberal gift was not delivered to us, in

¹² *The Official Book of Records*, St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota, n. p.

¹³ Gregor Scherr, now Archbishop of Munich, was president of the Council of the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

¹⁴ *Annalen*, 32:273.

spite of our great need, because the Very Reverend Lord Abbot Boniface Wimmer decided that the royal donation be given to the Benedictine Fathers rather than to the Benedictine Sisters in Minnesota. We have with misery and distress struggled for six years with no convent and no means to build one. For one year we lived in a small board house paying high rent. Then the parish of St. Cloud took pity on us and built a small house attached to the church so that we could at least attend divine services.

Soon we had something to eat; but very often with the setting sun all provisions had disappeared so that at sunrise I worried about what I would give the sisters and the poor children, who presented themselves already on the first day, to eat. From where would I procure it? With what would I nourish and clothe them? Even though our holy Order is not a mendicant order, I had no other choice but to send the one or the other sister out from time to time to gather kind donations for the Benedictine sisters. What we earned through our needlework, our teaching and our giving instruction was not sufficient for the daily needs, especially since during the first two years grasshoppers destroyed everything, which then caused the price of foodstuff to rise exceptionally high. We really had nothing left that they could have devoured. All our riches consisted in a small bed of white turnips which wisely, as the Gospel warns us, lay buried deep in the earth and so happily eluded the innumerable flying hordes of thieves, but not the speculating Americans of St. Cloud who often paid a visit to our little garden at night and devoured with great appetite what the grasshoppers had spared.

In this emergency all at once a very friendly excitement arose in the city. Germans and Americans came to congratulate us on the royal gift which we had received and which would deliver us from our difficulties. All our objections met with disbelief. No one wanted to believe that not we, but the Benedictine Fathers had been remembered by Your Royal Majesty. "But the newspapers say so," was the retort, and those whom we still owed something were sure that they would get what was coming to them.

God has helped until now and what He has given to us we shared confidently with the poor orphan children whose number always totaled from 10 to 15, among whom were two Indian girls brought to us as uncultured pagans. One of these, after receiving instructions, Holy Baptism and Penance, was unfortunately taken away from us by her pagan father. The other is still with us and has forgotten the Chippewa language and also with that has almost completely forgotten the Indian customs and whatever she had understood. She

speaks German beautifully and prays the Day Hours from memory in choir with us. However, so that she would have something in her hands just like the sisters, she holds her little German prayerbook, from which she prays the psalms and antiphons very correctly as though they were given in the book. This is for me a happy comfort for the many pains we have taken with her. These little Indians have a hard skull in which theft and lies, insolence and stubbornness are so deeply implanted that even untiring teaching, warnings, and physical punishments bring about hardly any change.

But now, what have I started? Should I be frightened or should I laugh? Your Kingly Majesty will most likely do the latter. However, I will not fear that I have so long tried the patience of Your Majesty. Was it not Your Majesty yourself who encouraged me in this? When I was but thirteen years old and met Your Majesty near the King's Residence in Munich, Your Majesty with great friendliness asked where I was going and what I was doing. You then gave me wholesome admonition, which until today I have not forgotten, as little as I have forgotten the kind interest Your Majesty took in my well-being. It is this which gives me courage to inform Your Majesty how the Benedictine nun is now faring, about whose conduct and action Your Majesty showed such friendly concern, so much so that the child received a scholarship for six years in the Institute in Altötting and another two years when Your Majesty was so pleased with a picture of the Mother of God — Queen of Peace — which I had embroidered. And now it is again the Heavenly Mother upon whom I rely that she will obtain a gracious reception for me by Your Majesty. It is true, I have at present neither gold nor silk to embroider, but I do still have the same trust in the Mother of God, that she will now, as she did then, be a kind and good mother towards all who in a childlike way call upon her. I ask her today to prevail upon the generosity of Your Royal Majesty for the nun in Minnesota as she did for the school child on the street in Munich.

What always grieved me most was that we as Benedictine nuns had to live without a convent in such a way that conventual propriety and discipline could be practiced only imperfectly, causing great harm to the souls of those who had applied for entrance into the Order. Thanks be to God! For one year now this difficulty has been overcome. The Blessed Mother has heard our prayer. Things have progressed so far finally that here in St. Joseph we now live in a well-organized convent even though it is only of boards. We are now thirteen sisters and four little orphans, who all look to me for food and clothing. We have but a very small income from the

school. Added to this, prices are three times as high as they were formerly because of the war and two succeeding years of crop failure in this region. The Mother of God has procured a house for us, the small convent dedicated to St. Joseph. Twelve months ago it was blessed by the Most Reverend Lord Bishop of St. Paul and the Blessed Sacrament was enthroned in the chapel. A few weeks before that I sent seven sisters to Atchison, Kansas, at the request of the Most Reverend Augustine Wirth, Prior of the Benedictines in Kansas, who by prayer and work dedicate themselves to the best of their ability to the education of youth in a day school and in an institute for teachers.

And now, with full confidence, I turn to Your Kingly Majesty, because we are in danger and expect every day that a policeman will make his appearance at our gate and evict us from our little nook because so far we have not been able to pay much towards the cost of it. The \$1,700 call every day: Pay the debt, or I will cast you out! However, in the quiet choir, in the presence of the throne of the Lord of Lords, seventeen hearts pray at midnight and seven times a day: "Lord, come to my help; Lord, make haste to help me," and wait full of confidence for the help and protection of the good King of Heaven.

In deepest respect,

Your Majesty's unworthy servant,
Maria Willibalda Scherbauer de
Mater Dolorosa, O.S.B.¹⁵

St. Joseph, Stearns Co.,
Minnesota
December 4, 1864

We have seen and approved.
† Thomas Grace
Bishop of St. Paul in Minnesota

A manuscript by Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B., presented the problem of the 3,000 gulden from the viewpoint of the monks of St. John's Abbey:

The Benedictine Sisters at St. Joseph, Minnesota

. . . The sisters expressed a desire to move out to St. Joseph in the days of Prior Othmar Wirtz, O.S.B., canonical prior of the

¹⁵ S.B.C.A., Baraga Collection, Er 2/26.

monks at or near St. Cloud (1862–1865). Prior Othmar decided to build them a suitable home in the village of St. Joseph. He did so for the following reason: Abbot Boniface Wimmer, abbot since 1855, had received from ex-King Ludwig I of Bavaria the sum of 3,000 gulden for the sisters in Minnesota. Considering that his monks needed more land, he decided, with the ex-King's permission, to use the money for his monks. Prior Othmar knew this and determined to compensate the sisters, who, as he believed, had been wronged, by building a house for them in St. Joseph. The house, a simple two-story building of wood, was erected on the main street, about where the paved highway turns off into the village and on the same side on which the church stands. In 1863 the sisters moved in.

The first house proving to be too small in course of time, Abbot Alexius [Edelbrock] built the first brick unit of their present convent — St. Benedict's — immediately behind the parish church in 1881, and the old house was abandoned. The sisters, up to that time, were poor. . . .

Alexius, March 3, 1934¹⁶

St. John's Abbey also remitted a debt of \$12,647.

WIMMER TO LUDWIG

Rome

Apr. 15, 1865

[Lord King!]

. . . The Benedictine sisters are also doing well: they have now, besides the convent in St. Marys, convents in Erie, Newark, Covington, Chicago, Atchison and St. Cloud, where in each place they have a day school along with a resident school for older girls. . . .

[Boniface Wimmer, Abbot]¹⁷

SCHERBAUER TO LUDWIG

St. Joseph, Clinton P.O.

Stearns Co., Minnesota

Dec. 6, 1865

Royal, Kingly Majesty!

Your Royal Majesty has deigned kindly to accept the petition of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Joseph, Minnesota, and to answer it

¹⁶ S.J.A.A., original MS; S.B.C.A., copy.

¹⁷ Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 164.

with a rich gift of \$400 in gold. May God reward Your Majesty richly for the comfort and happiness you have given us.

Although situated at the farthest and most hidden corner of the boundary, we give a hand to the uncultured and independent Indians to offer them the Christian faith and civilization, happiness and blessing for time and eternity. The Indians, because of independence, are not accommodated to work, and often, as they did last winter, reach out to us, begging for food and clothing. However, we are not forgotten nor abandoned. We have been approached a few times to pay a \$600 debt which we owe on the building of our convent and could only beg for patience instead of paying money. The generosity of Your Majesty has freed us from this emergency. How happy the trusting man¹⁸ was. He feared to be put off again for a long time with empty words; how happy the poor nuns were, and how grateful to Mary, the comforter of the sorrowing. She moved her faithful royal son to reach a helping hand to her children in the founding of a convent where God and neighbor will be served according to St. Benedict's Rule, so that God will be praised and glorified. The white man, as well as the Indian, will find a refuge where he can learn that which will bring him happiness and blessing for time and eternity. How can we repay Your Majesty, our noble patron and benefactor? What we have we gladly give: a joyful "May God reward you" from hearts filled with gratitude. Since my last letter to Your Majesty we have had eight students. Two were paying students; the others, poor orphans. That was as many as our resources permitted us to have. Our buildings, too, are still limited, and there is a debt of \$1000 on them.

Your Kingly Majesty may feel offended or perhaps be moved to laugh about the whim of sending a stone so far over land and water, but what is hidden in the stone is what Your Majesty was pleased to send us. It is a specimen from the gold mines of Pike's Peak in the Colorado Territory of the United States from where the father of one of our students, who works in these mines, brought it. I can attest, Your Majesty, that the stone contains gold and also from which mine it comes. Perhaps processed gold from these mines as well as the mines and pits of California is a common thing, but I thought that the metal and the story of how and where it was found could perhaps find a small place in Your Majesty's mineral collection.

May it please Your Majesty to accept our deepest respect and

¹⁸ The man who had given the sisters money to build.

gratitude and to regard our poor little convent with the same consideration as you have always shown.

