

Studies in Documents

Reading, Reporting, and Remembering: A Case Study of the Maryknoll Sisters' Diaries

ELIZABETH YAKEL

RÉSUMÉ Cet article présente une étude de cas des pratiques de gestion des documents entourant un journal dans le contexte d'une communauté religieuse particulière : les Maryknoll Sisters. La rédaction de ce journal a débuté en 1912 et s'est terminée en 1967 après que des réformes furent apportées en réponse à Vatican II. Cet article présente les quatre volets suivants: (1) le contexte et l'histoire des journaux (ou annales); (2) l'évolution des pratiques de gestion des documents qui ont entouré ces journaux; (3) les différentes raisons de rédiger des journaux, et (4) pourquoi les communautés religieuses ont cessé de tenir de tels journaux. L'analyse de l'auteure montre comment les traditions de gestion des documents, ainsi que la culture des Maryknoll Sisters, ont redéfini le genre littéraire du journal afin de l'adapter à leurs propres besoins. Par le fait même, les journaux sont devenus des documents utilisés à la fois pour les besoins internes de la communauté et ont servi à impliquer un auditoire beaucoup plus vaste. Les journaux ont ainsi renforcé l'identité de la communauté, aidé à maintenir le contrôle sur les missionnaires éloignées et façonné l'image des soeurs pour les lecteurs externes.

ABSTRACT This paper presents a case study of the record-keeping practices surrounding the diary within the context of one religious community: the Maryknoll Sisters. Diary writing began in 1912 and essentially ended in 1967 after reforms were instituted in response to Vatican II. The article traces: (1) the context and history of diaries; (2) outlines the evolution of the warrant and record-keeping practices surrounding diaries; (3) discusses the varied purposes to which diaries were put; and (4) examines the reasons for the discontinuation of the diaries within the context of this religious community. The analysis demonstrates how the record-keeping traditions and the Maryknoll Sisters' culture redefined the diary genre to fit their particular needs. By doing this, the diaries were versatile records used both within the context of the community and as a means of engaging broader audiences. In the process, the diaries supported community identity, helped to maintain control over far-flung missionaries, and shaped the image of the sisters for external readers.

Introduction

Opening a diary for the first time is like walking into a room full of strangers. The reader is advised to enjoy the company without trying to remember every name.¹

Since the emergence of diary writing during the Renaissance, this genre has expanded, evolved, and been adapted by different social systems. This paper presents a case study of the record-keeping practices surrounding the diary within the context of one religious community: the Maryknoll Sisters. Diary writing began in 1912 and essentially ended in 1967 after reforms were instituted in response to Vatican II. The article traces: (1) the context and history of the diaries; (2) outlines the evolution of the warrant and record-keeping practices surrounding diaries; (3) discusses the varied purposes to which diaries were put; and (4) examines the reasons for the discontinuation of the diaries within the context of this religious community. This analysis demonstrates how the record-keeping traditions and the Maryknoll Sisters' culture redefined the diary genre to fit their particular needs. By doing this, the diaries were versatile records used both within the context of the community and as a means of engaging broader audiences. In the process, the diaries supported community identity, helped to maintain control over far-flung missionaries, and shaped the image of the sisters for external readers.

Before launching into the case study, however, a brief discussion of the diary genre is necessary. First, it is diverse. Diaries can be anything from simple chronological notations of daily activities to introspective accounts of psychological and emotional development. For the purposes of this paper, a description provided by Madeleine Foisil forms a starting point for the exploration of diaries:

Diaries and *livres de raison* – for simplicity call them journals – were often kept in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ... Originally the journal was simply a book of accounts, and even in the more highly developed and elaborate examples of the genre the account remains the central element. Each day's happenings were recorded in the pages of the journal while they were still fresh in mind. The contents are prosaic, the activities described of the most ordinary kind, recorded day after day in a formulaic and unsophisticated manner. Journals divide time and action into a series of moments whose extent never exceeds a single day.²

1 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York, 1990), p. 15.

2 Madeleine Foisil, "The Literature of Intimacy," in Roger Chartier, ed., Arthur Goldhammer, trans., *A History of Private Life: III. Passions of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), p. 330.

