

# Printed Guides to Archival Centers for American Catholic History

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THE generally flagrant lack of concern by Catholics for the documentary evidence of their early history in the United States is a sin of omission for which there can be no adequate reparation. So careless, in fact, were certain pioneers that Archbishop Michael Corrigan of New York complained that "in too many cases old papers have been regarded as good only to burn or sell for waste."<sup>1</sup> The seriousness of this disregard for past accomplishments is further underscored by the realization that preservation of the contemporary chronicles concerning the growth and development of the church within the wholly new concept of a pluralistic society could well have formed the basis for one of the most interesting and edifying chapters in all of ecclesiastical annals.<sup>2</sup>

Without question the paucity of primary sources has been the chief contributing factor for the disjointed manner in which the story of Catholicism in this country has so far been related. It may be hoped that the discovery of new evidence, along with the more effective utilization of existing data, will eventually bring about an integrated and reliable narrative consistent with the best standards of professional historiography. Paradoxically, though they are widely scattered, poorly organized, and dreadfully incomplete, there are numerous documents available whose contents have yet to be exploited. That published guides do not exist for some of the more prominent ecclesiastical holding agencies can be considered one of the unfortunate corollaries to the neglect of prior generations. This brief sketch is restricted to those primary *fontes* of Catholic Americana for which at least some kind of printed finding device has been prepared.

The archival status of United States Catholicism was the dominating theme of a trilogy of general surveys written in a 15-year period. The first, published early in 1946, was Thomas F. O'Connor's analytical overview of those ecclesiastical, institutional, and religious archives which, by reason of antiquity, range, and integrity offer the richest

Father Weber, Archivist of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, has previously written "The Secret Vatican Archives" (Jan. 1964) and "Chancery Archives" (Apr. 1965) for the *American Archivist*.

<sup>1</sup> "Introductory," in *United States Catholic Historical Magazine*, 1:11 (Jan. 1887).

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence F. Flick, "Preservation of Catholic Documents," in *American Catholic Historical Society, Records*, 26:105 (June 1915).

opportunities to qualified researchers.<sup>3</sup> Also included in that well-balanced treatise are the canonical precedents for current legislation on archival management. In addition to updating the O'Connor article, Henry J. Browne's informative essay, "The American Catholic Archival Tradition,"<sup>4</sup> concentrated on the distortion and frustration unleashed into the public record as a result of the arbitrary attitude taken about retention of chronicles by many of the Nation's earliest churchmen. The New York priest also dwelt on the obvious breach between the notion of archives as treasure chests in which only historians and antiquarians are interested and the more complete concept of their prior role as tools of administration. He concluded by exhorting his fellow historians to make "the self-denying admission that the archivists whom they have for the most part begotten are meant to be more than the servants of the servants of historical truth." Browne felt that the time had arrived for recognizing documentary custodians, in a wider sense, as "the servants of the servants of God." In the last of the general surveys, Thomas T. McAvoy approached the subject from his vantage point as long-time archivist at the University of Notre Dame. Having personally encountered most of the technical difficulties in the science, McAvoy astutely advised against generalizing about what historians of the future might seek in record centers, in favor of a greater concentration on more effective means of preserving the evidence as it becomes available.<sup>5</sup>

Several relevant biblio-archival essays have also appeared in recent years. Forty of the entries compiled by Edmund L. Binsfeld for the Church Records Committee of the Society of American Archivists pertain exclusively to Catholic holdings.<sup>6</sup> An entire section of John Tracy Ellis' *Guide to American Catholic History*<sup>7</sup> is devoted to 23 ecclesiastical "Manuscript Depositories" located in the United States. Finally, in 1963, August R. Suelflow prepared an expanded edition of the *Directory of Religious Archival and Historical Depositories in America*,<sup>8</sup> listing 162 separate Catholic archival centers.

Of all the holding agencies, "the most valuable in the world for the American Catholic historian" is unquestionably the Roman Archives of Propaganda Fide.<sup>9</sup> Before 1908 practically all the correspondence

<sup>3</sup> "Catholic Archives of the United States," in *Catholic Historical Review*, 36:414-430 (Jan. 1946). This article also appeared as "Historical and Archival Activities of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States" in *Church Archives and History*, p. 287-304 (Raleigh, N.C., 1946).

<sup>4</sup> *American Archivist*, 14:127-139 (Apr. 1951).

<sup>5</sup> "Catholic Archives and Manuscript Collections," in *American Archivist*, 24:409-414 (Oct. 1961).

<sup>6</sup> "Church Archives in the United States and Canada; a Bibliography," in *American Archivist*, 21:311-316 (July 1958).

