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Meehan Media Records Donated

By

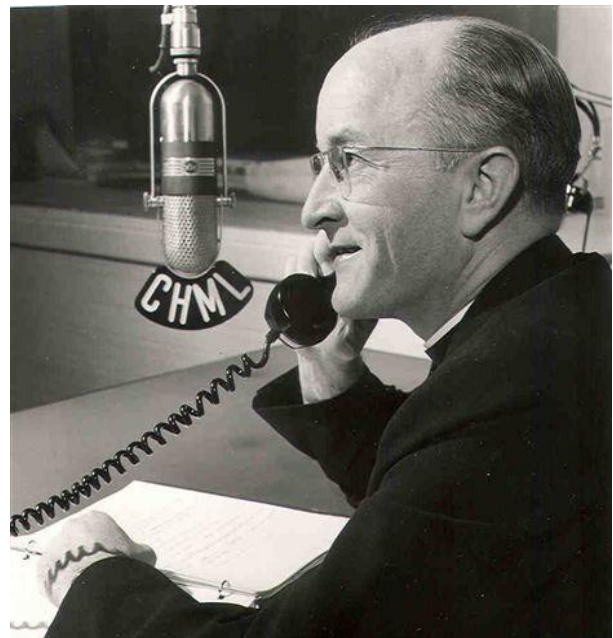
M.C. Havey

Archivist of the Edmonton-Toronto Redemptorists

On a crisp, sunny December afternoon, the media records of Rev. Matthew Gerard Meehan, documenting 51 years, likely the longest continuous religious broadcasting career in Canada, were deposited at the Provincial Archives of Ontario.

It all started in the summer 2009 when the Archives staff was requested to clear out Fr. Meehan's records from his former office at the Toronto Provincial Offices so it could be converted into a conference room for the coming of the International Novitiate.

So that summer, all of Fr. Meehan's files, which were stored in cupboards, underwent weeks of archival culling, arranging and describing – from his student days at St. Mary's College, Brockville, ON, to his final newspaper columns in 1998, just before his death.



As the impressiveness of the media records was uncovered in terms of his longevity and variety, it was decided that these records should be preserved in the proper archival and environmental conditions and be more accessible in a public Archives.

Fr. Meehan's personal records as a Redemptorist remain in the Edmonton-Toronto Provincial Archives.

Fr. Meehan's media career began in 1947 when he accepted a request on behalf of the Redemptorists from the Toronto Archdiocese to provide five of the 20 programmes on the TransCanada Catholic Hour, a Sunday weekly series on CBC radio. Specializing on family and social issues, Fr. Meehan's annual radio broadcasts became instantly popular and continued until 1962.

Fr. Meehan's broadcasting came to the attention of Bishop Ryan of the southern Ontario Diocese of Hamilton, west of Toronto and Bishop Ryan invited Fr. Meehan to provide Catholic broadcasting on a local radio station. From 1950 to 1970, Fr. Meehan went on the air with a weekly one-hour talk and phone in show at CHML 900 in Hamilton, usually on Sundays from 10-11 p.m.

Fr. Meehan entered the world of television in 1957. His childhood neighbour Ken Soble, then owner of CHML, approached him to produce a weekly religious television show at CHCH-TV. As the shows evolved into 13 half-hour programmes, Fr. Meehan tackled a wide-variety of topics from Canadian ethnicity, "Faith of Canadian People", "What's New with Vatican Two", "Spiritual Laugh-In", "How's Your Marriage", "What's It All About Lord?", and "Living and Dying". In the early 1980s, he moved the production and the CHCH-TV crew from the studio to the peaceful setting of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton.

The archival files document Fr. Meehan's planning of all aspects of the programmes, including arranging guests and establishing production timing and publicity. In its

prime, Fr. Meehan's show on Sunday nights, featuring a cross-section of Ontario luminaries, including hockey star Red Kelly, artist William Kurelek, prominent Catholic politicians and clergy, Redemptorist confreres, families, male and women religious as well as local music talents. The series were lent to interested groups across the country as well as being aired on EWTN Satellite out of Texas in 1998.



The records also include Fr. Meehan's columns on scripture readings and "Question Box" for *The Canadian Catholic Register*, *Canadian Messenger* and *Challenge* as well as his contributions to *The Toronto Star*. From 1964 until his death, he wrote many of the scripts and columns in his office at the Toronto Province's headquarters in north Toronto.

As a journalist, Fr. Meehan attended the Second Vatican Council, the Synod of Bishops in 1980 and 1983, travelled with Pope John II on his 1979 tour of the United States and 1984 Canadian tour.

