

Embrace the Swelling Wave represents history-writing at its best. While Noffke concentrates on raw facts, she paints them with such rich local colour of that time, both in Bavaria and America, that her chapters often read like a suspense novel. In fact, some of the subplots could easily stand on their own as historical novellas.

– Gertrud Jaron Lewis, author of *By Women, for Women, about Women: The [Dominican] Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996



Suzanne Noffke's study of Mother Benedicta Bauer and the origins of the Racine Dominican community is a tour de force of scholarship and style. Painstakingly researched and ruggedly honest, it is a life of Mother Benedicta as she herself would have wanted it written. Noffke sets a new standard of excellence in the writing of the history of religious women in Wisconsin and in the United States.

– Steven M. Avella, associate professor of history, Marquette University

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The Racine Dominicans
5635 Erie Street
Racine, Wisconsin 53402
262-639-4100

www.racinedominicans.org

*Announcing
the publication of the first volume of
the history of the Racine Dominicans*



Embrace the Swelling Wave

by Suzanne Noffke, O.P.

Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2004
639 pages, illustrated

Embrace the Swelling Wave

This first volume of the history of the Dominicans of Racine, Wisconsin, takes the reader through more than seven centuries in the halls of the Dominican Monastery of Heilig Kreuz (Holy Cross) in Regensburg, Bavaria, setting the context for the lifetime of that monastery's eventual prioress, Maria Benedicta Bauer. It traces Benedicta's path through thirteen years in that office (1845 to 1858), through the turbulent events leading to her deposition and her emigration to the United States, and along her winding road to Racine with her loyal young protégée and companion, Maria Thomasina Ginker. It then follows the new community through its first four difficult but hope-filled years, up to the deaths of its founders in 1865 and 1866. Theirs is a stormy tale, roiled by waves within themselves as well as in their monastic community and in the wider societies of Bavaria and America.

This is a story, however, not just of the past; it echoes into and speaks to our present as well. None of us is privy to the long-term historical context within which our own moment is situated. But we, as were Maria Benedicta Bauer and Maria Thomasina Ginker, are well aware that we are riding a great sea whose waves we know we must embrace though we cannot know yet where they will take us. The turbulent story of Maria

Benedicta Bauer and Maria Thomasina Ginker and the first Racine Dominicans is a saga which brings us sometimes to bewilderment, sometimes to admiration, sometimes to a simple prayer that we might finally learn the lessons of history.

What others have said

Suzanne Noffke's brutally honest study will come as a surprise to any reader still clinging to the romantic notion that convent life used to be steeped in other-worldly harmony or that missionary pioneers somehow succeeded with miraculous ease.... The reader wishes for some lighter moments in this depressing account but then realizes that the historian who relies entirely on archival material will rarely find documents that speak of contentment.

The strength of this book lies in the author's meticulous primary research. She finds her sources, many of them only recently made available, in monastic and diocesan archives in Germany and the United States as well as in Rome. And to decipher the numerous German documents with their idiosyncratic 19th-century spelling and old-fashioned handwriting, whose language moreover is sprinkled with outdated Bavarian dialect, is an accomplishment only paleographers will fully appreciate. Nor does the historian's task become

any easier when retracing the missionaries' steps into America. Noffke's vivid account of this trip through the northern states in the mid-19th-century relies on ship records, rail schedules and details about transfer points, on Federal Census, weather reports and local newspaper stories of the times, and, of course, on Benedicta Bauer's and Thomasina Ginker's scribbled journals. The attached bibliography suggests the depth of research underlying this book.



The author

Suzanne Noffke, a Racine Dominican, received her doctorate in linguistics from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1968. After a few years of teaching, she served

as her congregation's president from 1970 until 1976. Since then she has been occupied in researching and writing this history of the Racine Dominicans and in translating and interpreting the works of Catherine of Siena. She is a Scholar in Residence with the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin–Parkside.