the “traditional” midnight Mass. It would be the Capuchins at St. Francis parish who would begin the celebration of the Lord’s Nativity at midnight in 1882. In 1895, Archbishop Katzer reluctantly gave permission for the Sinsinawa Dominicans to celebrate midnight Mass (although he insisted that “no seculars be permitted” to attend and no one could receive communion). Nonetheless, the custom, fanned by the Victorian roman-

ticization of Christmas, became a desideratum of local Catholics, and by 1904 Archbishop Sebastian Messmer gave his permission to extend this mode of celebration to the rest of the archdiocese’s parishes.169

One celebration that distinguished German Catholics was the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi. Held on the Thursday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity, the most elaborate form of this celebration involved an outdoor procession with the Blessed Sacrament, accompanied by music, children strewing rose petals, vested servers and parish organizations marching in procession to three separate altar shrines where Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament would be given. The first one described in Milwaukee took place at St. Mary’s Church in 1851 and used a modified form of the celebration consisting of a novena of Masses, litanies, and religious ceremonies within the church. The Capuchins introduced the practice of the procession using their own ample grounds and drafting the brown-hatted and bearded young friars to perform the liturgical chanting to add solemnity to the event.

Other German churches, priests and institutions will be highlighted in this study, but the role of the clergy and the German influence of the seminary were pervasive. So also was the role of the sisters.

The German Sisterhoods:
Franciscan Sisters of Penance and Charity
Three groups of German sisters came to Wisconsin in the founding period and rose to

high prominence in Wisconsin Catholic life: the Franciscan Sisters of Penance and Charity, the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Racine Dominicans. Each of these sisterhoods was born in the religious revival of early 19th century Germany, and all of them came to have a defining influence on some very important areas of diocesan life.

The first group, eventually known as the Franciscan Sisters of Penance and Charity, began as a mixed community (men and women) of devout, even apocalyptic, communitarians, caught up in the full sway of German Romanticism. They were drawn together by a popular parish priest, Joseph Keppler, and his assistant Matthias Steiger, and on December 8, 1848, were formed as a lay Franciscan brotherhood and sisterhood in Ettenbeuren, Bavaria, a small town on the Kammback River, 25 miles west of Augsburg. Keppler and Steiger were taken with dreams of a commune in America and drew a farmer’s daughter, Ottilie Dir, to the association. She entered into an arranged and chaste marriage with Joseph Zahler of the group. Through the good offices of the Ludwig-Missionsverein Henni agreed to welcome them to Milwaukee in 1849. On June 11, 1849, these Tertiaries purchased from Heinrich and Eva Gross 35.67 acres of a small property called by the Indian name “Nojoshing” for $1,000. Immediately the group set to work to develop the property, building separate cottages for the brothers and the sisters. Ottilie Zahler became “Mother Aemiliana” and Keppler and Steiger helped support the community by providing liturgical service to surrounding communities. Keppler served as the local priest at nearby New Coeln, where a community of Germans had helped create St. Stephen’s Church. Steiger also rendered service in early Wisconsin, and for a year served as chaplain to the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Baltimore. When he returned he started a church on Beloit Road called “Holy Cross,” but it would later be renamed for his patron St. Matthias.

Tragedy befell the community. Keppeler finished building the new church at New Coeln and promptly succumbed to cholera in September 1851. A few days later Steiger died as well. In 1852, Henni then remanded the sisters (the brothers were slowly dying out) to the care of his close friend and confidant, Father Michael Heiss, newly returned from a two-year sick leave in Germany where he had served as chaplain to a convent of Visitation Sisters at Ditramzell, 25 miles south of Munich. Heiss attempted to impose order on the community by devising a religious rule, habit, and central leadership for the women under Mother Aemiliana Zahler. Their first work was to receive the care of German orphan boys who had initially been cared for by the Sisters of Charity and the School Sisters of Notre Dame. (The origins of St. Aemillian’s Orphanage will be covered later.) The
key work of the women’s community, however, soon became the housekeeping for the new diocesan seminary that rose on the grounds next to their early convent in 1856.

