

St. Louis Area Religious Archivists (SLARA) History of Development, 1986-2010

In 1986 interest in forming an informal organization was expressed by some of the novice St. Louis area religious archivists attending a Society of American Archivists (SAA) meeting in Washington, DC in 1986.

The first meeting of the St. Louis Area Religious Archivists (SLARA), a name chosen by those assembled, was held February 18, 1987 with twenty-three members present, representing sixteen archives. The initial membership included: Sister Mary Catherine Clark, ASC; Sister Elizabeth Jean DeMuth, RSM; Sister Elizabeth Deutsch, CSJ; Sister Mary Ursula Diebold, OSU; Father Barnabas Diekemper, OFM; Sister Teresa Maria Egan, CSJ, Archdiocese of St. Louis; Father William Barnaby Faherty, SJ; Sister Elizabeth Farley, RSCJ; Mrs. Mary Jane Gamache, Franciscan Sisters of Mary; Sister Henrietta Guyot, DC; Sister Mary Philip Hampton, CDP; Ms. Dorothy Kaiser, Kenrick Library; Sister Patricia Kelly, CSJ; Sister Mildred Mary Lambert, DC; Mrs. Nancy Merz, Jesuit Archives; Sister Laura Northcraft, SSND; Sister Marie Louise Padberg, RSCJ; Ms. Jacqueline M. Page, Kenrick Library; Sister Marylu Stueber, FSM; Deacon Martin Towey, Archdiocese of St. Louis; Sister Maureen Truland, OSB; Sister Virginia Volkerding, CPPS; Sister Mary Joan Weissler, DC; Sister Mary C. Wheeler, RSCJ. The purpose for meeting is education, information sharing, mutual assistance and camaraderie around archival concerns and developments.

At the second meeting it was determined that dues would be \$2.00 per Archives to cover cost of mailing and refreshments. (Sister Elizabeth Jean DeMuth volunteered as the first treasurer; Sister Marylu Stueber assumed role of chairperson from the beginning.)

A program committee of four Sisters (Betty Keppers DC, Pat Kelly CSJ, Virginia Volkerding CPPS, Laura Northcraft SSND) prepared for the third meeting and led a discussion on the use of computers.

Sister Elizabeth Deutsch volunteered to be the secretary at the meeting of November 17, 1988. It was determined that participants preferred a loose structure for the organization, however, a Program Committee was established (Sister Marylu Stueber and Sister Elizabeth Jean, along with the host/hostess comprised this committee.)

Sister Elizabeth Jean DeMuth died and Sister Marie Louise Padberg accepted the task of being treasurer on March 12, 1991. Denise Thuston volunteered to replace Sister Elizabeth Jean on the Program Committee.

At this meeting the Program Committee function was discussed. The minutes indicate there was a concern that difficulty in planning an agenda deters some from volunteering to host a meeting. Agendas have been arrived at by various means: topics raised at meetings, informal committee. After pinch hitting in taking minutes, in the absence of Sister Elizabeth Deutsch, Sister Charline Sullivan, CSJ became secretary November 12, 1991.

At the March 16, 1993 meeting it was agreed that the dues would be increased to \$5.00 per archives. It has been previously suggested that a speaker be engaged and the funds be used as an honorarium. The Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart Archives invited Brother Roy Godwin, CFA to give a presentation: How To Set Up A Religious Corporate Archives.

At the November 16, 1993 meeting the development of SLARA was reviewed. A questionnaire was submitted to membership to solicit ideas from the membership on future activities of this organization.

The meeting on March 15, 1994 included a presentation by Mrs. Ruth Ann Johnson: Copyright Basics and You. Denise Thuston volunteered to serve as treasurer to replace Sister Marie Louise Padberg, who died in January, 1994. As a result of the questionnaire, it was decided to develop guidelines for SLARA. Denise Thuston, Sister Angelita Heinrich and Sister Marylu Stueber developed guidelines submitted to membership in advance of the October 18, 1994 meeting.

The SLARA Guidelines/Procedures were approved at the October 18, 1994 meeting. The first Election of officers followed: Chairperson, Sister Marylu Stueber; Vice Chairperson, Nancy Merz; Secretary, Sister Charline Sullivan; Treasurer, Denise Thuston; Program Committee, John Waide and Father William Barnaby Faherty.

