

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. We will update this guide as we become aware of more information. (Last updated April 2026)

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. New Orleans, School of the Coloured Children

The Council minutes of January 10, 1838 include:

It was proposed to the Council to take the School of the Coloured children in N. Orleans but we find it impossible to accept of the Bishop's request--

Evidently, while this was proposed, it was never accepted or implemented.

F. New York, NY, Half-Orphan Asylum

The Council minutes of January 25, 1828 include:

the Bishop of N. York applied through Rd Supr for 3 Sisters to teach a school of a mixture of white & black children in the school rooms attached to Christ's Church the Sisters to board & lodge at the Asylum-----

The Council opposes black & white children to be taught together but are willing they shall be taught by the Sisters in separate rooms, having no intercourse with each other, no stated sum to be given for education but they may receive donations this never took place

Evidently, while this was proposed, it was never accepted or implemented.

G. 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.

H. Prichard, AL, At. James Major School

St. James Major Parish was founded as an African American parish in 1912, with a school being opened in the following year. From 1924, the school was staffed by the Holy Ghost Sisters and the Sisters of the Holy Family, lay teachers, and then the Josephite Fathers. The Daughters of Charity first arrived in 1964 and operated the school until 2001. The collection contains information on the management of the school during this time period. Four boxes.

I. 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. 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.

B. 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.

C. 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.

D. 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.

E. Emmitsburg, MD, Briscoe and Lee Families

The Briscoe family members were part of the Emmitsburg African American community, who worked on the Sisters' 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 Sisters 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 was Martin's son-in-law. According to Sister Helena Elder, Charles and his wife lived "up there in Brawner's place." This was the very same family that Charles had purchased his and his family's freedom from. Augustine attests that it became the property of the Beckert family. Martin offered the right of first purchase of his properties to the Daughters after his death, but they declined. The names Lee and Brawner both appear on the area plat of Emmitsburg in RG 19-3 Emmitsburg, Flat File #3, pre-1910.

Isaac Lee, son of Charles, also worked for the Sisters, and evidence of his employment appears in the financial ledgers and cash books. In addition, he was paid in 1838 for "Quarry Work" for the chapel, which became the chapel of the Central House that opened in 1839 and is now the National Firefighter's Memorial Chapel.

Hannah Lee, Charles's wife, worked for the Sisters as a wash woman and occasionally was paid to clean "for Cleaning Emmitsburgh Church." Her name appears in Ledger 58 with payments from December 1821 to January 1825, with her name explicitly being listed as Hannah Lee beginning on September 20, 1823.

More information about Charles, Hannah, Isaac, and Martin Lee can be found in the Recovering Identity report on Northern Frederick County by Catoctin Furnace and Edith B. Wallace: <https://catoctinfurnace.org/recovering-identity/>.

There is a possibility that the Lees are related to Ann Coales (alternatively Coates), a woman who formerly was enslaved at the wash house. She purchased her own freedom and discussed her experiences in the "Talks of the Ancient Sisters." She was paid for washwork between October 1823 and September 1824. According to the Catoctin/Wallace report, she was married to Kelly Coates and lived until 1903.

The Talks of the Ancient Sisters also mentions a Mary Diggs: "Mary Diggs Lee comes from Frederick County."

There is also a woman named Jane who is explicitly identified as Black in Ledger 57. In Ledger 58, she is identified with the last name Biskey. There is the potential that this is a mistaken or alternate spelling of Briscoe. She is listed in the ledgers from March 1819 to March 1824.

F. Emmitsburg, MD, Laborers and Wash Women

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).

A woman named Betsy is listed in Ledgers 55 and 57 from 1815-1816. It is noted that her pay is “at the same rate as this day goes at St. Mary’s Mountain [Mount St. Mary’s University].” She is explicitly identified as a “hired black woman.”

A woman named Sydney is paid for washing and cooking in Ledgers 57 and 58 from April 1822 to August 1823, as well as for occasionally cleaning the parish church in Emmitsburg.