The Historical and Administrative Context of the Diaries

History and Missions

The Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic (hereafter Maryknoll Sisters) trace their history to 1911, although formal recognition by Rome occurred in 1920. They are an international religious community founded with the intention of foreign missionary work. Beginning with their first overseas mission in China in 1921, the Maryknoll Sisters have founded hundreds of missions in Asia, Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, and most recently in Eastern Europe.³ The Maryknoll Sisters have carried out a wide variety of ministries internationally. In addition to working in parishes, teaching the Gospel, and spreading the Roman Catholic faith, the Sisters also began schools and hospitals where they served as teachers, doctors, and nurses. In more recent years, however, there has been a move away from formal institution building to work within the context of existing community structures. Due to declining numbers and a different vision of mission, Maryknoll Sisters are now more likely to be working in institutions owned by other groups, ministering alone, or serving in small groups. Today, the Maryknoll Sisters act more as experts in health care, education, social justice, agriculture, and community development in order to aid local people in establishing and administering locally controlled institutions, such as schools, literacy programs, credit unions, or cooperatives.

Administrative Context of the Records

The record-keeping context of the diaries is rich and diverse. By the mid-twentieth century, the Maryknoll Sisters had developed a hierarchical organizational structure with clear reporting relationships. The Maryknoll Sisters' Motherhouse in Ossining, New York led an organization divided into geographic regions. Regions in turn were divided into smaller geographic entities (usually countries), and countries were divided into a series of different ministries (institutions such as hospitals or schools, and convents). Each level had reporting requirements. For example, the regions were required to report to the Motherhouse and in turn received information from individual mission houses and institutions within the geographic area for which they were responsible. The types of records generated and collected at the regional level included council minutes, assembly proceedings, operational plans, and annual reports to the central administration. On the local level one can find negotiations to establish ministries, missions, or institutions. Here one finds property records,

³ This information is condensed from the two major histories: Camilla Kennedy, *To the Uttermost Parts of the Earth: The Spirit and Charism of Mary Josephine Rogers* (Ossining, New York, 1987), and Penny Lernoux, *Hearts on Fire: The Story of the Maryknoll Sisters* (Ossining, New York, 1993).

personnel records, and general correspondence concerning individual missionaries, houses, and potential new ministries. While the geographic areas encompassing regions has shifted, the genres of material produced by the regional leaders has remained relatively constant over the years. In addition to all of this documentation, diaries were also generated at the local level (convents, parishes, schools, hospitals, etc.).

The Diaries: History, Warrant, and Voice

History and Warrant

Diary writing began in 1912 before the formal designation of the Maryknoll Sisters as a religious community. When the Maryknoll Sisters sought recognition from Rome to form a religious community, diaries were formally incorporated into their first two Constitutions.⁴ The directives on diary writing in the Constitutions, and later in the directories, form the basis of warrant. Wendy Duff defines warrant as the “laws, customs, standards, and professional best practices accepted by society and codified in the literature of different professions concerned with records and record-keeping.”⁵ In this paper, the Maryknoll Sisters are considered a specific social group that has constructed specific rules of order under which they operate. Additionally, as professional religious, the Maryknoll Sisters adhered to standards, rules, and practices for missionaries abroad. Thus, the concept of warrant is applicable in this instance.

Articles in both the 1917 and 1925 Constitutions deal with different aspects that relate to diaries. For example, article 510 mandates the appointment of a “Chronicler.” Articles 549 to 553 concern the retention of “vital records” including the “Annals,” or diary compilations. The 1931 Constitution (Article 556, Section 20) provides more details on the responsibilities of the Local Superior. “The local Superior shall see that a diary is kept one copy of which shall be sent monthly to the Motherhouse for the archives and one to the Regional Prioress.”⁶ Subsequent Constitutions provide more direction and instructions for diaries. The 1937 Constitution includes provisions for maintaining diaries and sending copies up the organizational hierarchy. It also notes that visitations by the Mother General will include “examining the books, including annals.”⁷

4 *Tentative Constitutions of the Foreign Mission Sisters of St. Dominic (Third Order), Congregation of the Immaculate Conception at Maryknoll* (Ossining, New York, 1917) and *Tentative Constitutions of the Foreign Mission Sisters of St. Dominic (Third Order), Congregation of the Immaculate Conception at Maryknoll* (Ossining, New York, 1925).

