

THE FATHER BONAVENTURE T. KILEY, T.O.R., ARCHIVES FOR THE FRANCISCAN FRIARS OF THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR PROVINCE OF THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS

Zach Doll



Old Main at Saint Francis College, Loretto, engulfed in flames, October 30, 1942

Source: Father Bonaventure T. Kiley Archives

Franciscan Friars of the Third Order Regular Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

When six Franciscan teaching brothers from Mountbellew Monastery in County Galway arrived at the small settlement of Loretto in the Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania, a story began that resonates today. Loretto had been founded in 1799 by Russian prince, Catholic convert, and priest, Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin, on land deeded by Captain Michael McGuire. Michael O'Connor, the first bishop of Pittsburgh, invited the Irish Franciscans of the Third Order Regular to minister there. The brothers cleared the land and began a school in 1847 that would later become St. Francis College, now known as St. Francis University. It would be one of the first Catholic universities in the United States

and the first Franciscan college established. The small band of Franciscan lay brothers, under the authority of the local diocese and bishop, grew in number and ministries.

Desiring to reunite with the religious community of their origin, the Franciscan community at Loretto — then part of the new Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown — received permission in 1907 from Minister General Father Angelo DeMattia, T.O.R. to seek consolidation with the friars of the Third Order Regular, based in Rome. Papal permission was granted in 1908 and the Franciscan communities in Pennsylvania and, likewise, Nebraska were incorporated into the order. In 1910, the houses in the United States were erected into an independent province under the title of the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus with

its motherhouse in Loretto. A separate American province — the Province of the Immaculate Conception — was established in 1925 with its motherhouse located in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania.

At its peak, the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus was home to three hundred and fifty priests and brothers which included the members of the Province as well as the later independent communities of friars in India and Brazil. Today, community members work in education and campus ministry (St. Francis University and Franciscan University of Steubenville), parish ministry, retreat ministry, hospital ministry, and maintenance and promotion of shrines and gardens in Loretto.

The stories of the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus — its history, members, and the larger community of Loretto — are worthy of preservation. This article traces the efforts of the province to do just that.

Background on the Father Bonaventure T. Kiley T.O.R. Archives

Thomas Kiley entered the Third Order Regular in 1935. He was given the religious name of Bonaventure. He professed simple vows in 1936 and solemn vows in 1939. Father Bonaventure was ordained to the priesthood on May 14, 1942 by Bishop Richard T. Guilfoyle, bishop of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. Father Bonaventure worked primarily in the field of education, teaching at various institutions including Saint Francis College, the College of Steubenville and Bishop Egan High School.¹

The Archives of the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus began unofficially in 1938. Brother Bonaventure began crafting a series of source books and date books in order to tell the story of the Province as no official archives existed at that time. Following his ordination and some months later the disastrous fire of October 30, 1942, Father Bonaventure continued to collect materials in order to preserve the history of the Sacred Heart Province. Another fire in January 1958, set by a student, Robert Conkling, destroyed the archival collections further, but Father Bonaventure was undeterred. He remained as archivist both officially and unofficially until his retirement in 1990.

Following in Father Bonaventure's footsteps, Brother Michael Tripka, who earned a Master of Library Science, took over as province archivist for a few years beginning in 1990.



Father Bonaventure T. Kiley

Source: Father Bonaventure T. Kiley Archives

Speaking of his time as archivist, Brother Michael said, "I was archivist for three years. The first year was learning what I had in the collections. The second year was deciding what to do with it and the third year was starting to do it."² Brother Michael was reassigned to the Franciscan University of Steubenville in 1993.

Over the next couple of decades, several Franciscans served as archivists, including T.O.R. Fathers Fabian McNichol, Richard Davis, and Benjamin Medeiros. In 2004 Father Benjamin, who served an eight-year term as archivist, oversaw the move of the archival collections from the campus of Saint Francis University to Kelley Hall on the former Charles M. Schwab Estate, now owned by the Franciscan Friars. It was decided by then Minister Provincial, Father Christian Oravec, to move the archives to Kelley Hall because it was on Province property and was a more suitable location environmentally, for archival materials.

Father Benjamin was succeeded by former-University President Father Christian Oravec, whose main contribution to the archives was the creation of a necrology of the Province, an updated version of which is still used today within the houses of the Province.

Father Christian died suddenly in July 2014. At this point, Brother Michael Tripka was reassigned to Loretto from his previous assignment in Pittsburgh. Joining Brother Michael, in a limited capacity, was Father Gerard Connolly, T.O.R., archivist of the Immaculate Conception Province in Hollidaysburg, PA. Sadly, Father Gerard passed away as the result of a heart attack at dinner in 2015. Today, following national trends in archives of religious congregations, the archives is managed by a lay staff.

The Archival Collection

After the move to the new site (the former tractor barn of Charles M. Schwab, located on the back part of the estate) the work there began on May 11, 2015. For two days, the staff of the archives assisted by the Province's development staff and executive secretary moved the boxes from the former office of Father Christian, which was located in a cottage building on the estate, to the archives building just across the road. Following the moving of the collections into the new archives building, the archival staff fully organized and catalogued the collection according to archival standards, enabling users greater access to the collection.

