

SISTER MARIA HOFMANN 1898- 1985
Convent of the Sacred Heart
Albany, N.Y. 12202

Maria Hofmann was born on March 13, 1898, at Wickendorf, Oberfranken, in Bavaria, Germany, of Johann and Maria Hofmann, and was baptized the following day. She made her First Communion in April, 1910, and was confirmed the following June. There is no record of her parents' death, but while she was still young Maria went to live with an aunt, Frau Katherine Nickol in Grossau, Bavaria.

Maria's formal education would seem to have been minimal, but she had a keen, alert and logical mind, and profited by all that she learned. Later, she was trained in needlework by the Franciscan Sisters in Munich. But it was farmlife to which she was devoted, and she became familiar with the ways of all manner of living beings, plants, animals, birds. When World War I broke out this strenuous but happy life became grim. The men were called to the front, and young girls tilled the fields and cared for the beasts. Seventy years later Maria's mind returned constantly to those hard, hungry, outdoor days when she was responsible for the farm. She spoke of them gallantly, and with nostalgia.

After the war Maria's vocation became clear, and she sought to enter the Society of the Sacred Heart. So numerous were the vocations to be coadjutrix sisters at that time in Germany, that she was asked to leave her own land and enter in the United States. She was willing, and with five companions (all clothed for the journey in the religious habit) reached Kenwood on November 15, 1924. A witness says: "I remember so well the night the German novices arrived. The community had just begun supper when Reverend Mother Moran rang the little bell. Everybody looked up, to see that half a dozen young nuns in a not yet familiar habit were entering the refectory. It was beautiful to see how timid looks melted into a smile of happy security! Mother de Goebel, the Assistant, was beaming with a joy that was contagious. Of course! Since none of them spoke English, kind Mother de Goebel, the epitome of maternal charity, was their mistress of novices!"

Maria took the habit on July 16, 1925. Life in a foreign land was not easy, and from time to time the novice would disappear into the broom cupboard for a good cry. But her cheerful disposition dominated; she made her first vows on July 31, 1927, and was professed on December 27, 1932.

Sister Hofmann left Kenwood in 1936, and for forty years spent her tremendous and generously given energies in community service. She was stationed at Noroton (1936), Overbrook (1946), Stone Ridge (1951), Newton College (1953) and Varnum Street (1969). She could turn her hand to many things, but her chief employments were infirmarian, sacristan and refectorian, while always helping in the general housework. Some tasks, such as washing all the windows inside and out at Varnum Street, were volunteered. And at all seasons she loved to sing in a naturally beautiful and strong (very strong!) voice, especially "Stille Nacht". Her devotions, above all devotion to our Lady, were deep, and her trust in prayer was childlike - and effective. There are tales worthy of the Fioretti told of the "little miracles" worked through her prayers and her kindness for those who came to her in the infirmary.

At Newton College: "She was an overwhelmingly energetic worker.

Nothing was too hard for her, and her strength matched her energy. She could lift extraordinarily heavy things. The reason for her constant working was her love of poverty; she wasted nothing, including time. She picked the apples which fell from the trees, and then climbed up to the top of the trees, perched on a step ladder. When she was told not to continue because she might fall, she stopped at Newton College - but went down to Newton Academy and picked apples there! It was equally her love of poverty which led her to make literally hundreds of small yarn dolls - thus using up otherwise wasted scraps of yarn. Once she constructed a miniature carousel for Reverend Mother Barry and called it the "Washington Merry-Go-Round, featuring the yarn dolls as passengers."

Sister Hofmann's energy was at last spent, though when she left Varnum Street nine volunteers were needed to replace her at as many tasks. She joined the Pax Christi Community in 1977.

Her spirits were still high, and she greatly enjoyed a home visit to her native Bavaria. As long as she could still go to the chapel for daily mass, her presence was made known by her ringing voice prolonging the Our Father: "Deliver us from ~~evill~~!" Her sight began to fail, but she welcomed visits from friends, dimly seen. When no longer able to carry on a conversation she could - and did - whistle like the birds and make sounds like the animals on the farmlands of long ago. She found this useful: "I make a noise and get attention!" It was not easy for her, in the last months, to wait in patience for the Lord, but she responded gently and quietly, to His call to come home on January 1, 1985. Sister Maria Hofmann's grave is the first in the new plot in Kenwood's cemetery.