From the Chair

Greetings, fellow ARCS members,

As we embark on another summer, I am reminded of the benefits of taking time to relax and enjoy the season’s slower pace. Yet, there is always work to do, and we look forward to a time of collaboration and learning with each of you at the annual section meeting, which will be held virtually on Thursday, July 14, 2023, at 4:00 pm EST. Within this meeting, we will host a panel discussion on the topic of problems in religious archives.

The steering committee has been working diligently to provide additional opportunities and resources for the section. One of our accomplishments this year was a revision of the SAA ARCS Steering Committee Manual to include detailed information on the various roles of committee members and a project calendar. Another highlight of the year was our “Lunch and Learn” events coordinated by Member at Large Mary Grace Kosta. These have provided information on a variety of topics related to religious archives. I am continually amazed at the varied collections represented and the expertise within our midst. Please keep an eye out for more events coming.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of belonging to our section is the opportunity to collaborate, encourage, and learn together. To that end, I would like to encourage our membership to participate in the discussion forum. We are stronger together! It is an honor to serve with such a wonderful group of colleagues, and I am inspired by the amazing work accomplished within our constituency. Please do not hesitate to reach out if there is anything we can do to help you succeed in your calling.

Jill Botticelli
2022–2023 ARCS Chair
Director of Libraries and Archivist, Roberts Library
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Religious Archives in the News

Recent news stories compiled by Thomas J. McCullough, ARCS Newsletter Editor/Web Liaison


⇒ “NEH Grant to Digitize RNS Photographs,” Presbyterian Historical Society, April 24, 2023, https://www.history.pcus.org/blog/2023/04/neh-grant-digitize-rns-photographs


⇒ “Mississippi Department of Archives and History to Strengthen Religion Programs with Support of $2.5 Million Lilly Endowment Grant,” Mississippi Department of Archives and History, January 11, 2023, https://www.mdah.ms.gov/news/mississippi-department-archives-and-history-strengthen-religion-programs-support-25-million


The Iowa Women’s Archives might not be the first place a researcher would look for religion. However, a deliberate search of the collections reveals dozens of women and organization with spirituality and religious institutions at the center of their lives. Recently, I compiled these collections into a list accessible on our database.

The list displays alphabetically but contains several prominent themes. One of these are the papers of international missionaries. Among these are the papers of Esther Bacon, an obstetrical nurse in Zorzor, Liberia from 1941 – 1972, who worked under the United Lutheran Board of Foreign Missions, and Dr. Myrtle Hinkhouse. In 1916, the Presbyterian Board of Missions appointed Hinkhouse to China, where she served in various locations until 1943 when the Japanese army invaded and sent her to an internment camp and eventually, back to the United States. The nearly 15 feet of this collection are bursting with medical and missionary materials in Chinese and English, official, personal artifacts such as jewelry and bags from her years in China, and many, many photographs of everyday life, hospitals, and missions that no longer exist.

The Iowa Women’s Archives holdings also contain several women in the clergy and Catholic nuns. These collections include the papers of Edythe Stirlen, the “Little Minister” who broadcast her sermons over the radio out of KMA Shenandoah, Iowa from the 1920s to 1981, and several pieces of artwork by Corita Kent (formerly Sister Corita Kent), the “Pop Art nun” who folded her faith into bold, colorful screen prints. Also in this category are the small but intense collections of Sisters Molly and Irene Muñoz. Sisters both biologically and in the Congregation of the Humility of Mary from the 1950s, they dedicated themselves to the human rights of agricultural migrants near Muscatine, Iowa. Their papers feature an arrest record from 1978, when Molly Muñoz was arrested for trespassing while assessing the medical needs and living conditions of migrant laborers.

1963 conference on religion and race; and Kittredge Cherry who was ordained as clergy in the LGBTQ-affirming Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in 1993. Cherry met her future wife at the University of Iowa, but spent much of her life in California ministering to the LGBTQ community, and writing. Examples of her books and articles, such as Equal Rite: Lesbian and Gay Worship, Ceremonies and Celebrations, Art That Dares: Gay Jesus, Woman Christ, and More, round out her papers.