When St. Francis Seminary opened and Heiss assumed full-time duties as rector, he turned over the supervision of the community to Bavarian-born Father Leonard Batz, a faculty member. The history written by Franciscan Sister Eunice Hanousek, rather gently characterized Batz as “overzealous” in insisting on the details of their religious life. Benjamin Blied was more blunt when he suggested that Batz was “more devastating than cholera” to the sisters.\(^{171}\) Batz insisted on absolute obedience and demanded that the single women of the community either leave or be married. By 1860, the sister founders had had enough of Batz’s tyranny and they withdrew from the convent. This included Aemiliana Zahler who left her husband dumb-founded. Heiss was mortified by the departure and Batz lost his seminary professorship over the incident. Regretting his role in pushing the sisters to the limits, Batz then graciously made accommodations for them from his own considerable fortune. Known as the “Father Batz Sisters,” they remained at his side providing housekeeping help wherever he was. Ottillie/Aemiliana Zahler spent her final days with an offshoot of the community that opened a new motherhouse in La Crosse, dying in 1904. The male branch of the community continued to live on the grounds in the “brother house” (remodeled years later into the residence of the archbishop of Milwaukee). Joseph Zahler remained, pious, devout, and utterly irascible until his death in 1878. Other brothers remained as workers. One, Leo Seuss, ended his days with a similar lay community in St. Nazianz.

A new mother superior, Antonia Herb Zimmer, soon sought to get out from under the “condemnation” of seminary housekeeping and began asking Bishop Henni for permission to teach. Henni resisted, needing the small community to care for the seminary and insisting that they had no proper training to be school teachers. Zimmer persisted nonetheless and in September 1862 intensified her desire to “declare independence” of the regime at Nojoshing, and transferred the site of the community’s motherhouse (St. Colletta’s Convent) to the city of Jefferson in Walworth County. Eventually schools were given to Mother Antonia’s sisters. They provided teachers for St. Lawrence and St. John’s schools in Milwaukee. Teachers were also sent to Cross Plains, Janesville, Franklin, Germantown, and also to Watertown, Golden Lake, Fussville, Cazenovia, and Prairie du Chien. By 1871 the growing cadre of teaching sisters even had houses in Ohio. Eventually Mother Antonia decided to move the motherhouse to La Crosse, the jurisdiction of Bishop Michael
Heiss. A split developed among the sisters and the result was the separation of the congregation. Mother Antonia took a number of sisters to La Crosse where they renamed themselves the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and built a large convent on land donated to them. The sisters who remained at the seminary were the Franciscan Sisters of Penance and Charity, referred to henceforth in this work as the Franciscans of St. Francis.\(^{172}\)

**School Sisters of Notre Dame**

One of the largest and most influential of the German sisterhoods in Wisconsin, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, traces its origins to the 16\(^{th}\) century work of St. Peter Fourier. Their original founding was suppressed in the secularization of the revolutionary era. In the 1830s, the community was reconstituted under the leadership of Mother Teresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, and a new title, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, was bestowed on the foundation.\(^{173}\) A motherhouse was established in Munich and the sisters were first enticed to come to America by the Redemptorists, a male congregation of priests and brothers who had carved an important niche for themselves as ministers to the growing numbers of German immigrant Catholics in the United States. At some point, the sisters were taken into a Catholic colonizing scheme in rural southwestern Pennsylvania spearheaded by the company of Benziger and Eschback, a church goods supplier of Einsiedeln, Switzerland, that was given credibility by a protégé of Pope Pius IX, Baron von Schroeder. Additional enticement for the sisters was provided by the *Ludwig-Missionsverein*, which offered to pay their way over and support them in the colony, which by 1847 had about 200 families.

Gerhardinger and a cadre of sisters, including Sister Caroline Friess, then made the journey to the United States. After stopping briefly in Philadelphia to consult the Redemptorist provincial, John Neumann, (later the bishop), they made the arduous trip to the region. To their dismay, they found not the glowing city promised by Von Schroeder and the publicists, but a barely civilized swamp. Gerhardinger refused to begin a foundation there, but did leave sisters behind to teach in the school. She made her way back to Neumann, who offered her and the sisters a place in Baltimore near the Redemptorist parishes. The sisters remained in Baltimore, but a complex series of conversations and actions ensued that eventually caused them to relocate their motherhouse to Milwaukee.

