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RECORD OF A JOURNEY: MOTHER BENEDICTA RIEPP AND COMPANIONS TRAVEL TO NORTH AMERICA, PART II

Helen Herbstritt, O.S.B., and Ephrem Hollermann, O.S.B.

June 24, 1852, Day 7, Fair⁷⁵

The morning sun was already on its course before Morpheus⁷⁶ let us open our eyes. A review of our group revealed that Fr. Xavier, Sr. Benedicta and Sr. Maura were feeling sick. All of the others were in good spirits. The location of the ship at 12:00 noon was at 5.6 longitude and 49.30 latitude, 202.5 knots distant from the coast of England. The sea was very rough and the prospects were not good. During the night the waves rose higher and the passengers were thrown against the sides of the cabins. The thought of rest was impossible.

June 25, 1852, Day 8, Cloudy

The stormy sea continued. Only some passengers were alert. At breakfast the plates rolled out of their holding places and thundered to the floor. There was no good rest to be had. The ship's location at lunch was 51.18 latitude, 10.7 longitude, at 214 knots. At 1:00 p.m. I stood leaning against the mast eating some soup, which tasted really good. However, the rest of the group did not look good at all. Only Franz was up and walking. In the afternoon I stayed in the "smoke room"

Sister Helen is a member of St. Joseph Monastery, St. Marys, Pennsylvania. In addition to the many services she offers in her community, she is currently the monastery's archivist. Sister Helen first discovered the diary of Maximilian Gärtner, O. Praem., a text written in old German script, which in English translation forms the major content of this article. Sister Marianne Burkhard, O.S.B., a member of Saint Mary Monastery, Rock Island, Illinois, first read the handwritten German text and identified sections that related to the journey of Mother Benedicta Riepp and her companions. She translated pertinent excerpts and summarized others. Mr. Christian Schmidt, a German-born resident of St. Marys, Pennsylvania, then read and translated the handwritten diary in its entirety. In preparing this article, Sister Helen collaborated with Sister Ephrem Hollermann, O.S.B., a member of Saint Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph, Minnesota, currently serving as an Associate Professor of Theology at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University in Minnesota. Sister Helen was the primary researcher. Sister Ephrem assisted with the writing, and edited and annotated the English translation of the German sources.

⁷⁵ Part I in ABR 64:1 (March 2013) ended with the ship Washington's departure from Southampton, England. The author of the journal is Rev. Maxilimian Gartner, O.Praem.

⁷⁶ The Greek god of dreams.

on the upper deck, because here at least there was a space where you could enjoy fresh air. But the beating of the waves was felt much more strongly than down in the cabins. I gave up the “smoke room” around 11:00 p.m. and then went down to the cabin.

June 26, 1852, Day 9, Fair

The sky cleared up during the night, but the sea did not calm down. Xavier was suffering very much from sea sickness and Mr. von Brentano talked about writing his last will. The good-natured nuns were resigned to this general, disagreeable state and found comfort and hope when I praised the friendly sunshine as a herald of new calm. Around noon the sea grew calm. The beating of the waves on the ship lessened and the ride was much smoother. If only the passengers also had strong steel ribs to endure the heavy sea. Today the ship’s location was 51.34 latitude, 16.8 longitude at 228 knots. Boredom forced us all to go to the cabins early.

June 27, 1852, Day 10, Rain

It rained hard again but without wind. Therefore, we did not worry about another storm coming up. Since it was Sunday a British preacher had a “meeting,” by invitation of the captain, in the first-class cabin which anyone could attend who felt so inclined. The drum called for the service at 11:00 a.m., but not many people showed up. The aftermath of sea sickness kept people in their cabins. The man of God, lean as a rake, sat behind a little table and read from a book which treated the mysteries of religion, especially the Holy Trinity. Proofs were in the reasonableness of the teachings, works, and examples, he said. At the end he said a prayer for a safe voyage for us which certainly resounded in the souls of all those present. One could observe very polite behavior among several ladies, some men in the rear, and even some seamen in clean white uniforms.

Our position was 51.28 latitude, 22.14 longitude at 250 knots. Up to now that was the biggest distance in one day. There was only a small contingent at the lunch table, even though the food smelled very good and tasted even better. By evening the rain came again and it got real cold. This forced the people back into their cabins where Morpheus took care of them real fast. Fr. Xavier moaned continually about his dreadful condition, without having recourse to the bottles bought in Bremen which had been favorites at the beginning of the journey. He could not understand why this evil did not play its tricks on me. I told

him: *Juaret socium me habere malorum.*⁷⁷ I told him there are more storms to come and Xavier said this was bad for the poor ones who were already sick. But we had to stop talking about it so people would not get too discouraged. The wind howled in the masts and the sails and the rain dropped much water on the deck. The outlook was for a bad night and a worse morning. Fortunately the cabins of second class are deep down in the ship’s hull so that the wind’s howling is not heard as much—otherwise anxiety might become overwhelming.

June 28, 1852, Day 11, Very Rainy [Benedicta Riepp’s 27th birthday]⁷⁸

The storm continued. Rain and wind competed over which was the fiercest. The ship received a terrible beating, but there was no flooding over the railing. If there had been, the kitchen would have been swept overboard. To calm myself from thoughts like that I went to the foredeck to look around. The captain was standing at his post and smiled at me as if to encourage me. I asked him about the trip ahead but he only told me, “After a bad night, a bad morning.” After that I went to the smoke room. The rough weather stayed outside. We had only a small group at lunch and the warm soup was a good insurance against the upset stomach and sea sickness. The ship’s position was 51.05 latitude, 26.48 longitude, at 174 knots. Around lunch we saw a ship in the east and another one later in the evening but without a greeting. The beating of the water against the side of the ship was a bad omen for the night.

June 29, 1852, Day 12, Saints Peter and Paul

Only a couple brave men came on deck today even though the rain had quit overnight. My people, except Franz, were in a sad state and were not able to leave their beds. The three poor nuns lamented, especially about the fact that they were not even able to pray and to recommend themselves to their guardian angel. Mr. von Brentano wanted to send the “bride of the wind” to the Cape land of the Hottentots,⁷⁹ and complained, “If his wife would know how he suffers here, she would die in pain.” I only answered him that it is good that human beings cannot see beyond this horizon.

