

# A Plan of Organization for a University Archives

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*The Catholic University  
of America*

THE growth of interest in archival activity on the part of American universities was demonstrated most effectively by the survey presented by Mr. John Jennings of the Virginia Historical Society at the October, 1948 meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Raleigh. The varied approaches to the records problem which have already been tried in dozens of institutions of higher learning are an indication of what is rather obvious, that there is no master plan for a university archives. Yet the charter or regulations of one such organization may be of interest and of value to others in the same specialized field.

At the Catholic University of America agitation for the setting up of an archives was primarily the result of the joint efforts of library officials and of members of the history staff. The former were concerned not only with the growing and badly controlled bulk of material pertaining to the University's past which was stored in two library vaults, but also with several historical manuscript collections of great extent which needed better care. The historians, especially those dealing with American Catholic history, played their part by putting to use the early records of the University in their monographs. In doing this, the need of unifying scattered records and of making them more easily accessible was readily brought to light. Administrative officials were found in prompt agreement with the academicians for they, too, had begun after sixty years to feel the pressure of bulging record files.

The problem was faced, not only in the light of the University's own needs, but also with the assistance of the experience of others and the ever-ready counsel of Dr. Ernst Posner. The autonomous administrative position of the archivist was decided upon by a special Committee on Archives and Manuscripts. In this regard there was no precedent to be followed. Further details were worked out for dealing with the general types of material at hand, namely, the University records and the historical manuscripts. The effectiveness

of the resulting regulations may be only as great as their ability to stand up under the test of time, but meanwhile they remain a plan of organization for one university archives and as such, *mutatis mutandis*, may be of service to other institutions.

The following was issued as an executive directive from the Rector of the University to the executive officers, deans of schools, and heads of departments:

#### REGULATIONS FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS

The Committee on Archives and Manuscripts was authorized by a communication of the Rector of September 14, 1948. Its membership is as follows: Rt. Rev. Edward B. Jordan, Vice Rector, Chairman; Catherine R. Rich, Registrar; Eugene P. Willging, Director of the Library; Rev. John Tracy Ellis, Professor of American Church History; Rev. Henry J. Browne, Archivist and Secretary, *ex officio*. It has laid down the following regulations.

##### *Administration:*

1. The Department of Archives and Manuscripts will have for its purpose the concentration, custodianship and servicing of the official records of the University, as well as of special collections of historical manuscripts.
2. The Department will be a separate unit of the University under the immediate jurisdiction of the Rector and it will have a separate budget which will be submitted annually to the administration.
3. The Department, however, will also be responsible for the historical manuscripts of the general library, and will work with the staff of the general library in the utilization of equipment for photostating and microfilming.
4. The Archivist as official records officer of the University will be designed as having power under the Rector directly to acquire and administer non-current records.
5. The Archivist shall be a priest who has training in American Church History and archival administration, and ordinarily shall be associated with the Department of History.
6. The work of the Department is detailed under the following headings:

##### *Collection (Archives):*

1. Official records of any University office, school or department are the property of the institution, and therefore are not to be destroyed or removed without authorization.
2. Such records include the following types produced in any office, school or department.
  - a) files of letters sent or received
  - b) record copies of mimeographed material; ledgers; cash books; etc.
  - c) record copies of any matter printed for official use

- d) record copies of printed publications, e.g. doctoral dissertations, reprints of faculty articles, etc.
3. The existing material of enduring value in the various vaults and other up to now official depositories shall be unified in the archives.
4. The archivist, in consultation with the Committee on Archives and Manuscripts and with the heads of the record creating agencies of the University, will develop
  - a) a University records management program, aimed at facilitating the disposal of useless records and the transfer of permanently valuable records to the Department of Archives and Manuscripts.
  - b) a University-wide program for the disposal of records that do not have enduring value, and
  - c) a program for the accessioning of records of enduring value by the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, and, in his capacity as records officer of the University will submit these programs to the Rector of the University for his approval.
5. The archivist will be ready to receive and will seek such semi-official records of the University's life, as unpublished speeches or papers given at University functions, programs of University affairs not supplied by some official, campus publications of a popular nature, records of clubs and classes, pertinent pictures and cuts or scrapbooks, the private papers of members of the faculty or administration (except they constitute collections of historical manuscripts not pertaining to themselves).

*Collection (Historical Manuscripts):*

1. These collections should contain non-printed documents pertaining to the history of the Catholic Church, especially in the United States. They may be of any of the following types:
  - a) the letters, diaries, notebooks, etc., of Catholic clerics or laymen, whose papers pertain to the official records of no existing institution or to one unable to care for them,
  - b) the records of any Catholic organization presently defunct or wishing to dispose of the obsolete material,
  - c) microfilm, photostats, or copies of material in other archives relating to the history of the Church in the United States, and particularly of the Catholic University of America.
2. Gifts of such material will be sought by the archivist through personal contacts, and through the interest and help of the staff of the University as well as of its alumni and friends. No collection or part of a collection will be purchased or acquired by gift without a previous decision of the Committee on Archives and Manuscripts on its importance and value. If possible, gift collections should be received with the understanding that the University will have full control over them. In certain cases the Committee may decide to take manuscript collections in the nature of a temporary deposit.

*Preservation:*

1. Both archival and manuscript material will be housed in Room 33 of the Mullen Library which has been made safe against theft, fire, insects and dampness. All such documents will there be treated in the same manner, except that the Archives proper will be separated by a wire screen partition across the far end of the room.

2. After assembling both types of material the archivist will make provisions when necessary for the repair of documents, and then undertake the shelving of them and the preparation of finding aids. Part of the room will necessarily have to be set aside for this processing work.

3. In time a guide to the collections of historical manuscripts should be prepared.

*Utilization:*

1. Different regulations should be followed for the use of archives and manuscripts due to the diverse natures of the material. All searchers, however, should be made to register their name and address, the date, and the object of their search. Part of the depository room will be set aside as working space for them, and no material will be worked on outside of the archives. In time a small group of books might be brought together in the archives for the ready reference of searchers. The archivist will be in attendance and assist all those using the department's facilities. Mail inquiries including requests for photographic duplications, will be answered according to the judgment of the archivist.

2. Archives:

- a) The agency producing the records will have access to their own records at any time. Lesser inquiries will be answered by the archivist over the telephone. (Ext. 272)
- b) Other members of the University will need the permission of the archivist and the head of the office whose records are to be consulted.
- c) Investigators, whether they are from within the university or not, who wish to do historical research will need permission of the Committee on Archives and Manuscripts, and of the heads of the offices whose records they wish to consult.

3. Historical Manuscripts:

- a) These collections may be used with permission of the director of the library and the archivist.
- b) The staff and students of the University are to be encouraged to use them for research and publication purposes.
- c) Primary utilization of historical manuscripts may be limited to the University body since the University has expended its efforts and money in the acquisition of them. In conformity with general university practice, however, a liberal policy will be followed regarding the admission of *bona fide* research students from other institutions.