

MARYKNOLL MISSION ARCHIVES – SHEPHERDING MARYKNOLL'S HISTORY THROUGH TIME

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On a pleasant spring day in the Maryknoll Mission Archives' research room a group of Maryknoll Sisters sit around the worktables chatting amiably among themselves and with the four archivists who are leading their archives orientation tour. The group grows quiet and still as the sound of record needle scratches emanate from a boom-box. Heads bow, eyes close and a contemplative atmosphere fills the room as Mother Mary Joseph Rogers, Foundress of the Maryknoll Sisters, begins to speak. The sound of her voice recalls her physical presence for the Sisters who knew her. For those who became Sisters after her death in 1955, this four-minute recording is a precious opportunity to hear her wisdom. As she finishes speaking, the emotional impact is visible in the smiles, heartfelt thanks and occasional tears. It is on occasions such as this when the Maryknoll Mission Archivists are most poignantly aware that the paper, audiovisual and photographic materials and objects we carefully catalog, box, protect, preserve and provide access to are not just mere things. They tell the story of Maryknoll, bearing witness to the impact American Catholic mission has had on Maryknollers themselves and the world at large.

Maryknoll has three expressions: the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America¹ (commonly known as the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, founded in 1911), the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic² (founded in 1912) and the Maryknoll Mission Association of the Faithful³ (commonly known as the Maryknoll Lay Missioners, founded in 1994). The Maryknoll Mission Archives,⁴ founded in 1990, is the official repository for all corporate records and manuscripts produced by these three organizations and their members. The Archives traces its deepest roots through the Congregation's line. The Sisters had foresight enough to understand that their history would be important and took actions to preserve it starting in 1912. Maryknoll's history, according to Mother Mary Joseph, is the organization's "sweetest and dearest treasure because it is peculiarly our own."⁵

Formal recognition of the need for institutional archives would come many decades later. In 1966, the Society's leadership body established the position of Society Archivist and in February 1967 appointed Father William Coleman, M.M. to the job. Four years later, in 1971, the Maryknoll Sisters leadership charged Mother Mary Colman Coleman, M.M., with organizing the Sisters' records for research. After maintaining their histories separately for more than seventy-five years, the Society's and Congregation's leadership teams

made the decision in the spring of 1989 to consolidate their respective archives into one office. Their vision for this collaborative effort was to have a single office dedicated to facilitating and coordinating access to both collections by researchers and making preservation of the materials more efficient and effective. Although jointly administered by the three organizations, the physical and intellectual integrity and separation of the collections is maintained.

By the end of 1991, the Society's and the Congregation's materials resided side by side in the newly created archives space located in the Society's Center building. The Maryknoll Lay Missioners joined the office in 2001. The Archives is also home to the records of the Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico, the United States Catholic China Bureau⁶ (USCCB) and the United States Catholic Mission Association⁷ (USCMA), organizations that were founded in part by Maryknollers.



Writing Display Featuring a Diary, Letter, Pen and Lighter in Maryknoll Archives' Artifact and Manuscript Collections

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

Leadership's vision of one home for the entire Maryknoll story has proven to be an inspired one, greatly benefiting the parent organizations and external researchers who make use of its resources for a wide variety of projects including books, dissertations, films, genealogies, exhibits, promotional materials and presentations. The documents, films, audio, images and objects preserved in the Archives have taken on many new lives since their creation in the administrative offices at Maryknoll, New York, and the mission fields. For example, from the opening of its first mission in China in 1918 until the early 1970s, Maryknollers wrote

diaries recording their experiences which were sent home to New York. At the time of their creation, these diaries served as reports of missionaries' activities for leadership, sources of inspiration for missionaries-in-training who heard them read at dinner and mission education articles for Catholic America published in the *The Field Ajar*, Maryknoll's magazine. Today, these same diaries have been used by communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America to aid in recreating their histories lost in times of war, academics seeking to understand at a micro-level the conditions in the areas Maryknoll served, families of Maryknollers looking to walk in their relations' footsteps and the Archives itself in blog posts sharing the words of yesterday that are still so very relevant today.

Even more heavily used are the Archives' image and audiovisual collections. The written record of such diverse topics such as the liberation of those interned (including Maryknoll Priests and Sisters) in the Los Banos camp in the Philippines during World War II, the



Maryknoll Co-founder Bp. James A. Walsh (August 1933), his Chalice (in the Archives' artifact collection), and Photograph of his Chalice Being used during the Society's 2014 Ordination Mass

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

mission work of Maryknoll Sisters with disenfranchised communities around the globe, and the story of the first one hundred missionaries Maryknoll sent to “fields afar” visually come to life in films by the History Channel (*Rescue at Dawn: The Los Banos Raid*), Fishtail Soup Productions (*Trailblazers in Habits*)⁸ and the Maryknoll Mission Archives (*The First Hundred*).⁹ Many academics and filmmakers also access a selection of more than eight thousand images, approximately eight percent of the Archives image collection, through the International Mission Photography Archive website¹⁰ hosted by the University of Southern California Libraries.

As an overseas mission organization, Maryknoll's history is inextricably entwined with that of the communities it serves in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Of equal importance is how it has served American communities and been supported by American people and institutions. This fall, one of these domestic Maryknoll stories will be told as part of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum web exhibit, “America's Mailing Industry,” exploring the partnership between the U.S.