⁷⁷ “You would like to have a companion in difficulties.”

⁷⁸ An observation by the editor.

⁷⁹ The Khoikhoi (“people” or “real people”) lived in South Africa as early as the fifth century. When European immigrants colonized the area in 1652, the Khoikhoi were practicing extensive agriculture in the Cape region, with large herds of cattle. The European immigrants labeled them “Hottentots,” in imitation of the sound of the Khoisan languages. In nineteenth-century German, *Hottentotten* was used generically and indicated an undesirable faraway place.

I went back to the smoke room where the Anglican preacher and the American were having a discussion about the forces of nature. The preacher indicated that he could easily show them all the way to an earthly paradise. The Christian religion would be the entrance into a happy life. He did not think that the pilgrim life alone would be the goal for humanity, etc. Our position at noon was 49.46 latitude, 30.46 longitude, at 168 knots. There were only fifteen people at the dinner table and the walk back to the cabins happened fast.

June 30, 1852, Day 13, Cloudy

The night was a little quieter and the “afflicted” were being comforted. A good morning followed. Nevertheless, the sea-sick [passengers] ventured out only slowly to the upper deck for fresh air and fresh courage after nearly six days of misery. Today’s position: 48.46 latitude, 35.44 longitude, at 202 knots. Many people showed up for lunch and the young Portuguese, Barlino, played his violin in the parlor for the pleasure of all, accompanied by the piano forte. Some even danced, while others still wrestled with the infamous “destroying angel” of the days before. To maintain this playful atmosphere the captain came with lemonade, aimed at appeasing the grouchy. Since Xavier had had problems with his bowels for the past six days, I handed him a dose of tincture of arnica,⁸⁰ and that evening a second dose. The dose had the expected success. Sister Benedicta crept out of her cabin and wanted to go to the deck. But she asked for my arm so that her weak joints would remain upright. A significant cold snap came with dusk and forced us to leave the deck for our cabins. I wrote in the parlor because it was too cold and humid outside. Bedtime came at 11:00 p.m.

July 1, 1852, Day 14

The long awaited July sun stayed behind gloomy, murky clouds, and broke through only once in a while with a weak ray. Good weather was not expected. Xavier ate breakfast this morning without throwing up. Bruno had much to say about a rat that attacked him in the cabin. At noon we were at 48.36 latitude, 41.10 longitude, at 220 knots. The horizon became an ashen color, and the waves became abnormal. The

⁸⁰ Tea brewed from blossoms of one of Germany’s best known Zauberpflanzen, Arnica Montana, a tiny, daisy like flower that blooms from May to August on European mountainsides. The arnica plant has been used in homeopathic medicine for hundreds of years.

dreaded rain came and soon forced everybody from the upper deck to the parlor. Sister Benedicta felt it was advisable to familiarize herself with the English language and decided to have me teach her reading first—very practical, without many rules. The evening was spent doing this until 6:00 p.m. Content with her quick understanding, one could look forward to excellent progress in future lessons.

Then around midnight a terrible danger from the deep threatened to end our existence and to burst on the floating colossus *Washington*! Why? What happened to create such a danger? The sailor on watch signaled that something large was very close to us. The extreme cold that blew from it quickly indicated that it was a floating iceberg, which could result in an unavoidable collision and shipwreck unless the ship’s course could immediately be halted. Fortunately, this occurred just in time by stopping the steam engine, so that the icy colossus could continue its way southward in the stormy sea ahead of us. These monsters—more terrible than a storm—are torn off by swirling winds from the large polar ice fields and then pushed into the southern regions where eventually the equatorial heat puts an end to them. Naturally, they are the largest at the beginning and do not lose much on their journey, except for what the sea eats away from their lower part which amounts, without exception, to more than half of the entire colossus. The upper part [of the iceberg] above the water indicates the measure of its entire size, which we passengers could not see clearly tonight, but perhaps on the following morning. The sudden stop of the steam engine could wake up even the soundest sleeper and make him wonder whether an accident had occurred. As long as there is no loud noise it is not a significant matter. This is what occurred tonight, but only because a good guardian angel had preserved us from the worst accident on the high sea—usually impossible—by the sailor on watch who remembered his duty to announce the floating iceberg, and thus saved the 300 lives which had been entrusted to the ship. Had the sailor been intoxicated at that fateful midnight hour, the ocean’s profoundest depth would have certainly become the grave for the good *Washington* and every soul on board, for it would have been absolutely impossible to climb onto the slippery iceberg!

July 2, 1852, Day 15, Stormy from the northwest

A violent northwest wind again sped over the deck and thwarted our attempt to look for the vanished ice monster which had been such a threatening danger [the night before]. The thermometer showed only

7R,⁸¹ witnessing to the wild spirit from the north which was on its way. The icy wind blew strongly but without churning the sea. At 12:00 noon we were 47.49 latitude, 46.12 longitude at 204 knots. Suddenly, a cry arose again on the deck as if there were a fire. We came rushing out of the parlor with obvious fear in our minds, and searched for the cause of the noise. There was another iceberg, less than three miles away. What were we to do? The distance did not cause excessive fear, but one could not lose sight of the unwelcome guest, especially since the dropping temperatures indicated clearly that the colossus was coming closer and closer. Finally, at 5:00 p.m. the monster could be clearly recognized—it was about half an hour away—and its size could be measured. The length was roughly 500 feet, its height 200 feet, and its width about 100 feet. Therefore it was a mass of at least 200 tons.⁸² It was not very pleasant to enjoy this magnificent spectacle at length, since the fingers were hardly able to hold a pencil while drawing the northern colossus. Without the protection of an overcoat, there was real danger of inviting a bodily fever.