5 Wendy Duff, “Harnessing the Power of Warrant,” *American Archivist* 61, no. 1 (1998), p. 91.

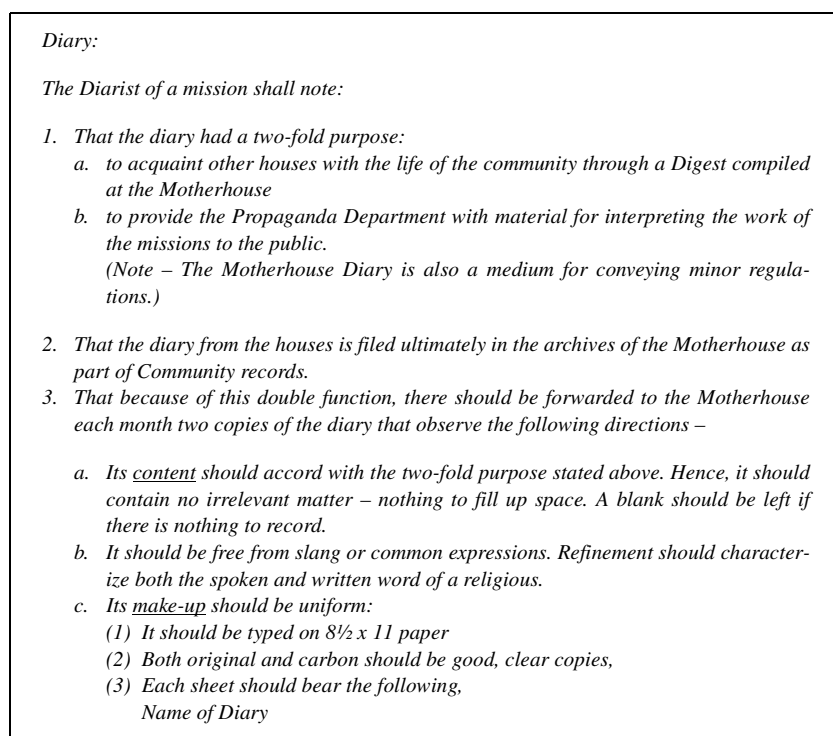
6 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, *Constitution of the Foreign Mission Sisters of St. Dominic* (Ossining, New York, 1931), p. 100.

7 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, *Constitution of the Foreign Mission Sisters of St. Dominic* (Ossining, New York, 1937), p. 125.

This emphasis on diary writing covered each Maryknoll Sisters house, school, hospital, etc. Often, the same group of sisters taught at a school and lived together in a house and as a consequence they had to submit two separate diaries documenting these different aspects of their lives.

After 1937, most of the warrant and record-keeping protocols for the diaries were removed from the Constitutions and moved into the alphabetically arranged Directory. The Third General Chapter of the Maryknoll Sisters, held in 1937, mandated that “(e) The Directory becomes a governing and binding force, amplifying the Constitution, and to it will be transferred principally several detailed instructions in regard to duties of Superiors, regulations for schools and other works, financial matters, etc.”⁸ The Directory is more procedural. As a result, in the first Directory dated, 14 February 1943, directions to diarists are included under the letter “D.”

Figure 1 Excerpt from the Maryknoll Sisters 1943 Directory⁹



8 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, *Acts of the Third General Chapter* held at Maryknoll, N.Y. 10–31 July 1937, p. 8.

9 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic Directory, 14 February 1943, unpaginated, but topics are presented alphabetically.

The Second Directory, resulting from the 1952 General Chapter, is drastically reorganized to form a modern procedural rules book that categorizes similar functions. The actual content in the diary section changes little from the 1937 version. However, the section emphasizes the role of the diarist rather than the diary. Subsection 3 also explicitly links the roles of the diarist and archivist: “Diarist – The diarist of a mission who may also be the archivist. ...”¹⁰ Additionally, a new final paragraph states: “Each house should have for the diarist’s reference, a copy of hints and suggestions for writing the diary as compiled by the Publicity Department at the Motherhouse.”¹¹ Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate a copy of these “hints and suggestions.” The very reference to the Publicity Department implies a more public function for the diaries.

The 1958 *Directory* further expands the role of the Diarist and outlines the process for digesting the excerpts for use:

Once a year, in the month designated by the Regional Superior, each mission should send to the Mother General a summary of its activities for the previous twelve months, in narrative form, highlighting any items of special interest. The article, from two to four pages, should cover: works, types of people, progress, difficulties, social problems, mission methods employed, use of laity, cultural, social, political factors that influence the work, etc. New houses should include a description of the mission site, surroundings, type of people, proposed works, aims, etc.¹²

The Constitutions and Directory detailed record-keeping from the top down. Even the early Constitutions detailed the record-keeping requirements for diaries at the local level.

