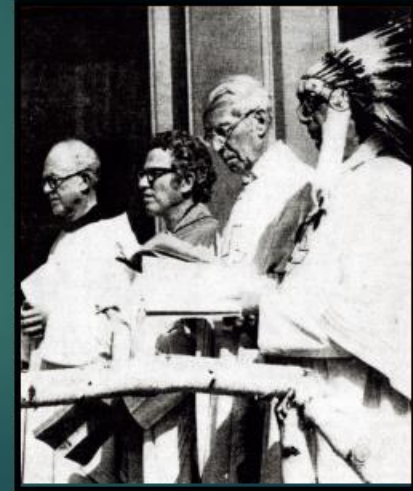


Adventures in Native Catholic Archives

Mark G. Thiel, Marquette University Archives, 2018



Frame One:

Since 1986, I've served the Marquette Archives by developing its Native Catholic collections. Nonetheless, some important developments preceded me, without which, my latter-day adventures would not have happened.

Two decades earlier in 1961, Jesuit Father Raphael Hamilton founded Marquette's Archives & Special Collections Department, now within its Raynor Memorial Libraries. He was a Marquette history professor and expert on the Jesuit Père Jacques Marquette, who donated his research collection about him, which planted the seed for seeking Catholic collections about Native Americans. The left-hand image depicts Marquette seeking his way to the Mississippi while exploring the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins and the righthand one shows Father Hamilton second from the right among priests concelebrating Mass at Chicago's 1973 tricentennial celebration of Marquette's explorations. As you may surmise, the priest next to him wearing the war bonnet is a Native American, Father Georges Mathieu. He was a Potawatomi Indian born and raised in Chicago when the U.S. Census was unable to identify any Native Americans there.

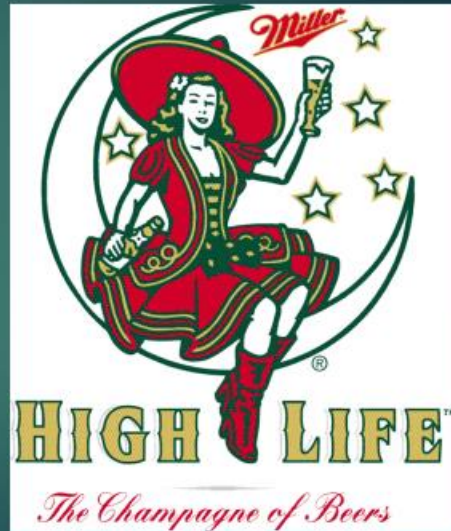
Jesuit Missions in South Dakota: St. Francis Mission and Red Cloud Indian School



Frame Two:

Soon after, through Jesuit connections, the Marquette Archives negotiated archival agreements with St. Francis Mission and Red Cloud Indian School, two large Jesuit missions in South Dakota, which date from the 1880s. Both transferred substantial holdings and have continued as robust institutions that have reinvented themselves in this persistently underdeveloped region. On the left, pupils on the playground at St. Francis gathered like their elders, sharing a cigarette like a pipe, and on the right, a Red Cloud teacher aids a student, many of who have distinguished themselves as Gates Millennial Scholars.

Father F. Paul Prucha, S.J., BCIM Director Monsignor Paul A. Lenz,
and the Rancé Foundation



Frame Three:

Meanwhile, the stars aligned for Marquette with, from left to right, Monsignor Paul Lenz, Director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Marquette History Professor, the Jesuit Father F. Paul Prucha, and Miller Beer money serving as the key ingredients. During the 1960s, Fr. Prucha researched *The Churches and the Indian Schools, 1888-1912*, which detailed Church-State conflict about Christian evangelization and schools for Native Americans. In Washington, D.C., he conducted extensive research at the National Archives and the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, and at the latter, he discovered that their treasure-trove of records needed archival preservation and access.

Soon, he secured University permission for their acquisition, and with his support, the Marquette Archives won crucial financial backing from the Milwaukee-based De Rancé Foundation. Its founder, Harry John, had a personal affinity for Catholic evangelization of Native Americans and he was a principal heir of Miller Brewing Company stock, which he sold for nearly \$100 million and invested into De Rancé, and at that time, it became the world's largest Catholic foundation.

Year-long negotiations followed between Marquette and the BCIM's all-bishop Board of Directors with the Catholic University of America presenting a counterproposal. However, Catholic University was no match for De Rancé's financial muscle. So, with De Rancé's support plus that of Msgr. Lenz, the BCIM's board of directors approve the agreement, which made Marquette its archival repository.