Among IWA’s collections the theme of social justice extends far beyond the Muñoz papers. Within the Women and Religion classification are activists like Jean Huffey, who dedicated decades to advocating for LGBTQ acceptance in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); Martha Nash, a Black woman whose leadership in the Dubuque Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women (ACCW) included a
Finally, the Iowa Women’s Archives launched a major collecting project, Jewish Women in Iowa, in 2014. In the 40+ collections that have so far been donated, are examples from the waves of Russian and German immigration that created vibrant Jewish communities across the state of Iowa, peaking in the mid-20th century. Though not all these collections have a focus on Judaism as a religion, some do stand out for their inclusion of synagogue life. The Agudas Achim Sisterhood records document women’s social and service activities in Agudas Achim Congregation in Iowa City and the Oliver Pollak papers include a collection of cookbooks compiled by Jewish congregations across Iowa. The sizeable Shaare Zion Synagogue/Mt. Sinai Temple records include records of three congregations and a Jewish Community Center in Sioux City, Iowa, which had one of the largest Jewish populations in the state in 1950s. Researchers can read meeting minutes from over a dozen organizations, view photographs from holiday celebrations across nearly a century, and page through newsletters prepared for Jewish soldiers from Sioux City fighting in World War II.

This overview is just a sample of religion-centered collections in the Iowa Women’s Archives, and the collection will only grow. I encourage those interested in women’s religious roles in the United States to explore our Women and Religion classification and get in touch.

Brooklyn College Library Receives NHPRC Grant

COLLEEN BRADLEY-SANDERS, Professor and Head of Archives and Special Collections
Brooklyn College Library
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

In 2021 the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) awarded the Brooklyn College Library’s Archives and Special Collections unit a $150,000 grant to digitize and share with the public unused footage from the creation of the 1997 landmark documentary A Life Apart: Hasidism in America.

The project, overseen by Brooklyn College Archivist Colleen Bradley-Sanders, digitized approximately 69 hours of outtakes and also re-mastered and color-corrected the documentary. Project Archivist Roberta Newman indexed the footage, created the metadata for the records, and wrote the finding aid, which contains links to the digitized materials. It can be found at https://archives.brooklyn.cuny.edu/repositories/2/resources/62. The footage can also be accessed from the Archives website: https://libguides.brooklyn.cuny.edu/c.php?g=1135687.

Described by producers Oren Rudavsky and Menachem Daum as “audiovisual field notes” on the religious practices, cultural mores, communal organization, family life, inter-communal relations, and the Americanization process of a distinctive immigrant community from 1936-1996, the film and the outtakes include interviews with scholars, community members and neighbors from the Brooklyn neighborhoods where the majority of America’s Hasidim live. The material has great potential for enriching scholarship in a broad range of humanities disciplines, including religious studies, immigration history, urban studies, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, folklore and ethnomusicology.

Above: DVD cover of A Life Apart.

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Interview with Shoshana Traum, Intern at the Jewish Women’s Archive

ELAINE NADEAU, Archivist
Mount St. Scholastica Monastery and the Federation of St. Scholastica
ATCHISON, KANSAS

Note: interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Could you tell us a bit about yourself?

My name is Shoshana Traum, I’m a student at Simmons in the archives management program. In the introductory archives class they give you an internship, so I was assigned to the Jewish Women’s Archive.

What was your undergrad degree?

I have a double major in linguistics and creative writing from Binghamton University.

When they assigned you to work for the Jewish Women’s Archive, did you indicate a desire to work there?

The way it works is they have you fill out a form of “here are my interests, here’s where I am, do you have a license, do you need somewhere you can get to by public transit.” Then the professor in charge of the program does match-making between students. I don’t know if she reaches out or they reach out.

At that time, you indicated you were interested in religious archives or Jewish Archives?

Yeah, Jewish Archives. I had started at Simmons pre-matriculated. I took a couple classes to see “do I actually want to do this with my life before I pay lots of money for it?” So, one of the classes I took was on oral history. For that I did a project where I recorded members of the community singing—there are these songs that are often sung mostly on the Sabbath, around the table as part of the meal. Not all of them, but many of them, the lyrics come from poems that were written in the medieval era, in Hebrew or Aramaic mostly. There are tons of tunes for them because they’ve been around for a very long time, and everyone does them slightly differently. I was seeing, “what tunes do you know, how do you sing them,” because, you know, everyone will do the ai-ai ai’s slightly differently or put the emphasis in a different place. I did that, and it got me interested in oral history. So, I put down that I was interested in oral history, I’m Jewish, I’m interested in that. So, she found the Jewish Women’s Archive.

Can you describe what you did at the Jewish Women’s Archive?

I was mostly doing transcription—they have an oral history collection which they’ve been working on processing—so I was mostly doing transcription or some abstracting. After we finished the internship, we went through the boxes to make sure we had all the information. Transcription also sometimes needed to be edited. I’m more likely to catch words in Hebrew or Yiddish because I have that background that I actually know what they’re talking about. So sometimes it was also, “here, can you go through this and see if the bits that I marked as inaudible, you can understand what they’re saying.” So, if someone was talking about “my Bar Mitzva Parasha” and the person who transcribed it initially might have written “Bar Mitzvah [inaudible]” and I could correct that and write “Parasha (the weekly Torah portion).”
How did they end up getting their materials?