In June of 1848, Neumann, Gerhardinger, and Friess journeyed by steamer and stage to Milwaukee to survey the prospects for a foundation there. Henni was on a trip to Europe when they came, but knowing of their visit, he used his opportunity in Europe to press for the sisters to come to Milwaukee. His first efforts were with the *Ludwig-Missionsverein*, which also assisted the sisters, urging the leaders of the organization to press the nuns to come to his diocese. The organization, through its general secretary Joseph Ferdinand Mueller, played an important role in urging the School Sisters to come to Mil-
waukeen, and paid many of their bills. By the time Henni got to Munich, Gerhardinger had returned from America, and he personally urged her to send sisters, suggesting that such an enterprise would win the assistance of King Ludwig of Bavaria. Henni continued to woo the nuns after his return. When the sisters in Baltimore lost their chaplain, Henni dispatched Father Matthias Steiger, one of the chaplains to the Franciscan Tertiaries in Nojoshing, to serve as chaplain for a year. In 1850, Gerhardinger agreed to move the general headquarters of her American foundation to Milwaukee under the leadership of Caroline Friess.¹⁷⁴

Friess, who had accompanied the group over in 1848, had taken to American conditions and worked hard to expand the community’s membership and teaching assignments throughout the East. Because the demands of school work often clashed with rigorous convent community and liturgical life, Caroline had also taken a strong hand in re-working the cloister-bound rules of the congregation to make them more responsive to the demands of an active life. She insisted, for example, that the sisters be permitted to attend Mass in parishes and not in the convent. She sought other mitigations of the exact letter of the European convent rule that would make it easier to serve the increasing number of parishes that the community was accepting. In pursuit of her plans, Friess made a controversial trip to the Munich motherhouse. Her major sin appeared to be the fact that she traveled without a companion, a clear violation of community regulations. When she arrived at the door of the convent, she was treated as a “fugitive” (the technical term to refer to someone who leaves their religious house without permission). After laying her case before Archbishop Ernest von Reisach of Munich, however, she convinced him of the purity of her motives and he pressed the reluctant Mother Teresa to receive her “erring daughter.” Her near defeat turned into victory and Gerhardinger not only agreed to the mitigation of convent rules, but gave Friess a broad grant of authority to act in her name by appointing her a vicar of the Superior General. The permission may have been tentative, because von
Reisach warned her “Now get back to America, or you will stay here altogether.”

Friess wasted no time. She secured additional help for her new plans when she agreed to escort Henni’s niece, Miss Agnes Casanova, back to America. By December 15, 1850, four School Sisters of Notre Dame arrived in Milwaukee with Casanova and were given hospitality by the Sisters of Charity. Few religious congregations had as soft a landing as they did. They moved into a house that had been purchased with the funds made available by King Ludwig I on Milwaukee and Knapp Streets. This would be the nucleus of one of the largest motherhouses of sisters in Milwaukee. By December 30, 1850, they had received their first recruit, Catherine Flasch, or Sister Mary Laurentia as she would be known, one of many religious vocations that would come from the very large and very Catholic Flasch family. By January 2, 1851, they had begun teaching the 130 pupils that had already been gathered at St. Mary’s parochial school. Friess soon added an annex to the small house. In October 1851, it became the home of St. Mary’s Institute, which welcomed resident and day students of all creeds. By 1864 she had encompassed the entire block bounded by Milwaukee, Jefferson, Knapp, and Ogden Streets. The huge convent that faced Milwaukee Street stood on that spot until its demolition in 1959.

Branch houses began to be founded—at first with limited personnel, but as the nexus of schools and convent “kicked in,” scores of young women poured into the Milwaukee motherhouse. Sisters added to their favor with the Milwaukee clergy by making altar linens and providing the delicate lace that stood inside tabernacle interiors. New houses appeared in Milwaukee (Holy Trinity School, 1854, and St. Joseph, 1860), Port Washington (1857), Watertown (1857), Kenosha (1858), Sheboygan and Lacrosse (1858), Burlington (St. Sebastian’s, 1860), Beaver Dam (St. Peter’s, 1862), Green Bay (St. Mary’s, 1862), St. Kilian (St. Kilian’s, 1867).

Friess wrote to her supporters at the Ludwig-Missionsverein in April 1858, “A decade has passed since our congregation was transplanted to America.... The tiny mustard seeds planted by our universally loved Mother General Mary Theresa of Jesus [Gerhardinger], warmed by the rays of divine grace, and supported by the generous donations from our unforgettable fatherland, is slowly bearing fruit.” Friess reported that the congregation had taken in 50 candidates, 24 novices, and had witnessed 11 sisters profess

The “House of Four Chimneys,” the site of the beginning of the School Sisters of Notre Dame Motherhouse

[ASND]
their vows.\textsuperscript{176} Their rising numbers suggest the importance of the heavy German immigration of the 1850s. Their strong presence and stable leadership allowed them to move forward quickly.

