



**Help Pages to Native Catholic Record Guides**  
[See User Guide for help on interpreting entries](#)

**PREFACE TO GUIDE TO CATHOLIC INDIAN MISSION AND SCHOOL RECORDS IN MIDWEST REPOSITORIES**

1984

© Copyright 1984, Marquette University  
Funded in Part by a Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities

From October, 1981, to March, 1984, the Marquette University Archives conducted a survey of 823 institutions located in 12 Midwestern states to identify collections of unpublished sources pertaining to the history of Catholic Indian missions and schools in the United States national period. The product is a *Guide to Catholic Indian Mission and School Records in Midwest Repositories*, which contains descriptions of records in 277 institutions.

**Survey** [Preliminary United States Survey]

The survey actually began in 1976. With private foundation and University support, Reverend Robert V. Callen, S.J., and other members of the Marquette Archives staff undertook a project to identify, describe, and collect, when appropriate, Catholic Indian mission and school records in United States repositories. The decision to embark upon this project was based on two considerations. The first was a recognition of the strong and growing interest in Indian history and culture and, more specifically, in the cultural interaction between Indians and missionaries. The Catholic Church established hundreds of missions and schools on Indian reservations throughout the United States. Clearly the records of this activity would provide primary source material essential to historians and other scholars studying federal Indian policy, Indian-white relations, and Indian culture and cultural change. Secondly, the staff recognized that intellectual access to these records was poor or non-existent. Very few regional or statewide guides to Catholic Indian mission and school records had been produced. Existing guides focused on the mission records of Colonial America, particularly the Spanish mission period. Catholic Indian mission records created after American independence had not been described at any level beyond the individual institution.

Beginning in 1976, letters and survey forms were mailed to approximately 400 institutions. Based on this survey, an 18-page "Preliminary Guide to Major Repositories of Catholic Indian Mission Records" was created in 1979. Project staff recognized that this preliminary guide was incomplete and inadequate. Further research and correspondence with missionaries and archivists indicated that the "universe" of potential repositories was much

larger than originally anticipated. Furthermore, it was apparent that descriptions of holdings based exclusively on mail survey forms were too vague and incomplete to be of real value to researchers. To some degree, this latter problem was a consequence of the limitations of written communication as the sole means of gathering data for any survey project. But it also could be attributed to conditions prevalent among repositories of Catholic Indian mission and school records. The majority of these records are housed within Catholic dioceses, provincial houses, abbeys, and motherhouses where, for the most part, progress towards meeting archival standards has only just begun. If more detailed information about records at these institutions was to be obtained, mail survey forms alone would not be sufficient.

De Rancé Incorporated provided generous support to the preliminary survey of Catholic records about American Indians in the United States.

[Comprehensive Midwest Survey]

With these criteria in mind, the Marquette Archives applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1980 for funds to 1) further identify repositories of Catholic Indian mission and school records created in the U.S. national period; 2) survey, in many cases on-site, the holdings of these repositories; and 3) describe these records in a published guide. At the Endowment's request, the survey was confined to a geographical area. In June, 1981, the grant was awarded, and in October, 1981, the project began.

Project staff identified four types of potential repositories. These included Catholic Indian missions and schools; religious archives, such as those found in dioceses, abbeys, provincial houses, and motherhouses; historical societies and the manuscript divisions of university archives; and Indian tribal archives. The major resource tool for identifying Catholic institutions was *The Official Catholic Directory*. For historical societies and university archives, the major sources were the *NHPRC Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories*, the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, and the *American Association for State and Local History Directory of Historical Societies and Agencies in the United States and Canada*. For tribal archives, the staff used a list of tribal leaders, archivists, and curators compiled by an NEH funded project designed to increase the awareness of Indian communities regarding the value of tribal archives.

Mailings were sent to a total of 823 institutions, which consisted of 166 churches and schools, 301 religious communities and dioceses, 227 historical societies and university archives, and 129 tribal councils, archives, and museums. Each mailing included a letter explaining the project, a survey form requesting information on records, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for returning the form. Letters and survey forms were tailored to each type of archives. Of the 823 institutions contacted, 418 or 51 per cent returned the survey.

After the forms were returned and the data reviewed, a decision was made regarding whether to follow-up with a telephone call and/or a visit. A phone call was made to contact key institutions, which had not responded to the initial mailing. Calls also were made to elicit additional information regarding records or to verify a response. An example of the latter situation was a call to a diocesan archivist who reported that no relevant records

existed in the archives, despite the fact that the diocese administered an area where Indian missions had flourished. Further questioning on the phone might verify the archivist's initial response or might establish enough doubt about the situation to suggest a visit and a first-hand examination of the records.

Based on the survey responses and telephone calls, an itinerary of visits was created. Six trips were made, each of 25 to 30 days in duration, and each involving visits to between 25 and 30 institutions. Of the 277 institutions listed in the Guide, the records of 160 or 58 per cent were reviewed on-site. Of the 117 institutions not visited, 99 or 85 per cent were churches, which contained only sacramental records. Visits were made to every known major repository of Catholic Indian mission and school records in the 12-state area.

After the data was compiled into an entry, drafts were sent to the repositories to be reviewed for accuracy. When the drafts were returned, they were revised, if necessary, by the staff. The completed text was then typed, proofed, and indexed.