Once described as the poor man's Bishop Sheen, Fr. Meehan was born on April 27, 1913 and was baptized in the Redemptorist parish of St. Patrick's in the city's downtown. He attended the St. Mary's juvenate at Brockville, ON (1925-1931) before entering Novitiate at St. Peter's, Saint John in 1931. After studies at St. Alphonsus Seminary, Woodstock, ON and ordination there on June 20, 1937, he studied at Angelicum University in Rome (1938-1940), earning a licentiate and doctorate in philosophy.

His broadcasting career began while a professor of philosophy at St. Alphonsus Seminary (1940-1952) and continued while director and rector of St. Mary's College, Brockville (1952-1959) and rector of his home parish of St. Patrick's, Toronto (1959-1964).

After 1964, he devoted his time to broadcasting along with appointed positions as director of communications for the Toronto Redemptorists (1964-1988) and Director of Radio-TV Office for the Hamilton Diocese (1972-1984), where produced and served as commentator on major diocesan events from Christmas Eve Midnight Mass to its 125th anniversary. He still found time to teach homiletics to seminarians, preach parish missions, retreats, novenas and facilitate at encounter sessions for engaged and married couples and Retrouvaille weekends for separated and divorced Catholics.

When all of these newspaper columns, scripts, correspondence of Fr. Meehan's were boxed, they occupied 14 feet of shelving. Another 18 bankers' boxes contained the film reels, beta and VHS tapes of some of the television programs.

Following an inquiry to the Archives of Ontario in February 2010, a staff archivist with expertise in audio-visual records came

to assess the files of scripts and boxes of film and tapes at the Archives. Her subsequent report recommended that Fr. Meehan's media files were of historical significance to the Province of Ontario.



After a legal agreement was completed with CHCH-TV for the transfer of copyright to the Archives of Ontario, Carol Hopp, the staff archivist, returned to the Archives office with an agreement for the donation of the media files. As Director of Archives, Fr. James Mason, signed the agreement on November 26.

Two weeks later with the help of three novices, a total of 18 bankers' boxes was delivered to the Archives of Ontario, now located in a new state-of-the-art building on the campus of York University in north-west Toronto.

And I went home and toasted Fr. Meehan with a mellow glass of wine.

M.C. Havey

All photographs courtesy of the Redemptorist Archives of the Edmonton-Toronto Province.

News of history in the making

We recently received the first part of volume 59 (2011) of the Redemptorist Journal, *Spicilegium Historicum*. Since 2011 marks the 200th anniversary of Neumann's birth, in the journal we naturally find two major articles in English on St. John Neumann. The first, by Denver Province's Father Gilbert Enderle, sits at just over 30 pages, and is titled "St. John Nepomoucene Neumann (1811-1860) – A Brief Memorial Biography of the Redemptorist Missionary Priest and Bishop." The second is also from a Denver Province member, Father Richard Boever: "St. John Neumann's Spirituality."

Two brief notes are in English. The first, also by Gil Enderle, is "In Memoriam: Father Samuel Joseph Boland" while the second, by Adam Owczarski, the director of the Redemptorist Historical Institute in Rome, appends a Bibliography of Father Boland. For those of us who relied on Father Boland's encyclopaedic knowledge of Redemptorist history in the world, it is a sad moment to think that no more articles will come from Sam's prolific mind.

In German, we have Martin Macko's description of the Vienna's Province's plans for the Balkans.

In the Redemptorist History Conference of 2010, an enthusiastic and dynamic power point presentation on the history of the Redemptorists with the Oblate Sisters of Providence was given by Sister Reginald Gerdes, O.S.P. What follows is a summary of her speech and some of the power point illustrations she showed. Black and White pictures do not do justice to her speech, but for more information, we can recommend that interested readers visit

<http://www.oblatesisters.com/History.html>

or read

Oblate Sisters of Providence: A Pictorial History, by Sharon Knecht

A French translation of a massive work originally published in Ukrainian in 2003 by Mikhail Bubnij, about the eastern-rite Redemptorists in the archdiocese of Lviv from 1913 to 1939 is heavily influenced by Polish spelling conventions and can be difficult slogging for North Americans but the article contains much valuable information to fill gaps in Paul Laverdure's *Redemption and Ritual*, which concentrated on the Eastern-rite Redemptorists in North America.

In Italian, Alfonso Amarante describes Sportelli's spiritual direction through his letters. Giuseppe Orlandi continues his description of the relations between the Redemptorists and the Jesuits in an article about Saint Alphonsus in Naples. And Michele Miele describes the relations of Alphonsus with the Dominicans.

All of the articles have summaries in two other languages, making the journal even more accessible to North American readers who master French or Spanish or who can read Italian or German. The issue is yet another magnificent contribution to knowledge of the world-wide history of the Redemptorists.