Some of them were done by other independent researchers or were given to the Jewish Women’s Archive. They weren’t necessarily done through the Jewish Women’s Archive. There was one that was done in cooperation with the Jewish Women’s Archive and one or two of the local temples. They have a big collection on the Soviet Jewry movement. People who escaped Soviet Russia and Americans who were involved with helping Soviet Jews get out or helping them survive being in Soviet Russia. It depends somewhat on which specific project.

Do you think there’s a specific collection or piece of oral history everyone should know about?

I do think the Soviet Jewry project is really interesting. It comes from these multiple perspectives. There’s one that’s with a local rabbi who was very involved in the movement. It seems like a very well-rounded project. There’s also a project called Women’s Whose Lives Spanned the Century. There’s one interview in another collection that was particularly interesting because it was a woman who had been a teacher and then later a school administrator who was involved, during McCarthyism, with all of the blacklisting of teachers and various other political activism—things that now are recent enough that we don’t think about them very much but are far enough back that we aren’t as aware of them. There was also one interview with a Hasidic woman, which I thought was interesting, because it seems to me at least, there’s not as much in the world on focusing on the stories of observant Jews, particularly Jewish women. Particularly in the public eye there tends to be this view of “oh, those observant Jews are just patriarchal and oppressed.” Getting her voice there, I thought that was really interesting.

Do you think you’re drawn to religious archives or are you looking to work in a secular archive?

I think I would prefer to work in specifically a Jewish archive, because I am Jewish and so it’s preserving my history as well and I obviously have a vested interest. Also, because I feel like, certainly in pop culture, there’s not as much representation as there could be, and not good representation when it’s there. I feel as though Judaism in particular has a lot of history baked into it because a lot of the holidays are specifically commemorating a specific thing—in Passover is coming up in a couple weeks and that one is very explicitly “you are supposed to relive as though it’s happening to you.” The connection is very meaningful to me, and making sure that we don’t lose things because we have already lost so much.

Do you feel your coursework at Simmons helped with your work in religious archives? Do you feel there’s anything in religious archives that is niche, that no one has prepared you for?

I do think it definitely emphasized the point that it is important to have someone who is part of the community, to at the very least look over things and make sure you’re not getting things completely wrong. They hadn’t, but there were certainly bits in transcription, which if you were a part of the community you probably wouldn’t have made this error in transcription. You do need to have somebody who knows what’s going on in order to correctly mark things up. On the other hand, it is also helpful to have someone who isn’t part of the community to be like, “but what does this actually mean, though? Because you didn’t explain this.” I occasionally forget to translate myself. In the Introduction to Archives class, we talked a lot about repatriation and also tribal archives in particular, where it comes up a lot, where you have to be a member of the community to see it, or other various restrictions. I tried to write a literature review for the class on the use of similar things like Traditional Knowledge Labels, particularly the protocol. I tried to find out if that had been used in religious archives as well, if it had been used in Jewish or Muslim archives for “there’s a recording of a woman singing and men are not supposed to listen to this.” That’s another one of those things that different communities have, to varying degrees, seeing if there were things like that in the religious archival community as well, but I was having trouble finding papers on it. I think it would be interesting to do some kind of something with that, of getting more knowledge out there into the community. It would be nice to have more information out there for religious archives as well, or similar minority cultural institutions that aren’t already represented in the literature. Or in general, I would like to work on getting more inclusion of religious women in Jewish archives, on the more Orthodox to Ultra-Orthodox side of things. My impression is that there is a lot of stuff in archives that focuses on especially Reform and unaffiliated Jews in archives. There’s some on orthodoxy, but it often seems to be focused on men. I’d like to get some more representation on Jewish women.

Do you have an idea of what you’re hoping for with your professional plans after you graduate?

I would like to work at a Jewish archive. The project I’d like to do, I would love to do an interview project with Chabad Rebbetzins, the women of the Chabad couple. I feel like they often have the best stories but a lot of the things I have seen have been more so from interviewing the rabbis. I think there’s a lot there that isn’t being recorded which I think there should be.
Summaries of ARCS MRC Archival Chats

Unlike the ARCS MRC’s Lunch and Learn sessions, Archival Chats are not recorded, as they are considered a safe space for open dialog among archivists, librarians, and others entrusted with the care of religious collections. Highlights from these sessions are therefore provided below.