Your Gracious Lordship's
very humble and indebted servant,
Maria Willibalda¹⁹

We have seen and approved.

†Thomas
Bishop of St. Paul

KARL SCHERBAUER TO LUDWIG

May 22, 1866

(Received May 31, 1866)

Very Serene and Magnanimous King!

Very Gracious King and Lord!

The prioress of the convent of Benedictine Sisters in St. Joseph, Minnesota, in North America — my own sister — sent me the very humble undersigned on December the seventh of last year, among other things, a parcel addressed to Your Kingly Majesty.

In sending this in all reverence to Your Highness, I beg most humbly of Your Royal Majesty that you graciously accept this little gift as a small sign of my sister's gratitude for the most kind support you deigned to give her.

Acknowledging deeply felt gratitude to Your Majesty, the noblest and greatest benefactor of our family, and begging heaven daily to bless Your Highness' life and work, I remain in deepest regard and submission,

Your Royal Majesty's
most loyally obedient and deeply grateful
Karl Aurel Scherbauer²⁰

LUDWIG TO WILLIBALDA SCHERBAUER

Munich

May 31, 1866

Prioress Maria Willibalda!

Through your brother, Canon Scherbauer, I received your letter

¹⁹ Geheimes Hausarchiv, original; S.B.C.A., copy. The December 6, 1865 letter is Mother Willibalda's last letter to King Ludwig I. She sent it to Bishop Thomas Grace of St. Paul for approval, then to her brother, Karl Scherbauer, a priest in Fensbach, Bavaria, who forwarded it to the King. This letter of Mother Willibalda to King Ludwig and two other letters — Karl Scherbauer to King Ludwig, May 22, 1866, and King Ludwig to Mother Willibalda, May 31, 1866 — are in the Geheimes Hausarchiv in Munich, Bavaria.

²⁰ Geheimes Hausarchiv, original; S.B.C.A., copy.

of Dec. 18 of last year and a little box containing a gold-bearing stone from the mines of Pike's Peak. With pleasure I accept your grateful feelings towards me expressed in your letter and also accept with thanks the stone sent to me, which I intend to give to the Scientific Collection of the State of Bavaria, since I myself do not possess such a collection.

I wish sincerely the best prosperity for your convent and the blessing of the Almighty Who will certainly not abandon you in your pious undertakings.

With sincere appreciation and devotion,

Ludwig I (signed)²¹

On June 23, 1866, Abbot Wimmer received a document from Rome, signed by Cardinal Alexander Barnabo of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, in answer to his questions relating to the monasteries and convents he had established. Of the fifteen points in the document, only the last three — 13, 14, and 15 — deal with problems relating to the sisters. The answers to these three requests of the abbot follow:

13. That on ferial days the Office of the B.V.M. be recited instead of the Divine Office.
14. That the custom already observed, namely, that after the novitiate in the religious profession, they make simple vows for three years and then after the expiration of this time, they make simple vows for life.
15. That all of the Benedictine women in America be as one congregation not, however, exempt, with a common novitiate under the rule of a mother general. That the monasteries of those nuns already founded be canonically erected.²²

In many of the Benedictine convents the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary continued to be prayed until eventually, one by one, all returned to praying the Divine Office.

The practice called for in No. 14 regarding the religious profession of the sisters was, in general, the custom in Benedictine convents in the United States, i.e., that final profession was made after five years, until recently when Vatican Council II permitted other arrangements regarding vows.

²¹ Ibid.

²² S.V.A.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

The single congregation visualized by the abbot for all Benedictine sisters was not formed, but a movement towards a number of congregations or federations began in the early twentieth century until today there are several congregations or federations of convents stemming from the European foundations:

Federation of St. Scholastica, founded in 1927, with 22 motherhouses;

Federation of St. Gertrude, founded in 1937, with 15 motherhouses;

Federation of St. Benedict, founded in 1947, with 7 motherhouses.²³

Abbot Boniface Wimmer's interest in a congregation for the Benedictine Sisters never wavered. However, by the 1870's he no longer thought of having the sisters belong to the American Cassinese Congregation of monks since the convents had been declared diocesan by Rome. His interest now was in forming a congregation of all Benedictine Sisters with a common novitiate and formation program.

In Abbot Wimmer's letter of July 2, 1872, he explained the plan he had:

My intention was that when a convent had become fully established, i.e., with at least 14 sisters, a superior [prioress] be properly elected for a term of three years and allowed to be re-elected for a second and third term. If she is elected for three succeeding terms, she should be superior for life.²⁴

In June, 1866, Abbot Wimmer commented on his plans for the sisters in a letter to Prioress Scholastica Burkhardt of Erie.

The abbot had been in Rome for more than a year in an attempt to have Rome permit the practice of lifetime abbots in America and have himself appointed to this position. He was successful in this. He was made a reigning abbot for life; St.

²³ The Congregation of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, which stems from the Convent of Maria Rickenbach, Switzerland, was founded in 1936 with five priories, a general motherhouse and novitiate. This Congregation follows Abbot Wimmer's model of a congregation more closely than do the other three. It is also more in accord with No. 15 of the June 23, 1866 document from Rome.

²⁴ Baska, *Benedictine Congregation*, p. 54.

John's Priory in Minnesota was raised to an abbey; and Wimmer was named president for life of his American Cassinese Congregation.

WIMMER TO BURKHARDT

Rome
St. Callisto
June 28, 1866

Rev. Mother Prioress:

Since I did not receive an answer to my letter to the Father Prior, I am writing to you in order to give you some information about myself. I still live, as you can see from this, because I can write. Until now, thanks be to God, I have been very well and have not lost patience, although I have been in Rome more than fourteen months — sitting or walking or standing — and have completed my business happily and to my complete satisfaction. The most annoying part²⁵ was already finished on the 16th of August of last year. Smaller items were settled in the meantime, and the most important part, on the 4th of June this year. These decisions I had already sought with confidence on the 5th of June, although they were not approved by the Holy Father until the 10th when he committed them to me in writing. To this important part belong several items which have little interest for you and, therefore, need not be mentioned here. What will interest you I will tell you, namely, that I am now a ruling abbot for lifetime, that the Minnesota Priory near St. Cloud has become an abbey,²⁶ and that the first abbot thereof, and in future all abbots of our congregation, will be chosen for life. With this, our standing is established according to law and our congregation is founded and approved. God be thanked a thousand times.

I also attempted to obtain a congregation under one general superior for the sisters. That proposition had been brought up by the Rev. Krug.²⁷ It was taken casually by the most eminent cardinals. However, the granting was deferred because Mother Benedicta's complaints about my "oppressions" had caused their Eminences to place the sisters under the bishops. The cardinals did not wish to recall their decision because they wanted to hear, first of all, what the bishops would say to that. When the Council of Baltimore meets

²⁵ Difficulties in the monastery of St. Vincent. See Oetgen, *An American Abbot*, pp. 210–211.

²⁶ The Minnesota Priory changed its name to St. John's shortly after the death of King Ludwig, 1868.

²⁷ Boniface Krug, O.S.B., at one time a cleric at St. Vincent. He was later abbot of Monte Cassino.

in October, they will report concerning this and I must then defend my proposition before the bishops²⁸ and, if they are for it, Rome will also be. The sisters must, therefore, pray fervently that the Lord will direct everything as will be best for His honor and their salvation and welfare.

I also insisted that the sisters pray only the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin on weekdays instead of the breviary, and they *gladly* permitted that. I did that from my own volition; however, I considered it advisable and necessary. I have already said that the sisters did not ask me to do that; they are such zealous devotees of the Office that they would rather pray two Offices than one but now it has been permitted by the cardinals and by the pope. I have it in writing in my hands and you may introduce it at once. Cardinal Reisach²⁹ was the referee in the whole matter. He journeyed to Luxembourg today to crown a picture of the Blessed Virgin. I should have liked to go with him but I had not yet had my farewell audience with the pope nor the document [making him an abbot for life]. This I received today; the former I hope to have this week — then I also will go to Bavaria for a short time and then home.

In Germany war broke out between the small states and Austria on one side, and Prussia and Italy on the other. The Prussians are already at Hof; it is sad! This morning at 9 o'clock the war broke out in Italy. The Italians have already attacked the Austrians! I attribute it to the prayers of my dear brothers and sisters that our affairs have turned out so well. Now pray for a safe journey by water and by land. Greet most sincerely in the Lord all your sisters, Father Prior and my confreres. Give my humble respects to the Rt. Rev. Bishop. God bless you!

Also, concerning profession. It is decided that after the novitiate, simple vows be taken for three years, but after that, for life.³⁰

Boniface Wimmer, Abt.

²⁸ Wimmer returned from Rome too late to have his propositions placed on the agenda of the Baltimore Council, 1866.

²⁹ Cardinal Karl August von Reisach, former Archbishop of Munich, at this time a member of the Roman Curia.

³⁰ S.B.C.A., copy.

MOTHER WILLIBALDA SCHERBAUER: 1868–1914

Mother Willibalda moved from St. Cloud to St. Joseph in 1863 and later found in Abbot Rupert Seidenbusch (1867–75) of St. John's Abbey another Abbot Boniface Wimmer. Bishop Grace of St. Paul had delegated the jurisdiction over the Minnesota Benedictine Sisters to the abbot. In 1868 the abbot deposed Mother Willibalda Scherbauer and appointed Mother Antonia Herman superior of the motherhouse in St. Joseph.¹ She was one of the original founders of St. Scholastica's Convent in Chicago founded by Wimmer from Erie in 1861.