At the March 21, 1995 meeting, John Waide, Sister Angelita Heinrich and Nancy Merz reported on various aspects of the Modern Archives Institute in Washington, DC which they attended in June 1994. The program can serve as a preparation for the examination for certification as an archivist. A presentation was given by Mr. Glenn Curran on "The History of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul" at the October 17, 1995 meeting. Mr. Tony Palumbo, Central Microfilm Service and Lanier Imaging Systems, gave a presentation on microfilming for archives preservation at the March 19, 1996 meeting.

SLARA members were asked to submit their name in regard to willingness to serve as an officer or program committee member to be elected at the October 15, 1996 meeting. Since there were only three volunteers by the deadline of September 1, 1996, a second request was sent to membership in order to prepare a slate for elections to be held at the October 15th meeting.

The slate of nominees was comprised of the following: vice-chairperson - John Waide; secretary - Christine F. Harper; treasurer: - Sister Angelita Heinrich, Dorothy Kaiser and Sister Margaret Phelan; program committee - Father Wm. Barnaby Faherty, Christine F. Harper, Sister Genevieve Keusenkothen, Denise Thuston, and John Waide.

At the meeting on October 15, 1996, after which Nancy Merz assumed the position of Chairperson of SLARA, the election of officers was held. Those elected were: John Waide, vice-chairperson; Christine F. Harper, secretary; Sister Angelita Heinrich, treasurer; Sister Genevieve Keusenkothen and Denise Thuston, program committee members.

As of October, 1996 the St. Louis Area has been broadened and now includes members in St. Louis as well as from O'Fallon and Perryville, Missouri, Alton, Belleville, Ruma and Springfield, Illinois, who are active members in the organization. The archives represented by membership include twenty active institutions and five institutions with inactive membership. Hosting of the meetings is rotated among the active archive membership. (This gives membership the opportunity to visit the archives of the host institution.)

The March 18, 1997 meeting was hosted by the Archives of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Ruma, Illinois. Father Faherty gave the members a brief tour of the old St. Patrick's Church, while local historian, Ruth Menard, showed the group the neighboring schoolhouse, museum, and shrine to the five Ruma sisters killed several years ago in Liberia. During the

meeting, special recognition was given to Sister Marylu Stueber for her tireless efforts in beginning and supporting SLARA.

A special meeting of SLARA was held on May 20, 1997. The featured speaker for the session was Mr. Richard Baker. Mr. Baker is a local book conservator and preservation consultant. He provided the members with ideas for a number of low cost preservation actions that virtually every repository could take.

SLARA was happy to have Ms. Mary Lou Brown of the Anheuser-Busch Corporate Archives as a visitor of the October 21, 1997 meeting. Mary Lou, who was a member of the Local Arrangements Committee of the recent Midwest Archives Conference meeting held in St. Louis, thanked the SLARA volunteers for all they contributed to making the St. Louis meeting such a success.

At the meeting of March 17, 1998, SLARA members were asked once again to submit their name in regard to willingness to serve as an officer or program committee member to be elected at the October 20, 1998 meeting. This meeting also included a panel discussion on the development of policy guidelines for the archives. The panel consisted of Sister Angelita Heinrich, Sister Genevieve Keusenkothen, and Mr. John Waide.

Elections were held at the October 20, 1998 meeting for the 1998-2000 term. John Waide assumed the office of Chair, while Denise Thuston was elected Vice Chairman, Christine Harper, Secretary, and Sister Angelita Heinrich, Treasurer. Those elected to the Program Committee were Andrew Cooperman, and Sister Carol Marie Wildt. The panel discussion on policy guidelines from the previous meeting was continued.

A panel discussion on archives and media relations was held at the March 16, 1999 meeting. The panel consisted of: Ms. Jeannette Batz, writer for the Riverfront Times, Mr. Jeff Fister, publisher of the West End-Clayton Word, and Rev. David Eckelcamp, OFM, Superior of St. Anthony Friary.

During the October 19, 1999 meeting, Sister Angelita Heinrich explained to the membership the policies and procedures manual she developed for the Sisters of Mercy Archives.