553. The Chronicler, who shall be appointed by the Superior during her period of office, shall carefully and exactly note in the Annals of the Convent all the important events concerning it, and she shall be careful that the Annals are continued from year to year (Article V, The Archives, Inventories, and Annals of the Convents).¹³

There is virtually no additional information on diary writing and record-keeping generated from the local level. One proposed set of regulations for local houses in China reiterates the directives from the Constitutions and Directory that a “Diary and Chronicle are to be kept in each house.”¹⁴ How-

10 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, *Directory of the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic* (1952), p. 107.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

12 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, *Directory of the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic* (1958), p. 107.

13 *Tentative Constitutions* (1917), p. 99.

14 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, South China Region Records, Kaying General, 1925–1952,

ever, the top down warrant for the diaries worked. Examining the extraordinarily complete series of Maryknoll Sisters diaries one can see that the diaries were maintained regularly and sent as directed, in the form specified to the Motherhouse. This may vary from similar records in other orders. For example, in the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, one annalist's postscript notes, "in the early days of the Community, no one had the time to keep the records."¹⁵

Diarists: Identity and Voice

In 1912, the Diary series began with one writer, one Diary, and one voice. The writer was Mary Louise Wholean; the diary was from what would become the Maryknoll Sisters Motherhouse. As the Maryknoll Sisters grew and began to found missions, the numbers of diaries, diarists, and voices grew. At their largest, there were probably 100 diaries, diarists, and voices being written around the world.

The Mary Louise Wholean, the first diarist, began the series in 1912 and served in this capacity until her death in December 1916. The voice in these early diaries is primarily in the first person, "I", although she sometimes does refer to herself as Mary Louise. The "I" all but disappears by the end of the year. In her final entry, Mary Louise (or Mary Xavier as she was known at that time), refers to herself in the third person noting, "The Chronicler is not well."¹⁶ After Mary Louise, few diarists identified themselves or wrote in the first person. One exception is the diary by a Maryknoll Sister who provides a daily account of internment at the Los Baños concentration camp in the Philippines during World War II.¹⁷

Identifying the owner of the voice in the diaries, however, was a subject of conversation among other Maryknoll Sisters. One diarist reports of Sisters' trying to guess the name of another chronicler: "We were asked to guess on the chronicler, and the known guesses run thus: Sister Mary Magdalen, 2. Sister Blanche, 3. Sister Clare. Who is right? At any rate, it was fun and we both need and want more."¹⁸

"Proposed Revision of Tentative Regulations for Houses in Kaying" submitted 28 February 1941, Box 3, Folder 3, p. 2 (under point III). Maryknoll Mission Archives, Ossining, New York.

15 As quoted in Elizabeth Smyth, "'Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries': Women Religious Recording and Writing History," in Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice, eds., *Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History* (Vancouver, 1997), p. 104.

16 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Motherhouse Diary, 16–21 December (1916), Maryknoll Mission Archives, Ossining, New York.

17 Los Baños Diary, Maryknoll Mission Archives, Ossining, New York.

18 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Motherhouse Diary, 4 November 1921.

Although working under the same warrant, different diarists did have different voices. When a new diarist assumed Mary Louise's role as diarist for the Sisters' Motherhouse in March of 1917, the diary became a schedule of religious activities and observations and a reiteration of retreats, sermons, and other community events. Other writers are more effusive and provide lively, detailed descriptions of activities in the missions.

The Purposes of the Diaries

Although the diaries' content made them compelling reading, it was the stated purposes of the diaries that led to a versatility of content. In particular, the diaries supported multiple types of communication functions both internal and external. Three of these were reading, reporting, and remembering. The diaries were inspirational readings for missionaries at the Motherhouse to whom the diaries were read during meals. Excerpts were reprinted in *The Field Afar Magazine* (1907–1959), later known as *Maryknoll* (1960–present), a magazine published by the Maryknoll Missioners. More recently, the diaries have taken on a new life as historical sources as they form the best documentation of activities in the regions. These diverse purposes extend and reinforce the idea of a communal diary as history or genealogy. As such, the diaries were not private and individual but open and belonged to the entire community.

These purposes were even noted on the back of many of the diaries that reached the Motherhouse. Initially a handwritten notation appeared on back of copies of the diaries. This notation provided routing information and space for each recipient (Mother Superior's Secretary, Propaganda Director, Digest Writer, Press Reader, Archivist, Acknowledged, and Press use: Publication, Date, Title). Beginning in 1938 a form was developed to note distribution and implicitly the different purposes to which the diaries were put.¹⁹

Reading

The Maryknoll Sisters, as other religious orders, maintained silence during supper. To aid in reflection, lectors read a variety of spiritual and inspirational works. This practice was codified in the Constitutions that directed appropriate readings on "any instructive and edifying subject" that were to be read during mealtimes.²⁰ Diaries were viewed as fitting the classification of instructive and edifying as is evident in this statement from the 1943 Directory: "*Arrangements should be made to have the Diary Digest read publicly to the*

19 One example of this form is in the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, South China Region, Sr. M. Regina Superior, July 1938, No. 7, Kowloon Tong Convent Diary.