Black & Indian Mission Office & the Catholic Church



Frame Four:

Since then, Marquette's archives staff received and processed over 800 cubic feet of BCIM correspondence, reports, photography, and rare publications, the bulk of which pertain to Native Catholic missions, parishes, and schools across the United States since its founding in 1874, to protect and promote these institutions staffed by Jesuits, Franciscans, and Franciscan and Blessed Sacrament sisters, and others.

I joined Marquette's staff in 1986, after three years of service as archivist of Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, which has provided invaluable insights for administering all of Marquette's Native collections, but especially the Red Cloud School, St. Francis Mission, and other South Dakota Native collections.

Like the South Dakota Jesuit ministries, the BCIM has continually reinvented itself, and in so doing, it took in two other Catholic agencies now alleigned with it. They are the Commission for Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, established 1884, which administers an annual Lentin collection for Black and Indian evangelization, and the Catholic Negro American Mission Board, established 1906, which supports Catholic schools for African American children. Since 1980, all three agencies have shared facilities, staff, and a board of directors comprised of the New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore ordinaries, while maintaining their distinct missions.

Discovering Exquisite Easter Eggs while seeking Miracles

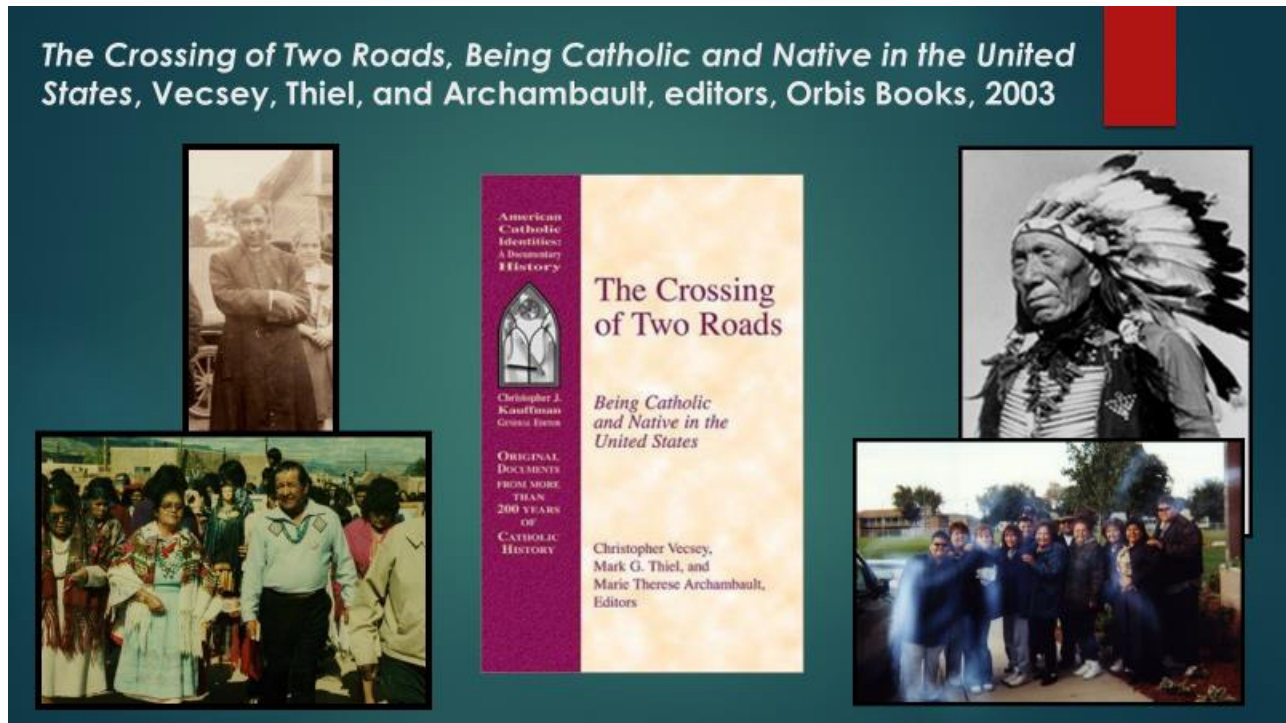


Frame Five:

By the mid-1990s, many Native Catholics were frustrated by the slow pace of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha's canonization cause, and at that time, I was unaware of exquisite hand-crafted Easter eggs by Native artists. One day, a Franciscan Sister and Oglala Lakota Indian from South Dakota who I knew well, called in hopes that I could further the cause. She asked that I interview Native Catholics about their devotional experiences with Kateri in the hope that I would discover an unreported miracle that would pass muster with Rome. Then I lacked interview experience and self-confidence, so I replied, "If someone gives me the money, I will do it." But to my surprise, the first foundation I asked awarded me all the funds I requested, which propelled me into the lives of Native Catholics as never-before.

