

# Guide to Researching African American history at the Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives (Province of St. Louise)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives contain a number of collections that are entirely or partially related to African American history, including those related to outreach to the African American community and to schools operated or staffed by the Daughters during the time of the segregated South. Many of these collections also often address the integration of these schools, or can be studied alongside other parallel collections to address the integration of these schools. The collections vary in their level of material created by administration or by students who attended these schools; this guide will do its best to delineate what is in each collection.

Several collections also address concerns with Civil Rights in the 1940s-1970s by Daughters of Charity and the institutions they operated. These include studies of Civil Rights concerns,

protest and activism initiated or supported by the Daughters, and the Community's activities to remedy social inequities as the Community evolved to better understand the role of structural racism in American society.

There are also collections containing information on the ways that the Daughters upheld these racist structures. Collections with information on those actions will also be delineated here. Involvement with the Daughters of Charity with the practices of slavery will NOT be covered in this research guide; that subject has [its own research guide here](#).

The Daughters of Charity are a global Community of Sisters accepting members of all races. This research guide is focusing exclusively on African American history as it unfolded in the United States; foreign missions, whether the work of American Daughters or Daughters in African provinces, are being considered outside the scope of this guide.

Although it was never explicitly defined as a white-only institution in the United States, membership of the American Daughters of Charity did not include any African American members until 1971. Personal files and collections of living members of the Community are not yet open to outside researchers.

We also ask that researchers, when they see gaps in this research guide, contact the Archives at [archives@doc.org](mailto:archives@doc.org). We will update this guide as we become aware of more information. (Last updated February 2024)

## **II. SCHOOL COLLECTIONS**

### **A. Emmitsburg, MD, St. Euphemia's School**

St. Euphemia's School in Emmitsburg, Maryland opened in 1878 for white children only. In 1886, the school began operating two parallel education programs, one for white children and one for Black children, operating in separate rooms. This system continued until 1944, when St. Euphemia's officially became the first desegregated school in Frederick County.

The St. Euphemia's collection consists of five boxes and includes newspaper clippings, photographs, and oral history interviews of African American students who attended both the segregated and desegregated school. The oral histories were conducted around 2003 by Sister Eleanor Casey, who interviewed Kathleen Richardson Williams and Barbara Van Brakle Weedon. Both of these individuals' homes appear on an area map of Emmitsburg from 1949 in RG 19-3, Flat File #2.

### **B. Frederick, MD, St. John's School and Asylum**

St. John's School and Asylum in Frederick, MD was founded in 1825 for white and Black students, including those who were enslaved. The school provided catechetical instruction in separate times and rooms. The collection includes names and sacramental records of Black students who attended the school between 1830 and 1846, when the Sisters withdrew and the school became the Visitation Academy.

### C. Greensboro, NC

The Daughters of Charity began teaching at the African American St. Mary's School in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1928; it changed its name to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal in 1949. In 1955, Bishop Vincent Waters of the Diocese of Raleigh ordered all Catholic schools desegregated. In 1972, due to declining enrollment, the Daughters and the Diocese closed the Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal School. The Daughters then served at the parish to assist with its own desegregation. The Parish changed its name back to St. Mary's. The St. Mary's Center served as the social outreach arm of the parish.

The St. Mary's / Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal School collection consists of three boxes, containing student rosters, administrative reports, faculty meeting minutes, historical writings by Sisters, oral histories of former students and community members recorded in 2003 by Sister Eleanor Casey, administrative correspondence, newspaper clippings, photographs of students and events, and information about the closing and mergers of the Black and white schools.

The St. Mary's Center collection consists of one box containing information about the parish and parish center as they began to build an integrated community. It contains historical accounts by both Black and white members of the parish community, correspondence, and photographs.

### D. Natchez, MS, St. Francis School

St. Francis School in Natchez, MS was the Daughters of Charity's first ministry dedicated exclusively for African Americans, lasting only for the school year from 1890-1891. This collection consists of one box with historical information and correspondence amongst the Sisters. The primary reason for the short time period of this mission was a series of conflicts between the Sisters and the pastor of the parish church and school.

### E. Portsmouth, VA

Both public and Catholic schools in Virginia were segregated since 1870. The Daughters of Charity taught at the white St. Paul's Elementary in Portsmouth school beginning in 1876 and St. Paul's High School in 1947. In 1961, St. Paul's became the first high school in the city to desegregate, with the elementary school following suit in 1970 when four schools – St. Paul's Elementary School, Little Flower School, and Holy Angels School into Portsmouth Catholic Elementary School – merged.

The Portsmouth Catholic High School / St. Paul's High School Collection consists of three boxes, including reports from the school after desegregation, student newspapers and school events, regional newspaper clippings, and photographs. The Archives also has the complete run of school yearbooks.