20 *Tentative Constitutions* (1925), Article 217.

Community – for example at the supper reading.” Notations to the “lectors” were in fact included on diaries to be read at the Motherhouse, “Attention Lector: When finished, please check thru the word READ.”²¹ As a result, Maryknoll Sisters were regularly treated to readings from the diaries of other Maryknoll Sisters around the globe.

Diary reading was definitely a part of the Maryknoll Sisters' culture and the earliest evidence of this comes from the 1917 Motherhouse diaries:

In the evening at supper, the first installment of Father Superior's Diary was read. It, with the sermon he preached at the Seminary the night before his departure, will appear in the October *Field Afar*. Father Walsh was gone on what the diarist described as his 'Momentous trip' which would result in the location of a field of labor for the Catholic Foreign Mission Seminary of America.²²

The excitement which greeted the diaries of other Maryknoll Sisters was also apparent. One diarist at the Motherhouse reports the reading of another diarist's work – a Maryknoll Sister on her way to China – with enthusiasm.

The house became excited at about dinner time when Mother announced a thick packet of mail sent from Yokohama. It was harder than you far offs can realize for us to wait until after Holy Hour and after supper to hear from you ... Dishes and Novice class kept some from early work on the *Field Afar*, but at 7:45 we all were there and Mother gave us the treat. She read and read and read the many letters and interesting diary of the first China band.

The Motherhouse diarist then continued to engage in a dialogue with her far-off Sister diarist:

On the whole you had a fine trip didn't you ... It grew late when we finished your “Pistles,” but Mother couldn't put off the Los Angeles installment of the diary which was produced after much cheering and clapping on the part of the “Children.”²³

Such readings were common and sprinkled throughout the diaries are references to reading the diaries of the other Maryknoll Sisters in other missions. The dialog between the diarists, however, shows the emotional connection between the sisters.

As the missions grew, diaries sent to the Motherhouse were digested, as mentioned in Figure 1 and also noted in the routing information. These excerpts were compiled and published together and sent to convents, schools,

21 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Diary from First Group of Sisters in China (1921).

22 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Motherhouse Diary, Monday, 17 September 1917.

23 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Motherhouse Diary, 4 November 1921.

and missions around the world for reading. This reading of each other's diaries formed a linkage across space and was an important factor in sustaining community identity and shared commitment to mission.

This internal publication of diaries was not unique. The diaries of the Grey Nuns and the Sisters of Providence in Montreal were "written to edify the other sisters in the order and teach future generations of nuns about the challenges faced at particular periods."²⁴ Later they were published as monthly newsletters. "In this monthly bulletin format they served the function of news sheets holding together a geographically dispersed religious community through shared knowledge of each other's joys, privations, and challenges."²⁵ In the seventeenth century, Puritan rector John Beadle recommended re-reading one's diary as a form of self-education.²⁶ At the very least, as shown in the case of the diarist speaking to her Sister diarist, the diary connected sisters over distance, trying to bridge space and create common identity, memories, and experiences.

Reporting

The diaries served two separate reporting purposes: one internal and one external. Internally, the diaries were used throughout the organizational hierarchy (local, regional, and Motherhouse levels) as an administrative tool for control. First, in the process of passing the diaries up the organizational hierarchy, the local superior could add to the diary. This enhanced the controlling function of the diary.

If there is anything private in the nature of health reports or such like, the Superior should add it each time the diary is sent out – e.g., operations, visit to doctors, etc. This information is to be on a separate sheet.²⁷

Annals and chronicles, summarized yearly reports of major events, were also created by using the diaries. Annals were written by the local Superior of each house and sent to the Regional Superior, who, in turn combined Annals of the various local houses into a Regional Chronicle. The Regional Superior would then send the Annals from each house and the Regional Chronicle

24 Bradbury, "Elderly Inmates and Caregiving Sisters: Catholic Institutions for the Elderly in Nineteenth-Century Montreal," in Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., *On the Case: Explorations in Social History* (Toronto, 1998), p. 130.

25 Ibid., p.130.

26 John Beadle, *Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian* (London, 1656). See also Tom Webster, "Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early modern Spirituality," *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 1 (March 1996), pp. 47–48. Webster documents several other diarists who regularly reread previous entries.

