

Additional Article for Spring 2008 ACWR Newsletter

A STORY OF ARCHIVES- HIGHLIGHTING A NEW WEB RESOURCE

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, California Province has been in this state since 1851. They had moved down from Oregon. The eight Sisters from Namur and Cincinnati traveled to Willamette, Oregon as requested by Father Peter De Smet, SJ. The documentation in the archives covers the time of the founding of the Oregon mission in 1844 to the present. This archive is an extraordinary, in depth recording of an apostolic women religious order's struggles to maintain its founder's charism in the face of the ever-changing American urban and rural landscapes from the 1850s to the present. This particular women religious archives are important because the motherhouse was not located in San Francisco but in San Jose, California: thus it escaped destruction of the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.

The archives were formally constituted in the late 1960's-the early 1970s by Sister Mary Justine McMullan. What's interesting is that several graduate theses and two general histories were written before the formal establishment of the archives. This may have been a case of research driving the need for formal archives. The structure and the organization were set up by Sister Mary Justine and followed by successive archivists as it suited the times and the administrative structure of the Province.

As Vatican II brought about tremendous changes in religious orders so it has brought changes in the archives of this Province. The change from a single Provincial Superior to a Provincial Team evolving to a future US National Team has left the older archives structure unable to accommodate these administrative changes. The diminishment of traditional ministries such as teaching, the change in living accommodations, the upsurge in justice and peace ministries and other non-traditional ministries such as chaplaincy and social work requires this archivist to redefine the present series and subgroups definitions.

The first functional area to be redefined is reference. This archivist, with many years of experience at the National Archives and Records Administration, decided with only a limited time presence that outside researchers would be invited to do their own searches under the guidance of the archivist. The imposed time limit for in-house searching is one hour. If an extensive search- more than the obvious straight forward record series- is required, the patron is called and an appointment made to visit the archives. This archivist has some flexibility to accommodate researcher's schedules. Researchers are required to pay for photocopying of records. Photographs are available to the public with the proviso that it's the researcher's responsibility to investigate who owns the copyright as most of the photographs before the 1960s were not taken by Sisters or by staff.

The first internal research project was to assist in the design of an archives page for the just launched redesigned web page, www.snddenca.org . The archives page is placed under the resources tab. This is a single page describing the archives in outline form with the pertinent contact information. Eventually there will be a rotating page highlighting upcoming events and anniversaries with archival photographs and documentation.

The archive is currently in the midst of planning a major timeline exhibit for the upcoming Congregational General Chapter July, 2008. The design is simple and the exhibit will be reusable after this one time event. The photographic copies will speak for themselves with captions lean in words. The intention is to reuse these panels at future events and to eventually post them to the website.

The major ongoing archival task will be to discover the best structure for the records created after the implementation of the team administration structure. The idea is to place records series within a comprehensive plan which will accommodate incoming records and will provide a plan for electronic records as well.

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