The captain invited everybody to the parlor for entertainment, punch and lemonade, and performances by the passengers. No sooner had it been said than it was done. You were invited either to make a toast, or sing a little song, or even make a longer speech. Our Mr. Baron [von Brentano] of Augsburg came back to life. He broke forth with a Bavarian sense of humor about the great future of America, under one condition: good unity and holding together inside and out. Of course, his German lecture was only understood by ten percent of the passengers but he, nevertheless, received much applause, as if he had really spoken to the listeners' hearts. At the end, a quartet of sailors sang some American melodies with the typical American "miss-tones," but most of the men liked it. Many toasts were made and mine was "To the merits of the good old *Washington* – upon land and sea!" I prompted the pious Sr. Benedicta to say: "To the youth of America in knowledge and piety."⁸³ Midnight had passed, and people gradually left to go to their cabins.

⁸¹ *Reaumur*, French. A temperature scale on which water freezes at 0 degrees and boils at 80 degrees.

⁸² Gärtner includes illustrations of the iceberg on the next two diary pages: a first view, a second view fifteen minutes later, a third view after another half hour (about two hours away), and a view as it was disappearing into the twilight.

⁸³ Both toasts were recorded in English in the diary.

July 3, 1852, Day 16, Cloudy

A good southerly wind invited the sailors to hoist the additional sails, thus preserving the steam, and we were full of hope for prosperous sailing. Position: 46.42 latitude, 51.40 longitude at 240 knots. But in the afternoon heavy rain and fog arose. The wild wind made it necessary to bring in the sails.

July 4, 1852, Day 17, Day of Freedom

The great feast day of the Union's sun of freedom did not dawn as gloriously on our wooden *Washington* as it may have been greeted on the continent. The captain considered the fact that it was Sunday and therefore a disturbance of the Sabbath quiet was not allowed. All the more willingly he approved my proposal to hold a Sunday Mass in the parlor. So I wrote out a few announcements stating: On the occasion of the great [American] national holiday there will be a Holy Mass for the Christian Germans at 10:00 a.m. in the large parlor. But soon information came that some Jews in second class were greatly angered and tore down the announcement. I went to the captain to get directions on how to proceed. My Christian service was to be held without delay, and whoever would dare to disturb it would be immediately locked up!⁸⁴ I immediately related this to the Jewish rabble⁸⁵ and explained, in consideration of the Sunday and holiday, that I as a good American—and seemingly better than they—would not blame them for this violation of good order and true humanity, and not deliver them up to their due punishment.

Time was short, and the young steward beat the drum and people gathered in the second class parlor where I was standing behind the table. In my loud voice I posed the question: Were we assembled Christians willing to be beaten down by some Jews? Would we have to concede to them the right to tell us that today we would not be allowed to celebrate the Holy Mass? The gathering of about eighty people was invited by me to show their disapproval of such a presumption by getting up from their seats. They got up almost to the last person so that I, much moved, expressed my gratitude for such a sign of honor for holy Christianity. Then I began, "In the name of God and Father," without making the

⁸⁴ The literal translation of the German, *Loch*, is "hole," but also means prison—any type of space where a person is confined as punishment.

⁸⁵ Gärtner uses the German word, *Judenpack* here. In German, *Jud* means "Jew." Long before Hitler, the German word "Jud" had very negative connotations.

sign of the cross, since I considered that we Catholics were actually a minority in the gathering. Then I read the prayer from the little book for emigrants from Einsiedeln and followed it with a sermon about the duty of revering God in general, and keeping the Sunday holy in particular. The main information came from Thomas à Kempis III. 22, inserting suitable thoughts of my own from earlier homilies of which I had drafts.

After a full hour I concluded my sermon by praying the "Our Father," the Credo, ending finally with a strong "Gelobt sei Jesus Christus," "Praised be Jesus Christ!" I found out later that some Jews and their wives were present and listened politely—without turning up their noses. Subsequently they approved of my teaching because I had based it on the Old Testament—including Moses and the prophets. A Protestant, Mr. Kraft, praised me in the afternoon while walking on the deck, with regard to my precise and logic proofs during the Sunday service, since the nature of man himself is to draw back into silence and mere materialistic thoughts. The man, a naturalist, desired further discussions as they reminded him of his youth. He almost admitted that he was not more involved in the spiritual side of his life. I would have loved to talk more with that gentleman, but he tried to avoid me afterwards. Maybe he did not want to be thought of as having been wrapped around a "Jesuit's" finger. It is too bad that shame comes over some people who are free, and does not let them follow their heart's intent. However the captain—always a gentleman—showed his approval by giving me an extra bottle of wine at lunch and raising a loud "hip-hip-hurrah" three times while the whole officer crew joined him. Of course, I had to respond with thanks for his approval. Today's position is 44.45 latitude, 56.10 longitude, at 224 knots. In the afternoon we saw a ship and a fishing boat pass by—a good sign that we were close to the great sand banks. A wonderful sunset. I gave an English lesson to Sr. Benedicta until 11:00 p.m.

July 5, 1852, Day 18, Fair, Celebration of the National Holiday

At 4:00 a.m. the ship's cannon shot eight salutes, and the bells sounded in honor of the new day, the seventy-sixth anniversary of the United States of America—from New York Bay to the far coast of the Pacific which was still in deep sleep. According to the written orders of the Captain the whole ship population, passengers and crew, should be dressed in their Sunday best and enjoy brotherly unity. The meals would be especially good with fireworks for the evening. At midday there was a commanding call from the ship's bell again and obligatory toasts. Some sailors were atop the highest masts or hanging on a boom. Flags of all

colors and sizes by the dozens were all over. Lunch was at 1:00 p.m., rich with three different wines, champagne, etc.

The main meal was at 4:00 p.m. with extremely splendid food, extra Bordeaux, Rudesheimer wine, and champagne again—enough and as much as you wanted. There were speeches and toasts in colorful exchanges. Our honorable "Count von Augsburg" [von Brentano] spoke with great excitement about being saved from the iceberg's death, and for the enjoyment of this country and freedom < >⁸⁶ My toast went like this: "A real homeopath allows only a few drops of spirits and liquor, but for the health of America and our respective company, I will offer a full glass like a thorough allopath." Our Xavier, completely happy, took an empty bottle and called out: "For big men, of the big land, a big bottle." He received roaring applause. The captain told a short history of America and gave three cheers to the ladies. One of them went to the piano and played a couple of pieces. Everybody then went to the upper deck for some dancing, where some young people were playing the flute and harmonica. Mr. Kraft did a comedy < > Our Tyrolean group was quite timid and played the role of spectators. Only the Swiss and the people from Baden were filled with the "spirits" and were less inhibited < >

All attention started to move toward the fireworks because we could see the preparations. At 7:30 p.m. it was dark enough so the bell called people together again. The sailors created groups all across the deck, on starboard as well as on the other sides. < > The drum called for attention, and the bell called one last time before the rockets whizzed to the sky—brilliant, colorful displays with a breathtaking finale. The display on the wide ocean was a beautiful welcome for the fourth of July celebration. Another sailboat passed by, a non-American one. Too bad they could not join us.