The program for the March 21, 2000 meeting included a discussion of activities that individual archives or SLARA might plan for celebrating “Archives Week” in October.

The election of officers for the 2000-2002 term took place at the October 17, 2000 meeting. Denise Thuston assumed the office of Chair of SLARA. The officers elected that day were: Sister Marylu Stueber, Vice Chair; Jane Lakebrink, Secretary; Sister Margaret Phelan, Treasurer. Those elected to the Program Committee were: Andrew Cooperman, Sister Carol Marie Wildt. Following the election, several members shared some of the activities sponsored by their repositories for “Archives Week.”

A “back to basics” discussion of procedures and practices for handling artifacts in the archives was the focus of the program at the March 20, 2001 meeting. Six archives brought examples of items from their collections to show to the group.

The highlight of the October 16, 2001 meeting was a presentation by Dr. Geraldine Rohling, Archivist for the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, about relics and reliquaries.

At the March 19, 2002 meeting, Father Michael Joyce, CM, a canon lawyer, gave a presentation on the pastoral function of Church archives. Father Joyce provided the members with the appropriate Church canons governing the operation of Church archives.

The October 15, 2002 meeting was held at the Pastoral Center of the Archdiocese of St. Louis. SLARA members were welcomed by the Most Rev. Justin F. Rigali, Archbishop of St. Louis. Archbishop Rigali opened the meeting with a prayer and spoke briefly with the group about the importance of archives. The main business of this meeting was the election of officers for the 2002-2004 term. Those elected were: Sister Mary Linda Tonellato, O. P., Vice Chair; Sister Mary Jeremy Buckman, R.S.M., Treasurer; Mrs. Audrey Newcomer, Secretary; Mrs. Denise Thuston and Mr. John Waide, Program Committee. After the formal meeting, Audrey Newcomer gave the membership a tour of the recently renovated Archdiocesan Archives.

The Spring, 2003 meeting was hosted by the Midwest Jesuit Archives on March 18, 2003. A variety of issues were discussed during the business portion of the meeting. Several changes in the SLARA guidelines were approved by the membership. Sister Rosemary Meiman, OSU, reported that Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious (ACWR) would be holding their triennial conference in St. Louis in September, and several SLARA members volunteered to assist with local arrangements. The program portion of the meeting focused on loaning of archival objects for exhibit. Nancy Merz (Midwest Jesuit Archives) and John Waide (Saint Louis University Archives) discussed their experiences of loaning materials for the Sacred Encounters exhibit, while Bob Lyner (Digital Preservation) presented an alternative to loaning original items by using high quality digital reproductions.

SLARA held a special meeting on October 7, 2003. The highlight of this meeting was the featured speaker, Dr. Anne Butler, from Utah State University. Dr. Butler, a well respected social and cultural historian of the American west, delivered a wonderfully received presentation on some of her research involving Catholic nuns and their importance in the history of the American west. Dr. Butler reminded SLARA membership of the critical role archivists of religious communities play in documenting important social and cultural histories.

The regular meeting for fall, 2003, took place on October 21. Elections for two offices were held. Roberta Doelling from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas was elected to the Program Committee while Sister Jane Hassett, CSJ, archivist for Fontbonne University, was elected treasurer. SLARA membership also voted to maintain an up-to-date membership directory on-line and suspend the printing and distribution of a printed directory.

Blythe Cermak from “Virtually Missouri: The Missouri Digitization Project” gave an excellent presentation at the March 16, 2004 meeting on the activities of “Virtually Missouri.” “Virtually Missouri” serves as a portal to an array of digital collections in repositories around the state, and SLARA members were encouraged to contribute images of items from their collections to the project.

The October 19, 2004 meeting featured a presentation by Sister Marylu Stueber, FSM, on a historical tour she developed entitled, “Walking in the Footsteps of the First Franciscan Sisters of Mary.” The pilgrimage tour is designed to be a day long activity and features presentations at each site along the tour. Sister’s presentation generated an interesting discussion of the value of such historical tours to an institution and how the archives can increase its visibility and viability by its contributions to the tour.