<sup>7</sup> (Milwaukee, 1959), p. 7-12.

<sup>8</sup> Issued by the Society of American Archivists.

<sup>9</sup> Peter K. Guilday, *On the Creation of an Institute for American Church History* (Washington, 1924), p. 29.

between churchmen in the United States and officials at the Vatican was channeled through the headquarters of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide on the Piazza de Spagna. Two descriptive overviews of the vast quantity of documentation in this pivotal depository, one by John B. McGloin,<sup>10</sup> the other by this writer,<sup>11</sup> are useful as general guides for researchers of Catholic Americana. Since 1955 the Academy of American Franciscan History has been sponsoring the compilation of an index to Propaganda Fide's holdings in collaboration with Anton Debevec, a leading European cataloger. The two volumes, calendaring an extended series that has already appeared under the competent editorship of Finbar Kenneally, O.F.M.,<sup>12</sup> are indispensable reference works for ecclesiastical historians.<sup>13</sup>

Other archival centers on the Continent abound in materials not fully utilized by American Catholic scholars. An excellent survey of the more useful private holding agencies, most of them religious, is outlined by William L. Davis in "Some Neglected Archives of Europe."<sup>14</sup> Another valuable guide, extraterritorial in scope and not restricted to Americana, is Arthur G. Doughty's "Sources for the History of the Catholic Church in the Public Archives of Canada."<sup>15</sup>

If the foremost among the historical treasurehouses of the Catholic Church in the United States are the Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, it is because the incumbents of that episcopal seat, erected in 1789, initially exercised jurisdiction over the entire country. With the subsequent divisions of the vast metropolitan district, the premier see remained the ecclesiastical capital of Catholic America. Even today, a "prerogative of place" accords the residential ordinary of Baltimore precedence over all noncardinalatial members of the Nation's hierarchy. When Martin I. J. Griffin arrived in 1886 in Baltimore to do historical research, he found the archival materials there wrapped "in bundles in book closets" at the archbishop's residence. Little care was given the collection until it was almost destroyed by a conflagration in 1904. After that James Cardinal Gibbons entrusted J. Frederic Weltry with the task of arranging the documents in a logical sequence and relocating them in safer quarters near the cathedral crypt.<sup>16</sup> The actual cataloging was begun two decades later by George W. White

<sup>10</sup> "The Roman Propaganda Fide Archives: An Overview and Assessment," in *Church History*, 33:84-91 (Mar. 1964).

<sup>11</sup> "Roman Archives of Propaganda Fide," in American Catholic Historical Society, *Records*, 76:245-248 (Dec. 1965).

<sup>12</sup> *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives. A Calendar* (2 vols., Washington, 1966, 1968). 2,278 entries are listed, identified, dated, and cataloged in the first volume and 2,127 in the second.

<sup>13</sup> The Archives of the University of Notre Dame has a complete microfilm collection of all documents enumerated in the Academy's calendars.

<sup>14</sup> *Mid-America*, 38:15-37 (Jan. 1956).

<sup>15</sup> *Catholic Historical Review*, 19:148-166 (July 1933).

<sup>16</sup> "The Archives at Baltimore," in American Catholic Historical Society, *Records*, 21:85-95 (June 1910).

and carried on sporadically by succeeding enthusiasts. In 1948 Archbishop Michael J. Curley placed the Baltimore Cathedral archives in a fireproof vault in the chancery office and appointed a part-time archivist to look after the collection. During the years he was working on his monumental biography of Cardinal Gibbons, John Tracy Ellis prepared a highly useful and succinct guide to the archives, giving a brief description of the different series along with such information as terminal dates, number of file boxes or drawers, some notion of their content, and a few words on their general arrangement. Also included were a list of newspaper files, Catholic directories, reference books, registers, ledgers, and scrapbooks housed in the archives.<sup>17</sup>

A brief overview of the 7,000 manuscripts and 35,000 volumes amassed by the American Catholic Historical Society during the first three decades of its existence at Philadelphia was published by William L. Lallou in 1915.<sup>18</sup> The short treatise also shed "a flash of light" on the extensive collection of Catholic newspapers, rare pamphlets, sermons, lectures, and biographical sketches that had been collected by the Nation's oldest Catholic historical society.