With assistance from local pastors, I selected and interviewed 50 Native Catholics from diverse backgrounds in South Dakota, Arizona, and New Mexico. Ultimately, while this Kateri Tekakwitha Oral History Project didn't further the cause, its collection further illuminated Native Catholic life and I discovered a rare Native artform—hand-crafted Easter eggs, which started when a young girl selling her grandmother's ceramic figurines door-to-door asked if I wished to buy one. I selected the brightly hued "egg" shown on the left within the basket, which reflected their Laguna Pueblo artistic traditions and somewhat reminded me of those from my Polish heritage. With persistence, I sought out and purchased more Southwest Native "eggs," which for Eastertime, 2014, graced the cover of the BCIM newsletter and formed the theme for the director's Easter message on the value of people being "good eggs."

The Crossing of Two Roads, Being Catholic and Native in the United States, Vecsey, Thiel, and Archambault, editors, Orbis Books, 2003



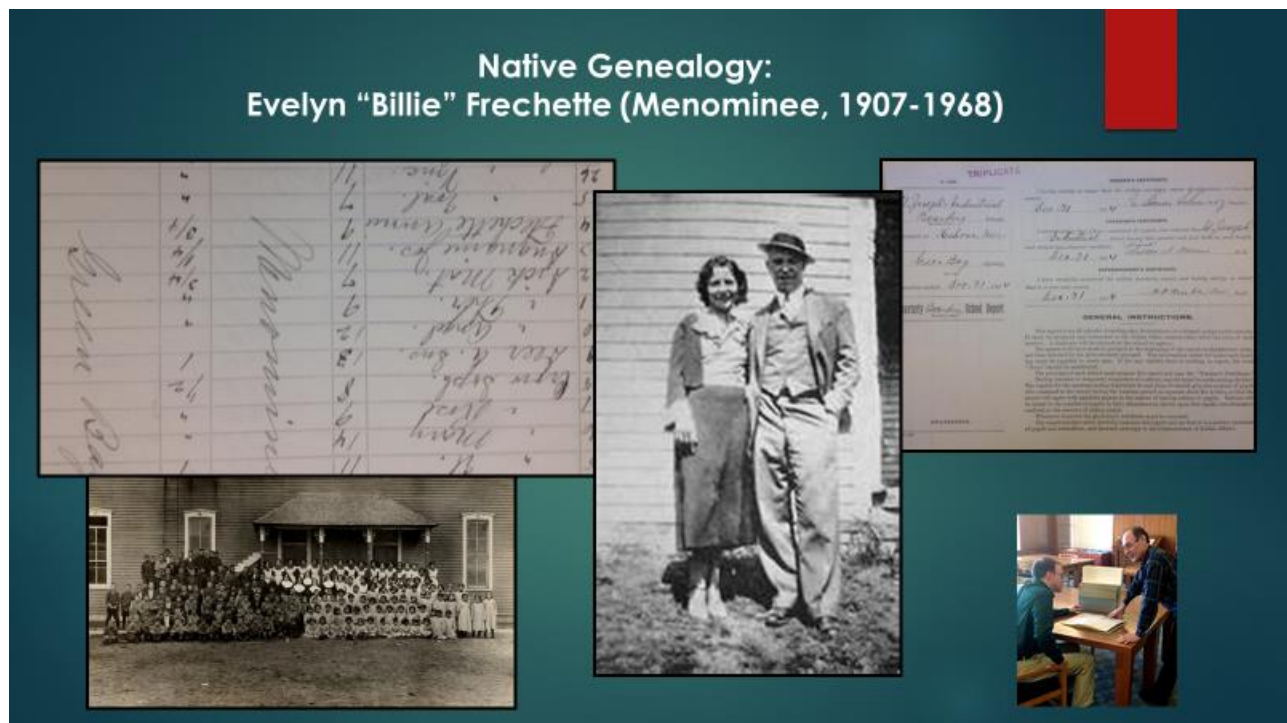
Frame Six:

When serving as a co-editor for *The Crossing of Two Roads: Being Catholic and Native in the United States*, a volume in, "American Catholic Identities, A Documentary History," my co-editors and I believed intuitively that the BCIM correspondence would be an important source for finding notable Native authors. But although indexed by author, identifying the Native ones proved daunting at first, because many lacked Native distinctions. However, I recognized that the BCIM attendance reports of Native Catholic school students provided a national source of representative Native surnames, which we used to cross-check those in the correspondence index. The resulting matches then allowed us to effectively focus our scrutiny on these now identified Native names.

