Catholic Archives in the Digital Age Conference

Left to right: Carol Coburn — Avila University, Tracy Bergstrom — Notre Dame Libraries, Erik Dix — Notre Dame Archives, Jane Zhang — CUA Department of Library and Information Science, Timothy Meagher — American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives

Catholic Archives in the Digital Age brought together archivists, reporters, and scholars to discuss the state of Catholic archives in the U.S. on Oct. 9, 2013, at The Catholic University of America’s Edward J. Pryzbyla University Center. The conference focused on three aspects of contemporary Catholic archivy: availability of archival materials to religion media reporters, Latino Catholic archival collections in the U.S., and the state of digital collections and digital best practices in Catholic archival repositories in the U.S. generally. Organized by CUA Archivist Maria Mazzenga, Michael Sean Winters of the Institute for Policy Research & Catholic Studies at Catholic University, and Pat Lawton of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance at Notre Dame University, the conference was sponsored by CUA’s University Libraries and Department of Library and Information Science, the Institute for Policy Research & Catholic Studies, and Notre Dame University’s Hesburgh Libraries.

The conference featured religion news writers such as Ann Rodgers of the Religion Newswriters Association and Kevin Eckstrom of the Religion News Service talking about the kinds of archival materials they would find useful. Archivists such as Susan Eason of the Catholic Archives of Texas and John Hebert of the Library of Congress discussed materials related to Latinos, and Jac Treanor of the Archdiocese of Chicago and Jane Zhang of CUA’s Department of Library and Information Science discussed digital best practices in archives. The conference had three goals: to increasing archivists’ understanding of the needs of religion news writers and news writers’ understanding of what is available to them for their work, especially digitally, via Catholic archival materials; to bring archivists at Catholic institutions together toward acquiring knowledge of materials, both digital and nondigital, in Catholic archives across the U.S., with a special focus on Latino Catholic collections; and to bring archivists at Catholic institutions together toward acquiring knowledge of strategies for making their collections known to various publics, and of best practices, grant opportunities, and current technologies for digitization. The conference achieved all of these goals.

Attendance at the conference was excellent. Ninety-seven attendees came from archival institutions across the country, and 85 watched via livestream. The conference can be viewed at lis.cua.edu/cada.
At our last Board of Advisors meeting in December 2012, Julie Yarwood, the graduate student member of our Board asked, “Where do you [the Archives] want to be in the next five years?”

Where, indeed, do we want to be? That question prompted us to begin a new planning process. This was not formal organizational planning, run by a facilitator and outlining lists of goals and objectives. We had done that before with great help from two longtime board members, Jack Augenstein, former dean of the Education School at Marquette, and Jim O’Toole, professor of history at Boston College and an expert in archives. This was more of a refresher, taking pause and thinking about what we like about what we do, what we think we should change, and what new trends in archives we should possibly incorporate into our work.

We did not assume that we needed to change everything we do, but we wanted to be thorough and consider every aspect of our program to make sure we had not overlooked any new opportunities. We are proud of our archives: our professionalism and our accomplishments. Some things we do we decided not to change. We decided, for example, not to change reading room policies and days and hours. Other aspects of our operations were ripe for change. For instance, we considered our space and hope to make some simple but important reconfigurations of furniture and partitions in two of our offices this year, as well as set some priorities for renovations in the future.

What became clear early on in this planning process is that we really needed to think more about how we handle digitization and digital materials. W. John Shepherd, Maria Mazzenga, and Jane Stoeffler had already been thinking about the need to enhance the Archives digital capabilities. Now in this planning process we wanted to think about what we should and can do in making or working with digital materials and how we would do it.

After we completed our regular planning meetings we moved into a more focused discussion in a series of meetings about digitization and digital materials. That discussion included a meeting with University Librarian, Steve Connaghan and Assistant Professor Jane Zhang of the library department, which was very helpful. The library department’s professors and students have always been important aids to our work. The information and broad concepts gleaned from these experts helped shape our further discussions internally.

We then began to think of what specifically we should do. We read up on current archival practice about digitizing print materials and accessioning and processing born digital materials that we might receive. Michael Dobbs and Paul Kelly, on our staff and both currently graduate students in the library department, recommended the articles we read. After discussing those readings and working out their relevance to our situation, we began to think of how we would undertake digitization through a mix of projects, collaboration, and digitization on demand. We also began to assess what equipment we would need, who our partners might be, how we can allocate personnel, and what training our staff would need.

Recently, I asked Michael Dobbs, Paul Kelly, and Maria Mazzenga from our staff to act as a small task force or committee to begin implementing and testing our planning recommendations.

“Where do we want to be in five years?” We have thought the questions through and begun to take steps to get there.

