WHEATON FRANCISCAN SISTERS
Wheaton, Illinois

In 1872, Mother Clara Pfaender, founder of the German order of Franciscan Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, sent three sisters to the United States to nurse the sick. Over the next several years, additional sisters joined them.

By 1875, Mother Clara had decided the fledgling community, based in St. Louis, could best be governed locally. She chose Henrica Fassbender, a 28-year-old sister, to head the U.S. province, now known as the Wheaton (Illinois) Franciscan Sisters. On December 2, 1875, Mother Clara said good-bye to Sr. Henrica and the four sisters who were to accompany her to St. Louis. The oldest was 32 years old.

When Mother Clara returned to her room after bidding good-bye to the women, she found a poem written by Sr. Henrica (see opposite page).

Four days after they left the convent, the five sisters perished at sea. The Deutschland, the ship on which they had sailed from Germany, hit a sandbar off the coast of England. The sisters gave their seats on the lifeboat to children and their parents.

Sr. Henrica was not the only one to write a poem that December. Gerard Manley Hopkins, a young Jesuit at the time, was so moved by accounts of the tragedy that he wrote the famous poem *The Wreck of the Deutschland* “to the happy memory of five Franciscan Nuns...drowned between midnight and morning of Dec. 7th, 1875.”

The five sisters who died were Sr. Barbara Hueltenschmidt, Sr. Henrica Fassbender, Sr. Norberta Reinkober, Sr. Aurea Badziura, and Sr. Brigitta Damhorst. The bodies of four of the sisters lay in state in England. The body of Sr. Henrica was never found.
Now the solemn hour of departure is at hand,
And my heart, deeply touched, throbs with fear;
'Tis bleeding as though pierced by many a spear,
For in bitter pain we leave you and our land so dear.

I have—yes, depart gladly and in peace—
In obedience to your wishes, O' Mother most dear;
Though distant, I know that your prayers will
never cease.

For your love will follow—be'ting ever near.

But oh! as once again before you I knelt,
Allow these tears of departure free reign—
Thus consoled, I shall depart; for I shall feel
Your precious blessing coming to us o'er the main.

Oh pray that this resolve upon me now laid
Shall not too heavy for my weak shoulders prove;
May I learn to bear all with soul unafraid
While for God's highest honor I Labor with Love.

Farewell! also to you, my sisters fond—
Ever preserve in your hearts your love for me!
Thus, uniting more firmly the consecrate bond
That binds our hearts for all eternity.

DEDICATED TO OUR DEARLY LOVED MOTHER AT
OUR DEPARTURE FOR AMERICA BY YOUR LOVING
DAUGHTER, GRATEFUL UNTIL DEATH. SR. M. HENRICA,
DECEMBER 2, 1875.