After 9:00 p.m. the last streamers went dark, and as a second finale the cannons on board shot fifty times. Even the old *Washington* could have thought it was being attacked. After the end [of the festivities] on the upper deck, we went down to the parlor to continue the celebration with punch, more champagne, lemonade, and sugar cookies. Glasses were filled again and all kinds of toasts began again. Everybody had to sing or say something. Mr. von Brentano gave the captain a great compliment about the lush evening parties. We wanted to thank the captain for his great kindness. We will greet New York tomorrow, even if it is still 600 miles or a three-day trip away. Then the captain directed the toast requests to the Tyrolean gentlemen. Xavier sang a Tyrolean

⁸⁶ "Caret marks indicate parts omitted by the translator."

chanson⁸⁷ and I sang another Tyrolean song with a great yodel to it and got loud applause. At 11:00 p.m. the great party was over, and some went up for a final walk on deck to admire the great star-filled sky. I walked the deck until 12:00 a.m. while others still danced below.

July 6, 1852, Day 19, Fair, a most beautiful morning

It deserves mention that at yesterday's celebration the captain had the courtesy to seat the nuns with the other ladies in the upper parlor, instead of having them—the only women—sit in the middle of our men's circle. Their immediate companions were two ladies from Philadelphia who spoke fluent German without, however, being Germans themselves. This morning we had a magnificent sunrise, coming out of the endless waters like a majestic queen of the light. Its golden rays were mirrored to eternity in the quiet ocean waters, right up to our ship, as if she left a long train behind her. The wonder of this scene made me think of a deep alpine lake with a white swan passing through under the rounded sky, as if ready for a painter. Or a better explanation—like a wild duck with its tail-feathers curled, in spite of the hunter hiding in the rocky bay. The colorful display was a reward for all the troubles and aches of the passage across the ocean from Bremen onward, and for the trials from wild Neptune.⁸⁸

For the first time Xavier spent time on the deck, at a little table in the smoke room, writing about his excitement and pleasure in a letter to his brother, Konrad—to be sent back to his home as soon as we touch land and can go to the mailbox—to prove that the ocean passage did not cost the life of anybody. I also used the calm to write my report to Rev. Prelate in Wilten and to my confrere Adalbert⁸⁹ in Sac-Prairie.⁹⁰ Of course, in the report to Wilten it was noted that since the departure from Southampton our Tyrolean Group had survived hardship. Now with only a few days away from American soil, they are all full of excitement and will soon forget all of the hard times. An exact description and the danger of the icebergs needed to be recorded too, to be read at mealtime to all of the [community members] back home. This would be an interesting account of mission life.

⁸⁷ Similar to a cabaret song.

⁸⁸ Discovered in 1846, the planet Neptune is said to have the highest winds in the solar system. In Roman mythology, Neptune is the god of water and the sea.

⁸⁹ Adalbert Inama, O. Praem., one of the earliest Wilten missionaries in North America, having arrived as early as 1842 in southwestern Wisconsin. Gärtner joined him in 1846. Halder, see Part I, 70 ff.

⁹⁰ An early settlement in Wisconsin where the Wilten Premonstratensians began their pastoral work in North America. Today, Prairie du Sac is a village with slightly over 3,000 inhabitants.

Our position today: 41.53 latitude, 64.4 longitude, at 223 knots. At 1:00 p.m. we saw two small whales so near to us that we could see them spouting water. A larger one showed up a little later, but much further away. We really only saw his black back appearing above the water. In the evening around 10:00 p.m. we saw a magnificent display of the Northern Lights. Their rays spanned the whole width of the horizon, and the magic light spread all across the sky. We saw the stars through the curtain, ever more brilliant in the golden nimbus of the gods. Our Mr. Baron [von Brentano]—a knight of Pegasus—recited some poems about the trip, to the enjoyment of the passengers. The captain contributed a couple of bottles of champagne and some of the men had trouble reaching their cabins in the lower deck.

July 7, 1852, Day 20, Fair with fog

A young Italian, Nicolo, had a young lively Turkish girl with him on the voyage. She was at times too attached to certain gentlemen which angered the fiery, jealous Nicolo. This morning at 3:00 p.m. there was a loud argument between them and the people in the nearby cabins heard him slap her. Today the Turkish girl did not appear on deck but stayed in her cabin. Our Xavier, free of sea sickness for some days, was on the upper deck early enjoying the beautiful morning. He thought it would be good to ask for a glass of Madeira for himself and his two companions, Sr. Walburga and Sr. Maura, who accepted since it was the last full day of the voyage. I brought out the last bottle and joined them in a little drink of this marvelous stomach elixir. A lady from Vienna asked me to come to the first-class cabins to help her child who had a very sore throat. A dose of Aconite⁹¹ helped quickly, and she thanked me very much in public.

Today at 12:00 p.m. the captain did not give the location, since Long Island already appeared on the horizon and we would surely get there before evening. We saw a couple of sailboats, and passed the *Constellation*, a large three-mast sailing ship from Liverpool with many emigrants on board, mostly Norwegians. Three mighty "Hurrahs" came from them and were returned with vigor.

