

# Voices from the Community

## AN ARCHIVIST'S REFLECTION

(I am an archivist).

Archives are a funny thing. These rooms brimming with historical records are often portrayed as secretive, though in the past few decades there's been work to undo that impression. They are not museums, though the items found within are often displayed in exhibits or digitized to share online. Upon stepping into an archive for the first time, many people are surprised to find shelves full of boring, gray boxes. Opening up those boxes, however, to find the treasures inside... now that is what excites people - and what got me hooked.

In my time at Saint Mike's, one of the history classes I took was hosted in the Society of Saint Edmund Archives, located in Durick Library. With the support of the college Archivist Liz Scott, Professor Jennifer Purcell tailored her WWII course curriculum around the historical materials of the Society of Saint Edmund. Quickly we students got to sift through photographs, correspondence, and artifacts related to the Edmundites experiencing the war in Europe, conducting our research in groups as we went. I was a French minor, and so while most of the class focused on researching the Edmundite communities in England, Professor Purcell let me explore the materials from the Edmundites in France. It was all my favorite topics wrapped up in one course - history, the Catholic faith, the French language - I couldn't get enough! I stayed that summer to complete a student research grant to further explore the stories of two American Edmundite priests who were sent to France to minister to rural parishes only to find themselves shepherding their parishioners through what the French remember as "l'Exode", the chaotic migration of people fleeing the German invasion in June of 1940. My research mapped out the priests' own escapes from France: through the countryside and through Paris, through Portugal and back to the United States - sometimes needing to be dressed in disguises! They were two tales of incredible intrigue: Americans in France, running from the Nazis. It felt almost like watching a movie, nothing like how I imagined spending a gorgeous Vermont summer indoors conducting archival research.

After graduating in 2014, I worked for five years as an high school Campus Minister, leaving behind Vermont and college life, but never quite leaving the world of Catholic history and heritage. Archives were always in the back of my mind, and eventually I went back to school for my Master of Library and Information Science degree and switched professional fields. For the past two years, I have been working my dream job as an Archivist at Boston College's new Catholic Religious Archives (CRA). This archive, which we are literally building from the ground up, serves as a steward for the archival collections of Catholic religious orders. As you can imagine, many congregations of men and women religious in the Catholic Church, especially those based in the United States, have declining numbers and need to prioritize their time and resources to more pressing needs within their communities. Boston College accepts these collections at no cost to the congregations and devotes its own people and resources to preserving and maintaining them. I am so proud of the work we have done at the CRA to connect with sisters, nuns, priests and brothers and to care for their historical legacies. We are eager for next year when the CRA will begin to host students and researchers to explore the materials in the collections. The stories inside, we can assure you, are incredible.

In the meantime, my coworkers and I are busy at work processing the collections so they can be more easily accessible to researchers, and since we have many French-founded religious orders, I am still using my French reading skills every day - thank you Professor Vantine and Professor Juel! I couldn't have predicted this professional route, but hindsight is 20/20 and it is now quite clear that my career path started in the basement of Durick Library, immersed in Edmundite history!

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