Mother Caroline’s ten-year report to the Bavarian mission society revealed many things about the German community’s adaptation to American soil. Seeking more money, she gave an account of the expansion of the community to New Orleans, Philadelphia, Rochester, and Detroit. “Here in Milwaukee and Wisconsin we still recognize our German country men,” she wrote appreciatively, and spoke tenderly of the goodness of those who presented themselves at the schools run by the sisters or who sought admission to the convent.\textsuperscript{177} However, she also noted immediately that among the “adversities and trials” faced by the congregation was the difficulty of getting American candidates habituated for the community, with their “exuberance for freedom,” to come around to “the voluntary renunciation of self-will” required by the Notre Dame way of life. “How difficult therefore,” she wrote, “the task to mold daughters of this free country into true religious!”\textsuperscript{178} But Friess was realistic. In dealing with the young girls who came to Notre Dame schools for instruction, the superior urged each teaching sister to “use her influence indirectly … on account of the attitude of the parents—who resent a fancied invasion of their authority … Compulsion must not be used.” Instead she urged a more gentle and easy-going approach to American pupils, “What cannot be achieved by kindness is unattainable, at least in the average case.”\textsuperscript{179} Henne appended a note to the request for funds, assuring the directors of the Missionsverein that Friess gave “a true picture of the situation” and lauding their work with the steadily increasing German population of the state.\textsuperscript{180}

Mother Caroline sat at the pivot of this expansion, and her own role as mother general of the community continued to grow. In many ways, her strength of character, her stability, and her ability to manage what eventually became an ethnically diverse and rapidly growing sisterhood made her one of the leading figures in the first generation of Catholic life in Wisconsin. Her contributions, although often cloaked behind a rhetoric of piety and “submission,” were clearly equal to those of most of the clergy and the equivalent in some respects of the bishops. Certainly only the bishops had both financial and administrative burdens equal to hers.

**Racine Dominicans**

Adding to the growing contingent of German sisterhoods was yet another Third Order group affiliated with one of the mendicant orders. This time it was the Dominicans. The Cloister of the Holy Cross in Regensburg was the site for a renewed presence of the German Dominican sisterhoods of the 19th century. The active and growing cloister was a part of the general religious reawakening of southern Germany after the Napoleonic era and the end of secularization. The sisters of this community had also formed a Third Order outreach and established a teaching sisterhood in Williamsburg, New York. The spearhead of
this renewed Dominican presence had been Mother Benedicta Bauer and her faithful companion, Thomasina Ginker.  

Like all strong leaders, Bauer had both inspired and created controversy. A long-fought lawsuit launched by a disgruntled former sister who had been expelled from the community by Bauer had eventually been decided against the Dominican prioress. In anger in 1859, she came to the United States “in exile” and began looking for a new life after the embarrassment and humiliation of Holy Cross. Her first stop, after a visit in Williamsburg, was to the diocese of Nashville, where Dominican Bishop James Whelan had invited her to come to establish a Catholic school program in his rural diocese. As with the experience of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Pennsylvania, the prelate’s glowing descriptions of life in Tennessee did not match the realities. Moreover, Bauer and Ginker, accustomed to the more bracing climate of Regensburg, found the heat and humidity of Nashville more than they could bear. Bauer next traveled to Green Bay and established a convent, pondering whether that would be the site of a new motherhouse. Through the work of a diocesan priest, Michael Diesenreider, the sisters were urged to share their plans with Bishop Henni. In 1863, at his urging, they opened a community house in the Lake Michigan port city of Racine. Another community was opened along Lake Michigan at Port Washington. But Racine was the location where Bauer decided to be “rooted,” and the community secured land on Racine’s south side near the German-speaking St. Mary’s Church. The land, marked out between 12th and Park Streets would be the site of a mother house that would dominate the south side of the city until it was torn down in 1973.