While all this happened, tips for the crew members of the *Washington* were solicited. I gave \$4.00 for us two priests, \$3.00 for the three nuns, \$5.00 for our Tyrolean people. At dinner the money was given to the

⁹¹ A homeopathic herbal remedy for sudden illness, aches, colds, coughs, sore throat, flu, chills and fever. It belongs to the genus *Aconitum*, of the buttercup family, having irregular flowers usually in loose clusters, including species with poisonous and medicinal properties.

crew members and Mr. von Brentano gave a short “Thank You” speech to the captain, who responded jokingly: “We have moved slowly, but surely.” I composed a canzonet⁹² for the poor Welsh boy who played his violin at the meal. He played it and received quite a good response. And a very beautiful silver coin was placed in the plate that circulated for him.

At 8:00 p.m. the captain threw a punch party for the folks in third class. The impertinent Jews quickly rushed to the bowl, and the less assertive people were left behind. The captain did not get much applause for this, but heard a good deal of grumbling about the audacity of the Jewish group whose main goal seemed to be to make things difficult. The captain had to give another party for our group as appeasement for not arriving at the bay of New York today. Many toasts were spoken and sung, which thundered like ocean sounds. Xavier recited “The Leather Fox.” My words were: “Long live the captain!” and the ending of an English song: “Let come the moment of welfare therein,” and “True friendship remaineth in the pearling wine.” The thoughtful Sr. Benedicta remembered the toast I had suggested to her earlier, “to the young girls of America,” but unfortunately she pronounced it wrong. Instead of saying “youth” which sounded almost like “Jud” and could have given offense, she changed it quickly to “yauth” and made everyone laugh, since it then alluded to kissing. After the evening party, we had a last walk on the deck—under the star-covered sky—until midnight.

July 8, 1952, Fair, New York Harbor

Our last morning on the vast ocean was full of beauty and warmth. At 5:00 a.m., the much-awaited pilot came on board the old *Washington* to guide us safely along the coast of Long Island, where we were already welcomed with much applause. What seemed like a detour in waters that were quite calm, prolonged the real entrance into the beautiful bay of the world-renowned city of New York, a city protected from the outside by two impressive forts. Then the bay opened up to the beautiful landscape of Staten Island, full of spectacular sights—forests, fields, villages, cities and bays. Our steamer stayed to the left of Staten Island, in order to stop at the medical island and show the papers verifying that there was no dangerous sickness on board.

Once we got [to Staten Island], a rumor spread fast that on the national holiday [Fourth of July] the over-loaded pier, with masses of people, collapsed and cost the lives of thirty people. With heavy hearts

⁹² A short, lighthearted song, the most popular of the lighter secular forms of this period in Italy and England and perhaps in Germany as well.

we awaited the last part of the trip, but our spirits lifted with the beautiful view of thousands of sailboats of all kinds—back and forth, up and down—looking like a busy ant-hill on water. Xavier and the nuns found the view very picturesque—the magic of the bay with the high buildings in the background, with its blowing flags of all colors, the billowing sails beyond number, the high-rising smoke clouds of the steam boats, the whole mix of busy working people. We finally had the renowned city of New York in front of our eyes.

Only the red spire of Trinity Church stood out amidst the mix of sailing ship masts and the immense circular Castle Garden,⁹³ a giant fort. As we slowly approached [the giant fort], we saw that it was connected via a bridge to the attached park. There were barriers to keep the immigrants away from the claws of rogues who try to steal money and merchandise from the travelers through underhanded means and lies—sometimes also their freedom. There was a pier at Castle Garden for the travelers from Europe who were sponsored by people in the United States, where the ship could unload people and goods. Without haste, a commissioner received the people and their belongings, and placed them in the large rooms of the fort until the next part of their trip was confirmed. If these newcomers don't know where to proceed from here, the commissioner will tell them or look for a friend of theirs. If the newcomers adhere to these instructions, no one will take advantage of them. Of course, it also depends on other things—trains, sicknesses, etc.—whether or not they will reach their destinations. Or they are dependent upon other circumstances until they finally do succeed to get to their destination.

At 9:30 p.m. our great steamer *Washington* moved closer, turned left and searched for its usual pier to make its way between two already anchored ships. The left rope was thrown out and the dock workers pulled it to the mooring post, but it broke due to the immense weight. It had to be done again, this time successfully. At once, a large bridge was dropped from the boat, and the people who were waiting approached to meet their acquaintances with a happy reception. A huge mix of people emerged with handbags, suitcases and boxes of all kinds. Some had already taken hold of the big piano forte, and loaded it up with all kinds of packages. The suitcases which could be opened were already inspected on board, and could be taken. But all the crates from the hold of the ship were brought to the customs house to get the necessary customs check and to pay the custom dues. And you needed a \$1000 worth of luck to find the right crates with your boxes. There were two

⁹³ America's first official immigration center, Castle Garden, welcomed over ten million immigrants to New York from 1830 until 1892, the year Ellis Island opened.

boxes from Vienna for me with especially important things, but due to some difficulties I will only receive them in a few days by paying thirty percent of their value in taxes. There was also difficulty with a precious item, the pastoral cross from Munich for his Eminence the Bishop of Milwaukee. The difficulty could only be resolved by writing a letter and receiving the item some weeks later. In the meantime, I had to ask my charges for more patience, and not to get off board. Mr. von Brentano and the three nuns wanted to get off board and go to their quarters.

Finally, relief came for my “crew” when I got them from the ship. Mr. von Brentano went to the Ligourians⁹⁴ on third street, and the nuns went to the Shakespeare Hotel⁹⁵ on William Street, along with the others in our group and their suitcases. This location was suggested to Mr. von Brentano by people from Munich. We got something to eat in a place where they say, “Help yourself,” and immediately afterwards “Eat as much as you can.”⁹⁶ The first meal in America tasted quite good and raised hopes for future days to come. The sleeping quarters left something to be desired, because they had rooms set up with beds for two people. But the nuns in the next room were more comfortable and seemed quite content.

While the people of higher rank [from the ship], on America’s free soil for the first time, freely enjoyed a rich meal in lively company, my situation was such that I should not waste my time in the same way. Rather, I needed to get on with my urgent business because every day of an unnecessary stay would be hard on my money bag and infect it with wasting fever. I left my charges to themselves, but not without cautioning them not to go into crowds in the streets because many dangers are lurking there, especially for such “greenhorns.” Every rogue can recognize newcomers and try to take advantage of them.