Mother Willibalda was obliged to leave St. Joseph. She went to the convent in St. Cloud but was refused a home there. For a few months, therefore, she lived with a friendly St. Cloud family by the name of Lahr, early Catholic settlers in St. Cloud.²

Mother Antonia Streitz, who had been acting superior during Mother Willibalda's absence in Chicago in July 1863, was also not permitted to remain in St. Joseph. She lived with her own family for a few months.³ Later Mother Willibalda visited some

¹ Abbot, later Bishop, Seidenbusch had experienced some misunderstandings between himself and Mother Benedicta and Mother Willibalda in St. Marys as the letters above indicate, but Mother Antonia Herman, whom he installed in St. Joseph when he deposed Mother Willibalda, presumably had not lost his favor.

² William Furlan, *St. Mary's Cathedral Parish*, p. 8.

³ Sister Alphonsa O'Donnell, 1852–1931, Oral History, S.B.C.A.

other Benedictine convents hoping to find one to which she could transfer. She was not successful in this. Upon returning to St. Joseph, she and Mother Benedicta Kump — three more sisters joined them later — were sent to New Trier, Minnesota, in 1872, to conduct a parochial school. Mother Willibalda and Mother Benedicta [Kump] worked towards making the New Trier convent independent of the motherhouse in St. Joseph. This met with opposition from Bishop Grace of St. Paul who forbade the acceptance of candidates and ordered the two Benedictine houses in his diocese to amalgamate: St. Mary's Convent in New Trier with St. Gertrude's Convent in Shakopee.

The New Trier sisters opposed this union and petitioned Abbot Alexius Edelbrock (1875–89) of St. John's Abbey for help. The following letter of Mother Willibalda contains this petition. She herself was contemplating returning to Europe. At one time she apparently had thought of requesting a dispensation from her solemn vows,⁴ but she did not leave. Instead, she and the other sisters from New Trier returned to St. Joseph. Mother Antonia Herman, who had been appointed by Abbot (Bishop) Rupert Seidenbusch, was not reappointed by Abbot Alexius Edelbrock in 1877. In her stead the abbot had appointed Mother Aloysia Bath.⁵

SCHERBAUER TO EDELBROCK

New Trier

Sept. 17, 1877

Rt. Rev. Abbot,

The Holy Spirit be with you! I do not know if you have been informed of our conditions here. If not, we humbly ask you to speak to Fr. Benedict Haindl about them. In him we have confided that from now on we will no longer remain under the direction of the Rev. Fr. Magnus.⁶ Concerning me, Your Grace need not trouble yourself because I have in mind to return to Europe as soon as an opportunity offers itself. I have endured many years of misery, worry and persecution, but it *cannot go on thus*. Without spiritual help, one becomes weaker every day. For the sisters, I would like to ask

⁴ McDonald, *With Lamps Burning*, p. 299, n. 1; also S.J.A.A.

⁵ Mother Aloysia Bath, formerly a member of the Convent of St. Agnes of Barton, Wisconsin, joined the Convent of St. Benedict and made her profession in 1877. At the age of 28 she was appointed to succeed Mother Antonia. She held this position by appointment from 1877 to 1880, later by election from 1889–1901.

⁶ Magnus Mayr, pastor in Chaska, Minnesota, and spiritual director of the sisters.

your help and your fatherly advice because every day they urge that we should go away from here as soon as possible and to ask for readmission of Mother Aloysia in St. Joseph.

Rev. Father Magnus says we may not receive nor invest candidates and, in fact, may not undertake anything until the union with Shakopee has taken place. And that the sisters will not do, even under danger of excommunication. Not one of us belongs there. All came from St. Joseph. Sister Benedicta Kump wants to pack even today. She says she will not wait until the Most Rev. Bishop of St. Paul has pronounced his judgment upon all of us and all our hard earnings will be confiscated. I believe it would be best to speak to you personally before we undertake anything. Most Rev. Abbot, could you not come for this purpose, either here or at least as far as Hastings, and in case that is not possible, to St. Paul, where one of us could meet you? Please grant us this great favor.

Humbly asking your Grace for a speedy answer. Meanwhile, we shall make a novena.

Your Grace's unworthy servant,

Maria Willibalda, OSB.⁷

By vote of the Chapter, October 18, 1877, the New Trier sisters were readmitted to the motherhouse community in St. Joseph, and later reinstated by Mother Aloysia Bath.

Mother Willibalda Scherbauer found peace under the succeeding superiors of St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota: Mother Scholastica Kerst (1880–1889), Mother Cecilia Kapsner (1901–1919).

In a letter to Bishop Seidenbusch, Abbot Wimmer states that he had spoken to Bishop Melchen, Bishop of Cologne, in regard to a dispensation from solemn vows for Mother Willibalda. It cannot be verified that she herself ever asked for this. He mentions that Bishop Miede of Leavenworth had given Sister Ehrentrudis (Wolters) such a dispensation.⁸ The latter had come to Minnesota as a candidate in 1857 and had gone to Atchison in 1863.

Mother Antonia Herman wrote a letter of apology to Mother Willibalda from Pierre, South Dakota, seemingly in answer to a letter from Mother Willibalda. There is no date given in the

⁷ S.J.A.A.; S.B.C.A., copy.

⁸ S.J.A.A.

letter. Mother Antonia had been superior of the convent in St. Joseph from 1868 to 1877. She returned to the convent of St. Scholastica in Chicago when, because of misunderstandings between herself and Abbot Alexius Edelbrock of St. John's Abbey (1875-89), she was not reappointed in St. Joseph. She had attempted a separate foundation in Pierz, Minnesota, in 1874, but dropped that plan in 1875 when Abbot Rupert Seidenbusch was named Vicar Apostolic of the Vicariate of Northern Minnesota.

From Chicago, Mother Antonia Herman answered the appeal of Bishop Martin Marty, Vicar Apostolic of the Vicariate of Dakota, for teachers for his Indian Boys' School in South Dakota. She went to Yankton where in 1880 she became one of the foundresses of the Benedictine convent in that city.

HERMAN TO SCHERBAUER

St. Mary's Hospital
Pierre, South Dakota
n.d.

Dear Reverend Sister Willibalda:

As best I can, I shall write a few lines in reply to your letter. It surprises me that you can still write so well. I find writing very difficult.

I trust that the good Lord has long ago pardoned you for what you at one time might have done amiss — as well as myself and all concerned. We shall diligently pray for one another so that we may have the grace of a happy death and thereafter soon be admitted to heaven.

Hearty greetings to you, to Mother Cecilia and all the sisters.

Your loving,

Mother Antonia, O.S.B.⁹

From the year of her re-admittance to St. Benedict's Convent in St. Joseph, until illness forced her to retire, Mother Willibalda was choir director and organist in some of the small German parishes of Minnesota: New Munich, St. Joseph, Pierz, and Chanhassen. She began a regular correspondence with her former prioress of St. Walburg in Eichstätt, Mother Edwarda

⁹ S.B.C.A.

Schnitzer, and after the latter's resignation and death, with Prioress Carolina Kroisz, 1902–1929. Only one of Mother Willibalda's letters to Eichstätt was located in the archives of St. Walburg — that of March, 1898. An unfinished letter dated December, 1913, was found in her room at the time of her death which occurred on February 12, 1914. Both of these letters follow.

SCHERBAUER TO SCHNITZER

St. Benedict's Academy
St. Joseph, Minn.
March 1898

Jesus and Mary be praised in friendly greeting!

My very dear, venerable Mother Prioress!

You will likely be surprised and open your eyes at seeing again, after such a long time, a letter from your former spiritual daughter in America. I am only sorry that I did not bring along a letter which I wrote to you, dear Mother, at my mission, Chanhassen, and which I intended to send to you on my return. A few days ago I came from Chanhassen to St. Joseph, our motherhouse, to do a little business. Oh! how good it is to see and to be able to greet our Rev. Mother [Aloysia Bath] and sisters after such a long time. Of course, only a small number of the community are at the motherhouse; the greater number of them are stationed on the many missions. And how much good it would do my old heart once again to see my old home, the beautiful St. Walburg's, my precious spiritual mother and all the dear sisters there. However, this wish will never be fulfilled. I am too old, but well and happy.

It would be a great joy for our good Rev. Mother, to be able to visit a well-established convent like St. Walburg's. However, with her weak health, she will not be able nor permitted to make a trip across the ocean. Today during my visit here we again spoke of St. Walburg's and because I am going to be here a few days, Mother Aloysia requested me to write you, urgently asking you to send us, if possible, a copy of your *Constitution and Customs*, whether printed or written. Our Rev. Mother would like to pay for everything, including the postage. Of course, not everything will be applicable to America, but most will be. Besides, old customs are venerable and often to be preferred to new ones. Dear, good Mother, you will give us the greatest joy if you grant us this wish. Our convent, which has 286 sisters, not including candidates, will remember your venerable

community in prayer, but I, above all. I am from St. Walburg's and your spiritual child. We did have a copy of your Statutes, but it is no longer here. Very likely it was burned along with other important things several years ago.¹⁰

Now, my very dear Mother, how are you? I hope for the best. I wish I could embrace you and tell you what and how I feel. I am fine, quite well, and happy. I will write again soon from my mission. But I beg you humbly to grant our wish and do let me hear from you, dear Mother, and from St. Walburg's. It would make me young again and very happy. Our good Rev. Mother Aloysia greets you cordially and recommends herself and all her community to your prayers. She asks you to accept this simple scapular, painted by one of our sisters, and a picture of her 25th jubilee. Finally, repeating my request, I embrace you sincerely and remain as always,

Your faithful and ever-loving child,

Mother Willibalda, O.S.B.¹¹

Address:

Ven. Mother Aloysia, O.S.B.
St. Joseph, Stearns County, Minnesota
North America

My address:

Ven. Sister Willibalda, O.S.B.
Chanhassen, Carver County, Minnesota
North America

Mother Willibalda saved many of the letters which she received from the prioresses of St. Walburg, from her priest-brother Karl Aurel, her sisters, her niece Kathi, and others. Some of these letters are added here as well as a few of her own that have been located.

