

Catholic Archives and Manuscript Collections

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FOR many years the chief centers of manuscript materials and records on the Roman Catholic Church in the United States were the Catholic Archives of America, organized by James F. Edwards at the University of Notre Dame, the papers of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, and the collections of the libraries of Georgetown University in Washington, D. C., and St. Louis University in St. Louis. Nearly every Catholic college library had a small collection of documents dealing with its own institutional history and the Catholic activities of the neighborhood and perhaps of the neighboring diocese. The archdiocesan archives of Baltimore were intact and constituted the chief actual archives of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States because Baltimore had been the first diocese and the first archdiocese and had even functioned as a kind of primate see until the appointment of the Apostolic Delegate in Washington in 1893. But, since there were no universal church laws on archives in force in this country before the recodification of canon law and the publication of the Code in 1918, the contents of other diocesan and archdiocesan archives were dependent upon the personal interests of the bishops and the members of their official households. It was to check the frequent destruction of such papers that Professor Edwards, the librarian of Notre Dame, founded the Catholic Archives of America as a central depository. He never succeeded in assembling the extant papers before his death in 1911. The Code of Canon Law, put into effect in 1918, required that each bishop keep his own archives as well as those of his predecessors if their papers existed. The present Archives of the University of Notre Dame, the successor of the Catholic Archives of America, while preserving the papers that Edwards collected, also has collected the official papers of the university and certain personal papers of Catholic bishops, priests, and laymen.

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Religious societies, such as the Jesuits, the Dominicans, the Redemptorists, the Sulpicians, the Holy Cross Fathers, and the like, have their own records and frequently the religious records of parishes and missions attended by members of the society. The availability of these records depends upon the superior and his archivist, and the rules of most religious communities provide for the keeping of a chronicle and the appointment of an archivist. Unfortunately the personal records of the members of any society depend upon the interest of the person himself, and the general mobility of members of these communities and the vows of poverty they take tend to keep at a minimum the records and old correspondence they retain and leave behind when they die.

Before discussing my own activities of recent years, I might point out some of the technical difficulties of the Catholic official archivists. The first problem is that of the archivist himself. Either he is an active assistant chancellor or secretary and therefore heavily burdened with many other duties, or he is a person of limited health and activity. In either circumstance, the amount of purely archival work that he can perform is quite small. Further, the diocesan archivist is usually a canon lawyer who has to participate in the canonical problems of the diocese.

Diocesan, religious, and university archives among Catholics suffer along with others from the modern multiplication of records. If the man holding the office of chancellor of a diocese or secretary of a province or congregation is very efficient, he will generally eliminate the duplications of documents. Some of the more efficient, I have found, are almost too efficient, leaving the records reduced to the bone. The less efficient the officer the more abundant the records and the greater the amount of unnecessary records and duplicates. I have found, however, that the suggestion of inviting an adviser on the disposal of unnecessary records is not commonly welcome. The total result is that one may not generalize on what the historian of the next generation will find in these archives.

Of the older collections of manuscript materials outside of the official chancery archives, undoubtedly the most important in the past were those at Notre Dame and in the Philadelphia historical society, although the Georgetown collections included the papers of John Gilmary Shea, the first important historian of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. In more recent years the Catholic University of America has established a Department of Archives and Manuscripts in the university library. Besides the papers of the university, the department has acquired such docu-

mentary materials on labor as the Terence V. Powderly papers, the John Mitchell papers, the Philip Murray papers, the papers of the late Msgr. John A. Ryan, and the like; and the early papers of the National Catholic War and Welfare Councils. In this depository also have been collected the transcripts of the papers of John Carroll, first Bishop and then Archbishop of Baltimore, which are to be edited and published with Federal encouragement. Another collection of growing importance is that of the Baraga Association of Marquette, Michigan. Although it collects primarily documents bearing on the life of this zealous missionary among the Indians, the association has assembled materials from France, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, and Italy on missionary activities and also has acquired transcripts dealing with the fur trade and other secular activities in the regions around Lakes Michigan and Superior.

The collections of the Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, which are now stored at St. Charles Seminary at Overbrook, are rich in early Catholic Americana and Catholic newspapers and contain some important collections of personal correspondence. These are being reorganized by Batholomew Fair, the seminary librarian, with the aid of student assistants. Some progress has also been made in microfilming the early newspapers of the collection, many of which are unique and irreplaceable. The library of Marquette University has announced the formation of an archives on the history of Catholic journalism in the United States. Since Marquette was the first Catholic school of journalism in the country and has been very active in the field, this should become a very important center for the student of Catholic journalism in the United States. The collection of transcripts from the Vatican Library now housed at St. Louis University, although it does not concern American history, is very important to American scholars.

Since the enactment of the new Code of Canon Law of 1918, American Catholic archives dealing with the official organization of the Church are governed by universal church law. While there was already a general requirement for the preservation of the records of baptisms, confirmations, and burials, which usually was fulfilled quite well, all other records were left to the whims of the individuals who possessed them. Under the code the chancellor is the archivist of the diocese, although the ordinary duties of the archivist are usually assigned to one of his assistants. Because the assistants are almost always burdened with other chancery chores, the older records do not generally receive much attention. Another loophole in the church law, from the point of view of the historian,

is the lack of law governing the preservation of what might be called the bishop's personal papers. If a bishop is personally very active the destruction of his papers by himself or his heirs could eliminate many important documents, even though they would not be official records. Another provision that has not been clearly defined is the separation of secret archives from the other archives. These secret archives contain documents, mostly sacramental in character, which need to be preserved at least for a while but which come under the laws of natural or sacramental secret. These are eventually destroyed. The transfer of papers, temporarily secret, to the secret archives would allow historians greater access to the rest of the diocesan archives.