The notable examples of faith we found included Father Phillip Gordon (left) and now Servant of God Nicholas Black Elk (right), who wrote during the early 20th century. Father Gordon was an Ojibwa Indian and nationally prominent activist from Wisconsin who sought equal rights for Native Catholics while serving as a chaplain in Kansas at what is now Haskell Indian Nations University. Black Elk was an Oglala Lakota catechist from South Dakota, who like St. Paul, interpreted the Bible for others with his life experiences.

Other expressions included an interview of Mr. & Mrs. Joe and Juana Pecos from the Kateri Tekakwitha Oral History Project and the La Belle Family portrait and narrative regarding a deceased loved one. Mr. & Mrs. Pecos were two Jemez Pueblo elders and local church activists, who during the 1980s, were first to enshrine a statue of St. Kateri in their New Mexico church. The La Belle Ojibwa Indian family portrait depicts them in a Milwaukee cemetery with they believe, the image of their loved one's spirit embracing

them who was Jerry Starr, one of three ironworkers killed in 2000 by a crane crash at the Miller Baseball Park in Milwaukee.



Frame Seven:

Evelyn "Billie" Frechette is best known as the girlfriend of Chicago gangster John Dillinger. But as a child in 1914, she and her siblings attended St. Joseph School on the Menominee Reservation in Wisconsin.

Frechette was one of thousands of 20th century Native students documented in BCIM attendance reports of Native Catholic school students, copies of which it forwarded to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. These reports listed Native students at over 100 Catholic schools in 15 Midwest and Western states who were enrolled in tribes with Government-administered tribal funds, which gave the Government documentation to justify paying tuition to the schools with the tribes' funds.

Today, these records provide descendants and others with crucial documentation for tribal enrollment, U.S. citizenship verification, parental identification, and family knowledge, which seekers have acknowledged by their many gifts and expressions of appreciation to the Marquette Archives. To expedite genealogical queries within these school attendance records, without compromising confidentiality to records less than 70 years old, several local volunteers compiled an alphabetized list to its 25,000 surnames. Now online, this list identifies all surnames with spelling variations, tribal and non-Indian ethnicities, states of the schools, and record box for about 13 cubic feet of records. When a match occurs with a surname representing a sought-after subject, there's at least 50% certainty that the record sought will be found within clearly defined parameters.

Guide to Catholic Records about Native Americans & Sister M. Claude Lane, O.P., Memorial Award, 2008



Frame Eight:

ACDA's 1992 meeting focused on the Columbian Quincentennial, in which I and two others from Marquette presented on its 12-state records survey and *Guide to Catholic Indian Mission and School Records in Midwest Repositories*. We were pleased to bring these sources to light, many of which are obscure and complement Marquette's holdings. But it prompted a Southwest diocesan archivist to ask, "When are you going to do the rest of the country?" It caught me off-guard without an answer, but I never forgot.

A decade later when we secured funding, I promptly notified that diocesan archivist, but she no longer remembered her question. Nonetheless, with in-house assistants and my wife Patricia on the road, we conducted a 14-state records survey, which resonated with "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles" and culminated with the online *Guide to Catholic-Related Records in the West about Native Americans*. In 2008, we received the Sister M. Claude Lane, O.P., Memorial Award at SAA in San Francisco, and while approaching the podium to receive the certificate, an Alaskan Native archivist in the front row stood and clapped, and soon, everyone else followed, which pleased me to know that others cared about our efforts to illuminate these sources.

Collectively, the guide volumes not only illuminate Native Catholic archival sources beyond Marquette, but they also further illuminate Marquette's holdings beyond its finding aids. Recently, with information from new accessions of the Black & Indian Mission Office in tandem with the Official Catholic Directory and various Catholic websites, we've updated and added new entries for the Eastern states and we've moved on to the Midwestern states too. In so doing, for example, we've discovered that the

Cleveland has more than just the Cleveland Indians. Although the State of Ohio has no Indian reservations, the Cleveland Diocese has some Native Catholics dispersed among more than a dozen parishes, which resulted from post-World War II in-migration for education and jobs.



