

# ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD



## OFFICE OF THE ARCHDIOCESAN ARCHIVES

(EST. 1976)

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*AOH central administrative office since 1976 - professionally managed since 2001*

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### HISTORY OF THE AOH ARCHIVES & RECORDS CENTER

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#### IN THE BEGINNING

(1974-2001)

In preparation for the 1976 United States Bicentennial, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops - NCCB (now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops - USCCB) issued, *A Document on Ecclesiastical Archives*. The 1974 document urged Catholic dioceses across the United States to establish an archives program (if one did not already exist in their own diocese). Archbishop John F. Whealon, D.D., S.S.L., S.T.L., (1921-1991; Archbp. 1968-1991) heeded the call for Hartford and an organizational committee for the Archdiocesan Archives was formed in 1975.

In October of 1975, a formal proposal plan for the Archdiocesan Archives (AOH Archives) was prepared by Sr. Dolores A. Liptak, RSM, (then Assistant Professor of History at St. Joseph College and a doctoral candidate) and Vivian R. Stephenson (first women editor of *The Catholic Transcript* newspaper). In early 1976, Archbishop Whealon approved the proposal plan and the Office of the Archdiocesan Archives was officially established and located at the Chancery (Hartford, CT).

#### Original Staff

- Sr. Dolores A. Liptak, RSM (Historian/ Archivist)
- Vivian R. Stephenson (Research Assistant)

- Mary A. Caffrey (Coordinator)
- Alice Angelo (Typist/ Transcriptionist)
- Harriet Foley (Typist/ Transcriptionist)
- Msgr. John V. Horgan (French Translator)
- Sr. M. Sarah, RSM (Latin Translator)
- Jay Griffith (Seminarist Assistant - summer 1976)

The initial holdings of the AOH Archives comprised two vertical file cabinets of unclassified correspondence and administrative records (approx. 16 linear ft. of records – 08 file drawers). A budget of \$2,500 was allocated to the AOH Archives, which covered the cost of educational expenses, resource books, membership fees, supplies, and a small stipend for Sr. Dolores.

In 1977, Sr. Dolores assumed charge of the AOH Archives on a regular part-time basis. Vivian Stephenson and Janet Schmalt, a graduate of St. Joseph College (now the University of St. Joseph - West Hartford), worked as her assistants. In 1979, Archbishop Whealon appointed Sr. Dolores as Archdiocesan Historian and in 1985, following her retirement, elevated her to Emeritus Historian (she still holds the title to date).

Following Sr. Dolores' retirement, Sr. Mary Jaskel, OSF (1985-1990; d.2011), was appointed as the first full-time AOH Archivist. She was succeeded by Sr. Theresa McQueeney, SND (1990-1994; d.2015); Sr. Irene Fortier, DHS (1995-1996; d.2023); and Sr. Marjorie Fallon, RSM (1996-2001; d.2002). Under the leadership of these early Archivists, the AOH Archives developed its core collections and assisted with two major Archdiocesan publications: *Hartford's Catholic Legacy: Parishes* (1994) and *Hartford's Catholic Legacy: Leadership* (1999).

## **TRANSFORMATION** (2001-2017)

In 2001, under the episcopacy of Archbishop Daniel A. Cronin, S.T.D., (1927-; Archbp., 1992-2003) the Archdiocesan administration committed to operating a professionally managed Archives and hired its first full-time professional Archivist, F. Maria Medina, MLS, (2001-2014). Ms. Medina introduced professional archives policies and procedures and was instrumental in laying the groundwork for an internal Records Center. Additionally, she had proper shelving and climate control measures installed. Also, during her time of service, *Lift High the Cross: The History of the Archdiocese of Hartford* (2003) was published and joint projects with the Archbishop Henry J. O'Brien Memorial Library ensued (then part of the Archdiocesan Center at St. Thomas Seminary – Bloomfield, CT). [*The Library was established in 1896 as part of the newly founded St. Thomas Seminary - located in Hartford, Conn., and later, Bloomfield, Conn.*]

Following Ms. Medina's departure in 2014, two consecutive interim Archivists, Stephanie Gold, MLS, (2014-2015) and Emily Bartram, MLS, (2015-2016) were hired. In November 2016, the Chancellor closed the AOH Archives indefinitely and suspended all services, pending its vacancy.

**TODAY**  
*(2017-Present)*

In late September 2017, Bridgette A. Woodall, M.Div, MLIS, (2017-present) was hired as the next full-time professional Archivist. Starting in 2018, a long-term restructuring process to overhaul the internal operations of the AOH Archives was initiated - aligning the office with the 2014 AOH Pastoral Plan (initiated during the episcopacy of Archbishop Leonard P. Blair, S.T.D.) and reinstating professional archives standards and current "best practices."

To date, two full-scale inventory audits of the AOH Archives general holdings have been conducted; a uniform cataloging system established; policies and procedures updated; COVID-19 protocols enacted; daily operations streamlined; the website revamped; several reference sources prepared; and essential internal services restored. Likewise, the Records Center has been completed and an internal records management program launched. Additional space for the expanding collections and operational needs of the AOH Archive have likewise, been allocated to the AOH Archives.

Currently, the accessions backlog is being properly processed and preservation issues of older collections assessed. Moreover, repairs and updates to address facility, security, and environmental issues have been underway since 2018.

Notable Projects

- **2018** - Time Capsule/ Memorabilia Project
  - Project launched to coincide with the 175<sup>th</sup> Archdiocesan Anniversary and augment the AOH Archives holdings
  - In conjunction with the AOH Office of Communications
- **2021** - Research and preparation of historical sketches for the Cathedral's Memorial Garden Signage Project
  - Commemorating Cathedral history and the site of St. Joseph Convent (honoring the invaluable service of the Sisters of Mercy - RSM)
  - In conjunction with The Hartford Bishops' Foundation, Inc.

- **2022** – Rare Book Preservation Project
  - Preservation initiative of the O’Brien Library’s historic collection of 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> Century rare and aging books
  - In conjunction with the Archbishop Henry J. O’Brien Memorial Library (St. Thomas Seminary/ New England Catholic Biblical School at the AOH Pastoral Center – Bloomfield, CT)
- **2023** – Completion of the AOH 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Time Capsule (1843-2018)
  - Commemorating the 175<sup>th</sup> Archdiocesan Anniversary (2018)
  - Prepared in time for the 180<sup>th</sup> Archdiocesan Anniversary (2023)
  - Solo project of AOH Archives (Time Capsule housed in the AOH Archives)