In general American Catholic archives have not followed the hundred-year rule of the Roman archives but are accessible up to almost contemporary times. The question of storage space has begun to plague many diocesan officials, except in the newer buildings. In some cases the only solution will be absolutely dead storage until new chanceries are constructed. Some chanceries have obtained bombproof storage places for older records. A third handicap to archival work in most archives and manuscript collections is the lack of endowment to take care of cleaning, proper storage, and cataloging or calendaring. This raises an important problem for the student of more recent church history. Since the very private correspondence is stored with the unimportant, and not cataloged, the curator is unwilling to allow the researcher access to any of the records. Secondly, since these records are locked up in deep storage, no one knows when they will be made available.

Aside from St. Louis University with its Vatican transcripts, the Catholic centers most active in collecting manuscript materials are the University Archives at Notre Dame and the Department of Archives and Manuscripts at the Catholic University. Father Henry Browne accomplished admirable things during his short tenure at the Catholic University, especially in the fields of labor relations and labor unions. His successor is Father Robert Trisco of Chicago, who received his training in Rome.

In the University Archives at Notre Dame, aside from the assembling of official archives and collections dealing with the university and the neighboring community, the collecting of new groups of manuscripts has continued. With the aid of assistants the calendaring of the older collections has progressed, but rather slowly. My assistant, Mercedes Muenz, has been working on the calendar of the New Orleans papers and has completed it just about to the end

of the Spanish period. The Hudson papers are about half calendared and the Detroit diocesan papers are about two-thirds finished. The Brownson, Edwards, and Cincinnati papers are already calendared. New collections added in recent years are those of Frederick Kenkel, director of the Central Verein of St. Louis, the personal papers of Bishop McDevitt of Harrisburg, the papers of the family of Gen. William T. Sherman, and the papers of Frank C. Walker.

Another activity of the Notre Dame Archives has been collecting transcripts of letters of missionaries from American to European centers. These letters are like the Jesuit Relations of still earlier days in that they were written to promote the interest of Europeans in American missions and to obtain funds for this missionary activity. The chief centers supporting this activity, outside of Rome, were at Paris and Lyons; and the University Archives with the aid of the Baraga Association of Marquette has obtained transcripts of the files of these organizations dealing with the United States. The Austrian missionary society, the Leopoldinen-Stiftung, has very extensive records in the archdiocesan archives at Vienna. So far only the records dealing with the Middle West have been copied, but the copying of the other records has been arranged for. Also, records in the City Archives in Vienna dealing with these missionary affairs are being copied. The Munich Ludwig-Missionsverein records have also been copied. Some records have been obtained from Ireland and from Yugoslavia, but the records from Italy are handicapped by the Roman rule of withholding records from searchers until the passage of a hundred years. Eventually these Roman records will probably be found to outweigh in value the other letters, since they constitute official reports of the missions and the mission fields. In arranging the transcription of European records the Notre Dame University librarian, Victor Schaefer, has been very helpful, even supplying funds from the library budget on occasion. The chief collaborator has been Joseph Gregorich of the Baraga Association, who personally arranged for most of the transcriptions. The Baraga Association has also copied, translated, and duplicated most of these records useful for the cause of Bishop Frederick Baraga.

Other collections, besides those in diocesan chanceries and offices of religious superiors that are of value to the historian include the collections on Franciscan history assembled by the Academy of Franciscan History in Washington, D. C.; the collection on Dominican history at the Dominican House of Studies at the Catholic

University; the Jesuit collections at Woodstock, Md.; the materials at St. Louis University; and the collection at Mount St. Michael's in Spokane, Wash. Other Catholic libraries that have begun to collect Catholic Americana include Holy Cross College, Worcester, Mass.; St. Vincent's Archabbey, Latrobe, Pa.; St. Bonaventure University, Olean, N. Y.; St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn.; and San Francisco University.

In 1957 there was completed and published a calendar of the *Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 1678-1900*, by Fray Angélico Chavez, O. F. M. A few years ago I had occasion to consult this notable collection of papers and as a result I think the published volume represents a notable achievement. The papers included chiefly concern the Franciscan missions of the region and the episcopate of John Lamy, the Archbishop of Santa Fe whose story has been so deftly told by Willa Cather. Included in the calendar are the items collected for the history of the archdiocese by Archbishops Gerken and Byrne during the past three decades from archives in this country and Mexico. Few diocesan chanceries have either the funds or the manpower to undertake similar calendars.

It was suggested that the financial problems of archives in Catholic America be explored. Frankly, I cannot generalize on this point. Although I have accumulated a small endowment for the University Archives at Notre Dame, the sum is not large enough yet to allow more than small purchases from the annual income. I doubt that any other Catholic manuscript or archives collection has any endowment. The preservation of records in the diocesan archives is taken care of by the diocese as part of the office maintenance. In universities and colleges the librarian is usually short of help and has to struggle to get suitable salaries for the staff. I find that when a community or diocese decides to prepare an official history the authorities are quite generous in paying the costs of collecting materials for the history. That is the usual beginning of a notable archival and manuscript collection, which is housed either in the chancery office or in a nearby college or university. I think most archivists who have been successful in gathering funds would rather not speak about either their sources or their methods.