A Note from the Archivist

Mike Dobbs — Graduate Library Professional, Maria Mazzenga — Education Archivist, W. John Shepherd — Associate Archivist, Jane Stoeffler — Reference Archivist, Paul Kelly — Archives Technician, Timothy Meagher — Curator and University Archivist
Manuscript Collection Update

From May 2012 to the end of 2013, the word to describe the manuscript collections must be volume. Large volumes have been acquired, and even larger volumes have been made accessible through finding aid creation. Archives staff also has been part of a few consultant projects for current and potential archival donors, particularly with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, our most voluminous donor. This work helps us fulfill our goal of making American Catholic historical primary sources discoverable and accessible to the general public and researchers in more sizeable numbers than in previous years.

As far as specifics are concerned, ACUA accessioned more than 180 linear feet of material in 63 separate accessions. While most of these accessions came as additions to currently held collections, 16 new manuscript collections were also added, bringing the total manuscript collections the Archives holds to 371. The new collections vary from papers of individual professors such as drama professor Josephine McGarry Callan, to clerical individuals such as Monsignor John O’Grady, to national organizations such as the nondenominational Thomas Moore Society of America.

For the first time in decades we began to receive substantive material from our most important donor, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops. The deposit of the records followed a long period of substantial work by our staff in helping the USCCB organize and describe its records and negotiations of a new agreement that reaffirms The Catholic University of America Archives as the long-term archives of the Conference that included a survey of the USCCB archive room by John Shepherd and GLP Mike Dobbs during August and September 2012. The resulting shelf list arranges nearly 2,700 linear feet of space. The organization process enabled the Archives to make informed recommendations about some 600 linear feet of material dated about 1967–1988 that should come to CUA. The first of hopefully many installments of these records from the USCCB was received in July 2013.

In the past year, a new genre of collection has emerged at ACUA: records and papers of organizations and individuals based in the U.S. who work in international Catholic communities. The three collections recently arranged and described in this category are the International Catholic Organizations Network Records, the Jubilee USA Network Records, and the Papers of Father Luis Dolan.

Growing our manuscript collection remains only a portion of the equation at ACUA; we must also process collections in order for them to become useful to patrons. Under the direction of and supported by John Shepherd, the Archives staff, including student workers and LIS practicum students, have created 40 new finding aids in the last year and a half. Though each collection may get a different level of description based on size and use, the amount of the manuscripts described now hovers near 50% of our total manuscript holdings. Specifically, we have 170 finding aids (out of 371 collections) published, describing close to 6,000 linear feet of material. The collections processed include updates to USCCB Legal and Youth Department Records and the McManus Papers, new finding aids for the National Society of St. Vincent de Paul Records and Eileen Egan’s Mother Teresa Collections, and separate treatment for each of the Vatican II collections.
Outreach

Promotion and outreach at the American Catholic History Research Center continues to use a multifaceted approach to developing the Archives’ patron base and making our materials more widely known and available. In addition to adding American Catholic History Classroom websites and maintaining a social media presence, Maria Mazzenga has presented about the Archives, primary source documents, and historical research to groups and classes. All these efforts support the desire of ACUA to maintain and strengthen connections to the Catholic community, near and far.

One of the primary methods of opening primary source documents to wide analysis and research is through thematically organized online classroom exhibits. To research and compose these sites frequently takes months to complete. Not only do these sites provide avenues for distance research, they also create opportunities to promote the Archives’ collections. In the past year and a half, we have produced two full websites on the NCWC/USCCB: Refugees and Resettlement, and Labor Priests. In addition, in part to promote the recent digitization of the Mother Jones collections, a Mary “Mother” Jones classroom website is nearing publication.

As part of the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, ACUA contributed to multiple projects in order to promote our own Vatican II collections as well as to connect with other institutions with similar holdings. Carter Rawson, a student worker, completed an online exhibit showcasing the CUA Archive’s collections, providing context for each collection as well as related material and links. Moreover, we took part in a Vatican II census started by Tricia Pyne, the archivist of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. This survey of Catholic archives sought to locate and make public the primary source documents that articulate this historic occasion in the Church’s history.

Mazzenga presented to the music school faculty and students on the 1938 Kristallnacht anti-Nazi broadcast in April 2012, then again to a later event sponsored by CUA libraries. She presented to Jane Zhang’s Archives Management class and oversaw the practicum program in September 2012 to Seth Smith’s history class on Catholics and the 1936 Presidential Election in November 2012, and to Timothy Meagher’s immigration class on Catholics and immigration in October 2012. She also presented materials to a University of Maryland research seminar in October 2013. Additionally, Mazzenga and Michael Dobbs worked with several teachers at Our Lady of Good Counsel to create a website featuring primary source materials applicable to their tenth grade religious studies curriculum.