Developing a Volunteer Program, 16 March 2023
Presentation by Mary Grace Kosta, Congregation of St. Joseph Archives

Four polls were taken during the presentation, which proved to be an innovative way to get participants involved. Mary Grace covered what distinguishes a volunteer program from a training practicum, concentrating on fourteen principles that are important in developing an ethical program. She focused on the importance of supervision, ensuring work is part-time and hours are tracked, existing legislation is followed, safety training, dispute resolution, encouraging diversity, providing written expectations in the form of position descriptions, work plans, confidentiality requirements, professional ethics, schedules, and time commitments, understanding that staff time will be needed to provide guidance and feedback, ensuring practicums emulate training in an educational setting, and the necessity of showing appreciation. Mary Grace noted that “volunteer training programs like ours can increase diversity within the profession as a whole by providing job skills and references.” She also said that practicums must benefit volunteers. According to her, “this is at the heart of the ethicality of unpaid labor. There must be an exchange that is perceived as fair by both parties.”

After the presentation we had a discussion until the end of the hour which included discussion of remote volunteering and the importance of tracking hours both to ensure work is part-time, but also to improve workflows and, as Mary Grace mentioned in her presentation, it’s important to collect statistical information for funding purposes. Attendees shared examples of their volunteer programs, and it was noted that volunteering in an archive can help students decide if this is the career path they want. Attendees were engaged and it was an interesting discussion.

Summary provided by Junia Papas, MARA, CA, Junia Papas Archival Consulting

History and Planning for the Boston College Catholic Religious Archives Repository, 19 January 2023
Presentation by Michael J. Burns, Boston College Catholic Religious Archives Repository

The Lunch and Learn session had at its height 72 attendees. The presenter for the program was Michael J. Burns, the Associate Director of the Boston College Catholic Archives Repository.

Michael was born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he was educated, both in elementary and high school, by the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids. He is a 1965 Jesuits’ Marquette University graduate, where he earned the traditional Jesuit Latin baccalaureate degree in History, Literature, and Philosophy. After graduating from Marquette, he joined the United States Marine Corps, serving with the 26th Marines and the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade. Upon discharge from the Marines in 1968, he worked on Wall Street for five years. He has a graduate degree, also in History, from Harvard University. He joined the administration of Princeton University in 1973 and has worked in higher education ever since that time. He came to the John J. Burns Research Library at Boston College in 2010 and began working in Catholic Religious Archives when it was established in 2017.

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Boston College (BC) has established a Catholic Religious Archives Repository to assist in collecting, preserving, and studying institutional records and documents belonging to Catholic religious orders and congregations in the United States and Canada. The repository will be part of the University’s library system and will be guided by an advisory committee of archivists and faculty associated with Boston College. After materials have been evaluated, accepted, and processed, they will be available for students and scholars seeking to learn about the contributions of religious communities of men and women to the Catholic Church, Catholic life, and the broader culture.

In July 2018, Boston College hosted a conference entitled “Envisioning the Future of Catholic Religious Archives,” which brought together 165 archivists, historians, and leaders of religious communities to consider ways of ensuring that archival holdings of various religious orders and congregations would be maintained and available to future generations. The decision to launch the Catholic Religious Archives Repository was made due to the conference.

The reason was that many Roman Catholic archives would need to find new homes as membership in religious communities declined. Is an academic repository an ideal solution? What are the considerations regarding ownership, access, copyright, processing, and deaccessioning? Are alternatives like collaborative archives or public archives better or worse options? These issues were addressed in this session.

Michael provided an overview of history beginning with Malachy McCarthy, and Father David of BC said “let’s do it.” Movement proceeded, and it developed well with a brief pause during COVID. Construction of the new space began in 2020 for $1,000,000. This will provide a space for the intake and processing of Catholic archives on site. It provides a central place for scholars to visit and conduct research.

Some additional notes from the session:
⇒ No charge for depositing congregations coming to fulfillment. BC will have processors.
⇒ Currently, 10 congregations have been signed up to deposit. Twelve others are considering this option.
⇒ There can be restrictions on the collections, but permanent restrictions are not encouraged since that would discourage use. While artifacts are accepted, excessive numbers of such are discouraged.
⇒ There are two agreements: deposit and gift.
⇒ Contracts are individual and specific to the needs of the depositing or gifting congregation.

Summary provided by Russell Gasero, Reformed Church in America (retired)

DID YOU KNOW? Recordings of Lunch-and-Learn sessions are available!

If you would like to watch or re-watch a Lunch-and-Learn session hosted by the ARCS MRC, now you can do so by consulting the ARCS microsite at https://www2.archivists.org/groups/archivists-of-religious-collections-section/events or our YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpWzzChlhR-8O7CrKmiL2rw.