

Brother Bernard (Karl) Gerlemann FSPA Heritage – Insight December, 1984 by Sister Patricia Tekippe

My Aunt Dolores’ voice came over the telephone. **“Did you know one of your relatives gave the land for the Convent in La Crosse?”** Your great-grandma Timp’s uncle.”

“You mean St. Rose” I asked. “I’ve never heard anything about that.”

But I set right out to find out.

Is Sister Mileta Ludwig’s history of the community I read an enlightening passage concerning a time when several priests were visiting Bishop Michael Heiss in LaCrosse in the spring of 1869:

... “one of the priests remarked what a boon it would be if the diocese could secure a community of sisters to establish a motherhouse in the Episcopal city. Brother Bernard immediately answered that if there were any prospect of establishing a convent in LaCrosse, he would be the first to help the cause along by purchasing the five lots facing Ninth Street between Market and Winnebago and making a gift to them of whatever sisters might come. He had \$300 on hand. He would borrow \$200 more... true to his word, **Brother Bernard, a few days later, surrendered to the bishop the deed for the five lots.**”

A Chapter of Franciscan History, page 161

Karl Gerlemann had left Festina as a young man to join one of the first classes at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee. According to OUR COMMUNITY pp. 105-106 he was obliged to leave because of pulmonary trouble. He later joined the Capuchins of Calvary, Wisconsin, but the same illness forced him to withdraw. At that point he was invited by his friend and adviser, Bishop Heiss, to join him in La Crosse, where he continued as secretary and personal servant until the bishop’s death.

Both books add that he prepared for the sisters coming by planting corn and potatoes on their land, and digging a well. Sister Lucina Gerlmann thinks it is the well under the green pump near the light area entrance.

She also remembers that he lived has last years in a small house where the Viterbo College Church now stands. He worked for the orphans, and grew flowers for the churches in town. When he could no longer manage on his own he had a room at St. Francis Hospital.

Following Sister Lucina’s directions, “At the head of the first sisters’ graves. It has a large iron cross on it,” I went scouting for Brother Bernard’s grave.

There it stood, under a tree, a respectful distance from the sisters’ tombstones. Almost as in life he seemed to hover near, a quiet agent (angel?) of God’s hand in our history.

When I told my parents as a fourteen year old that I going to the convent, my mother said, “Pick one that is close enough so we can come to see you.” It took me 26 years to discover the family connection that helped to locate St. Rose Convent that close.

Sister Lucina’s memory and the Festina parish history book give the information for this sketch of our relationship.

Family:

Wilhelm Gerlemann

Friedrich Catherine Gerleman Timp Theodore Timp Seraphine Timp Tekippe Sr. Patricia Tekippe	Karl (also known as Leo and Brother Bernard)	William Henry Cecilia (Sr. Lucina)
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