The Portsmouth Catholic Elementary School / St. Paul's Elementary School Collection consists of four boxes, including meeting minutes for the consolidated school after desegregation, newspaper clippings, and programs.

The Our Lady of Victory School Collection consists of two boxes, containing information from the opening of the school in 1930 to its final closure in 1964 after the schools desegregated and students began to attend Portsmouth Catholic High School / St. Paul's High School. The information includes reports, historical notes, oral history interviews with white teachers and

Black alumni, newspaper clippings, numerous photos, and records of the Our Lady of Victory alumni association.

#### F. St. Louis, MO, St. Malachy School

St. Malachy school was founded in 1941, after administration of the parish was turned over from the Archdiocese of St. Louis to the Jesuits. By this point, the parish had primarily been an African American one for several decades. These Jesuits invited the Daughters of Charity to open a school, which operated from 1941 to 1959. The school was segregated and for Black students, and remained so after Archbishop Ritter enacted desegregation throughout the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese in 1947. Enrollment declined consistently after 1947.

The collection consists of one box and contains historical accounts of Sisters, financial information, student newsletters, and photographs of students and events.

### **III. Civil Rights**

#### A. African American Outreach Collection

This collection contains collaborations between the Daughters of Charity and various offices and ministries of the Catholic Church, institutes of religious life, and Dioceses//Archdioceses related to Black Catholic ministry, cultural diversity, and related departments. This includes organizations like the National Black Sisters' Conference. These take the form of reports, ministry and pastoral plans, and formal correspondence. There is a particular focus on the St. Louis area.

The collection also contains a number of newspaper clippings related to Catholic religious and the Civil Rights protests of the 1960s and 1970s, some relating to the Daughters, some not. It also contains formal statements and press releases related to the Daughters in the 2010s and 2020s.

This collection provides another access point for information related to the Daughters of Charity who were arrested in Chicago in 1965 (see section "Chicago, Marillac Social Center"), as well as copies of oral history transcripts from the Emmitsburg, MD and Portsmouth, VA school collections.

#### B. Baltimore, St. Agnes Hospital

Box 4 of the St. Agnes Hospital, Baltimore collections contains correspondence and reports examining the relationship between the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Catholic hospitals (including St. Agnes) and the Black community of Greater Baltimore between 1970 and 1972. The report attempts to establish and study deficiencies amongst care and employment the Black community and determine ways to begin to remedy the deficiencies.

#### C. Chicago, Marillac Social Center

In 1965, six Daughters of Charity were arrested during a protest of housing policies in Chicago. The Provincial Archives contains photographs, accounts by the Sisters, newspaper clippings (Boxes 6 and 16). This was part of the larger "Summer of Hope Program," a program with great

community organizing in predominantly African American neighborhoods of Chicago (Box 18). Sister Karen Baustian also discusses these events in her Oral History interview.

In 1964, Sister Mary William Sullivan, the Director of Marillac, along with a number of other religious leaders in Chicago, held a banquet in honor of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., after the announcement that he would receive the Nobel Peace Prize. This collection contains the program from that event, as well as photographs of Dr. King with Sister Mary William, and a handwritten note from Dr. King to Sister Mary William (Box 19).

Sister Karen Baustian's oral history addresses the Civil Rights movement in Chicago and at Marillac, as well as the night of Dr. King's assassination and subsequent unrest.

#### D. Kansas City, MO, St. Vincent's Hospital / St. Anthony's Home

Box 1 of the St. Vincent's Hospital / St. Anthony's Home collection contains a report by the University of Kansas on discrimination in employment related to St Vincent's and St. Anthony's. The report cites the Hospital as "a hospital with a completely integrated program of racial employment and service" and dates from 1952 to approximately 1955.

#### E. Natchez, MS, Cathedral School

Sister Teresita Heenan's oral history addresses the time of integration and white flight at Cathedral School in Natchez, MS.

#### F. New Orleans, St. Stephen's School

As the Archdiocese of New Orleans Education Department sought to consolidate schools with a focus on both financial matters and racial integration, the movements of white flight and massive resistance entangled public and Catholic schools in the 1970s. The project itself is documented in the file "Project Excellence: Catholic Urban Education" (Box 3), as well as the reports, histories, correspondence, and photographs in the rest of the collection.

#### G. Washington, DC, Providence Hospital

Box 47 of the Providence Hospital, Washington collection contains information on a study of Black doctors in the District of Columbia conducted by the Washington Urban League, circa 1955.

Box 118 contains a scrapbook titled "Civil Rights 1963-1964," created by an anonymous author. It consists of newspaper clippings related to desegregation and pro-Civil Rights initiatives under Archbishop (later Cardinal) Patrick O'Boyle in the Archdiocese of Washington, as well as the March on Washington and passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Sister Eileen Kinnarney's oral history goes into some further detail about Washington, DC. in the time of the Civil Rights Movement and the integration of Providence Hospital.