A woman named Mary, who is identified as Black, was paid for washing from December 1821-October 1823, per ledger 58.

Three individuals enslaved by Mount St. Mary’s University were nonetheless paid for various activities related to wagoning: Clem (Ledger 58, April 1822), Nace (Ledger 58, March 1823 to December 1824), and Abraham (Ledger 58, January 1824 to August 1824).

There is also a general payment “To wash women” of \$21.50 in July 1824.

There are also numerous references in the Daughters’ collections to a man named Clem who was enslaved by Mount St. Mary’s. Information on this life can be found in the “Researching Slavery at the Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives” guide referenced on page , although we have not found any evidence that the Sisters/Daughters utilized his labor without payment.

G. Evansville, IN, St. John’s Parish

St. John’s Parish was a historically Black parish founded in 1931 and located in Daylight, outside of Evansville. The parish also included a school, although the Daughters did not start their ministry there until after the school closed. In 1953, it became a territorial parish, before becoming an apostolic parish again in 1967 and a territorial parish yet again in 1978. The Daughters served in the parish briefly in the 1970s and returned in 1984, running various parish programs until withdrawing in 1989. The collection contains reports about the parish and sisters’ activities; photographs of parishioners; and a petition signed by many parishioners to return to territorial status in 1978, a reflection of the sense of ending parochial segregation. One box.

H. Gulfport, MS, St. Theresa’s Parish

St. Theresa’s Parish was a historically Black parish under the auspices of the Josephite Fathers, founded in 1932. The Daughters began their ministry at the parish in 1976 and withdrew in 1992, although the collection only covers the period from 1976 to 1989. The collection deals with the situation of a historically Black parish transitioning to the era of being an integrated but non-territorial parish. The collection contains background and administrative information regarding programs of the Sisters; correspondence regarding the state of the parish;

parish directories, bulletins, and newsletters; and photographs of parishioners and of the 1985 Hurricane Elena. One box.

I. 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 and are found in Ledgers 56, 57, and 58.

J. The Oblate Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of Charity

The Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's managed the Baltimore Infirmary under the University of Maryland beginning in 1823. One of the provisions of their agreement read as follows:

The Sisters shall have the care, management, and ordering of the interior concerns and labours [sic] of the Infirmary, and will have under them as many servant men as the service of the House may require, which servants they are permitted to appoint at the expense of the Institution, and at pleasure to dismiss, and which hired servant men shall be made to be subservient to the orders of all or any of the Sisterhood. The Sisters shall be at liberty to hire in any colored women by the day, at any time, and as often as they may deem it necessary, to wash the linen of the house, and which will be performed under the direction of a Sister to be by themselves appointed to that department. The linen and clothing of the Medical Students are exempt from, and not to be admitted in this arrangement.

As part of the regulations of the Baltimore Infirmary as they pertain to students, there is a clause that reads:

It shall be the duty of the Senior Students to keep the books of the house, to attend all white female patients, to assign the patients respectively to the other students as may seem best, to visit all the patients in the house before retiring and see that they are faithfully attended, to see that a record be kept of all the prescriptions, to collect the dues of the patients in the house and render to the Treasurer a weekly report of such collections and of the number of patients in the house. It shall be the duty of the other students to attend faithfully to such patients as may be assigned to them, to put up all prescriptions of the attending physician and surgeon and do all necessary dressings.

The Baltimore Infirmary played a significant role in the cholera epidemics of Baltimore. Box 1 of the Epidemics collection provides 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.

Today, the Baltimore Infirmary has morphed into the University of Maryland Medical Center.

Father Deluol's diary, the French-language original and of which the Daughters Archives has an English-translation copy, includes an entry from August 23, 1844:

Sister Catherine, an Oblate, left for Emmitsburg, where she will teach cooking to the Sisters of Charity.

We have found no other reference to this event in the collections. The Oblate Archives have also said they have no records of this. We plan to investigate this further with the Archives of the Baltimore Archdiocese.

The Provincial Annals do contain references to visits from the Oblate Sisters in the first half of the 20th century.

K. 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."

L. 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.