My next stop was at Pearl Street, the other side of Broadway, to go to the merchant counter of Kölker and Möllmann, number 96, to which I was sent from Bremen. But on the way I got thirsty and stopped at the “Stuttgarter Hof” for a glass of beer to “strengthen my heart”— which was necessary. I also had to do some bank business for London, hoping that the deposits had arrived already. Mainly, I had to check on the two Tyrol crates sent from Bremen, whose value was of great importance to me. Hopefully, tomorrow I will find out more about them.

⁹⁴ The Redemptorists.

⁹⁵ By the year 1840, the leading German hostelry in New York City was the Shakespeare Hotel. The location of the hotel, according to the author consulted here, was Duane Street north William Street. It was the meeting place of professional men, freethinkers, politicians and the headquarters of revolutionary propaganda during the German uprisings of 1848 to 1850. The hotel’s charge was \$3.50 to \$4.00 a week for room and board. See Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse U 1994) 89.

⁹⁶ Probably a cafeteria.

As soon as I was finished, I got into a bus and drove about three-fourths of a mile north on Chatham Street, to find Mr. von Brentano at the Ligourian [house] and to talk to Father Rector about the three nuns, who had to get from here to Pennsylvania. Father Boniface had given an order in reference to the three nuns to Father Rector Miller, but he did not pay much attention to me when I arrived.⁹⁷ Then on Second Street I visited Fr. Ambrose who was sick, but improving, and was invited to stay with him. I told him, however, that in appreciation of the help of Mr. von Brentano, I would accept the offer to spend the night at the Ligourians. There I was shown to a room in the newly constructed building behind the majestic church which enclosed a little garden. I had to have a good strategy to let my people know about my stay here instead of the Shakespeare [Hotel], so that they would not fear that I had been a victim of the very thing against which I had warned them.

THE STAY IN NEW YORK

I did not have to worry. My “youngsters” were ready to fly. Excitedly, they talked about the miraculous things they had seen as they drove on Broadway, and the traffic jams in the small streets leading to Broadway—this lower part of the city, where there is so much traffic. The expansive park near the capitol was very impressive. They had never seen anything like it. In the evening a bus brought me back to Third Street for a small meal. After that we had a party with much conversation. < >⁹⁸

July 9, 1852, Fair

The night was quite noisy, and the morning seemed far away. At 7:00 a.m. I said Holy Mass in the beautiful church of the Ligourians and thanked [God] for our arrival in this country. After [Mass] I began a discussion with Father Rector about how the three nuns could be transported to Father Boniface at St. Vincent. The decision was to telegraph St. Vincent. After that I made a short visit to Father Ambrose at

⁹⁷ Volume 3 of the diary (allegedly written in 1858) makes no mention of Boniface Wimmer in this entry. The insertion made here is from volume 4 which Halder believes was written during the journey in 1852. See fn. #9, of Part I. The diary versions’ differences here add to the complexity about why Benedicta Riepp and her companions were not met upon their arrival in New York.

⁹⁸ Two or three sentences follow here, with a reference to “Norbert House, the fifth place of our honorable Order.” The context of the reference is difficult to decipher and translate.

St. Nicholas Church⁹⁹ in the lower town, and also spoke with Möllmann, Kaufmann's friend, about this. We then went to the agency and the clerk told us that St. Vincent does not have a [telegraph] station. I was told that there was no other solution than to take the chance and send the nuns by train via Philadelphia to St. Vincent, giving them the necessary information in writing.

Before doing that, I went to Möllmann's office and checked again on the crates from London, being transported on the ship *Amaranth*, which were supposed to arrive within the next couple of days. I wrote out the order to receive the crate from Unkraut which was on the ship and to have it sent to Graml & Härtel in Milwaukee. I also had to complete some money matters. I had two checks to cash and received \$520 in gold pieces.¹⁰⁰ Since the money was a bit heavy for my leather bag, I hid it in the foot of my boots where no thug would be able to take it away from me.

When I got back to my "troops" I found them quite happy. We went to Pier III and the old *Washington* to receive our baggage, but the process did not go quickly. All the crates had not yet been unloaded and there was much shuffling and pushing. It took great patience until I got the idea to slip a dollar into the hand of the clerk, asking him to make a list of our crates and to arrange them for us. By evening we had the correct list. My group was relieved and we had some dinner. Later I went to Broadway to visit Father Alexander at the Franciscan Church, but he was with his Eminence, the Archbishop, on personal matters. He would not be home before evening. The waiting was not too difficult since the housekeeper had come over here on the same boat [with me] on the last trip. When Father Alexander finally arrived, he had a surprise letter for me from my confrere, Adalbert, dated June 25. He was glad that I was back in the states and had great hopes for more money. <> I then asked Father Alexander to exchange the money from my boots and to send it to him. I asked for a receipt, since it was required. He also took the letters [to be mailed] to Innsbruck from his confrere, Father Ambrose, and from a Capuchin missionary, Father Colombo. I also wanted him to send my letters to confreres in Cincinnati, as well as the Jesuit College in Fordham. Of course, I had to stay overnight and we talked about home until midnight.

⁹⁹ St. Nicholas, founded in 1833, was the oldest German church in the Diocese of New York. The growing number of German immigrants some years later necessitated a larger church, and in 1848 a Gothic Revival building was erected. By mid-twentieth century, the demographics had changed on the Lower East Side, resulting in the discontinuance of church services and the parochial school. St. Nicholas Church was sold in 1960 and demolished.

¹⁰⁰ He actually refers to the gold pieces as "gold eagles."

July 10, 1852, Fair

Yesterday during my waiting for Father Alexander I was asked to do a Baptism by the godfather of a baby. Father Alexander insisted I have the money for the Baptism, so I had to take it. This morning at 6:00 a.m. I went in haste to the Shakespeare Hotel to get my group to go to Pier III to get our crates from the *Washington*, which the clerk had assembled. The two items from Vienna were treated as merchandise and had to go to the public warehouse. I unpacked the chalice and missal for the nuns. We now had to get on the good side of the customs clerk, to tell him that all of the material was only immigration material. However, on his first test the "Cerberus"¹⁰¹ gripped some toy, showed it to me and asked: "Are you a father of boys?" and I answered: "Over fifty in my college." But then he found another toy and laughed with a sneer: "And do your boys play with dolls?" What could I say? Like a fox in a trap, I told him with the most innocent expression that the nuns under my tutelage also have a school for girls and these toys are meant for them. But he did not accept my explanation, and said that this box had to go to the customs office where the import duties were to be paid. I had to smile at this "game" for being treated like a smuggler. Only the gods might know how this would end.