Thanks to the gracious bequest of Dorothy and Bruce Mohler, we continue to provide travel grants for researchers to use our collections for research. In 2013, Deborah Beckel, Ph.D., and William Cossen were the recipients of these grants. Beckel, who currently teaches history at Lynchburg College, is examining women and the Knights of Labor in the South. Cossen, a doctoral candidate at Penn State University, is researching the construction of Protestant identity by American Catholics.

Please follow us on Facebook and Twitter for regular outreach and programming updates!
University Archives

Unlike the manuscript collections, our holdings of University Records serve a distinctly different purpose. That is to say, while our manuscripts are meant to make public portions of the history of Catholic life in America, the University Archives are meant for historical safekeeping. Moreover, the audience these holdings serve is primarily internal to the University community. To that end, any records we take from the University need to be protected but also available when needed.

This dance of security and retrieval is made even more challenging, from time to time, when the Archives receives significant amounts of records in a short period of time. In the past year and a half, we have received more than 360 linear feet of material, 230 of which were accessioned during the summer of 2013. This unusual volume was due to the inordinate number of departments and offices that were relocated across campus this summer, which necessitated removal of archival documents to the Archives.

In order to make sure that these records can be accessed by the department specifically, inventories are kept of each accession and aggregated by both department and specific series of documents for reference. While this is often enough information to retrieve specific documents effectively, there are certain collections that, due to size and use, need more efficiently utilized inventories. The latest example of such a project was the creation of a database for the records of the provost. Two student workers, and the GLP, supervised by John Shepherd, created a database, searchable by folder title, date, and other indices, for more than 300 linear feet of documents dating back to the beginning of CUA.

Finally, the Archives staff is looking into ways to plan a pilot project for managing electronic records at CUA. While still a fledgling idea, it would attempt to reduce the need for physical space for storage and increase document retrieval efficiency.

Digital Collections

Digital collections at ACUA continued to be a group effort from 2012 through 2013. The main focuses were on-going projects, including the completion of long-standing digitization efforts and creation of digital exhibits. The Archives also began comprehensive planning toward the creation of a digitization program. In all these projects, the staff collaborated with external experts and stakeholders, particularly those in the John K. Mullen of Denver Memorial Library and WRLC.

At our most recent Archives Advisory Board meeting, the staff were challenged to envision our work and services three to five years from now. To that end, the Archives staff has begun an intensive research and planning project to decide the ultimate goals and direction of a systematic digitization program at ACUA to provide more online access to research collections. In the most abstract terms, ACUA envisions its digital program as more productive: creating and maintaining digitized collections in-house at a larger scale than previously possible. The staff has been identifying and reflecting on institutional and researcher needs, current resources, and gaps in the Archives’ current tools and skills. Moreover, there is a plan for a pilot, in-house digitization project using a Zeutschel high-speed, overhead scanner that will give us a broader understanding of our capabilities. Ultimately, ACUA hopes to have a full-fledged in-house digitization program soon, possibly in the next calendar year.

Aside from planning for a more comprehensive and continually productive program, the primary goal of the staff was the completion and continuation of works in progress. Due to the procurement of a high-speed scanner at the WRLC, the digitization of the Treasure Chest of Fun and Fact was completed and the Mother Jones Collection and Cardinal Yearbooks were digitized in their entirety. In fact, the digital Mother Jones materials along with pieces from other collections both inside and outside of CUA are being used in a forthcoming Omeka exhibit focusing on her life’s work. Access to and storage of the digital collections are a work in progress with the WRLC Digital Projects Committee. While we continue to use our finding aids as the primary point of discovery and access, we are looking forward to a new digital repository that is in committee for approval for consortium-wide use. A new, more robust repository would potentially make our collections more visible on the Internet and more accessible to researchers.
Audio-Visual Collections Update

With offices moving all over campus, a lot of material fit for transfer to the archives has been discovered! Two departments in particular donated quite a cache of materials to the archives. The first was the drama department. While helping to assist them with a mold problem in their storage area, we discovered prints of every drama production ever performed here. We persuaded them to transfer these to us, and they are now safe and sound in new housing and a controlled climate. We have plans to digitize the entire collection and make it available online.

Another big donor was our Office of Video Production and New Media. As they are responsible for taping all campus events, one can imagine the size of their donation. We were lucky enough to receive more than 2,000 mini DVDs and 3,000 CDs of footage over the summer. Thanks mainly to the efforts of our student assistants, many of these have been inventoried and itemized. Our hopes are that years down the line, when a researcher requests footage of a very esoteric event, the Archives will be able to provide it for them.

New Staff

Paul Kelly
Archives Technician

Paul hails from Scotland, and attained his bachelor’s in English and film from the University of Glasgow. In 2005, given the choice between teaching literature to high school students and emigrating to the United States, he opted for the latter, moving to Athens, Ga., in 2007 before relocating permanently to Washington, D.C.

