



# Archdiocesan Archives stretch back to 1718

By Dr. Emilie Leumas  
Contributing writer

There is an emotional power that one gains when exploring an archives and finding a true historical nugget of golden truth. Sometimes it is tracing the history of our ancestors or knowing how a church community started.

Historical documents offer intrigue, first-hand knowledge, and yes, gossip.

The Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans is no different. It documents a fascinating and colorful history, one which has its beginnings three-quarters of a century before the diocese was established.

The mission of the Office of Archives and Records is to document and care for the historical records, publications, manuscript collections and related records documenting the Catholic experience in Louisiana. Records date from 1718 to the present.

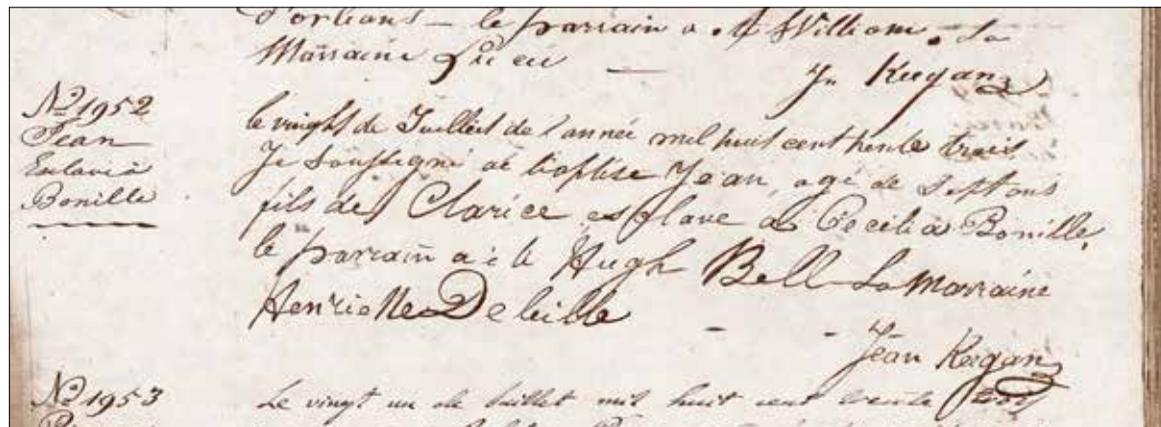
## A diverse treasure trove

Within the Archives there are approximately 6,000 cubic feet of boxed archival material (administrative files, property files, organizational files, parish visitation reports, institutional histories, photograph collections); 528 bound volumes of primary source material (such as funeral expenses, pulpit announcements, diaries, scrapbooks, minute books, cemetery plot books); and approximately 1,500 sacramental registers.

Secondary sources numbering more than 3,500 include the Official Catholic Directory (and its predecessors), the archdiocesan newspapers, parish histories and the Society of the Propagation of the Faith.

But how did it all begin?

A ramble through the precious, old registers of the



The archdiocesan Office of Archives and Records maintains important documents such as sacramental records, including the baptismal record at left, signed by a godmother named Henriette Delille. Bottom photo: Bound volumes of "Le Propagateur Catholique," the French-language newspaper of the Archdiocese of New Orleans from 1842-1864, are part of the Archives' vast collection.

Images | COURTESY ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE OF ARCHIVES AND RECORDS



St. Louis Cathedral is like a reunion of New Orleans families and a front-row seat to Louisiana's past. These old registers give us a glimpse into the narrative of the masses, from the affluent leaders, to the workers, to the enslaved and to the Native Americans.

All the great names familiar in the history of French and Spanish colonial days are to be found – French noblemen and Spanish officials, counts and marquises, barons and baronesses, Spanish grandee, chevaliers and military officers – as brides and grooms, witnesses and godparents.

## Foresight of bishop

After the Good Friday fire of 1788, which destroyed the Church of St. Louis and numerous irreplaceable sacramental records, Auxiliary Bishop Cirilo de Barcelona ordered all records be kept in a safe place. At this time,

the archdiocese had not yet been created, and the Louisiana colonial territory was under Spanish rule, by the Diocese of Havana, Cuba.

This order, given on Jan. 12, 1790, created the Cathedral Archives in the sacristy of the St. Louis Cathedral, which eventually became the Archdiocesan Archives.

Today, the archives are kept in a temperature- and humidity-controlled secure vault by a team of archivists who are dedicated to preserving the history of New Orleans and the surrounding area.

Scholars, historians and researchers use the material to tell the Louisiana Catholic story, to gain knowledge in how that story is relevant today, and to guide us into the future.

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## THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH



Pauline Jaricot  
Foundress

### The Society for the Propagation of the Faith

Our story begins in France in the early 19th century. Pauline Jaricot, inspired by letters about the Missions from her brother, starts gathering together small groups — mostly workers in her family's silk factory. She asked each member of the group to offer daily prayer and a weekly sacrifice of a sous (the equivalent of a penny at that time) for the Church's worldwide missionary work. Pauline insisted that her efforts be directed to all the Church's missions, that it be universal.

The very first collection of the Propagation of the Faith in 1822 supported the vast diocese of Louisiana, which then extended from the Florida Keys to Canada, as well as the Missions of Kentucky and China.

The missionary Society for the Propagation of the Faith continues today to contribute to the life of the poor in dioceses and supports missions throughout the world. We seek prayer and sacrifice for the world's Missions. Now some 1,100 mission dioceses in Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands and remote regions of Latin America are assisted for pastoral and evangelizing programs, for catechists and catechetical work, to build churches and chapels, for the work of Religious Communities in health care and education and for communication and transportation needs.

While we are 200 years young we join our New Orleans Catholic Community in celebrating the Tricentennial – 300 Years of River of Faith

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