27 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, *Directory*, 14 February 1943, unpaginated, in the Diaries section, topics are presented alphabetically.

(derived from these annuals) to the Mother General. The following section from the 1962 Directory details construction of the Annals:

The local Superior will be responsible for including in the Annals the important items of the diary and also things not given out for general Community reading. Items suggested for the Annals and Chronicle are:

1. Invitations to open new mission houses.
2. Relations to Chancery Office and Ordinary, other than routine.
3. Relations to Local Parish.
4. Relations to Civil Authorities, i.e., obtaining licenses and permits to open schools, hospitals, homes, etc., giving dates these opened.
5. Opening of new works – with dates and names of personnel.
6. Developing of works – with dates.
7. Closing of works – with dates.
8. Obtaining of degrees by Sisters.
9. Acquiring of additional property, extensive additions to buildings.
10. Visitations: Ecclesiastical Superior, Mother General or her delegate, Regional Superior.
11. Withdrawal or dismissal of Sisters.
12. "Firsts" – i.e. – graduation, convent's first Mass, etc., anything that can be used in compiling a history in the future.
13. Dates of events that might be useful for future reference locally.²⁸

The record creating practices for the annals provides more insight into the scope of the diaries and the details that were demanded of them in order to support this detailed type of summarization.

A similar type of internal publication of diaries was also done by other religious orders, such as the Grey Nuns and the Sisters of Providence in Montreal. Writing with the intended purpose of external publication makes the Maryknoll Sisters' diaries different from those of other religious orders.²⁹ These diaries were a major source of information and copy for *The Field Afar* and later *Maryknoll Magazine* and other promotional literature. This purpose, again stated in the Constitutions and Directory, is also evidence of what Tom Webster refers to as "technology of the self." Webster notes that diaries are a "means by which the godly self was maintained, indeed constructed, through

28 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Superior's Section, *Directory of the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic*, (Ossining, New York, 1962), pp. 63–64.

29 Smyth, "Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries," p. 124. For a view of the line between the public and the private in other diaries see also Margo Culley, "Introduction," in Margo Culley, ed., *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present* (New York, 1985), pp. 3–26.

the action of writing. The Diary is a mechanism for turning the ephemerality of action and speech into an artefact.”³⁰

The self-consciousness with which the Maryknoll Sisters presented themselves is evident from the reference to the directional materials from the Publicity Department on how to construct diary entries. The degree to which the diaries were edited for publication is more evident in the Maryknoll Fathers’ diaries. In this collection, one regularly sees the editorial hand striking out passages and adding emphasis to certain statements for publication. In addition to documenting use of the diaries through the routing information, record-keeping practices were established to keep track of what had been reported and in which context. As noted, this was done through the routing data that asked for the name of the publication, the date of publication, and the title of the article.

Remembering

Elizabeth Smyth identifies three facets of purposefully created institutional religious history. One of these facets is the prescription of community records and archives.³¹ Smyth goes on to note that historical consciousness and creating a historical persona are important variables in religious life because they link Sisters intergenerationally – through time. The Maryknoll Sisters’ earliest Constitutions and later the Directories explicitly direct diaries to be deposited in archives, both locally and at the Motherhouse. “That the diary from the houses is filed ultimately in the archives of the Motherhouse as part of Community records.”³² Furthermore, in the Directories, the role of diarist moves from diarist to include the functions of archivist and historian.³³ The close linkage of these roles indicates that at some level there was a consciousness of the role of the diaries in ensuring posterity. Initially, deposit in the archives meant that the diaries would be shared with Maryknoll Sisters in the present and future. However, with the professionalization of the archives, the diaries can now be read by a variety of researchers. In this way the diaries perpetuate community over time, but have continually evolved as a communication mechanism.

Although the diaries document lives in a religious congregation, they should not be viewed as spiritual journals. The content really did reflect “everything of interest” as urged by the 1958 Directory. The earliest content is focussed on the activities of the fledgling sisters, their journey toward formal foundation as a religious congregation, and the complicated story of their

30 Webster, “Writing to Redundancy,” p. 40.

31 Smyth, “Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries,” p. 103.

32 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic *Directory*, 14 February 1943, unpaginated, in the Diaries section, topics are presented alphabetically.