News of the death of her brother, Karl Aurel Scherbauer, in April, 1910, was sent to Mother Willibalda by the superior of the Institute in Landsbach where Father Karl had been chaplain and by Prioress Carolina of St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt. At the end of the letter from Landsbach there is a note from Kathi Scherbauer König, a niece of Father Karl and Mother Willibalda.

¹⁰ This may have happened after the death of Mother Benedicta Riepp and be the reason why so many of the letters sent to her are no longer extant.

¹¹ S.W.A.A., original; S.B.C.A., copy.

KROISZ TO SCHERBAUER

Eichstätt, Convent of St.
Walburg

April 6, 1910

Venerable, very dear Mother Willibalda:

A sad occurrence, for you, prompts me to write at an unusual time. Yesterday, the day after the feast of our glorious, holy Father Benedict, I received from Landsbach from the superior of St. Joseph's Home the sad news of the holy death of your beloved brother, the Reverend Curate Karl Scherbauer.

R.I.P. † Apr. 4, 1910, at 4:30 o'clock.

Confident that you, dear venerable Mother M. Willibalda, although separated from your reverend brother by the immeasurable ocean for more than half a century, were closely united to him by sisterly love, I understand the deep sorrow your heart will experience at this news. But you do not carry this sorrow alone; your fellow sisters in Europe also take part in it insofar as the dear departed one has been in correspondence with the Convent of St. Walburg until recently. As it seems, the Reverend Father in his last position as curate did very much charity and the good sisters in Landsbach liked him very much. I have not found out more about his holy death.

Now the Lord of all living has called his good servant to his eternal reward; let us be happy and thank God that this good priestly soul has happily attained the eternal goal, as we are confident. If there should be anything lacking in the adornment of his heavenly crown, we will unite with you, dear Sister Willibalda, in prayer and sacrifice to make amends so he will arrive at the heavenly land soon.

And for us, too, every death in the circle of our loved ones is a warning to have our lamps prepared also so that the heavenly bridegroom will at no time find us unprepared.

With us, the call of the Lord came on the first of February to our 26-year-old dear Mother Ildefonsa, whose soul I also commend to your prayers. Mothers M. Boniface, Antonia, and Benedicta send hearty sisterly greetings.

We all hope and wish that you are real well and that you have received our January letter. Greetings in sincere sisterly love to you and your reverend superiors and fellow sisters through the Divine Heart of Jesus. I am,

Your devoted sister,
M. Carolina, OSB.¹²

¹² S.B.C.A., original.

A paper (MS) on the history of St. Walburg's Building at St. Benedict's Convent in St. Joseph,¹³ which for many years was the location of the vestment department of that convent, speaks of Mother Willibalda Scherbauer and her artistic gifts. In addition to her musical abilities on organ and piano, and in the composition of songs, she also was proficient in needlework, such as tapestry, filet, and embroidery. According to this paper, she attended the Königliche Kunstschule in Munich.¹⁴

This school offered a five-year scholarship in embroidery to the pupil who should produce the most artistic work in drawing and embroidery. To every student, a different lesson was assigned. The work of Miss Scherbauer consisted in drawing and embroidering a Madonna similar to a woodcarved statue which was in the chapel of the school. The young student was permitted to study the statue in the chapel but was obliged to draw and embroider it in the classroom without the model. After the work of all the students was inspected, the scholarship was awarded to Miss Scherbauer.¹⁵

Mother Willibalda taught the younger members of the community and so in a way began the Art Needlework Department at St. Benedict's Convent. As superior of the community from 1857 to 1868 and later as organist and music teacher, she was not able to have charge of the work, but the love for it remained through her declining years to her death in 1914.

SCHERBAUER TO LANGFORD

Nov. 10, —

Venerable and dear Sister Anatolia,

I heard from Venerable Sister Edward [Kelly] that, while you were waiting for the train, you went into the drug store and the owner of the store was very obliging and played a gramophone for you. You heard the most beautiful Ave Maria. If he has two records of this Ave Maria, we would like to buy one or perhaps you, dear Sister, could get the address for us where it is to be had. I believe you would give great pleasure to many with this song, if not for a nameday, then at least for a Christmas present.

¹³ MS. in St. Benedict's Convent Archives.

¹⁴ In her letter to King Ludwig, Dec. 4, 1864, Mother Willibalda mentions Altötting as the location of the school she attended.

¹⁵ Quoted from the MS.

We now have a gramophone and we were allowed to play it for the first time on Reverend Mother's nameday. We have a few songs, one waltz, and a few marches. How happy I would be to have a religious song also. Our gramophone has records not rolls. Come to celebrate and enjoy yourself with us! How about it?

I think you have forgotten to send the "audibentium." Well, you can bring it along when you come for a visit. It would make me very happy.

I can hardly write, I am so nervous and bothered with dizziness.

Through the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary I greet you and all the dear sisters most heartily.

Your true sister in Christ,

M. Willibalda, O.S.B.¹⁶

Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, O.S.B., died on February 12, 1914. She had written a Christmas letter to the prioress of St. Walburg, Eichstätt, which remained unfinished and was found in her room after her death. The feast day celebration she mentions is that of St. Cecilia, November 22, the nameday of Mother Cecilia Kapsner, 1901–1919.

SCHERBAUER TO KROISZ

St. Joseph's

December, 1913

Much beloved and dear Mother Prioress!

May the Child Jesus give you a friendly Christmas greeting!

Your treasured letter with congratulations for my nameday, which I had mislaid for a few days but have again found, was gratefully received. May the good Lord fulfill your good wishes. To you, too, respected Mother Prioress, do I send, for the holy feast of Christmas and for the coming New Year, my best wishes for happiness and blessing, for yourself as well as for your community. May the good God for many years keep you in good health and happiness so that you, very revered Mother Prioress, always, as until now, may lead your daughters on the path of virtue and of the fear of God until all of us will be called to eternity to celebrate another happy and blessed New Year with Jesus in heaven. But I, poor Sister! However, you will pray for me also, so that the dear, dear Child Jesus must and will help me.

¹⁶ S.B.C.A., original.

The nameday of our respected Mother Prioress Cecilia¹⁷ was celebrated, as usual, in a manner worthy of the feast. The students, on the second day of celebration, presented the beautiful play, "Saint Walburga," in English on the stage in the study hall of our academy. I myself found out three or four days before that this saint was to be portrayed and I confess that it was an unspeakably great happiness for me and also for you, is that not true? The young ladies acted very well; the investing of eight noble ladies was very moving and also the departure for the missions, and so this day was turned into a beautiful family feast. Many guests from the city were present.¹⁸

The following letter of February 11, 1914, addressed to Mother Willibalda was received after her death. It contains the news of the raising of St. Walburg Priory to the rank of abbey. The Secularization Act of Napoleon and the reign of Maximilian I of Bavaria had deprived the convent of this title. Following the letter is an article found in the Munich Staatsarchiv which gives a fuller explanation of this event.

KROISZ TO SCHERBAUER

Eichstätt, Convent of St. Walburg
February 11, 1914

Venerable, beloved Mother Willibalda!

Happy, heartfelt greetings in the Divine Heart of Jesus, my Sister. We have had no further word since your last letter so we are giving in to the consoling hope that there has been some improvement in your health and that the heavenly Bridegroom has again postponed your homeward journey to heaven. We felt deep concern and now thank the loving God. Each moment of life is a grace. Be assured of our prayers — whether living or dead — and do you, too, make intercession at God's throne for your beloved former motherhouse of St. Walburg.

In this letter, dear Mother Willibalda, I have a pleasant event to tell you and all the venerable sisters in America.

Our new, kindly disposed King Ludwig III, grand nephew of King Max Joseph I, who in 1806 secularized the Convent of St. Walburg, through God's gracious providence again raised our convent to an *abbey* last Saturday, the 7th of February, on the feast of St. Richard, the father of our great St. Walburga. Secularized in 1806, this ancient

¹⁷ Mother Cecilia Kapsner, Prioress, 1901–1919.

¹⁸ S.B.C.A., original.

holy place was reopened in 1835 by King Ludwig I as a priory and entrusted with the direction of the town's elementary school for girls. Now, after 108 years, the convent is given its rightful rank and an old wrong is at last in this manner atoned for.

Our happiness is extremely great. Rejoice with us and help us to pray that everything will contribute to the glory of God, to the best of the convent and of each soul.

All the sisters greet you a thousand times, especially Mothers Antonia and Boniface.

United with you in the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

Is your respectfully devoted sister,

Mother Carolina, Prioress, OSB.¹⁹

KIRCHLICHES

February 7, 1914

St. Walburg — raised to an abbey. His Majesty, the King has, as already mentioned, raised the venerable Benedictine convent in Eichstätt to an Abbey, after the women's monastery of the same Order of Frauenchiemsee was raised to the same rank by Prince Regent Luitpold. St. Walburg, a venerable place of cult and culture, the burial place of St. Walburga who was the sister of St. Willibald, the first Bishop of Eichstätt (consecrated in 743) and who was called from England by St. Boniface, was founded in 870. In 1806 it fell a victim to the storm of secularization and in 1835 it owed its restoration to King Ludwig I. Since at this time a few of the aged nuns were still living and since in 1836 the first three Benedictines of the new era made vows, we can speak of a more than a thousand-year unbroken period of life and work according to the Benedictine spirit, a blessing also for the world. The girls' school of the city of Eichstätt had been entrusted to the convent at this time. The duties of the Order at the venerable place are performed by 37 choir sisters and 25 lay sisters.

P.R.J.²⁰

Mother Cecilia Kapsner's secretary, Sister Athanasia Peterman, informed the prioress of St. Walburg of the death of Mother Willibalda. Mother Carolina's letter of March 3, 1914, is an acknowledgement of the reception of this news. The election

¹⁹ S.B.C.A., original.

²⁰ Staatsarchiv, Munich.

referred to in this letter resulted in the election of Mother Benedicta von Spiegel, who ruled the abbey for 24 years, from 1926 to 1950.

Mother Carolina Kroisz died July 5, 1927. She had been prioress from 1902–1926.