It was during the 1880's that James Farnham Edwards,<sup>19</sup> librarian at the University of Notre Dame, "first conceived the idea of collecting in one place the documents and other priceless papers referring principally to the history of the Catholic Church in America."<sup>20</sup> Edwards' systematic endeavor to gather, from a wide array of sources, any and all kinds of relevant material into his envisioned Catholic Archives of America<sup>21</sup> eventually culminated in the largest single collection of its kind in the country. Thomas T. McAvoy compiled an outline of the major categories in the rich archival center in 1952, along with pertinent excerpts from Edwards' unpublished diary concerning some of the obstacles he encountered in his zealous pursuits.<sup>22</sup>

Except in isolated cases, very little was done towards preserving the records of Catholic activities in the decades immediately following Edwards' death in 1911. The eminent ecclesiastical historian, Peter

<sup>17</sup> "A Guide to the Baltimore Cathedral Archives," in *Catholic Historical Review*, 32:341-360 (Oct. 1946).

<sup>18</sup> "The Archives of the American Catholic Historical Society (Philadelphia)," in *Catholic Historical Review*, 1:193-195 (July 1915).

<sup>19</sup> For a biographical sketch, see Sr. Damien Tambola, O.S.B., "James F. Edwards, Pioneer Archivist of Catholic Church History of America," in *American Catholic Historical Society, Records*, 72:3-32 (Mar.-June 1961).

<sup>20</sup> Paul J. Foik, C.S.C., "Catholic Archives of America," in *Catholic Historical Review*, 1:63 (Apr. 1915).

<sup>21</sup> Because of the legislation in the Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1918, the notion of a national agency was discarded. The title was changed by Thomas T. McAvoy to the Archives of the University of Notre Dame.

<sup>22</sup> "Manuscript Collections Among American Catholics," in *Catholic Historical Review*, 37:281-295 (Oct. 1951). For another interesting account of the archives, see *Library Occurrent*, 11:177-178 (Apr.-June 1934), a reprint from the *South Bend News-Times*. A final descriptive article on the holdings of the Notre Dame Archives is Ralph Wright's "Something for Historians," which appeared in the *Catholic Educational Review*, 47:380-383 (June 1949).

K. Guilday of the Catholic University of America, attempted to enkindle new interest in the project by calling for the establishment in 1924 of a national Catholic historical center honoring the centenary of John Gilmary Shea's birth.<sup>23</sup> "His plan envisioned a permanent center of Catholic scholarship encompassing three broad aspects: the preservation and classification of a national Catholic archives, formation of a national Catholic library, and establishment of an institute for training reputable historians."<sup>24</sup> Even Guilday's persuasive plea, however, was buried beneath the indifference of those without whose support such a program could not succeed.

Agitation for setting up an archival depository at the Catholic University of America was an outgrowth of joint efforts by library officials and members of the history staff.<sup>25</sup> Nucleus of the collection, organized as an autonomous department of the university in 1949, was the outstanding array of transcripts and photostats gathered by Peter K. Guilday during his three decades at Washington as professor of American Church history. Subsequent designation of the Archives "as a repository for the papers of any prominent Catholic who has made a significant contribution to the Church or to the Nation and whose papers would have no other fitting means of proper provision for scholarly use"<sup>26</sup> has resulted in a widely diversified assortment of materials of vital interest to students of Catholic Americana. The major categorical divisions of the holdings are spelled out by this writer in a descriptive checklist, "The Catholic University of America Archives."<sup>27</sup>

An extensive microfilm collection of documentary sources for activities of the Society of Jesus in the New World during the colonial period has been amassed at Saint Louis by Fathers Lowrie J. Daly and Ernest J. Burrus. The materials, drawn mainly from Spanish, Roman, Mexican, and German archives, are broadly described by John Francis Bannon in his essay, "The Saint Louis University Collection of Jesuitica Americana."<sup>28</sup> Also located at that university are the chancery archives for the Archdiocese of Saint Louis. Some idea of those holdings can be ascertained from examining the general description and partial catalog prepared a half-century ago by Frederick G. Holweck.<sup>29</sup>

Surely the most ambitious accomplishment of its kind yet to appear in the United States is the 283-page calendar, *The Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 1678-1900*, issued by the Academy of Ameri-

<sup>23</sup> *On the Creation of an Institute for American Church History* (Washington, 1924).

<sup>24</sup> Francis J. Weber, "Peter Guilday: American Church Historian," in *American Ecclesiastical Review*, 147:150-151 (Sept. 1962).

<sup>25</sup> Henry J. Browne, "A Plan of Organization for a University Archives," in *American Archivist*, 12:355 (Oct. 1949).

<sup>26</sup> Michael Hall, O.S.B., "The Department of Archives and Manuscripts," in Catholic University of America, *Bulletin*, 1:3 (Nov. 1967).

<sup>27</sup> American Catholic Historical Society, *Records*, 77:50-59 (Mar. 1966).