### **IV. Other Prominent Materials**

#### A. Baltimore and Oblate Sisters

The accounts of cholera in Baltimore provide significant details about patients, identified as white, Black, or mixed-race, who suffered from the disease (Box 1).

The Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's received wide acclaim and gratitude for their service in Baltimore during the 1832 cholera epidemic, while Mother Mary Lang's Oblate Sisters of Providence, an African American community, did not. While the accounts of the cholera epidemic in the Daughters collection are very detailed about patients, they do not mention the Oblate Sisters.

#### B. Billy Johnson

The Provincial Annals provide details of a story of an African American child from Utica who was "adopted" by Mother Margaret O'Keefe in 1906 and taken to Emmitsburg. When he expressed his desire to be an altar server, the Daughters would not allow him to serve in Emmitsburg, so arranged for him to be adopted by a Black family in Baltimore. Billy's story is recounted in the 1925 edition of the Provincial Annals.

#### C. Bladensburg, MD, Elizabeth Seton High School

Elizabeth Seton High School in Bladensburg is an all-girls private Catholic school run by the Daughters, which opened in 1959. Beginning in the 1980s, the school became a majority-minority school with an over 50% student body of African Americans. The collection provides a resource for alumni and descendants of alumni in a high-performing school environment. Notable alumni include Muriel Boser, mayor of Washington, DC.

#### D. Cumberland, MD, Sacred Heart Hospital

Box 1 of the Sacred Heart Hospital collection includes reports, correspondence, and findings between the Hospital, priests, Daughters of Charity, and Cardinal Lawrence Shehan, Archbishop of Baltimore, regarding the Cardinal's Study on Race Relations by the Urban Commission in 1970. It includes results of the study as it relates to Sacred Heart Hospital.

#### E. Dallas, St. Paul's Hospital

Box 14 of the St. Paul's Hospital collection contains correspondence to and from the Bishop and various hospitals about the desegregation of Catholic facilities in the Diocese of Dallas-Fort Worth dating from the years 1962-1965. They contain statements from bishops and administrators of Catholic facilities as well as Black individuals who used or attempted to use these facilities in a dignified way.

#### F. Emmitsburg, MD, Briscoe and Lee Families

The Briscoe family members were part of the Emmitsburg African American community, who worked on the Daughters property from the late 1830s through the 1930s, first Augustine Briscoe and then his son John. The family can be traced through the various ledger books of the Community as well as the Provincial Annals and the "Talks of the Ancient Sisters." The Briscoe family also appears on the area plat of Emmitsburg in RG 19-3 Emmitsburg, Flat File #3, pre-1910. John's death in 1936 was marked by a Requiem Mass on campus.

Martin Lee worked for the Daughters from 1840 until his death in 1897. The Provincial Annals contain a lengthy obituary of him, and financial records of his work exist in the early ledgers. The "Talks of the Ancient Sisters" also makes reference to Charles Lee, who, according to Augustine, was the grandfather of Martin and was free, but had an enslaved wife. According to Sister Helena Elder, Charles and his wife lived "up there in Brawner's place." Augustine attests

that it became the property of the Beckert family. The names Lee and Brawner both appear on the area plat of Emmitsburg in RG 19-3 Emmitsburg, Flat File #3, pre-1910.

There is a possibility that Charles and Martin Lee are related to Ann Coales, a woman who formerly was enslaved at the wash house and purchased her freedom and discusses her experiences in the "Talks of the Ancient Sisters."

#### G. Emmitsburg, MD, Laborers

Several African American individuals are identified as receiving payment for various services in the early financial ledgers. Sometimes, the payments are very specific and detailed; other times, they read, for example: "pd. Black Thomas \$22.52" (Ledger 94, page 29).

#### H. Mother Theresa Duchemin

Almeida Maxis Duchemin attended St. Joseph's Academy from 1819-1823. She was a mixed-race student who was able to pass as white and later was one of the founding members of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first community for African American women religious. She was the first African American Superioress General of a community of women religious when she co-founded the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The records in Emmitsburg relate to her schooling.

#### I. Richmond Scrapbook

Box 351 of the Emmitsburg, St. Joseph's Provincial House Collection, a scrapbook, contains a page of "souvenirs from the war time" from the Civil War. Among them is a calculation system by an enslaved girl in the Richmond area who, according to the description "could not read or write."

#### J. Washington, DC, Providence Hospital Nurses

Estelle Howard was one of the first two Black nurses at Providence when she started in 1947, where she worked until 1990. She started as a Nurse, working her way up to Director of one of the segregated nursing wards, Assistant Director of Nursing, and Control Coordinator of the Emergency Unit. She was the first Black head nurse of an integrated unit at the Hospital. She received a special sendoff when she retired and several employee awards along the way. Her life and career is documented through the programs held in her honor and in the Hospital newsletters 'Providentially Speaking' and 'Memo' throughout the years of her tenure.