The Workings of Providence: Redemptorists and the Oblate Sisters of Providence

by
Sister Reginald Gerdes, O.S.P.

Rev. William Du Bourg, p.s.s. started catechism classes for the French-speaking black population who had fled Saint Domingue (now Haiti) beginning in 1796.

This led to the first Black Catholic parish in America. Although Du Bourg was only 36, he was excellent with youth and organized the parish. He was eventually replaced by John-Marie Tessier, p.s.s., as pastor of black Catholics at Paca Street for 30 years. He established a lending library for the parish, gave religious instructions, established a lay religious society and kept strict records of all sacramental proceedings.



James Joubert, p.s.s. (1828-1843) succeeded Father Tessier as pastor. He wanted to start a school for children of color, but he had difficulty

teaching children on top of his other pastoral work.

Elizabeth Lange offered to help. Elizabeth was highly educated and conducted, at her own expense, a school of her own in Fells Point.

Marie Balas, also from Haiti, also taught in the school. They began to teach catechism in St. Mary's Lower Chapel (originally called the Basse Chapelle).

This led to the founding, in 1829, of the Oblate Sisters of Providence (O.S.P.). In 1843, with the withdrawal of the Sulpicians, there was no spiritual direction or clerical patronage availa-

ble, but the arrival of the Redemptorists in 1847 changed that.

Father Thaddeus Anwander, CSsR, was named the Sisters' director. Over the next few years, the Redemptorists most involved with the sisters were Father Louis Gillet, Francis-Xavier Seelos and Peter Czackert.



Fr. Thaddeus Anwander

Thaddeus Anwander, C.Ss.R. began the confraternities, enlarged the chapel to seat 500, built a meeting hall, started a school for black boys, and re-established a mission school in Fells Point.



The foundress, Sister Mary Elizabeth, OSP was successful in reducing the debt by soliciting donations from Redemptorist parishes to pay for these buildings and activities. The number of students and of vocations increased. In 1855, Anwander was replaced as spiritual director by James Portier, C.Ss.R. (1855-1857), John Vogien, C.Ss.R. (1857), and Dominic Kraus, C.Ss.R. (1857-1868).

Other Redemptorists who ministered to the Oblates were John Neumann, Egidius Smulders, and Joseph Wissel.

In 1867, even while stationed in Annapolis, Father Anwander continued to work on behalf of the Sisters and had the Sisters incorporated. Their growth can be seen in the buildings they held; the Redemptorists had a lot to do with this and Redemptorist influence can be seen clearly in the Sisters' habit with the Redemptorist rosary.



Sisters in habits with the Redemptorist rosary.

Other Redemptorists served as confessors: From 1928 to the present there were: Fathers Daul, Kricker, Sipple, Braun, Obrecht, Kessler, Englehart, Hoetzelein, Rice, Cliffors, Wilinski and Carr.



**Sister Reginald Gerdes,
OSP**

The Sisters ministered with the Redemptorists in St. Louis, Missouri at the Rock Church, St. Clement Parish, Orangeburg, South Carolina at Christ the King Parish and at Holy Trinity Parish, in Wilson, North Carolina at St. Alphonsus Parish, in Aiken, South Carolina at St. Gerard Parish, in Baltimore, Maryland, in Sts. James and John Parish. One student in an Oblate school became a Redemptorist. As of October 2010, the Sulpicians have returned as weekday chaplains, and the Redemptorists continue as confessors.

The celebrations of the centenary of the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Province (1911-2011) were magnificent three-day affairs in August and in October of this year. In the next *Bulletin*, we will be printing an English translation of the speech given originally in French by the *Bulletin's* editor, Paul Laverdure, on the history of the Beaupré Province as well as some of the photographs of the celebrations.

From October 3 to 7, 2011, the Institute for Redemptorist Historical Studies (North America) met in Liguori, Missouri for its annual executive meetings.

Present: Chair: Father Gil Enderle, C.Ss.R. (Member of the Istituto Storico della Congregazione del Santissimo Redentore, Consiglio di redazione, *Spicilegium Historicum*, member of the Denver Province), co-chair Father Rich Luberti, C.Ss.R. (Denver Province, former archivist of New Orleans), Brother Steve Fruge, C.Ss.R. (Denver Province), Ashley Large (Archivist of the Denver Province), Father Matt Allman, C.Ss.R. (Archivist, Baltimore Province), Father George Rassley, C.Ss.R. (Denver Province, former librarian and archivist), Patrick Hayes (Archivist, Baltimore Province), Paul Laverdure (former archivist of the Yorkton Province and former historian for the Yorkton and Edmonton-Toronto Provinces), M.C. Havey (Archivist, Edmonton-Toronto Province), Father Ed Cosgrove, CSSR, joined the group and was warmly welcomed after lunch on Tuesday.