Next it came to the boxes of the nuns, which were secured with steel screws, and had to be opened. I had the idea of just ripping open the top to make it easier for the "Cerberus" to get in, but the splinters cut his skin bloody and "God dammit" came out of his mouth. When he pulled the first item out—it was a wooden spoon—he laughed "like hell" and just threw it overboard. The crèche crate was not there. In the meantime, I showed him the address of the nuns and pacified the examiner with the statement that these crates really were "women's stuff."

Lunchtime was long past and the crates had not yet been correctly closed for further transport. So, it took some more work before I was allowed to leave and moisten my dried-out lungs with a glass of beer, while the others in my group were comfortably stretched out on their beds and I could hear them snoring away. The decision was made to leave the day after tomorrow at the latest, provided the last two crates would arrive from Tyrol on the ship *Amaranth*. This delay was too much for Sister Benedicta and she proposed to leave on that very evening. So I went to the Schultz's agency (at Greenwich corner) to buy the three

¹⁰¹ The use of this word here is metaphorical—an allusion to Greek mythology, wherein Cerberus is a three-headed dog that guards the entrance to Hades, the world of the dead. Even today "Cerberus" is often used allegorically to describe a person who is a particularly fierce or strict guard.

tickets to Hollidaysburg via Philadelphia for \$17.50. Xavier and Joseph went to get Walburga and Maura at the hotel. A carriage brought the nuns to the steamer, *Amboy*. However, the ship had left before our carriage got there, luckily without their baggage. I asked to store their baggage at the pier. After a dock agent took their things and locked them up, they returned to the hotel.

I had to go back to the Schultz agency again and asked them to change the tickets for a Monday departure. At that time I decided to get our tickets to the West: eight tickets at \$7.00 each, to Milwaukee, including baggage. I increased the baggage to 100 pounds each, (instead of 50). They did not want to accept that weight change at the station, so I had to threaten with an official poster to warn other parties about the swindle in the agencies. A visit from an agency clerk allowed us go as we had wished.

The crates were packed on a river steamer to go up the Hudson River to Albany, the capital of New York. Among these masses of people, a man in a brown coat used the people to his advantage and tried to get my briefcase. But before he could get away, I caught his collar and pushed him to the ground. I pulled him across the road, to a place with beams and other goods, and yelled to give the briefcase back. Instead he pulled out some money to exchange with \$50.00 counterfeit bills. He cut himself with an open knife in the briefcase and let out a hellish scream that alarmed the passersby. But my hand was still on his collar. A policeman walked up and grabbed me first, but understood quickly what was happening. I told the policeman that everything was OK—that I had returned some false money to the man. At the end I gave the would-be-robber a solid kick in the a__. Whether the policeman went after the man in the brown coat is very doubtful, since he had been punished already. Then I had to follow the baggage transport to the pier. Finally my team and I went to the hotel and had a good dinner for once in two days. The night was not very peaceful with a fire alarm in the streets and all the other noise.

July 11, 1852, Cloudy, Feast of St. Norbert

To celebrate the feast of this, the patron of our Order, I led the caravan on foot to the Church of St. Nicholas on Second Street, where the three nuns, the Servites, and Weinhart went to confession while I celebrated my Mass in honor of our patron—after which Xavier did the same. At 8:00 a.m. Father Ambrose had Holy Mass for the people with the organ and singing and communion. Poor Sr. Walburga got sick and

wished to be brought back to the hotel. I accompanied her and the others to the horse-drawn streetcar that goes to Chatham Street and stops at the Capitol Square. The short distance to Greenwich Street had to be done by foot. There was no opposition. Then Xavier and I went over to the Ligourian Church and listened to the sermon with a very poignant theme: “Misery and War”—the certain results are lies, deception, force, murder, revenge and bloody persecution. A very sad forecast.

After that I contacted Father Rector in reference to the three nuns, since Father Boniface had ordered to keep him updated. The Rector promised all due care. Both of us then went over to Father Alexander on Thirty-Third Street for a visit. He insisted that we had to be his lunch guests. The bacon dumplings, beer and wine were very good, as was everything else. Vespers was held at 3:00 p.m. and we sang the “Pange Lingua” at the end, which is being done a lot here. When Father Alexander was about to finish he went up to the altar and announced that I, Gärtner, would give the second part of the sermon, as I had done last year. I was confused and irritated about this sudden, unforeseen invitation but that made no difference. I went up to the pulpit and the theme was already set. I resumed speaking about the courage needed by Catholics against radical and godless people. I spoke a whole hour and all listened with rapt attention. After the sermon I spoke briefly about my mission trip and asked for the prayer of the community for a successful mission. Father Alexander clapped his hands when I came from the pulpit, as he thought that my fiery speech was a great success. < > Xavier said, with some applause, it would take only a couple of months in New York to prepare him for the mission life. But I stopped him and said that he is assigned to St. Norbert’s and not New York.¹⁰² Xavier then said that even this comradeship would not allow him to stay here. To avoid any more temptations, he resolved to leave and went to the bus station on Broadway to return to the hotel. I stayed here since there was no place for me at the hotel. Father Alexander smiled and opened his residence to me. During dinner we talked about Xavier and the crates from Tyrol. I took a bath in a stone tub which was very soothing and restful.