KROISZ TO KAPSNER

Eichstätt, Convent of St. Walburg
March 3, 1914

Very Reverend Mother Superior!

With deep sympathy we learn from the letter from the Venerable Sister M. Athanasia of the blessed death of our beloved, venerable Sister M. Willibalda, to whom we addressed a last letter, I believe on the same date, and shared with her the news of the raising of our convent to the rank of abbey. But now she has hastened ahead of us and sees all in the light of eternity. R.I.P.

That the loving God was pleased to accept the many trials and sacrifices of her long life on the missions is shown by her quiet, peaceful death. What she did and suffered for God now contributes to her eternal reward, to her eternal recompense.

We unite our prayers for the faithful soul with those of her community, so that very soon she will be found in the ranks of the great Benedictine family in heaven.

It is very fitting that Mother Willibalda will find her last resting place beside the Venerable Mother M. Benedicta Riepp. May God reward you!

Receive our sincere sympathy, Venerable Mother Superior, at the sad loss of your good mother. Her soul will be included in our prayers and in our good wishes.

Thank you for the subscription money for the *Walburgisblätter*. The amount was entirely sufficient! Mother Anselma and her helpers are very pleased and thank you very sincerely.

Before closing, another urgent request for your good prayers and those of your spiritual daughters for the election and blessing of an abbess which will most likely take place in the near future. May the loving God give His blessing on it, and may all be for His glory, for the good of the convent and for the salvation of each soul.

In the love of our Holy Father Benedict, greetings to Your Reverence from

M. Carolina, OSB.²¹

²¹ S.B.C.A., original.

History helps us twentieth-century American Benedictines to trace our beginnings and growth to our founders, Mother Benedicta Riepp and, in Minnesota, to Mother Willibalda Scherbauer. But we may not appreciate what lay behind these beginnings in the form of hardships and mental and physical suffering — above all, the faith and tenacity of spirit which impelled them to persevere. It was the purpose of this study to find out and to write about this hidden part of our history. The greater part of the study is in the form of letters. These give the reader not only a grasp of the part played by faith and suffering but also an appreciation of the personalities behind the beginnings of our history.



APPENDIX

MOTHER WILLIBALDA SCHERBAUER, O.S.B., TO
PRIORESS EDWARDA SCHNITZER, O.S.B., ST. WALBURG CONVENT, EICHSTÄTT
MARCH, 1898

PAGE ONE OF THREE-PAGE LETTER
TRANSLATION: PAGES 193-194

MARCH, 1898

PAGE ONE OF THREE-PAGE LETTER

TRANSLATION: PAGES 193-194

APPENDIX A

King Ludwig I of Bavaria, 1825–1848

King Ludwig I succeeded to the throne of his father, King Maximilian I of Bavaria, in 1825. He was married to Theresa of Saxony in 1825. Bavaria had been raised to a kingdom by Napoleon Bonaparte and the Elector, Maximilian II Joseph, had become King Maximilian I. Ludwig, at the time of his succession, was 40 years old, highly cultured, quite liberal and Catholic. At the same time, he seems to have been restless and impatient. He worked hard to make Catholic Munich the center of learning and culture in South Germany to compete with Protestant Berlin in North Germany.

He moved the University from Landshut to Munich in 1826 and brought to it men like Joseph von Görres, Joseph Adam Mohler, and Johann von Dillinger. He beautified the city with great buildings and renowned art museums. He was deeply interested in restoring religious houses — monasteries and convents. He restored eight monasteries and two convents, among them the monastery of St. Michael in Metten and the Convent of St. Walburg in Eichstätt. These are the two Benedictine houses from which the first foundations in the United States were made: St. Vincent Abbey in Latrobe and St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys.

The strong revolutionary spirit of 1848 brought on his abdication in that year in favor of his less liberal son, Maximilian II. After this Ludwig lived for periods of time in Berchtesgaden or in Rome. He died in Nice in 1868.

APPENDIX B

Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B.

Father Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., laid the foundation of the Benedictine Order in America with the financial aid of King Ludwig I of Bavaria and the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

Father Boniface Wimmer, baptized Sebastian, was born in Thalmassing, Bavaria, January 14, 1809. After finishing his parish school and Latin school education, he continued his education in the Collegium Georgianum in Munich and the diocesan seminary of Ratisbon. On July 31, 1831, he was ordained a diocesan priest. He and four other novices entered the monastery of Metten during the time of its restoration in the 1830's. He was professed as a Benedictine December 29, 1833. In Metten he received training and experience as a religious, as pastor, procurator, prefect, professor, and restorer of monasteries. After 14 years of helpful experiences in Bavaria, he took upon himself the founding of Benedictine monasteries and convents in the United States beginning in 1846 with St. Vincent Monastery near Latrobe, Pennsylvania. In 1852 he founded St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys. Both of these religious foundations were made in hilly and forested western Pennsylvania.

In 1852 St. Vincent Monastery was raised to a canonical priory under Boniface Wimmer as prior. Three years later, it became an abbey with Boniface Wimmer as first abbot, appointed by Pius IX for a three-year term. In 1858 he was elected abbot by the monks of St. Vincent. In 1866, by papal decree again, he was appointed abbot and president for life of the American-Cassinense Congregation which he had established. Pope Leo XIII gave Wimmer the title of archabbot in 1883 — a title held since then by each abbot of St. Vincent.

At the time of his death December 8, 1887, Abbot Boniface Wimmer had laid the foundations of most of the abbeys of the American-Cassinense Congregation existing at the present time.

APPENDIX C

Ludwig-Missionsverein

King Ludwig I supported the missions by personal contributions of money. However, he also established the Ludwig-Missionsverein for the special purpose of giving financial aid to the German Catholic missions in Asia and America. Letters from relatives and friends in America about the difficulties and dangers in a newly opened land aroused the sympathy of their German relations and friends. At first financial aid came through the French Lyons Society for the Propagation of the Faith which was founded in 1822. A number of the early Irish American bishops expected immigrants to adopt American customs and to learn the English language immediately.

German immigrants, however, being very national, hesitated to give up their language, culture, and customs and soon began to suspect that the Lyons Society was not directing to the German-speaking missions all the money collected in Bavaria for the missions. The Austrian Leopoldinen Stiftung also did not satisfy the Bavarians. It had been organized in 1829 in Vienna, also for the purpose of helping the missions.

Ten years later Frederick Rese, Bishop of Detroit, Michigan, succeeded in interesting King Ludwig I in the missions, particularly among German settlers. The Ludwig-Missionsverein came into being in December, 1838, at first as a branch of the Lyons Society; later, in 1844, as a separate and independent Bavarian organization. It was to help support missions in Asia and America and also give financial support to the Franciscan custodians of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Archbishop of Munich-Freising, who at this time was Karl August von Reisach, was the director of the council of the Verein. The Court Chaplain, Joseph Ferdinand Mueller, was the business manager. At his resignation he was followed in this position by Baron Rudolph von Oberkamp. In 1856, when Archbishop Karl August became a member of the Roman Curia, Abbot Gregor Scherr, O.S.B., of Metten became Archbishop of Munich-Freising and so also Director of the Ludwig-Missionsverein. Each of the individuals mentioned here played a part in the work both of Abbot Wimmer

and of Mother Benedicta Riepp. It was King Ludwig and the Ludwig-Missionsverein on whom they could depend for financial support and encouragement in their missionary work.

At the present time the Ludwig-Missionsverein is known as *Missio-Internationales Katholisches Missionswerk*. Not all of the original documents that were saved have been sorted and rearranged since the destruction of World War II. The staff gives almost full time to distributing financial aid to the "Church in Need." Many archives in the U.S. have photostatic copies of documents and letters relating to the early American Benedictines, principally the Archives of the University of Notre Dame and the Bishop Baraga Diocesan Archives in Marquette, Michigan.

APPENDIX D

Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B.

In spite of her short life and her hardships, Mother Benedicta Riepp's accomplishments were lasting. Close to forty of the Benedictine religious houses in the United States consider her their foundress. But more important than numbers is the pervading spirit of the Rule of Benedict which she and her sisters brought to St. Marys, Pennsylvania, from Eichstätt and instilled in the foundations made from St. Marys.

Not much is known of the early life of Mother Benedicta. She was born in Waal, Swabia, West Germany, on June 28, 1825 and baptized Sybilla in the forenoon of July 30. Her parents were John Riepp and Catherine, born Mayr. Her godparents were Casimir Halzschaft and Sybilla Kendler. She had three sisters: Johanna, Sophia and Juliana.¹

Waal is an old Catholic Swabian town, now quite industrialized, lying almost directly south of Augsburg and west of Munich. A religious event for which the town has been noted for over 350 years is the Passion Play performed by the St. Anna

¹ *The 1825 Record of Baptisms*, St. Anna Church in Waal. Two items were later added in the Record: the first, that Benedicta Riepp died on March 15, 1862 — a religious in North America; the second, that the family had died out.

parish in fulfillment of a vow made at the time of the Thirty Years War, 1618–1648. Mother Benedicta as a young girl may have witnessed this play.²

Mother Benedicta was one of three volunteers chosen from the Eichstätt sisters to open the first Benedictine convent in America in 1852 at the request of Father Boniface Wimmer. She had entered St. Walburg Priory January 7, 1844, and had received the religious habit on August 4 of the same year. She made profession of simple vows on July 9, 1846, and of solemn vows three years later on July 9, 1849. At the time of emigration to America, Mother Benedicta was 27 years old and held the position of teacher and novice mistress.

Mother Benedicta and her two companions, Mother Walburga Dietrich and Sister Maura Flieger, left Eichstätt on October 24, 1852. Prioress Edwarda Schnitzer appointed her superior of the new foundation.