After the traditional *gaudeamus* on Monday evening and the warm welcome by the Liguori Mission House community, the group met on Tuesday morning in the basement meeting room at St. Clement's Health Centre.

Gil Enderle called the meeting to order, began with prayer, and thanked the communities of Liguori for their hospitality. The group began with a round-table description of works-in-progress.

Father Luberti is working on transcribing the **annals of Holy Redeemer, Detroit**. He is also looking at having Father Edward Day's licentiate thesis on the early history of the Redemptorists in North America republished.

Paul Laverdure gave a brief overview of the **centenary celebrations in Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré** and the state of the archives and libraries in Beaupré.

Brother Steve Fruge stated that he was organizing the **Vice-Province of New Orleans** documents in the Denver Province Office of Provincial records. He is creating an Inventory of the Denver archives and library, separating photographs and manuscripts from library and printed materials.

Patrick Hayes commented on the value of the Religious Portal for archives in such work. Hayes then described his own work. **St. Michael's, Baltimore, has been closed** and its archives, dating to the 1850s are being accessioned in about 25 boxes. The Esopus library continues to be studied. The National Library Relocation programme has been contacted about moving it.

To applause, Father Matt Allman announced that he had finished his M.A. (American History), and M.L.I.S. (in library and archives). He is now coordinating the Esopus and provincial library moves on behalf of Baltimore. Father Matt added that the Esopus Redemptorist community and all materials will be removed by January 2012. His proposal to move the archives to St. Peter's, Philadelphia has been accepted.

Hayes continued his description of the work in the Baltimore Archives, how the Neumann collection is being treated; how Father **Sheeran's Civil War diary is being prepared for publication**. Hayes has also pre-

pared an article on **Father F.X. Murphy** for the Congregation's history journal, *Spicilegium Historicum*, and an article on Redemptorist biographers for the *U.S. Catholic historian*. He is working on the possibility of **publishing B. Haering's American lectures** and on a **biography of Francis Connell**. He is also picking up Hoegerl's story of the murder case in Third Street, Manhattan.

Father George Rassley continues to update the history of the Redemptorists in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. He also is looking at the history of Redemptorist spirituality.

M.C. Havey reported that in 2007 the Edmonton-Toronto Chapter adopted policies and procedures which restricted the archival collections to that specific to Edmonton-Toronto. Others have been de-accessioned and sent back to diocesan or parish archives. The Sisters of Service are closing at the end of the year and will be taken over by the Sisters of St. Joseph. She accessioned Father Ray Coriveau's papers.

M.C. Havey also reported on the topics interesting current researchers: e.g. the history of the Irish of Montreal (of the Redemptorist parish of St. Ann's) and German immigrants in Toronto (in St. Patrick's parish). More requests for information are coming through the website. Parish histories continue to be popular research topics and a Redemptorist from the **Beaupré Province has been researching a history of Japanese missions**.

Ashley Large continues processing and inventorying. Currently, she is **re-housing relics** (630 individual ones); preparing materials for a CSSR alumni reunion, and working on the preservation of the Province's material archives.

Father Enderle announced that his **biography of Louis Gillet will be published** by IHM-OSP in 2012. The **Stanggassinger biography** by Otto Weiss, translated by Tony Kiesenhofer and edited by several others should be published by Liguori in a matter of days.

There was a brief discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the 2010 conference and some first thoughts about the next public conference for 2013.

There was a discussion of the Institute's finances, since the budget for the last conference had been overspent. The members discussed the need for an annual membership fee and for a conference fee. Ashley Large would study the issue.

A report on the history of the Congregation in the world by Otto Weiss was read by Father Enderle. The continuing problems include finding historians to do key sections of the work while illnesses and death of key people slow the progress of the General History.

After such news, there was a free and open discussion about the future of the North American history group, its financing, its composition and identity, its mandate, and its governance.

Father Enderle was confirmed as the co-ordinator of our group and he would look into the archives for any statements on policy. The discussion on how we could assist each other brought the suggestion by Laverdure that each province or historian help others with translations.

One formal motion was introduced, debated, and passed (Laverdure/Luberti) urging every community to begin, revive, or continue house annals.

Father Luberti, Allman, and Enderle accepted to draw up a tentative 2013 schedule, possibly for **Canandaigua**, from **September 30 to October 4, 2013**. This would be confirmed at the 2012 meeting.

It was also decided that 2012's meeting would be **October 1-5, 2012**, at a place to be decided later by the executive.

On Thursday. Paul Laverdure gave a power point presentation on the Beauré Province history. The meeting broke up shortly afterwards, with several of the members visiting the Rock Church and the St. Louis Museum and Arch.

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