



# Heritage Happenings

Archives Office

December 2022

Lest We Forget...

The summer of 1876 all the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity were home from their missions. The second group of German sisters had arrived and had been introduced to their new home. Before the Sisters would leave for their missions, the question of "becoming one" was in everyone's thoughts. Sr. Gonzaga Leineweber seemed to be in favor as classes had already been set up for teaching them English in preparation for teaching.

## Amalgamation



With everyone home, Mother Gabriel now called a meeting. It is noted here that before the second group arrived, Mother Gabriel had suddenly left the convent one night. Mother Odelia went after her and brought her back. A reason has never been identified but consider: she had just been elected Superior the previous year just before the first group of German Sisters came. Now she had to prepare for the arrival of 10 more. Was she feeling overwhelmed, unsure, anxious? Who knows. Eventually she decided to resign her position as Superior. She convinced the Sisters that since the two communities had been brought together, a new election should take place. Archbishop Henni, already a good friend of the small community and Father Joseph Fessler were consulted and both agreed with such. The Sisters were in agreement.



Before proceeding, the differences should be recognized as this decision enforces that these Sisters would



between these two groups to amalgamate had many consequences to face. Transition was hard enough for the Germans but the Americans faced their own "transitioning."

Amalgamation is defined as **the blending of cultures**, rather than one group eliminating another or one group mixing itself into another (assimilation). Both groups now faced: a new Superior, name changes for some, new type of habit, new life style. Let's compare:



### German Sisters

April 15, 1856  
Nineteen Years  
44 Members  
14 Deaths  
All certified teachers  
Mother Augustine: Six years  
Average Age: 31 years  
German

### Germans compared to Americans

Founding Date:  
Experience as a Community:  
Members since Founding:  
Deaths of Members:  
Education:  
Experience as Superior:  
Average Age of Members:  
Language:

### American Sisters

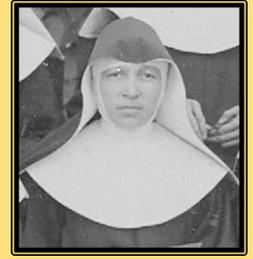
November 9, 1869  
Seven Years  
29 Members  
None thus far  
Elementary School  
Mother Gabriel: < than a year  
Average Age: 26 years  
English/German



Before proceeding with voting, Archbishop Henni was consulted. In agreement with their decision, he contacted Father Kilian Flasch, a professor at St. Francis Seminary and appointed him delegate to the election. The election began with a three day Retreat which ended September 2, 1876. Before the election, Reception and First Profession took place. Mary Ann Davey was received as Sister Perpetua and Margaret O'Connor was given the name Sister Innocentia. Five novices also made their first profession of vows.



Sister Bernward Schwetge in her memoirs wrote: *After the Retreat all voted as to whether or not amalgamation should take place. All but three or four were in favor.*



After the Retreat, the General Chapter was opened in the chapel. Participants were: 26 Americans and 27 Germans. Both groups had novices and professed Sisters. Election now took place. Mother Augustine, Superior of the German Sisters, was elected for one year. Sister Agnes Roemer of the American group was elected her first assistant.



Sister Cassiana, a young girl from Francis Creek, was a junior Sister in 1878. She entered the convent in 1874 at age 16 but returned home the following year to care for her mother. She returned in 1878 and was received that same year. She was a novice during the early years of the German Sisters. In her memoirs she writes, *"...in some ways the coming of these Sisters proved to be a blessing. They had been established in religious life longer and hardships had proved their fidelity. they were well educated, according to standards of German schools, and had administered their temporary affairs well."*

## National Events of 1876

1. Hand of the Statue of Liberty comes to Philadelphia. See people up around the flame!!



2. Alexander G. Bell makes first successful telephone call!

3. First National League baseball game is played in Philadelphia.

4. American Library Association founded.

## TRAGEDY Death of Sister Seraphica



Just one month after the decision to amalgamate, Sister Seraphica, sister of Father Joseph and Father George became the first American Sister to die. The German Sisters had already been thru 14 deaths and thus were probably a tremendous source of strength and faith to their American Sisters. She had been suffering from lung trouble for about four weeks. A martyr to duty, it was only four months previous to her saintly death that she consented to leave her post of love in the schoolroom. The day before her death was the first that our dear Sister was obliged to forego Holy Mass. While dressing, she fainted and was unable to get up and continue. She finally yielded to the inevitable. She died of TB early in the morning of November 2, 1876. She was only 30 years old and 6 years professed. She was one of the original foundresses of our community. Such sadness must have brought them closer together in their understanding of loss and loneliness.



Our next issue: The Enlarging Group in the one wing convent!!



During the following summer 1877, General chapter took place again. The two provinces (American and German) voted that the amalgamation be lasting. Election of the new Superior resulted in Mother Augustine receiving the required votes. She was elected now for three years. Sr Benedicta Stitch, an American Sister, was elected her assistant.

In September of 1877 Sister Bonaventure Hueffer of Potosi suffered an unexpected death. She had suffered a nervous breakdown, and after two weeks of suffering, she was called to eternal rest. She was 20 years old and one year professed. She was organist at St. Boniface downtown.