The March 15, 2005 meeting was held at the Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet. The members welcomed Sister Angelyn Dries, OSF, of the Saint Louis University Theology Department faculty, as she discussed her research in the history of the American Catholic missionary movement. She distributed a survey to SLARA members in an attempt to gather information on which Catholic groups have sent or sponsored missionaries overseas. The featured speaker for the program was Klara Foeller of the Missouri Historical Society. Klara gave an interesting presentation on the on the preservation of old film.

The Daughters of Charity hosted the October 18, 2005 SLARA meeting at their new facility on Olive Street in the Central West End. The election of officers resulted in Sister Jane Hassett, CSJ being elected as Treasurer, and Roberta Doelling of the Sisters of Mercy Archives elected to the Program Committee. It was announced that Tonya Crawford of the Daughters of Charity Archives was leaving to accept an archival position at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, so Scott Grimwood accepted a three year term on the Program Committee. Carole Prietto and Tonya Crawford presented an interesting program on the Daughters of Charity Archives, which was followed by a tour of their collections.

The April 11, 2006 meeting of the St. Louis Area Religious Archivists was held at the SSM Health Care Corporate Archives. SLARA recognized Nancy Merz, who recently retired as Associate Archivist for the Midwest Jesuit Archives, as a charter member of SLARA. Although she was unable to attend the meeting, Nancy will be presented with a framed certificate in recognition of her service to SLARA. Audrey Newcomer informed membership that there is still time to participate in the Media Grant project. The task force hopes to develop a pilot project to preserve the local cultural heritage of area religious archives as represented in film and video materials. Scott Grimwood, the Archivist for SSM Corporate Archives, provided membership with a description of his collections.

The Fall 2006 meeting of SLARA was hosted by the St. Louis Public Library, Central Library, on October 17, 2006. SLARA met at the Public Library jointly with membership from the Association of St. Louis Area Archivists (ASLAA). The first part of the program consisted of a program on “Virtually Missouri,” featuring presentations by Tracy Byerly from MLNC and Sue Rehkopf, Archivist of the Historical Society of University City and the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri. The following slate of officers was presented for election: Audrey P. Newcomer for vice-chairperson and Sister Jane Behlmann, CSJ for secretary. There being no additional nominations from the floor, the slate was unanimously approved as presented.

The Archives of the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help served as hosts for the Spring 2007 meeting of SLARA on March 20, 2007. Sister Karen Kennelly, CSJ, provided the membership with a report on the progress of a significant exhibition being planned by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious on the topic of women religious in the United States. LCWR is working with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington on the exhibit. The major focus of the meeting was a “town hall” discussion of various topics of interest to members as brought out in the recent survey of membership. As 2007 marks the 20th anniversary of the beginnings of SLARA, various special events/recognitions are being planned for this year.

The Archives of Fontbonne University was the site of the October 16, 2007 SLARA meeting. Sister Rosemary Meiman recognized current members of SLARA who were members when SLARA began 20 years ago—Sister Marylu Stueber, Sister Teresa Eagan, and Sister Pat Kelly Fontbonne University. In celebration of SLARA’s 20th anniversary, members gathered in

front of the Fontbonne Library for a group photograph. The featured activity of this meeting was a presentation by attorneys Bernard and Lucie Huger on “Religious Archives, Privacy and the Law.” The Hugers practice law for the Greensfelder firm which represents several of the religious communities. Among other issues discussed by the Hugers were: including information on photographs; permission to publish photographs; HIPAA requirements and archives; responding to subpoenas; copyright issues. Members found the presentation to be very practical and useful.

Sister Carol Marie Wildt of the School Sisters of Notre Dame welcomed membership for the March 18, 2008 meeting of SLARA. Sister Carol Marie introduced Sister Kathy Schmittgens, SSND, a member of the Provincial Council. Sister Kathy gave the members a short history of the Congregation. The sisters are celebrating 150 years in St. Louis and 175 years of existence in 2008. The learning focus for this meeting was a presentation on: “Using a Database in Your Archives.” Roberta Doelling and Sister Marylu Stueber gave the presentation with technical assistance from Scott Grimwood. Roberta indicated that her finding aids are all paper based but she uses Microsoft Access to help provide more efficient searches. Roberta told members that she is satisfied with her database. Sister Marylu then spoke about her positive experiences using Past Perfect archives/museum software. After the presentation, a nice discussion occurred among the group about what database technology other repositories are using or considering. Scott Grimwood reminded everyone of the upcoming Midwest Archives Conference (MAC) meeting in Louisville in April, and that St. Louis is the host for the 2009 MAC meeting. Scott is the chair of the Local Arrangements Committee and numerous SLARA members are chairing or working on various committees for the St. Louis meeting. Scott asked SLARA members for their help as the meeting approaches. Finally, Sister Marylu Stueber was recognized for recently receiving the Association of St. Louis Area Archivists Achievement Award.

The Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart served as hosts for the October 21, 2008 meeting of SLARA. The meeting was held in the new parish hall of St. Anthony’s Church on Meramec Street in St. Louis. Membership approved a contribution of \$200 to the Midwest Archives Conference for the upcoming annual meeting in St. Louis. Sister Rosemary Meiman reported that the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) exhibit entitled “Women and Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America” is scheduled to open in May, 2009, at the Cincinnati Museum Center. The LCWR History Committee will be soliciting artifacts from various congregations. The major order of business at this meeting was the election of officers for SLARA. No member was nominated for the position of Vice-chair/Chair elect, and nobody volunteered at the meeting. After some discussion, including whether SLARA might disband, it was decided to leave this position vacant for one year. Roberta Doelling had been nominated for Treasurer, and Carol Prietto was nominated for the Program Committee. Membership approved these nominations by acclamation, and Audrey Newcomer, Vice-chair/Chair elect, assumed the position of Chair of SLARA.

The March 17, 2009 meeting of SLARA was a joint meeting with the Association of St. Louis Area Archivists (ASLAA) held at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis. Although SLARA held a brief business meeting, the primary purpose of this joint meeting was preparation for the upcoming annual Midwest Archives Conference being held in St. Louis. Dr. Robert Moore, the historian for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial gave an orientation to St. Louis in a PowerPoint slide show while Jennifer Clark presented an overview of various activities and sites

for visitors to St. Louis as well as advice for practical issues such as ATMs, restaurants, parking, etc. Signup sheets for volunteers at the MAC conference were circulated during the meeting. After the meeting, Monsignor Joseph Pins, Rector of the Cathedral Basilica, met the group for a tour of the Cathedral.

The Adorers of the Blood of Christ Archives in Ruma, Illinois, were hosts for the October 20, 2009 meeting of SLARA. During the business portion of the meeting, several members reported on recent meetings or conferences attended. Roberta Doelling and Sister Carol Marie Wildt both gave presentations at the recent ACWR meeting in Milwaukee, while several members commented on the excellent opening address to the conference given by Sister Gertrude Foley. Carole Prietto, Sister Mary Lu, and Roberta Doelling all commented on the mergers that have been occurring recently and how these mergers affect their institutions. Audrey Newcomer and Carol Prietto reported on their attendance at the SAA meeting in Austin. The proposed revisions to the Bylaws were passed unanimously. Sister Rosemary reported on the LCWR exhibit, "Women and Spirit," which just opened. The Missouri History Museum was hoping to bring the exhibit to St. Louis, but they have changed their mind due to space and timing issues. LCWR is looking for another exhibition venue in St. Louis. Elections were held, with Sister Carol Marie Wildt being elected Vice-chair/Chair elect and Sue Rehkopf being elected to the Program Committee. Scott Grimwood was presented a plaque in appreciation of his years of service on the Program Committee. SLARA members were treated to a presentation on the history of the development of the archives of the St. Louis Jewish Federation by Diane Everman, the Federation's archivist.

The Spring 2010 meeting of SLARA was hosted by Sue Rehkopf and the Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion in University City on March 16, 2010. It was announced that since the Missouri History Museum had decided not to host the LCWR "Women and Spirit" exhibit, LCWR was still exploring other venues in St. Louis. Several SLARA members reported on attending a free workshop on preservation given by Lisa Fox of the Missouri State Archives, while Sue Rehkopf reported on a "Digitizing Audio" workshop she attended. The learning/sharing portion of this meeting was a very informative presentation given by Carole Prietto on scanning and using Photoshop.