

SISTER WALBURGA SIEGHART

1872 - 1970



One of the first three Sisters of the Divine Savior to come to the United States in 1895 was Sister Walburga Sieghart. Sister Walburga was born in Bavaria on December 12, 1872. At the age of eighteen on November 1, 1890, she entered the Congregation in Tivoli. The seedling of the Congregation was just about to complete its second year of growth, having been sown on December 8, 1888, by Father Jordan and Mother Mary. Sister Walburga experienced all the joys and graces which come to persons who begin any work for God, but since He generally effects these works through laying a foundation in the Cross, she also shared in the suffering and poverty of the early years of the Congregation's history.

The Salvatorian Apostolate in North America has been founded and has grown, like any other venture, on the strength of its early pioneer members. She was just twenty-three, a young Sister three years professed. She stands as a link with the very first stirrings of the

missionary spirit in our Congregation, as the embodiment of the apostolic zeal and sacrifice evoked by Father Jordan and Mother Mary. Before leaving for the United States, Sister Walburga Sieghart, Sister Raphaela Bonheim and Sister Agnes Weber received a blessing from Pope Leo XIII. "Go, he said to the Sisters. Go and do much good."

When Archbishop Katzer asked for Sisters for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Mother Mary chose Sister Walburga to be one of the first three pioneers to begin the work of social nursing in the New World. Milwaukee was then, as so many cities of America, experiencing a great influx of immigrants from Europe. Immigrants from Germany, Poland and Ireland settled in Milwaukee in large numbers. Sister Walburga and her companions set about the task for which they had been invited, the caring of the sick in their homes. She and her companions stayed at this task for over fifty years. She became the image of the Sisters of the Divine Savior in Milwaukee. She was loved and respected for her self-sacrificing generosity and her warm and friendly manner.

A few stories written in the chronicles, will help us understand what life was like in America and the hardships our Sisters encountered. "On July 4, 1895, the three Sisters arrived at the Milwaukee Depot of the Erie Line. It was nearing midnight, and the pop and bang of firecrackers could be heard. This scene that greeted them must have seemed strange and somewhat fearful. By the time they decided to strike out alone for a promised shelter with the Franciscan Sisters on Greenfield Avenue, they were approached by what the chronicles describe as a bearded man who conducted them by streetcar to their foster home with the Franciscan Sisters."

In the chronicles of 1896 we read that Sister Walburga had been called to care for a patient with tuberculosis, who, it turned out, together with her husband and ten-year old son had abandoned the practice of her religion. Sister convinced the dying woman to see the parish priest and persuaded the father to send his son to a Catholic school. For thirteen weeks the patient lingered on, ministered to by Sister; then died peacefully in her arms.

Miss Frances Stockhausen, a patient at St. Mary's Nursing Home, recalls the days when Sister Walburga carried her up the steep steps to their flat. "Sister was loved by everyone," she says. "She was not only a nurse; she stayed with us at the bedside of the dying, did the housework and took care of us children. At various times, she nursed my Grandma Hames, who came from Luxembourg, and my two school-teacher aunts, Anna and Cecilia."

On January 25, 1967, the Sisters of the Divine Savior marked the 75th anniversary of Sister Walburga's Religious Profession. Bishop John B. Grellinger of Superior was in attendance. His words speak a powerful message.

"This frail little frame of a lady grown old is an institution all by herself – an institution with long and intimate memories. Anyone who lived under the same roof with her in times of sorrow, came to think of the initials SDS as standing primarily for the resolute and sympathetic soul ever ready to share the privations and miseries which crowded around the sick beds at which she kept loving vigil. If those memories were recorded, they would not only serve as a fairly thorough account of the establishment of the Salvatorian Sisters in Milwaukee, but they would also attest to the close family ties which sprang up between the early Sisters and the families they served in the old days of home nursing." ~ Bishop John B. Grellinger.

Sister Walburga died on November 10, 1970, at St. Mary's Nursing Home. We pray that nothing of her life be lost, but that it will be of benefit to the world, the Church, our Congregation. May everything that was great in her continue to live on in us, the members.

(The above information was taken from the sources in the Sister's Archives)



Mrs. Margaret Bremington being nursed
by Sister Walburga in the home.
(1910 or 1912)