Within the approximately 1,000 linear feet of the collection, the archives contains archival and manuscript collections. The archival records document the Province of the Most Sacred Heart and also their seminary, the university, Loretto Borough, and the Sisters of Mercy (Cresson/Dallas branch).³ The archives contains not only documents but

also artifacts, such as the altar stone of Old Main, which survived the fire of 1942. The records of the Saint Francis Seminary represent the formation of priests and friars for many dioceses, including several in the Dioceses of Altoona-Johnstown, Greensburg, and Pittsburgh.

The archives is also home to an extensive manuscript collection of papers from friars as well as other notable individuals in the history of the Sacred Heart Province and the Loretto area. Of particular interest are T.O.R. Fathers Linus Lynch and Michael Scanlan. Father Linus was one of the friars who worked to establish the union of the friars with the Third Order Regular. Father Michael Scanlan served as president of the Franciscan University of Steubenville from 1974-2000. Through the efforts of Father Michael and others, Franciscan University of Steubenville maintains a very Catholic identity with an emphasis on charismatic renewal.

Manuscript collections include those of early twentieth-century steel magnate Charles M. Schwab; Apostle of



The Charles M. Schwab Estate in the early 1900s.

Source: Father Bonaventure T. Kiley Archives

the Alleghenies and Servant of God Father Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin; and artist, author, and teacher Sister M. Fides Glass, S.C. The Charles M. Schwab collection contains articles and publications about him as well as photographs and information pertaining to his summer estate in Loretto. Also included in the Schwab collection

are construction contracts for the various amenities Schwab included on the estate. The Demetrius Gallitzin collection contains publications about Father Gallitzin as well as memorabilia that was donated by the Sisters of Charity. Sister M. Fides Glass wrote a book on Prince Demetrius Gallitzin and thus had corresponded with Father Bonaventure Kiley as part of her research. Also included in the collection of Sister M. Fides Glass are artworks by her as well as a signed copy of her book, *The Seton Ballad: a true story in verse and pictures of Mother Elizabeth Seton*.



The Father Bonaventure T. Kiley, T.O.R. Archives is located in the former tractor barn of what was once the Charles M. Schwab Estate.

Source: Kathleen Washy

Additionally, the T.O.R. Archives was fortunate to receive donations of material from Frank and Betty Seymour, historians who have been the promoters for the cause of Father Gallitzin's sainthood.⁴ The material donated has further enhanced the intellectual knowledge and archival holdings of collections pertaining to Charles M. Schwab, Father Demetrius Gallitzin, and the Borough of Loretto.

In May 2016, the archives began interviewing friars as part of an oral history project. The first to be interviewed was Father Alex Bombera. Father Alex was the last living friar of what is referred to as the "Old Main period," and the fire of October 30, 1942. At the time, Father Alex was a novice living on the second floor of Raymond Hall. He noticed the flames and exited the building while heading towards Old Main. Father Alex shouted as he ran toward Old Main, "Friars... friars... the building's burning... the building's burning... get out get out!"⁵ Father Alex went back and forth from the building to the roadway desperately trying to save religious books, chalices and vestments.

As of summer 2022, a total of thirty-four interviews have been completed with friars and other notable individuals as part of this on-going oral history. The archives also have other oral history interviews that were produced prior to 2016. All of the interviews have been digitized and transcribed. And in the past few years, this digitization effort has extended to the photograph collection, as well as slides and other audio-visual material.

Father Bonaventure T. Kiley's documentation of the history of the Franciscan Friars of the Third Order Regular Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus began the Province's archives, a solid resource for the history of Catholicism in Western Pennsylvania. The tradition started by Kiley continues through the work of today's archivists.

Endnotes:

¹ Biographical Information on Father Bonaventure T. Kiley, T.O.R., MG 9 — Father Bonaventure Kiley, T.O.R.

² Interview with Brother Michael Tripka, T.O.R. (August 4, 2016), RG 92 — Oral History Interviews

³ Coming to Pittsburgh from Ireland in 1843, the Sisters of Mercy expanded to Loretto in 1848.

⁴ See: Blanche McGuire, "A Saint for Pennsylvania: Loretto Couple Promotes Sainthood for Prince-Priest Gallitzin, Apostle of the Alleghenies," *Gathered Fragments* 24 (Fall 2014), 12-14.

⁵ Interview with Father Alex Bombera, T.O.R. (May 9, 2016), RG 92 — Oral History Interviews

Memories of Zach Doll: My mother was working in the Saint Francis College Archives during the mid to late 1990s. As a young boy, I remember seeing a friar in a black habit; however, I did not know his name. I learned years later, when I began working for the Sacred Heart Province, that the friar in the black habit was Father Fabian McNichol, T.O.R. Little did Father Fabian know of the impression that his work would have on that little boy.



Space is provided for researchers in the archives. The setting includes artifacts from the history of the Province.

Source: Kathleen Washy