### **Guide**

Entries in the Guide are arranged alphabetically by state and by city there under, and within cities, by name of institution or religious order. Standard data elements for each entry include an entry number; the name, address, and telephone number of the repository or mission; information on hours, access policy, and copying facilities for each repository (excluding churches); a history, normally in the form of a chronology, for each mission, school, and religious order; and a description of holdings, which includes dates, volume, and an analysis of the records.

Very few of the collections or series listed in the Guide are closed. However, there are a number of repositories, primarily in religious institutions, which require the permission of the archivist before a researcher may gain access. Generally, this stipulation is due to the fact that in many religious archives the processing of records has only begun. Being unfamiliar with many holdings, archivists are cautious in granting unrestricted access. Sacramental records, although not specifically designated as closed, are not generally open to the public. However, this is not to say that these records are inaccessible. Traditionally, individuals seeking records about themselves or about members of their family have been able to obtain copies.

Histories were included in the Guide for two basic reasons. In the first place, they are useful, in fact essential, in tracing the provenance and final destination of records. Catholic Indian missions and stations are characterized by their frequent transfer from one parish to another. It is not unusual for a mission or station during its lifetime to be administered by four or five different parishes and two or three different religious communities. In this fluid situation, it is virtually impossible to trace records, particularly sacramental records, unless grounded in a solid understanding of the administrative history of the institution under consideration.

A second reason for including the chronologies was the realization by Project staff that no other sources provided the detailed and in-depth coverage or possessed the scope of the chronologies produced by the Project. In fact, the paucity of historical data on Catholic Indian missions and stations made the compilation of the chronologies extremely difficult and time-consuming. The most useful sources were *The Official Catholic Directory* and Indian mission and school reports included within the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Records. But these sources were either limited in coverage, as in the case of the reports, or were not always accurate or complete, as in the case of the Directory. For example, the staff discovered that the Directory often reported changes in the status of missions or stations several years after the fact. Moreover, the quality and depth of information provided by the Directory varied from diocese to diocese and from year to year, particularly in the period before 1900. Unfortunately, for the pre-1900 period the Directory was often the only source available. Consequently, for a number of missions and stations, only approximate dates regarding openings, transfers, and closings are provided.

Another problem in writing the histories and in compiling the Guide was the identification of missions and stations as Indian. For the predominantly Indian congregations, which have remained so over time, identification was straightforward. However, there are a number of parishes, missions, and stations which historically were only partially Indian or which were once predominantly Indian and over time, as white settlers moved into the area, changed to partially Indian or non-Indian. In these cases, identification was difficult, since available sources often disagreed on which were Indian and non-Indian and for how long a period of time. In making a determination, Project staff generally erred on the side of including rather than excluding missions and stations whose status was open to question. Every attempt was made to identify parishes, missions, and stations, which were no longer Indian and to assign approximate dates indicating when the change occurred.

Finally, an explanation is needed regarding the use of the terms parish, mission, and station. As used in the Guide, they denote the following: a parish is a congregation having its own church and a resident priest; a mission is a congregation having its own church but not a resident priest; and a station is a group of Catholics having neither a church nor a resident priest. Stations usually were visited at irregular intervals with Mass offered in a private home or a town hall. These definitions should be kept in mind, since they are more precise than the usage in some literature whereby any Church activity among Indians is referred to as a mission, regardless of whether a priest is in residence or a church exists.

In the description of holdings, Project staff attempted to describe records according to the system of arrangement and description developed by the repository. Thus, if a classification scheme existed, the records are described in relation to that arrangement scheme. Whenever possible, folder headings created by the archives are reproduced in the description. However, if the records were not processed, or a classification scheme did not exist, Project staff developed, for the sake of a coherent description, an arrangement scheme based on type of record. Situations in which this occurs are noted in the Guide. The descriptions are written in outline form. Series and collections are designated by a /, and sub-series, folders, and items by A., 1., and a., respectively. This format was used to better organize information within entries and to make lengthy descriptions more readable. Analysis of records is primarily by date and volume, by name of mission,

school, or individual, and for certain records, such as reports, by type of data included within the record. Except when specifically noted, the dates and volumes given are for Catholic Indian mission and school records only. Few of the entries include an analysis of subject. Even in an on-site survey project, subject analysis of records, particularly correspondence, is not realistic. It should be noted, however, that for many records a listing by type, along with a description of the nature of the information included within the records, provides a clear indication of the subject content.

Unpublished sources comprise the vast majority of the records listed in the Guide. However, some published documents are described. Publications that appear most prominently are histories of missions and schools, Indian language studies, Indian mission and school publications, community publications, and diocesan newspapers. Copies of original records are noted, and, whenever possible, the sources of the originals are indicated.

### **Index**

The index is keyed to the numbers assigned to each entry, and not to page numbers. Terms indexed include: parishes, missions, and stations, along with their location; religious communities and their location; Indian Nations; names of individuals; organizations active in Indian mission work; archival repositories; periodicals and newspapers published by Native Americans, missions and schools, communities, and dioceses; and, on a selective basis, published monographs, particularly those relating to Indian languages. Since the Guide is arranged geographically, all institutions included within the index are listed under their name rather than or in addition to their location. Institutions whose name has changed over time are indexed under their most recent name, although the older names are included in the main entry. Institutions with the same name are arranged alphabetically by state and by city there under. In an effort to maintain this geographical arrangement, churches, missions, chapels, and cathedrals bearing the same name are alphabetized under the term church.