Frame Nine:

In 1885, the U.S. bishops opened St. Kateri Tekakwitha's cause for canonization, and in 2012, Pope Benedict closed it with her canonization. During the 19th century, her cause inspired the formation of the American Sisters, a 19th century community of Lakota women in Dakota Territory. In 2006, the miraculous healing from strep A on the face of Lummi Indian boy Jake Finkbonner resonated with Kateri's childhood bout with small pox four centuries earlier. It led to her canonization with young Jake as a special guest who received communion from Pope Benedict.

For that event, BCIM Director Father Wayne Payse requested a photo exhibit about notable Native Catholics, which I was pleased to fulfil, and in collaboration with an historian, I co-edited a volume of writings about Native Catholic devotion to St. Kateri, which included Jake Finkbonner's miraculous healing. Thereafter, Father Payse invited my wife Pat and I to attend the canonization ceremonies, which we were pleased to do.



Frame Ten:

On the morning of the ceremony, Pat and I arrived early and selected our seats in front of St. Peter's Basilica. Soon, an unknown and lone Native elder sat next to us, who is shown with me on the left, and without introductions, we struck up a conversation to fill the time. He told me about a photo of his grandfather teaching his mother how to pray the rosary and he wished that his grandfather would be canonized too someday. By then, I realized he was a Black Elk grandson who had just met an archivist who administers important documents about his grandfather's life, which caused me to believe that someone above had brought us together for good in this sea of humanity halfway around the world.

Later, several Native Catholics voiced their support for Black Elk's sainthood cause, and another started a petition to garner support from Rapid City Bishop Robert Gruss, which Black Elk's grandchildren presented to him in 2016. The next year, after prayerful study, Bishop Gruss opened Black Elk's cause as the petitioner, which the U.S. Bishops endorsed. Since then, he appointed a Native deacon candidate as postulator, a Jesuit as his coach, and an historical commission comprised of a Jesuit biographer of Black Elk, the South Dakota state historian, and myself, who are charged with identifying all pertinent documents about his holiness. In the center is a bucket of topsoil from Black Elk's grave, which I was gifted along with the fan and rosaries in Lakota sacred colors, at the opening of his cause on the Red Cloud Indian School, Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

Le Monde to “Faith on the Frontier”



Frame Eleven:

Since then, Black Elk's cause has captured media attention worldwide, from Parisian newspaper, *Le Monde*, which this year became the first one to quote me in a foreign language, to “Faith on the Frontier,” a forthcoming EWTN documentary by James Kelty, an award-winning cinematographer and Marquette alumni. With archival photos, pictorial charts, and maps from the Marquette Archives, interviews of archivists and historians, such as Dominican Sister Mary Ewens, an expert on American Indian communities of women religious, and historical reenactments, Kelty plans to tell the story of the Church's 19th and early 20th century evangelization of Native Americans in the West from Jesuit Father Pierre-Jean De Smet to the life of Servant of God Nicholas Black Elk.



Frame Twelve:

During the 1970s, the annual Tekakwitha Conference emerged as the premiere national gathering of Native Catholics and others ministering to them, and during the next decade, Marquette became its archival repository as well with outside financial support enabling me to attend. In so doing, I learned to meet regularly with attending donors and researchers; to observe history in-progress from changes in the Church to emerging trends among Native Catholics; and to present high-interest PowerPoint presentations with themes including Native Catholic genealogical sources, canonized and presumptive Native saints, pictorial catechisms that transcended language and cultural barriers, and pictorial histories of the BCIM and Tekakwitha Conference.

In 1979, the Conference held its 75th anniversary gathering at its birthplace in Fargo, North Dakota, at which I presented a lavish pictorial history as a keynote address to perhaps a thousand attendees, including several bishops. In answer to "Why Fargo?", I focused on the state's rich Native Catholic history and the Conference's founding during the Great Depression by Bishop, Aloysius Meunch, a Milwaukee native experienced with Catholic Action in Germany who was ordained Fargo's bishop at Marquette's Gesu campus Church. So, with complete honesty, I proclaimed that the Tekakwitha Conference began under my nose, and afterwards, one bishop confessed that I sent shivers up his spine. I thought, Wow! I never knew that an archivist could so affect a bishop. But like evangelization with pictorial catechisms, the power in PowerPoints, I believe, lies with the effective use of pictures.

So now with Black Elk's cause, I'm setting the bar high, and while the excitement continues, I won't retire.

Last updated July 15, 2018