Primary responsibility for this choice of superior rested on Mother Edwarda. It can be presumed that Wimmer had something to say about the choice. Furthermore, Mother Benedicta could not have been chosen without the consent of Bishop George von Oetzl, the spiritual father of the convent, and of the Reverend Francis Anthony Schmid, S.J., confessor of the sisters.

In his early letters Father Boniface Wimmer speaks kindly of Mother Benedicta as a capable, cheerful superior, loved by her religious sisters and by the students. She opened a novitiate at Wimmer's suggestion and in doing so took the first step towards independence from the European motherhouse. Jerome Oetgen calls her "an energetic woman with very definite ideas about the manner in which the community in St. Marys ought to develop."³

It is quite certain that Mother Benedicta Riepp never held the position of superior of the St. Cloud foundation of Benedictine Sisters who came from St. Marys, Pennsylvania. By 1858, when she came to St. Cloud after her trip to Europe, Abbot Wimmer had appointed a superior in every convent stemming from St. Marys. He had appointed Mother Willibalda Scherbauer supe-

² Otto Kobel, *350 Jahre Passion Waal*, n.p.

³ *American Benedictine Review*, 23 (September, 1972) 3:296.

rior of the St. Cloud foundation in 1857 and had not supplanted her by the appointment of any other sister.

A study⁴ in MS. of the *Catholic Directories* and the *Sadlier Almanacs* from 1858 on shows that Mother Willibalda Scherbauer was superior of the Benedictine Sisters in St. Cloud in 1859, 1860, and 1861 when Mother Benedicta was living in St. Cloud.⁵

Little is known about the onset or the course of Mother Benedicta's illness and death, but it is presumed that she died of tuberculosis at a very early age. Attention was called above to her letter of May 3, 1857, where she spoke of her continued weakness; to the authors who refer to her death as being caused by tuberculosis; as well as to a letter by Mother Willibalda Scherbauer in which reference is made to the burning of many important things "long ago" — a method of precaution often used earlier to prevent spread of the disease.

APPENDIX E

Mother Willibalda Scherbauer, O.S.B.

Mother Willibalda Scherbauer was born November 18, 1828, in Kastl in Upper Palatinate, Germany. She was the daughter of John Nepamuk Scherbauer and his wife Margaret, born Sandner, and was the fourth in a family of eight children, four girls and four boys. At the time of Mother Willibalda's birth, the Scherbauers were living in the secularized Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter where the father, a government finance minister, also had his office.⁶ The child was baptized in the chapel of the for-

⁴ Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B., "Benedictine Sisters in Minnesota, 1858-1919." MS.

⁵ S.J.A.A.; S.B.C.A., copy.

⁶ St. Peter Abbey in Kastl in Upper Palatinate was founded by the Benedictines of the Cluny reform in 1098. It became a double monastery in the thirteenth century, was secularized during the religious wars of the 16th century Reformation, and was given to the Jesuits of Amberg in 1636 as a result of the Counter-Reformation. When the Jesuits were suppressed in 1773 the monastery was given to the Knights of Malta who held it until it was again secularized by Napoleon in 1806. The abbey church of St. Peter then became the parish church of Kastl. For a time government offices were housed in the buildings. In 1957 it became a secondary school for Hungarian boys. Ludwig Kraus and Hugo Schnell, *Kastl Oberpfalz*, (Munich, 1976), pp. 1-5.

mer monastery and given the names Frances, Elizabeth, and Eugenia.

According to Kastl records, the family moved frequently, living in Kastl only between 1824 and 1833, during which time all the children were born. The record of deaths in Kastl lists no Scherbauer.⁷

At age thirteen Frances Scherbauer was given scholarships to the Royal Institute in Altötting for eight years by King Ludwig.

Frances Scherbauer entered St. Walburg Priory in Eichstätt on December 17, 1849. She was invested in May, 1850, and professed as a choir sister on November 20, 1851. Four years after profession, December 16, 1855, she left Eichstätt with two other sisters and two candidates to come to America to St. Joseph Convent in St. Marys, Pennsylvania.

In 1857 she was asked to lead the group of sisters sent to St. Cloud, Minnesota, by Mother Benedicta Riepp and reappointed by Wimmer in the same year. She continued in this position until 1868 when she was deposed by Abbot Rupert Seidenbusch.

Mother Willibalda has been described as "small in size, a woman of tenacious will, firmly imbued with the monastic tradition, born to rule rather than to be subject to the rule of others. Her administration was marked by firm discipline and good order. She was kindhearted and was loved by her subjects."⁸ Just before Abbot Seidenbusch's arrival in St. Joseph to depose her as prioress (1868), she had permitted the sisters to have breakfast, a cup of roasted wheat or burnt bread coffee and one-half ounce of bread.⁹ The answers to her letters show her deeply loyal to her former monastery in Eichstätt, to her family, especially her brother, Karl Aurel, a priest, and to her nieces. She seemed to show a strong resiliency to the hardships and suffering she had experienced earlier.

⁷ Letter: Ludwig Kraus, Dean of the church of St. Peter in Kastl, to the author, June 18, 1977.

⁸ McDonald, *With Lamps Burning*, p. 62.

⁹ Borgerding, *Chronicle*, p. 9.

APPENDIX F

Minnesota

The *Chronicle of the Convent of St. Benedict*¹⁰ states that Bishop Joseph Cretin of the Diocese of St. Paul (1851–1857) applied to Abbot Wimmer in 1856 and to St. Marys Convent in 1857, for missionary sisters for the growing number of German Catholics in his diocese. In response to this call, Mother Benedicta Riepp sent a group of sisters to St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Abbot Boniface Wimmer was in favor of sending sisters to Minnesota and had previously taken a group of sisters to Indiana in Pennsylvania to be prepared for work in Minnesota. When he changed his plans and moved the sisters destined for Minnesota from Indiana to Newark, at the request of Bishop Bayley, it seemed to leave St. Cloud without any prospect of receiving sisters for the German-speaking Catholics of the settlement. Mother Benedicta, who had herself volunteered for Minnesota (letter May 3, 1857), filled the gap, seemingly without apprising Abbot Wimmer of her plans. The group of sisters whom Benedicta had chosen came as far as Erie from where seven continued their journey to Minnesota, arriving there on July 7, 1857.

APPENDIX G

Demetrius di Marogna, O.S.B.

Demetrius di Marogna was born in Tyrol on September 17, 1803, and was ordained for the diocese of Augsburg in Germany on March 31, 1826. He came to America and after acting as pastor for a few years, he joined St. Vincent monastery in 1853. He came to Minnesota in 1856 and was prior of the monks in St. Cloud, 1857–63. He held positions of chaplain for sisters and pastor of various parishes. From 1859 to 1869 he was vicar-

¹⁰ The *Chronicle* was written by Father Henry Borgerding, chaplain of St. Benedict Convent from October 5, 1890, to August 31, 1928.

general for Germans in the diocese of St. Paul and a member of the bishop's council, 1864–1869. He died March 27, 1869.¹¹

Father Willibald Mathäser writes:

P. Demetrius di Marogna, because of the difficulties in St. Cloud regarding the acquisition of land, resigned from his position as superior of the monks in Minnesota and upon the request of the Bishop of St. Paul became the Vicar-General for the German immigrants in that city. His successors in St. John's Abbey were P. Cornelius Wittmann, P. Othmar Wirtz and finally, P. Benedict Haindl. P. Demetrius can be regarded as the pioneer Benedictine in Minnesota, coming to America in 1846. He worked in Chicago as diocesan priest and in Highland, Illinois, until he joined St. Vincent's Benedictine monastery in 1852. He died March 27, 1869.¹²

APPENDIX H

Tuberculosis in Early Convents

The necrologies of the convents of Benedictine sisters in America¹³ confirm the fact that an extraordinary number of young sisters died during the first years of their religious life in the St. Marys, Erie, and St. Cloud convents. It can be presumed that many of them died of tuberculosis which, during the nineteenth century, was frequently the cause of early deaths in convents because of the crowded and sometimes unhealthful living conditions.

APPENDIX I

RIEPP TO VON REISACH

St. Marytown

January 7, 1855

Most Reverend Archbishop!

Gracious Lord!

Kindly permit me, Your Reverence, to take the opportunity of the

¹¹ The *Scriptorium*, p. 7.

¹² Mathäser, *Letters*, p. 109, n. 5.

¹³ See necrologies in *Catalogue of Nuns and Convents of the Order of St. Benedict in the United States with a Sketch of Their Work of Half a Century*, (August, 1903), *passim*.

trip of the Very Reverend Lord P. Boniface Wimmer, Superior, to graciously thank Your Excellency for all the graces which so often and in such abundance Your Lordship has bestowed upon me, and also to extend my sincere best wishes for the New Year.

We will with all energy endeavor by our zealous work in the mission life to respond to the wishes and expectations of our highly esteemed benefactor. Two years have now passed during which we here in America have given ourselves especially to the formation and instruction of youth. Our German countrymen are very satisfied and pleased that their daughters are being instructed and educated by sisters, and in spite of the free schools everywhere, they send their girls five or six miles to us. The small ones come in troops out of the bush from all sides, often benumbed (by the cold) and only half dressed, to school, where they then take their breakfast and noon meal from little bags which they carry with them.

It is the special goal of the Reverend Lord Boniface Wimmer to spread our Order here, so I do not hesitate at once to accept novices and acquaint them very soon with our holy Rule. Our sisterhood has increased very quickly and at present we have twenty-one novices, of whom eleven have already made simple profession for one year, and seven candidates. Many of them are Americans, the others are German, but all with few exceptions speak both the German and English languages.

St. Marys is a very suitable place for our novices, since we are so secluded and free from all the loud noise of life in the city. And even when the money-chasing American looks with disdain upon St. Marys, because here he does not find what he is looking for, namely money, but only poverty and simplicity, in religious matters it is not the most lowly settlement since almost only Catholic hearts beat here. Your Excellency will, therefore, not reject it when I send a picture of St. Marytown as a sign of my gratitude and esteem through the Reverend Lord P. Boniface Wimmer.