In 2008, Paul accepted a copy editing position. Sensing the likely decline of the publishing industry and feeling the pull of public service, he applied to the library and information science program at Catholic University, from which he graduated in December.

Juggling internships at the National Archives and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, combined with professional obligations and education, made for a hectic 2012. The elimination of his copy editing team that year signaled that the time was right for merging academic interests and employment. Paul joined the staff of ACUA in April of 2013.

Although the technician role is largely administrative, Paul has found time to work on several additional projects in his time at the Archives. Balancing reference with processing, Paul says, is both challenging and rewarding; he hopes to continue performing such work long into the future, wherever his career may take him.

Mike Dobbs
Graduate Library Preprofessional

Mike Dobbs comes to the CUA Archives via a circuitous path of best-laid plans, dreadful experiences, and centering reflection. He graduated in 2007 from the University of Michigan with a B.S. in English (and math) and set out to work with Teach for America (TFA) in Washington, D.C. He taught middle school mathematics for two years and received his M.A. in teaching from American University. After completing his commitment to TFA, Mike took a position teaching elementary mathematics in Fairfax County, Va., ultimately deciding that public education was not his calling. Also in that time, he married his wife, Kim, who has supported him in his journey to balance professional challenges with personal well-being.

Mike always had a love of books, and libraries and information science seemed a natural next-step from education. He entered the CUA library and information science program, a decision made easier when the Archives offered him their GLP position in April of 2012. Despite having no experience in Archives, his desire to seek out new and varied learning experiences made him accept this challenge.

Under the tutelage of W. John Shepherd, Mike has enjoyed the intellectual puzzle of “creating order out of chaos” that is finding aid creation. In that capacity, he has completed more than six finding aids, describing more than 150 feet of collections, in the past year. Some collections, such as the Father John Whalen Papers, were relatively straightforward; others, such as the Father Luis Dolan Papers, were more of a challenge due to their lack of initial organization. He also has enjoyed working with the rest of the Archives staff to update policies and upgrade the digital program at the Archives through their five-year planning process. His ultimate goal before graduating in May 2014 is to see the Archives’ digitization program up and running. The experience at the CUA Archives has opened his eyes to the broader possibilities inside the information profession.
Student Worker Spotlight

The student workers at the American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives are integral not only to day-to-day operations, but also to furthering our mission of making available documentary heritage of the American Catholic people in various forms.

Shane MacDonald’s work on the Mother Theresa collections and the Archbishop Martin J. O’Connor photograph albums presents a wonderful example of variety not only between collections, but also within them. Shane encountered materials ranging from handwritten letters from the Mother herself to UN-issued coins featuring her visage. Such a breadth of material can prove challenging from a processing perspective, but the end result will undoubtedly be of enduring value to researchers and staff alike. Shane’s scanning of more than 3,000 images from the O’Connor collection will not only improve access to the materials, but also aid in the preservation of the original photographs. Centering on the North American College in Rome between 1943 and 1971, these images provide a lens into the work and life of the College itself and of Rome in general during the post-war and Vatican II years.

Student Chris Burroughs has created educational websites for the American Catholic History Classroom, gathering primary documents and photographs that would eventually become “The Catholic Church, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and Labor in the United States, 1930–1950.” Since the completion of this project, he has embarked on both research for and construction of a similar site on the life of noted American Catholic figure Mother Jones.

Coinciding with the 50th Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, student worker Carter Rawson overhauled our finding aid for the papers of Monsignor Frederick R. McManus, who served as a peritus, or expert, to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. In a similar vein, Carter compiled some 20 finding aids into a single educational website featuring key ecclesiastical participants in the Vatican II proceedings that would eventually donate their papers to Catholic University.

Raymond Moore has been a processing powerhouse in the past year, having worked on many notable projects, large and small, including the International Federation of Catholic Alumna, the papers of Reverend Gilbert Hartke, the Catholic Daughters of America, the papers of Clarence C. Walton, the papers of Monsignor Frederick McManus, the National Council of Catholic Women, the papers of Monsignor Paul Furfey, and the papers of Mary Elizabeth Walsh.

Whether processing collections, creating finding aids, or setting up educational websites student worker contributions have long proven invaluable to ACUA and will continue to be so into the future.
The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives
Is Asking For Your Support!

The Archives is always seeking new collections, equipment donations, and additional funds to continue our mission of collecting, organizing, preserving, making accessible, and promoting scholarly and public understanding of the records of The Catholic University of America and, more generally, the documentary and artifactual heritage of the American Catholic people. Please take a moment to fill out the form below or email the information to archives@mail.lib.cua.edu. Thank you!

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