July 12, 1852, Fair

At 6:00 a.m. I said Holy Mass in honor of the day when we started our first trip from Wilten, Austria [departure from Augsburg to Bremen]. A terrible thunderstorm broke out and the rolling thunder was possibly

¹⁰² Both diary volumes are unclear about whether Father Alexander actually asked Father Xavier to stay with him for some time to help out.

a bad omen for the rest of the day. After breakfast my plan was to check where the crates from Tyrol were. If they would not be here yet, it would be up to Xavier to decide if he wanted to stay with Father Alexander or leave it up to me to decide what to do—that is, whether to continue the trip to the West. The crates had valuable contents: monstrances, chalices, vestments, my clothes etc. For all of this a thirty-percent customs fee would have to be paid if the ownership of the person could not be directly proven. It would be worth it to sacrifice a couple more days for one person, and then have that person catch up to the main travel group later. Father Alexander liked that idea and we agreed that Xavier would stay here along with a schoolteacher from Westphalia—Heidkamp—who came to the hotel in the afternoon. Xavier could show him the city.

Following this plan I began to say my “goodbyes.” I did not want to forget the money I had deposited with Father Alexander. I did that immediately, but the Man of God shook his head as if he did not know anything about it. Looking me in the eyes, he asked for proof that he had my money. I pulled out the portfolio from my breast pocket and looked for the receipt. When I unfolded it he tried to pull it out of my hands, but did not succeed. Suddenly his face changed and he laughed out loud and said: “I don’t think you understand what I was trying to do here. Never trust a man with your money—not even your best friend—without giving him written instructions about what to do with the money later.” I nearly had to say he was right, but I was too embarrassed that I needed such a lesson. He immediately gave me the money and I was one experience richer. We said our “goodbyes” and parted good friends. By the way—I did not tell anybody about that incident, in order to protect Father Alexander and me. I paid our bill at the hotel and asked for an extra-large roast beef [sandwich] for our trip to Albany.

When I returned to the lower city, I found my people happily together and told them about the necessary stay of Xavier with Father Alexander. He would procure the two missing Tyrolean crates, in case they still had not arrived. They understood, and Xavier asked for travel money which he received. We asked the agent at Kölker and Möllmann, but the crates had not yet arrived. I left the order about the two crates with Xavier. However, Xavier was still not sure about the plan, and we told him he could come with us or stay here.

We had lunch at the Shakespeare Hotel with Mother Benedicta [and her nuns]. The nuns would be taken to the train station by a lay brother assigned by the Rector, who came to help us in the general confusion. Money matters were taken care of and accepted [by the nuns] with much gratitude. They promised they would offer up three Holy Communions

as a “thank you” for our help. Mr. von Brentano paid back the money I lent him, and we said “good bye” until we would see one another again. I paid all of the costs at the hotel. At 4:00 p.m. [the nuns] were on their ferry and it was time for us to prepare for our departure. Bruno and I rode to pier ten on the baggage cart. The others had to walk. They wanted an extra fee again for overweight. I protested and went to the office, and they wrote out the weight—all too high for the travelers. Two workers from the steamer, *Washington*, showed up and wanted \$5.00, but received only \$2.00. I asked him if the money was bloody, but he still held out his hand. Xavier was upset because Father Alexander’s teacher did not want to go with us and threw the ticket on the ground. He thought it was treason on our part to force him. I told him he could come with us or leave. It was up to him. He and Xavier left without even waiting for our ferry to leave. Our crates were loaded on the ferry, and we departed up the Hudson at 6:00 p.m. We saw rich houses along the shoreline, and the railroad was on our right. The nuns had departed on their train trip at 5:00 p.m., bound for Youngstown via Philadelphia. It was a wonderful evening.

The Last Page of the Diary, Book #3

The last page of this diary is being written. My report about the remarkable happenings in the dear European Fatherland took up quite a bit of space, and I will—as God wills—start book four, since this book three has such a splendid ending—with setting foot on this American soil for the second time, as already six years earlier. May I have the necessary leisure in free and solitary evening hours to write an account that is simple, true, not made up, without a trace of pride, and without counting on any recognition of the work. May I then again emphasize the essential point that here [in America] the high and holy enterprise of God and his holy church is worth every sacrifice in order for it to take hold in the hearts of the faithful and to provide it with a happy entrance into the hearts of those people of good will.

EPILOGUE TO THE DIARY IN TRANSLATION

The diary reads like an adventure which required tremendous risk and sacrifice on the part of three women as they stood on the threshold of the rigors of missionary life in the so-called “new world.” It also corrects some previously held notions about what happened on that historic trip. It is important to return to that one “particularly puzzling” question raised

at the beginning of this article: Why had no preparations been made to receive the three Eichstätt Sisters upon their arrival in New York harbor? There is ample evidence when one considers the whole diary account that Boniface Wimmer was careful to place the Sisters in the charge of a seasoned missionary, Rev. Gärtner, and that they were well taken care of on the entire journey. As for the circumstances of their arrival in New York, Gärtner indicates that Wimmer had been in communication with the Rector of the Ligourian House. Recall that in the diary entry for July 8, Gärtner reported that "Father Boniface had given an order in reference to the three nuns to Father Rector Miller," and in the July 11 entry Gärtner states that he contacted the Rector "in reference to the three nuns, since Father Boniface had ordered to keep him updated. The Rector promised all due care." Boniface Wimmer, himself, was not in New York to greet Benedicta Riepp and her companions upon their arrival, and this circumstance has been long interpreted as a lack of sensitivity on his part. But Gärtner's diary vindicates him on this account, as it seems he had been careful to delegate this responsibility in his absence.

Given the above re-interpretation and a variety of other fascinating details, the discovery of Gärtner's diary presents a long-awaited revision of the first chapter in the history of Bavarian Benedictine women in the United States. After 160 years, a new version of the arrival story can be told—a story about pioneer Benedictine women who risked a perilous journey, without counting the cost, for the sake of the establishment of the Benedictine way of life among women in North America.

The translation of Gärtner's diary is offered as a contribution to the documentary history of the founding of Benedictine women in North America. The value of a primary source such as this cannot be underestimated in a story that still remains fragmentary and tentative at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Why this discovery now, it may be asked? Perhaps Divine Providence has been at work to provide a renewed message of courage in this, yet another challenging era of transition and radical change for Benedictine women in North America. The courageous spirit of the Bavarian Benedictine foundresses lives on, and calls for a renewed willingness on the part of Benedictine women today to risk and sacrifice for the sake of a gospel mission that always surpasses ordinary human effort.