In again repeating the above best wishes and petition I presume humbly to ask Your Excellency for the holy blessing for myself and my beloved sisters, who all express to you their obedient respect. I remain, in deepest reverence and esteem,

Your Excellency's most grateful servant,
M. Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Annalen*, 23 (1855):238–239.

APPENDIX J

Exempt Abbot

Abbot Boniface Wimmer frequently referred to himself as an exempt abbot. The privilege of exemption was sometimes allowed by the Holy See to persons or institutions. It meant the release from the authority of the immediate superior, i.e., the bishop of the diocese, and being subject only to the higher superior, the Holy See.

The privilege gave the abbot complete control of the internal affairs of his community. External or apostolic works remained under the jurisdiction of the local ordinary.¹⁵

APPENDIX K

Congregations

History records instances when both monks and nuns belonged to the same congregation. The best example at present is the English Benedictine Congregation. As far back as 1619 Pope Paul V united all English monks in a congregation, which from 1623 onwards also included nuns.¹⁶ There are monasteries of nuns subject to abbots or to a congregation of monks also in Germany, Italy, Belgium and other countries. In the United States the sisters of St. Gertrude Convent in Louisiana were under the jurisdiction of the abbot of St. Joseph Monastery.¹⁷ In Germany (c. 1500) the Bursfeld Union or Congregation admitted convents. These became subject to abbots of the Union, who appointed confessors and had visitation rights.¹⁸ The visitors supervised the election of abbesses and could depose an abbess who did not support the decrees of the congregation of the

¹⁵ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 5 (1967):716-17.

¹⁶ Daniel Rees et al., *Consider Your Call* (London, 1978), p. 362.

¹⁷ Stephanus Hilpish, *A History of Benedictine Nuns* (Collegeville, Minn., 1958), pp. 95, 100. St. Gertrude Convent no longer exists. The sisters have been absorbed into another convent.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-56.

general chapter. Abbesses as well as abbots attended the general chapter of the Bursfeld Congregation.

Regarding the Cistercian convents, Daniel-Rops states:

In early times each feminine community had an abbot who was obliged to make an annual canonical visit, to be consulted for the admission or dismissal of a nun, and to oversee the material administration. The monks furnished the nuns with almoners and confessors and in the beginning even with lay brothers to take care of manual work while the convent was waiting for lay sisters to be admitted.¹⁹

By 1964 eighty percent of the Benedictine sisters in the United States had come under pontifical jurisdiction.²⁰

APPENDIX L

M. Augustina Short, O.S.B.

Mother Augustina Short, a young English-speaking sister, accompanied Mother Benedicta Riepp to Europe in the fall of 1857 and returned with her to Erie in April 1858. From Erie she went back to St. Marys. About ten years later she became a member of Mt. St. Scholastica Convent in Atchison, Kansas. Here Mother Augustina held the position of Directress of Mt. St. Scholastica Academy for fourteen years. She then returned to the East, becoming a member of St. Walburg Convent in Covington, Kentucky, where she died in 1902.²¹

APPENDIX M

Chronik, Convent of St. Walburg, Eichstätt

Chronik 12

The St. Walburg Convent Chronicle reports the following on Mother Benedicta Riepp's trip to Europe:

¹⁹ Henri Daniel-Rops, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1963), p. 264.

²⁰ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2 (1967):293.

²¹ Schuster, *The Meaning of the Mountain*, pp. 47; 70-75.

1857

On the 14th of July, Sister Benedicta Riepp (superioress) and a companion from America came unexpectedly to visit us to deal with matters concerning the Order and stayed. . . .

1858

On April 8 Sister Benedicta Riepp and Sister Augustina Short, an American, took the coach at 3:45 in the morning to Pleinfeld. From there they took the train to Bremen. On the evening before their departure, I called together all capitulars in whose presence I gave the above-mentioned sisters 600 fl. (600 gulden) travel money, with the permission of the Most Reverend Bishop. I had her (Mother Benedicta) sign the receipts for what had already been sent to America, which amounted to 4722 fl. 30 kr., and a receipt for the 600 gulden.

The money brought to the convent [as dowries] by the sisters who went to America amounted to 3800 fl. After subtracting this from the amount given to the sisters in America, the convent could demand 922 fl. 30 kr., besides the 600 fl. travel money. Summa 522 fl. 30 kr. (See Wimmer's letter of June 1, 1858, above, on the sisters' dowries.)

Chronik 9a (1858)

Document signed by M. Benedicta Riepp, 1858

The undersigned herewith indicates that she received 600 gulden from the Convent St. Walburg as travel money to America to the convent in St. Marytown, diocese of Pittsburgh, for herself and her fellow sister, Sister Augusta (*sic*) Short.

Eichstätt, January 11, 1858.

(Signed)

M. Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B.

Chronik 9a (1858)

Convent of St. Walburg to the Magistrate of the
Royal City of Eichstätt

For preparing a travel pass to North America for Sister Augustina Short who travelled with Sister Benedicta Riepp from the convent in St. Marystown in the Diocese of Pittsburgh in June of last year to the above-named Benedictine convent, M. Benedicta Riepp of the convent in Marystown in North America, with a free conscience and by her own signature, witnesses to the Prioress of the above-mentioned convent:

That the above-named Augustina Short is a native American.

(Signed)	M. Benedicta Riepp
	M. Edwarda Schnitzer, Prioress

(The explanation is added that the responsibilities of surety for Sister Augustina Short are assumed by the same.)

	Respectfully by the Convent of St. Walburg
(Signed)	M. Edwarda Schnitzer, Prioress

Chronik 9 (1858)

The Convent of St. Walburg
to the
Magistrate of the Royal City of Eichstätt

At your esteemed request we notify and testify that for Sister Benedicta Riepp from the Convent of St. Marytown in North America and her traveling companion, Sister Augustina Short, for the return trip to their legitimate convent, there are at their disposal

600 fl. (six hundred gulden).

Most respectfully,

The Convent of St. Walburg
M. Edwarda Schnitzer, Prioress

Chronik 9A (1858)

From the Convent of St. Walburg
to the
Magistrate of the Royal City of Eichstätt

In behalf of the return journey of Sister Benedicta Riepp from Waal, Province of Buchloe, to the Convent of Marytown, Diocese of Pittsburgh in North America and in respect of the written law it is set forth here that the Convent of St. Walburg will go surety for whatever obligations arise.

We entreat the very Venerable Magistrate in behalf of the traveling pass that it be prepared as soon as possible.

Very respectfully,

The Convent of St. Walburg

Chronik 9B (1858)

The
Convent of St. Walburg
to
The Magistrate of the Royal City of Eichstätt

In behalf of the issuing of a passport to North America for Sister Augustina Short who in July of last year came from St. Marytown in North America, Diocese of Pittsburgh, to Europe with Sister Benedicta Riepp to this Benedictine Convent, it is attested in conscience and by the signature of the name of Sister Benedicta Riepp from the Convent at Marytown in North America and that of the Lady Prioress of this convent:

“That the above-named Augustina Short is a native American.”

Signed: M. Benedicta Riepp
M. Edwarda Schnitzer, Prioress

It is also added here that we assume all obligations of Sister Augustina.

Signed: Very respectfully,
M. Benedicta Riepp
M. Edwarda Schnitzer

LIST OF LETTERS

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Page</i>
Ludwig to von Schenk	Aug. 24, 1831	5
Ludwig, Decree	June 7, 1835	5
Wimmer, <i>Postzeitung</i> article	Nov. 8, 1845	6
Wimmer to Friends in Munich	Dec. 28, 1847	9-10
Ludwig to Wimmer	Aug. 30, 1849	10
Wimmer to Ludwig	Feb. 13, 1852	11
Wimmer to von Reisach	Apr. 5, 1852	11-12
Schnitzer to L.M.V. ¹	May 29, 1852	14-15
O'Connor to Wimmer	July 15, 1852	16
Wimmer to Annalen	Aug. 9, 1852	16-17
Wimmer to Leiss	Oct. 8, 1852	18
Wimmer to Scherr	Oct. 17, 1852	18-19
Wimmer to Abbot of Schottenstift	Oct. 19, 1852	19-20
Ludwig to Riepp	Oct. 19, 1852	21
Schnitzer to Ludwig	Oct. 27, 1852	21-23
Riepp to von Reisach	Nov. 27, 1852	23-26
Riepp to Ludwig	Jan. 8, 1853	26-27
Wimmer to Ludwig	July 4, 1853	28-29
Wimmer to Scherr	July 6, 1853	30
Schnitzer to L.M.V.	Oct. 28, 1853	30-32
Von Oettl to L.M.V.	Oct. 29, 1853	32
Riepp to L.M.V.	Dec. 15, 1853	33-37
Wimmer to von Reisach	Aug. 7, 1854	37-38
Riepp to von Reisach	Jan. 7, 1855	38-40
Wimmer to Ludwig	Feb. 19, 1855	40

¹ L.M.V. = Ludwig-Missionsverein.