33 Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Superior’s Section, *Directory of the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic* (Ossining, New York, 1958), p. 107.

establishment. The diary reads almost like a family history or genealogy. Each step in the process of formally organizing a religious congregation is noted and each step in the religious journey by an individual Maryknoll Sister is recounted. This illustrates a point made by Margo Culley who argues that women's diaries served several semi-public purposes and that these works were often community and/or family histories.³⁴ An illustration of community history is the diary of Martha Ballard, so poignantly analyzed in *A Midwife's Tale*.³⁵ Bettina Bradbury has characterized religious women's diaries as both an incipient case file and as a ship captain's log. "Entries varied, with much detail at times on apparently trivial matters and little detail on events that might seem important to historians today."³⁶ Both of these types of entries reflect the concern for posterity evident in the early Maryknoll Sisters' diaries.

While the multiple purposes of the diaries led to diverse content, the content also reflexively supported these purposes. Furthermore, diary entries were highly contextualized and self-contained. "They form coherent, freestanding texts that are more or less self-explanatory if the entries are read in toto."³⁷ Contextualization has been identified as a key feature of these private yet published diaries that were needed to support the broad range of purposes.

Demise of the Diary

In response to Vatican II, all religious communities reevaluated their mission, reidentified their charism,³⁸ and revised the rules (Constitutions and Directories) by which they lived. Among the elements in the Maryknoll Sisters' lives that ceased were the diaries. Anecdotal evidence suggests that diary writing was not popular, but dissatisfaction with this chore was a minor factor compared with larger events. Several larger social factors also contributed to the demise of the diary. First, the Maryknoll Sisters moved from institutionally based to individual ministries. Second, the institutional structure of ministries was often altogether absent. Third, the purpose of maintaining control through the diaries was viewed as outdated. Finally, the overall decline in the numbers of sisters has worked against the continuation of diaries because sisters lived alone or in smaller groups.

34 Culley, *A Day at a Time*, p. 4.

35 Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*.

36 Bettina Bradbury, "Elderly Inmates and Caregiving Sisters", pp. 129–30.

37 Lynn Z. Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers": Private Diaries as Public Documents," in Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst, MA, 1996), p. 30.

38 Charism is the spirit and intent of the founder that originally guided the religious community.

Deinstitutionalization

Since the 1970s the Maryknoll Sisters have been pursuing a massive deinstitutionalization process. They have been turning over schools, hospitals, and other institutions to the local people. While some Sisters remain and work in these organizations, the ownership and primary control is in the hands of the indigenous peoples, not the Maryknoll Sisters. As such, there is less of an impetus or responsibility to create documentation for accountability. Furthermore, since the Maryknoll Sisters now are technically working for other organizations, the records they create are owned and hopefully maintained by those other institutions or organizations.

Individual Ministries

The rise of individual ministries is related to the deinstitutionalization and has become the norm for new ministries. In these cases, such as in one of the Maryknoll Missioners newest missions in Albania, a few Sisters have begun ministries where there is no corporate structure whatsoever. Thus, the work of Maryknoll Sisters is more difficult to document. Ministries such as this one have become more individualized and the records of that work have become more akin to personal papers than archives (i.e., the result of organizational activities). Although these records are archival records and provide evidence of organizational activities, the missioners themselves view them more as personal records. If Sisters do create diaries in this context, they may be a more personal record of an internal spiritual journey. The view of a diary as a very personal dialogue with God is compounded by the fact that in a religious order the organizational and individual lines are already blurry. Missioners see themselves as the organization and the organization is a large part of their individual identities. This strong individual identification with the group poses a series of problems. Individual missioners may see turning over their records as hubristic. As a result, sending one's individual work products to the archives for all to see may be seen as self-aggrandizement. Also as ministries become more individual and more fashioned to fit the needs of a particular community and culture, the chance that records could be used to duplicate programs elsewhere is less likely, thus diminishing the impetus for turning in samples of work. When records are created, even for the organization as a whole, these records become much less predictable in form, content and timing, and are less well organized.

Third, the diaries were a form of control and in the post-Vatican II reforms this was no longer acceptable or required. There was more individual responsibility and much less organizational hierarchy. The flattening of the organization and changing norms for supervision and oversight in religious communities led to the discontinuation of the diaries.

Finally, the demise of the diary was also a result of more individual ministries and fewer large communities of Sisters living together outside of the Motherhouse. As the number of Sisters living together in a community declined, the communal nature of the record also diminished. Diaries, if kept, became more individual spiritual records of a more solitary journey as previously noted.