In 1865, Bauer accepted a school at the Norbertine stronghold of Roxbury, near Madison. When she died on October 13, 1865, she left behind a small but close-knit community that was already beginning to adapt the regulations of the cloistered Dominican life to the demands of a busy apostolate. Subsequent community leaders would steadily expand the ambit of the teaching sisterhood. Using the Catholic schools of Racine as their main base, the Dominicans eventually branched out to the Fox River Valley, near Madison, and into other areas in the diocese.
All of these Wisconsin sisterhoods established an ever-wider scope of Catholic visibility and influence in the state. Historian Florence Deacon has accentuated the social significance of religious sisterhoods in Wisconsin. Her study notes in great detail the major financial investments the sisters made in Wisconsin land and services. Further, as “autonomous women” they proved to be one of the most important outlets for women’s activism in early Wisconsin. Few Wisconsin women had as much control over financial assets, made decisions that affected hundreds of people and jousted as effectively with male church authorities as these nuns. In their teaching roles, sisters created the framework of the major system of Catholic schools in the state, and sometimes, in rural areas, they also taught in the emerging public school system.

A Wisconsin Holy Land:
Father Caspar Rehrl and the Sisters of St. Agnes

Caspar Rehrl, who would engage in church-planting north of Milwaukee, was born in Aigen, a suburb of Salzburg, Austria, in December 1809. Strong Catholic faith produced three vocations to the priesthood from the Rehrl family; and two of the brothers, Caspar and George, came to America. Caspar Rehrl was ordained to the priesthood on September 20, 1832, for the archdiocese of Salzburg. A prodigious intellect, Rehrl knew nine ancient and modern languages, held a doctorate in theology, and was a master of homoeopathic medicine. He served 10 years as an assistant in a Salzburg church, which prepared him for pastoral ministry. He came to maturity in the 1840s and like many German-speaking priests, Rehrl heard of the exploits of his co-religionists in far-off America. These accounts, popularized by the dramatic writing of people like Henni and Kundig, were circulated by the Leopoldinen Stiftung in Vienna and stirred Rehrl’s imagination.

Rehrl arrived in the United States in early 1845. After stays at New Orleans and St. Louis, he made straight for Wisconsin. Arriving in Milwaukee in May 1845, he met with Henni. “He [Rehrl] came unannounced and unexpected, but he was very welcome.” Henni assigned him to the districts north along the Milwaukee River. In August 1845, he offered Mass in the home of Alban Kent in Sheboygan. In September 1845, he arrived at
Johnsburg, where a church had begun under Father Constantine Carabin. Johnsburg became Rehrl’s base of operations, and he established a school where his brother George taught. From Johnsburg he fanned out over 170 miles to the north and west engulfing seven Wisconsin counties. In all he founded twelve churches and visited twenty parishes in Calumet, Fond du Lac, Sheboygan and Washington Counties.

In 1858 at Barton, Wisconsin, in Washington County, Rehrl began a young ladies society to assist him in catechetical work. He dedicated this group to the patronage of St. Agnes, an early Christian martyr, whose tomb he visited in Rome. The first three recruits were Katherine Goetz, Madgalene Hapfer, and Gertrude Rehberg. After a few months, they made a profession of vows for one year. Rehrl recruited mostly children and young teenagers for this new group. The next year, the Agnesian chronicle reports, “twelve children, ages 11 to 13 received the white veil, after a few months several of these children received the black veil.”

By 1860, the St. Agnes Society had 18 members. The chronicler further noted, “the rule was very defective and community life not well-ordered.” Rehrl did not closely supervise the young women and their religious training and formation was haphazard at best. Eventually, however, Rehrl began to come under some pressure from Bishop Henni and others to provide more of a regular structure of religious life (i.e., habit, rule, convent cloister, etc.) for this young group. At Henni’s urging, he agreed to allow the sisters to elect their own leader.

In 1864, four of the five sisters able to vote elected young 17-year-old Agnes Hazotte as their mother superior. Hazotte, a native of Buffalo, New York, had only entered the community the year before. She set to work and numbers began to grow. Before long the small band had accepted seven rural Catholic schools. Hazotte’s determination to keep the community alive led her to the spiritual care of the nearby Capuchins, who played a major role in the next phase of the community’s existence. Mother Agnes moved to Barton and attempted to work with Rehrl, and immediately conflict arose. Hazotte wished to
take more time to train and form young recruits to the community, but Rehrl insisted that they move quickly into new apostolates. "I did not establish a convent for contemplatives," he huffed to Hazotte, "but a pious Society to teach the ignorant." 187 As relations between Rehrl and his sisterhood grew increasingly tense, Rehrl's Austrian priest-friends, including Salzmann, urged him to disband the sisterhood.