<sup>28</sup> *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 37:82-88 (Feb. 1957).

<sup>29</sup> "The Historical Archives of the Archdiocese of St. Louis," in *St. Louis Catholic Historical Review*, 1:24-39 (Oct. 1918).

can Franciscan History in 1957. The extensive assortment of loose documents, books of patents, accounts, baptisms, marriages, and burials was assembled by the late Archbishop Rudolph A. Gerken in the mid-1930's. Although the vast majority of materials pertain to missionary work in New Mexico, the relatively small group of papers encompassing the pre-1900 archdiocesan era is also recorded in the calendar, which was prepared as an "extracurricular" project by the meticulously accurate Angelico Chavez, O.F.M.<sup>30</sup>

Similar in coverage, if not in thoroughness, to the Santa Fe calendar is Sister M. Claude Lane's short but well-ordered survey, *The Catholic Archives of Texas: History and Preliminary Inventory*, published by Sacred Heart Dominican College.<sup>31</sup> This 114-page compilation, intended "to make known the work of a group of men who collected and preserved the early records of the Catholic Church in Texas,"<sup>32</sup> extended Paul J. Foik's earlier "Survey of Source Materials for the Catholic History of the Southwest."<sup>33</sup>

Included in the extensive archival calendaring program of the Historical Records Survey of the Work Projects Administration, launched by Presidential order in 1936, were several valuable inventories of select ecclesiastical centers.<sup>34</sup> Each of the mimeographed volumes benefited from the collaboration of a large corps of generally competent and careful researchers and compilers.

The ecclesiastical record centers in California have received proportionately more attention than those of any other State in the Union. A section on "Archival Depositories" in this writer's *A Select Guide to California Catholic History*<sup>35</sup> enumerates and locates 8 curial holding agencies and 11 nondiocesan archival centers in which materials relating to the Golden State's Catholic heritage can be located.

To the scholarly world the *Calendar of Documents in the Santa Barbara Mission Archives* (Washington, 1947), prepared by Maynard Geiger, O.F.M., and published by the Academy of American Franciscan History, is "an outstanding contribution to the study of

<sup>30</sup> Both the Utah Genealogical Society and the Huntington Library at San Marino have microfilmed reproductions of the contents in the Santa Fe Chancery Archives.

<sup>31</sup> (Houston, 1961).

<sup>32</sup> Review by Bernard Doyon, in *Catholic Historical Review*, 48:298 (July 1962).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 15:275-281 (Oct. 1929).

<sup>34</sup> These included: *Guide to Depositories of Manuscript Collections in New York State* (Albany, 1941); *Inventory of the Church Archives of Michigan, the Roman Catholic Church, Archdiocese of Detroit* (Detroit, 1941); *Inventory of the Church Archives of Nevada, Roman Catholic Church* (Reno, 1939); *Inventory of the Church Archives of New York City, Roman Catholic Church, Archdiocese of New York* (New York, 1941); *Inventory of the Church Archives of Wisconsin, Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of La Crosse* (Madison, 1942); *Inventory of the Roman Catholic Church Records in New Hampshire, Diocese of Manchester* (Manchester, 1938); *Preprint of Inventory of Records of St. Patrick's Church and School* (Washington, D.C., 1941); and *Translation and Transcription of Church Archives of Florida, Roman Catholic Records, St. Augustine Parish, White Baptisms, 1784-1799* (Tallahassee, 1941).

<sup>35</sup> P. 157-162 (Los Angeles, 1966).



California mission history"<sup>36</sup> as well as "a distinct service to archival history."<sup>37</sup> In the calendar 2,842 items are specifically enumerated and described, exclusive of reports, statistics, tables, lists, and a considerable number of documents not belonging to the Californiana collection. Now that the archives have been reassembled in a specially constructed annex off the central corridor at Santa Barbara Mission, Father Geiger hopes to publish a revised and much enlarged edition of this valuable finding device. The interesting story behind the amassing of material pertinent to the beatification process of Fray Junípero Serra is told in Geiger's article, "In Quest of Serrana."<sup>38</sup>

Students of western Americana are quick to recognize the importance of the Chancery Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, inasmuch as the incumbents of that metropolitan seat have traditionally occupied a pivotal position in furthering Catholic interest in the State of California. The appointment of a chancellor for the archdiocese, as early as 1878, conferred a measure of permanency on the ecclesiastical archives not widely shared by other American jurisdictions. Basically, the organizational structure has not deviated from that initiated by Father Charles Ramm, who cataloged the more obviously valuable materials shortly after the turn of the century. This writer examined the holdings late in 1963, and subsequently issued a survey article, "The San Francisco Chancery Archives,"<sup>39</sup> based on the format used by John Tracy Ellis for the Baltimore Cathedral Archives.