Institutional Responses to the Demise of the Diaries: Newsletters and Evaluations

After the diaries ceased, communication patterns and community needs led to the development of new documentary forms, principally local newsletters and ministry evaluations. However, these genres do not capture the same granularity or types of the intricate day-to-day details of life previously presented in the diaries. Newsletters are monthly and carry general information on missionaries' activities and regional news. Newsletters also act as a co-ordinating mechanism for missionaries throughout a region. Ministry evaluations are done on an annual basis and elicit summary information on ministries. While these new forms serve the current information needs of the Maryknoll administrators, they are distinctly different from the forms – and perhaps the information needs – of the past. The evaluations are necessarily summary in nature and although they do contain an analysis of the ministry, the information is often condensed. Yet, the diaries linked time and space in a way that the newsletters and evaluations do not.

Individual Responses to the Demise of Diaries: Diaries and Letters Home

Recently, some Maryknoll Sisters are again experimenting with diaries or with the “letter home” (a letter from a individual missionary to the central administration, fellow Sisters, or friends). In particular, the letter home has become a popular means of documentation of ministries. These have become the rightful successor to the diaries among the Maryknoll Sisters. These letters contain many of the rich details formerly found in the diaries, but still lack the daily, sometimes mundane details of life on the missions. Also, the warrant for these new diaries and letters is definitely different. Their creation is more a matter of personal choice and there is no formal institutional mandate.

Conclusions

The Maryknoll Sisters' diaries represent the best source of daily information about life in the mission and form a detailed and rich collection of writings on mission activities consistently maintained over time. While there have been disruptions, diaries were produced and have survived under the most horrendous conditions or war, poverty, and social strife.

The Maryknoll Sisters' diaries provide an opportunity to examine and challenge the convergence of four themes in the literature on diaries. First, the creation of self-works is usually identified and analyzed as the work of a single individual. As such, diary writing is usually associated with individual voice and authorship and existence in a more private sphere. Yet, many religious communities have adapted this genre as a communal means of strengthening identity, remembering, and expression. This is definitely true in the case of the Maryknoll Sisters. Second, diary writing is generally seen as a private record. Comparatively few diaries are written with the intention of publication. In many religious communities, the diaries can be internally open records. They are shared within the community, but not outside. The Maryknoll Sisters' diaries, however, were written with the intention of reaching and inspiring a broader public. Third, diary writing has long been associated with spiritual journeys. The Maryknoll Sisters' diaries, while describing both intellectual and physical journeys do not primarily address religious feelings and beliefs directly. Fourth, women's diary writing as an acceptable form of expression is a major topic in the diary literature. This is particularly true for historical studies on time periods when the accepted forms of expression for women were fewer. The Maryknoll Sisters' diaries, though, supported a variety of other forms of expression.

This case study adds to the literature on genre as a social practice by illustrating record-keeping practices within a specific context. It also demonstrates how an established genre, such as the diary, encompasses a wide range of expressions and evolved within a given culture. In the case of the Maryknoll Sisters' diaries, the explicitly open nature of and the multiple audiences for the diaries makes them unique. As a result of the more open nature and multiple purposes reaching different audiences, the diaries supported community identity, hierarchical control and communication, and helped to present a coherent identity to the public. Reading of the diaries during the Sisters' supper and recreational periods was perhaps the most powerful internal use, inculcating Sisters into the community ethos and values.

Externally, diary entries were published in *The Field Afar*, *Maryknoll Magazine*, and in other promotional literature. In these publications, the diaries formed the basis for informing a largely Catholic public about the work of the Sisters and their mission needs. Yet, these publications also shaped that public's opinion of the Sisters. The audiences for the diaries, however, did not end when diary writing ceased in the community. The diaries also form an ongoing dialog between past, present, and future. Their placement in the archives ensured reading by both present and future Maryknoll Sisters. However, changes in the structure and the opening of the archives to a broader public have in fact created new audiences for the diaries.

Madeleine Foisil notes that identification of the individual diaries with the private sphere and collective works with a broader public audience is incor-

rect. Ambiguity in genres of records is a fact of life.³⁹ The Maryknoll Sisters' reconceptualization or extension of the diary has enabled them to successfully bridge space and time for ninety years. The multiple purposes and audiences of the Maryknoll Sisters' diaries illustrate this ambiguity as well as the tension in the diaries that arises because they are simultaneously private and confidential and yet, also open and published. Tom Webster postulates that even more intimate spiritual diaries evolved over time and developed a "concern for posterity and a public dimension."⁴⁰ As such, the Maryknoll Sisters' diaries fall into this ambiguous tradition of a diary written to inspire, instruct, and lead. As such, the diaries continue to be read and the voices continue to speak.

39 Foisil, "The Literature of Intimacy," pp. 394–95.

40 Webster, "Writing to Redundancy," p. 39.

