

SISTER M. BONAVENTURE ERDMANN NUMBER 3
DATE OF DEATH: SEPTEMBER 27, 1873
DATE OF BIRTH: 1852
SISTER M. GABRIELLA BUTZEN NUMBER 4
DATE OF DEATH: SEPTEMBER 30, 1873
DATE OF BIRTH: MARCH 10, 1842

Owing to the yellow fever epidemic that raged in the city of Memphis in 1873, the Sisters were withdrawn in October of the same year. The schools had been closed and although none of the Sisters had ever been actively engaged in hospital work, they all volunteered to become nurses to assist the sick and dying, and two of these noble souls, Sister Bonaventure Erdmann and Sister Gabriella Butzen fell victims to the plague. Their bodies rest in Mount Calvary Cemetery, in the beautiful burial place set apart for the priests and sisters who lost their lives in administering to the plague stricken people during the several periods of the epidemic.

Sister Bonaventure Erdmann was the first victim to be brought home sick. The Reverend Franciscan Fathers attended her in her last illness, administering to her the last rites of the church. She had the last coffin found in the city.

Meanwhile, Sister Gabriella Butzen had fallen a victim while she was nursing the sick poor and was brought home to die. When Sister Bonaventure's funeral was to pass the Sisters' house, Sister Gabriella asked to be taken to the window to see the cortege; however, she could not see it. No doubt she had already lost her sight from the disease. Twenty-four hours later she too passed to her reward, having been fortified by the Sacraments of the dying. Some hours before her death, Sister Gabriella had heard that Mother Alfred Moes, Superior General, had arrived in St. Louis, and she, Sister Gabriella, sent Mother Alfred the following message: "Tell Mother Alfred if she does not soon take me away from Memphis, she will have to send me a coffin from St. Louis." Strange to say, there was no coffin for her in Memphis, Sister Bonaventure having had the last one, and a coffin was sent for her from St. Louis.

P.S.: The booklet entitled STRONGER THAN DEATH includes the story of Sisters Bonaventure and Gabriella. This section was written by Sister Augustine Fricker, an eye witness. Sister Augustine became General Superior of the Rochester Franciscans in 1896.