Closely akin to the Bay City's curial collection, but differing essentially in structure and content, are the Chancery Archives of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.<sup>40</sup> Much of the documentation has been assembled since July 8, 1963, when, on the ground level of the newly constructed chancery annex, James Francis Cardinal McIntyre formally blessed and inaugurated what one local newspaper predicted would eventually constitute the largest concentration of ecclesiastical documents in the Western United States.<sup>41</sup> The numerous materials acquired in recent years render obsolete the brief overview, "The Los Angeles Chancery Archives,"<sup>42</sup> issued in 1965, wherein specific items were classified within general categories. The more outstanding accessions are enumerated in a special section of the annual edition of the archdiocesan directory issued by *The Tidings*.

In 1961 John B. McGloin published a descriptive account of a tour he had made 3 years earlier, to photograph materials from European ecclesiastical archives pertaining to the American period of Catholic

<sup>36</sup> Review by Mathias Kieman, O.F.M., in *Franciscan Studies*, 8:205 (June 1948).

<sup>37</sup> Review by Roscoe R. Hill, in *American Archivist*, 11:69 (Jan. 1948).

<sup>38</sup> *The Americas*, 1:97-103 (July 1944).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 20:313-321 (Jan. 1964).

<sup>40</sup> For the historical background, see Francis J. Weber, "California's Catholic Heritage," in *American Ecclesiastical Review*, 113:9-18 (July 1965).

<sup>41</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1963.

<sup>42</sup> *The Americas*, 21:410-420 (Apr. 1965).

development in California.<sup>43</sup> Items mentioned by the Jesuit historian are now in the Gleeson Library at the University of San Francisco.

Of vital necessity to any program of record retention is an understanding of the "archival mechanics" associated with collecting Catholic Americana. The excellent essay by Thomas T. McAvoy, "Catholic Archives and Their Preservation,"<sup>44</sup> superbly outlines procedures for calendaring materials and schedules for retiring and/or disposing of outdated records, both in diocesan and institutional offices. The doctoral thesis of William F. Louis, *Diocesan Archives*,<sup>45</sup> in addition to tracing their canonical history, treats such practical items as the care, custody, and accessibility of documents normally associated with day-to-day activities of chancery offices in the United States. Charles A. Kekumano's opus, *The Secret Archives of the Diocesan Curiae*,<sup>46</sup> also written as a dissertation at the Catholic University of America, focuses attention on the creation, contents, and use of those ecclesiastical records that are rarely examined by historical researchers. This writer's essay, "Chancery Archives,"<sup>47</sup> based on the organizational structure used in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, was prepared specifically as a guide for American curiae interested in adopting a workable yet simple system for cataloging their holdings. A considerable amount of useful information for classifying materials associated with religious orders is obtainable in Sister M. Paschalia's account of the records and archives of the Dominican Sisters housed at Santa Clara Convent in Sinsinawa, Wis.<sup>48</sup> Additional data can be gleaned from the "Trial Draft" of *Archives Management*, issued by the Generalate of the Sisters of Mercy.<sup>49</sup>

A former Assistant Chief of the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress once noted that "the Catholic Church, though firm in her reliance upon something higher than humanity, can nevertheless ill afford to be neglectful towards the record of her human activities."<sup>50</sup> Fortunately, evidence points to a more intensified archival consciousness on the part of the Nation's ecclesiastical administrators in recent years, both among curial officials and directors of institutional activities. It is hoped that this archival *aggiornamento* will bring about the realization that even the "most highly significant and valuable collection amounts to no more than a warehouse of waste paper unless finding aids and retrieval systems are available."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>43</sup> "European Archival Resources for the Study of California Catholic History," in *Church History*, 30:1-3 (Mar. 1961).

<sup>44</sup> David Martin, C.S.C., ed., *Catholic Library Practice*, 2:37-99 (Portland, 1950).

<sup>45</sup> (Washington, 1941).

<sup>46</sup> (Washington, 1954).

<sup>47</sup> *American Archivist*, 28:255-260 (Apr. 1965).

<sup>48</sup> "Preluding History," in *Illinois Libraries*, 26:238-244 (June 1944).

<sup>49</sup> (Washington, 1962).

<sup>50</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, "The Preservation of Ecclesiastical Documents," in *Catholic Historical Review*, 1:390 (Jan. 1916).

<sup>51</sup> August R. Suelflow, "The Stewardship of the Institute," in *Concordia Institute Quarterly*, 38:119 (Oct. 1965).