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Page</i>
Schnitzer to L.M.V.		
c. P.S. by Bishop of Eichstätt	Mar. 2, 1855	42-44
Riepp to Garner	Mar. 15, 1855	44
Riepp to von Reisach	May 20, 1855	45-46
Riepp to L.M.V.	May 21, 1855	46-48
Wimmer to Barnabo	Aug. 1, 1855	50-51
Young to Barnabo	Oct. 1, 1855	52
Von Oetl to Young	Oct. 6, 1855	53
Riepp to L.M.V.	Feb. 14, 1856	54-55
Riepp to Garner	Aug. 25, 1856	56
di Marogna to Wimmer	Mar. 10, 1857	60-61
Riepp to L.M.V.	Apr. 13, 1857	61-63
Seidenbusch to Wimmer	Apr. 24, 1857	63-65
Riepp to Wimmer	May 3, 1857	65-66
Seidenbusch to Wimmer	May 22, 1857	67
di Marogna to Wimmer	June 15, 1857	68
Young to Wimmer	July 4, 1857	69-70
di Marogna to Wimmer	July 14, 1857	71-73
di Marogna to Wimmer	Aug. 12, 1857	74-75
Roetzer to Wimmer	Aug. 12, 1857	75-77
Scherbauer to Wimmer	Aug. ?, 1857	77-79
Scherbauer to Wimmer	Aug. 19, 1857	79-81
di Marogna to Wimmer	Aug. 20, 1857	81-82
Scherbauer to Wimmer	Aug. 27, 1857	83-84
Kremeter to Wimmer	Aug. 22, 1857	84-85
Wimmer to Mueller	July 24, 1857	86-99
Wimmer to Ludwig	Aug. 10, 1857	99
Wimmer to Burkhardt	Nov. 15, 1857	99-100
Wimmer to Ludwig	Dec. 7, 1857	101
von Oetl to Mueller	n.d.	103-104
von Oetl to Mueller	Aug. 31, 1857	104-105
Wimmer to Oberkamp	Sept. 18, 1857	105-108
Mueller to Wimmer	Nov. 6, 1857	108-109
Riepp to von Oetl (Points of difference)	n.d.	110-113
Wimmer to Oberkamp	Nov. 23, 1857	113-121
Barnabo to Wimmer	Mar. 17, 1858	109-110
Wimmer to Burkhardt	June 1, 1858	127-129
Wimmer to Lang	July 27, 1858	129-130
Schnitzer to Burkhardt	Oct. 20, 1858	130-132
Mueller to Wimmer	Oct. 21, 1858	132
Barnabo to Wimmer	Nov. 11, 1858	123-124

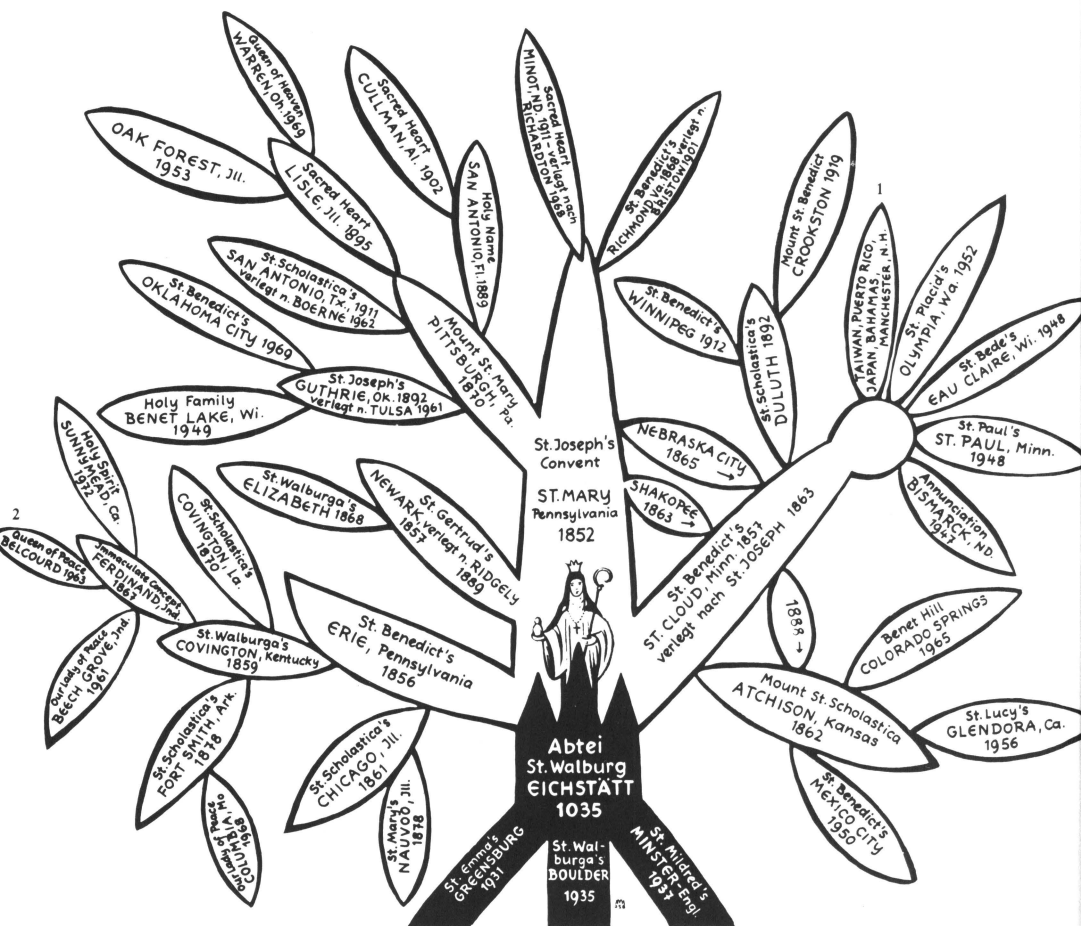
	<i>Date</i>	<i>Page</i>
Wimmer to Ludwig	Dec. 12, 1858	133-134
Riepp to Barnabo	Jan. 4, 1859	135-137
Young To Whom It May Concern	June 25, 1857	138
Ludwig to Wimmer	Jan. 5, 1859	138-139
Wimmer to Abbot of Scheyern	Feb. 25, 1859	139-140
Mueller to Wimmer	Mar. 15, 1859	140-141
Wimmer to Ludwig	Apr. 5, 1859	141-142
Wimmer to Ludwig	Apr. 9, 1859	142-150
Ludwig to Wimmer	May 29, 1859	150-151
Mueller to Wimmer	June 1, 1859	151
Wimmer to Ludwig	July 25, 1859	152
Schnitzer to Burkhardt	Nov. 15, 1859	153-154
Young to Wimmer	Jan. 25, 1860	155-156
Genga to Young (Decree & Rescript)	Dec. 6, 1859	156-157
Wimmer to Ludwig	Feb. 22, 1860	157-159
Ludwig to Wimmer	Mar. 22, 1860	160
Wimmer to Burkhardt	Apr. 25, 1860	160-162
Young to Grace	Jan. 28, 1861	162-163
Wimmer to Ludwig	Feb. 9, 1861	163
Wimmer to Ludwig	Aug. 17, 1861	163-164
Grace Diary	Sept. 16, 1861	164-165
Swisshelm, <i>St. Cloud Democrat</i> (on M.W.S.) ¹	Sept. 26, 1861	165
Riepp to Rev. Father <i>St. Cloud Democrat</i> (d. of M.B.R.) ²	Dec. 30, 1861	166
Wimmer to Ludwig	Mar. 20, 1862	167
Grace to Wirtz	Dec. 2, 1862	167
Grace to Wirtz	Dec. 21, 1862	161-172
Grace to Wirtz	Apr. 27, 1863	172
Grace to Wirtz	June 1, 1863	173
Grace to Wirtz	June 18, 1865	173
Scherbauer to Novices	July 1, 1863	174-175
Scherbauer to Streitz	July 20, 1863	175-176
Scherbauer to Sisters	July 20, 1863	176-177
Wimmer to Scherr	Feb. 16, 1864	178
Scherbauer to Ludwig	Dec. 4, 1864	178-181
Ludwig to L.M.V.	May 10, 1865	178
Wimmer to Ludwig	Apr. 15, 1865	182

¹ M.W.S., Mother Willibalda Scherbauer

² M.B.R., Mother Benedicta Riepp

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Page</i>
Scherbauer to Ludwig	Dec. 6, 1865	182-184
Karl Scherbauer to Ludwig	May 22, 1866	184
Ludwig to Scherbauer	May 31, 1866	184-185
Wimmer to Burkhardt	June 28, 1866	187-188
Scherbauer to Edelbrock	Sept. 17, 1877	190-191
Herman to Scherbauer	n.d.	192
Scherbauer to Schnitzer	Mar. ?, 1898	193-194
Kroisz to Scherbauer	Apr. 6, 1910	195
Scherbauer to Langford	Nov. 10, ?	196-197
Scherbauer to Kroisz	Dec. ?, 1913	197-198
Kroisz to Scherbauer	Feb. 11, 1914	198-199
Kroisz to Kapsner	Mar. 3, 1914	200

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¹DEPENDENT PRIORIES OF
SAINT BENEDICT'S CONVENT, SAINT JOSEPH, MINNESOTA:

TAIWAN
PUERTO RICO
JAPAN
BAHAMAS
MANCHESTER, N.H.
UTAH (NOT LISTED ABOVE)

² BELCOURT, ND

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sister Incarnata Girgen, O.S.B., was born in Vermillion, Minnesota, on December 24, 1899. Entering Saint Benedict's Convent, Saint Joseph, Minnesota, on September 3, 1917, she pronounced final vows there on July 11, 1922. She received a B.A. in history with a minor in Latin from the College of Saint Benedict, Saint Joseph, Minnesota, and a Ph.D. in Education with minors in history and philosophy from Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, Missouri. Her dissertation, *The Schools of the American Cassinese Benedictines in the United States: Their Foundation, Development and Character*, is based, in part, on visits to and research in fourteen American Cassinese abbeys.

She taught in two high schools and one elementary school for a total of twenty years. From 1941 to 1947 she served as dean of the College of Saint Benedict; from 1947 to 1977, she was a faculty member teaching courses in logic, psychology, and history, including church history and the history of Benedictinism. During part of this time, she was on the overseas teaching staff in Luxembourg and in Germany. In the latter country she did some of the research that enabled her to locate materials about the first Benedictine women in the United States — materials which are appearing in print in English for the first time in this volume.

From 1949 to 1955 she was sub-prioress of Saint Benedict's Convent. Her knowledge of history, her appreciation of Benedictinism, her expertise as a teacher have made her a valued participant in many and varied convent committees as well as a member of the convent council and of the council of the Federation of Saint Benedict.

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