Cameras and Film Reels in Maryknoll Archives' Artifacts and Audiovisual Collections

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

Postal Service and private sector enterprises. As one

of the participating organizations, the Archives has an opportunity to share and pay tribute to Maryknoll's more than a century long relationship with the Postal Service. Postal workers with mailbags full of mission education materials, donations, and letters home from missionaries have literally carried the message of Maryknoll throughout the United States.

As the Archives shepherds Maryknoll's history through time, the formats in which it has been recorded have changed dramatically presenting great opportunities and challenges for access and preservation. Hand- or type-written onion-skin pages have largely given way to word-processed documents created in a number of file formats. 16 mm film and reel-to-reel audiotape have been replaced as recording mediums with flash drives, SD cards and cloud storage. The rise of the digital world has provided the Archives with faster, more efficient ways of sharing Maryknoll's story. Digital surrogates of objects, images, films, audio and documents, created through scanning and digital photography and recording, can easily travel to all parts of the world via email and through the Archives' website vastly increasing the number of people we can help. The precarious position in which we stand, though, is how to manage, preserve and provide access to both the content of already obsolete formats and that of the dynamic world of digital records. Creating and maintaining a stable environment for objects in the physical world with appropriate enclosures and temperature and humidity controls is easier to achieve than providing the same for their electronic counterparts in the digital realm. The Maryknoll Mission Archives is working towards creating such an environment to ensure their longevity even in the face of technological change.



Maryknoll Mission Archives staff:
(L to R): **Jessica Di Silvestro** (Archivist),
Stephanie Conning (Archivist),
Ellen Pierce (Director), and
Jennifer Halloran (Photo Archivist)

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

One of the most frequently asked questions by visitors to our office is, “what is a typical day like?” This query always elicits smiles and the response, “atypical is our typical.” Our days don’t have a regular rhythm. Any given week may include, among other tasks, a combination of arranging and describing a collection of materials, answering reference requests, writing content for the Archives’

in New York City where it was part of the Society’s Centennial celebration Mass. It was given to Bishop Walsh in 1933 when he was ordained Titular Bishop of *Siene*. It has been raised during the Liturgy of the Eucharist for many Society celebrations including ordinations and Foundation Days over the more than eighty years since Bishop Walsh first held it. This chalice and the many other paper-based documents, images, films, tapes and artifacts under the Archives’ care are testaments to Maryknoll’s past and guideposts for its future. As a member of the Maryknoll Mission Archives’ staff, it is a privilege to be among the cadre of caretakers ensuring that the spirit of Maryknoll endures.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, “Global Missionaries of the Catholic Church: Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers,” <https://maryknollsociety.org/> (accessed July 26, 2016).
- ² Maryknoll Sisters, “Catholic Charity: Maryknoll Sisters,” <https://maryknollsisters.org/> (accessed July 26, 2016).
- ³ Maryknoll Lay Missioners, “Maryknoll Lay Missioners: Where the Compassion of the Faithful Transforms Lives,” <http://www.mkmlm.org> (accessed July 26, 2016).
- ⁴ Maryknoll Mission Archives, “Home – Archives: Archives,” <http://maryknollmissionarchives.org/> (accessed July 26, 2016).
- ⁵ Mother Mary Joseph Rogers, M.M., “Silver Jubilee,” [Meditation given at Silver Jubilee celebration, Maryknoll, NY, February 2, 1951].
- ⁶ US Catholic China Bureau, “US Catholic China Bureau,” <http://www.uscatholicchina.org/> (accessed July 26, 2016).
- ⁷ The United States Catholic Mission Association, “United States Catholic Mission Association – Washington, DC,” <http://uscatholicmission.org/> (accessed July 26, 2016).
- ⁸ Fishtailsoup Productions Inc., “Trailblazers In Habits,” <http://trailblazersinhabits.com/> (accessed July 26, 2016).
- ⁹ Maryknoll Mission Archives, “The First Hundred,” From the Collections – Maryknoll Mission Archives Blog, entry posted October 2, 2014, <http://maryknollmissionarchives.org/?p=4451> (accessed July 26, 2016).
- ¹⁰ University of Southern California, “International Mission Photography Archive, ca. 1860 – ca. 1960,” <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15799coll123> (accessed July 26, 2016).

website, strategizing about digital records preservation, preparing an exhibit, hosting visitors, working one-on-one with researchers and providing resources for Maryknoll’s missioners overseas and its mission education projects at home. Each staff member contributes in all these areas, juggling and reprioritizing each project in relation to the others. The thread that unites it all is the staff’s dedication to helping the Society, Congregation and Lay Missioners integrate their history into all aspects of their work today. Always mindful that the treasures in our care are significant pieces of Maryknoll’s story and world history imbued with spiritual significance, we strive to promote Maryknoll’s history as a rich, relevant resource to be drawn upon for the work of mission today and tomorrow.

On October 30, 2011, Society co-founder Bishop James A. Walsh’s chalice (cataloged as Archives artifact MFB.155) left the Maryknoll Mission Archives and was transported to St. Patrick’s Cathedral



Liberation of Maryknoll Sisters from Los Banos Internment Camp, Philippines (1945); internee Maryknoll Fr. William McCarthy’s Pamphlet Account of Camp’s Liberation; Fragments of U.S. Army Cargo Parachutes used to Deliver Supplies to POWs in Philippines

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives