

Mother Willibalda Scherbauer

Prioress from 1857–1868



Mother Willibalda (Franziska) Scherbauer was born in 1828 in the secularized Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter in Kastl, Bavaria, the daughter of Johann Nepomuk Scherbauer and his second wife, Margaret Sandner Scherbauer. She was the fourth in a family of eight children. At an early age, Franziska was sent to the Benedictine school in Eichstätt. When she was 13, she received a five-year scholarship to the Royal Institute in Altötting from King Ludwig for producing the most artistic work in drawing and embroidery. Besides her talent in the arts, she excelled in music, both vocal and instrumental.

On December 17, 1849, Franziska entered St. Walburg Convent in Eichstätt, Bavaria. She became a novice and received the name Willibalda in May of 1850. Sister Willibalda professed her vows on November 13, 1851, and four years later, volunteered to join the two groups of Benedictine nuns from St. Walburg who had gone to the United States in 1852 and 1854 to establish the first community of Benedictine women in North America at St. Marys, Penn.

In 1857, Mother Benedicta Riepp, of St. Joseph Convent, St. Marys, appointed Mother Willibalda superior of a group being sent to establish a new convent in St. Cloud, Minn. For 11 years, she guided this small community until she was deposed by the newly-elected Minnesota abbot, Rupert Seidenbusch, OSB, in July of 1868. After her deposition from the office of prioress, she obtained permission to transfer to another Benedictine convent. For three years, she spent some time in Shakopee, Minn., Chicago and Pennsylvania. Nonetheless, she returned to St. Joseph in 1871. During the following year, she was sent to open a school in New Trier, Minn., where, during the course of the next five years, she attempted to establish an independent convent. The attempt failed because the bishop of St. Paul did not approve of opening another motherhouse in his diocese. On October 18, 1877, Mother Willibalda returned to Saint Benedict's Convent. She spent the next 25 years as organist and music teacher in Minnesota parishes—New Munich, Pierz, Chanhassen and St. Joseph. She celebrated her golden jubilee on November 13, 1901, and died on February 12, 1914.

During her years as the first prioress of St. Benedict's Convent, Mother Willibalda was firm in her attention to the community's observance of the *Rule* and was much loved by the sisters. It was said of her that she was gifted with a kind heart and a tenacious will.