Hazotte's "salvation" came from the nearby Capuchins. 188 In early 1870, she had met Father Francis Haas, one of the founders of the Order (more later) at a mission at St. Bridget's Church in Washington County. On this occasion she discussed her plight, and Haas urged her to move the community to a new location in Fond du Lac. In this small city there was a rail link, available land, and parishes that needed teaching sisters. Hazotte traveled to Fond du Lac, and received a warm reception from the pastor of St. Mary's (German) Church in the city. In June 1870, she purchased twelve city lots on East Division Street, which included a two-story frame house.

When this happened, Rehrl withdrew his support, and jurisdiction for the sisters reverted to Martin Kundig, vicar general of the diocese in charge of affairs while Henni was attending Vatican Council I. Viewing the relative disorganization and lack of structure of the Agnesians, Kundig ordered the sisters to spend no more money and contemplated the dissolution of the community due to the lack of a rule. Once again, at Hazotte's request, the Capuchins intervened. At a retreat in Barton in July 1870, Hazotte asked Father Haas to draft a rule that would be acceptable to diocesan authorities. Haas immediately set to work, extending the length of the retreat by a few days, and produced a written constitution that provided a framework for religious life for the community. Haas also argued with Kundig, who had actually shown up with a decree of dissolution, and assured him that he would oversee the community. The sisters themselves, now 32 in number, voted to accept the rule that Haas had hastily drafted during their community retreat. When Henni returned, he was not happy with the decision to continue the community, but allowed it to go forward. Some sisters remained with Rehrl at Barton.

Nonetheless, with the rule and the support of the more stable Capuchins, the sisters re-established themselves firmly in Fond du Lac, where they built a motherhouse, a sanitarium, a girls academy, and a hospital. In 1874, four sisters began work at St. Thomas parish in Beloit where their chronicle noted, "The parishioners were chiefly pioneers who had emigrated from Ireland .... The children were docile, humorous, and promising." 189 With these stable apostolic works the community soon settled into a healthy existence. In the meantime, the sisters devoted themselves heavily to the education of young people in the growing number of parishes in the Fond du Lac/Washington County area. The Agnesian presence was especially strong among the German-speaking communities of the region. German was spoken among the
sisters and was part of their common prayer life until the 1920s.

The Capuchins

The role of the Capuchins in the “rescue” of the Sisters of St. Agnes demonstrates the close links that existed among the religious communities of men and women in Wisconsin—especially among those who spoke German. This cooperative spirit existed to a lesser extent between religious order priests and diocesan priests. The most prominent German-speaking community of men in Wisconsin were the Capuchins, who established their American roots in the archdiocese of Milwaukee.

The Capuchin Order, a reform of the Franciscans, had been founded in Europe in the 17th century. Although various groups of Capuchins abroad thought of creating a Capuchin province in America, the task fell to two Swiss diocesan priests, Gregory Haas and John Frey. Haas had attended the University of Tübingen, and Frey completed his studies at the Benedictine house in Einsiedeln. The two met in 1850 at the University of Freiburg in Baden and the two of them began to share their mutual dreams of priestly service in mission lands. Capuchin historian Celestine Bittle characterized Haas, the elder, as more staid, conservative and reserved. Frey was younger, more voluble, and more willing to take risks. It would be Frey who would take most of the initiative in literally building the Capuchin presence in the United States.

Haas was ordained in his home diocese of Basle in 1851. Three years later, Frey was ordained by Henni’s old friend and mentor, Bishop Peter Mirer of St. Gall. While at a parish assignment in Sirmach in the Canton of Thurgau, Frey met a man who had temporarily returned from a visit to America. Enthused by the man’s descriptions of the American frontier, Frey supposedly asked if the Capuchin order was to be found over there. When he learned that it was not, he contacted Haas and another Swiss priest, Ferdinand Zuber, and the three decided to transplant the Capuchin Order to the United States.

The fact that they were secular priests and not even Franciscans did not deter them from approaching Capuchin Father Theodosius Florentini, who tried to dissuade them and urged them to work in their native Switzerland to reclaim “lost” Protestants. Temporarily dissuaded by Florentini’s arguments, they stayed for a time, but eventually their fervor for the project returned. They knew from Mirer about the needs of Henni’s new diocese in Wisconsin and they boldly went back to Florentini and asked him to inform Bishop Henni of their coming. Further plans were hatched at a conference in Zurich, where another possible cooperator, Aloysius Stocker, was invited to join the band. When the time came to actually cross the ocean, however, only Haas and Frey were able to