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JOHN GILMARY SHEA PAPERS

The preeminent American Catholic historian of his day, John Gilmary Shea (1824-1892) amassed an extraordinary collection of correspondence, manuscripts, and research materials. The John Gilmary Shea Papers preserved in the Georgetown University Library Special Collections Division provide valuable documentation of both American History in general and American Catholic History in particular. The papers are contained in 26 boxes (11.5 linear feet).

Along with a small amount of outgoing correspondence from Shea, most of which was sent to Edmond Mallet, the John Gilmary Shea Papers include a large quantity of incoming correspondence to Shea, most notably letters deriving from his editorship of "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly." Many prominent individuals corresponded with Shea, and this collection includes letters from the likes of Frederick Douglass, Thomas Edison, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Shea's correspondence provides key insights into nineteenth century America.

In addition to his rich correspondence, Shea's papers feature a substantial amount of documents relating to Native American linguistics and history. Scores of original documents in Native American languages, most dating to the 1800s, are preserved in this collection. Many grammars, vocabularies, and other written records of Native American languages exist within this archive. Original letters and papers of Lewis Cass, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, and William Wadden Turner are retained.

As a large portion of the collection highlights American Catholic History, letters and documents to and from notable figures; such as Frederic Baraga, Pierre Jean DeSmet, John Joseph Hughes, and Elizabeth Ann Seton; are preserved. One box alone consists of transcripts of Archbishop John Carroll correspondence, the source material for Shea's writings on America's first Roman Catholic bishop. The research material in the Shea Papers documents the early history of the Catholic Church in America and includes original documents from the colonial period from Canada, Louisiana, New York, Florida, northern Mexico, and other regions. The research files served as the basis for Shea's monumental four-volume work "The History of the Catholic Church in the United States" (1886-92) and his other prolific writings.

Moreover, Shea's personal manuscript collection holds original documents of historical significance. Documents signed by Patrick Henry, Louis XIV, Anthony Wayne, and others show the breadth of his collecting interests.

The manuscripts and primary sources in the John Gilmary Shea Papers complement the library of John Gilmary Shea, which is also housed in the Georgetown University Library Special Collections Division. Over 5,000 printed books, journals, newspapers, and pamphlets once belonging to Shea are available to researchers. In many cases, individuals appear as both authors of books in the Shea Book Collection and correspondents in the Shea Papers. Taken together, Shea's books and manuscripts provide a thorough record of his career. Georgetown University Library owns over 60 books authored or edited by Shea, some of which are stored in the Georgetown University Library main stacks. Others are located in the Special Collections Division.

The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. holds some papers related to John Gilmary Shea. That institution retains the papers of Shea's biographer Peter Guilday.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: John Gilmary Shea (1824-1892) was the leading American Catholic Historian of his era. A prolific writer and editor, Shea's crowning achievement was the publication of a four-volume history of the Catholic Church in the United States.

John Gilmary Shea was born on July 22, 1824, in New York City. The son of James Shea, an Irish immigrant and school principal, and Mary Ann (Flannigan) Shea, John graduated from Columbia Grammar School in 1837. Admitted to the New York bar in 1846, he entered the Society of Jesus and continued his studies from 1848-50 at St. John's College, Fordham. From 1850-52, Shea was associated with Jesuit historian Felix Martin at St. Mary's College in Montreal. In 1852, Shea left religious training and pursued a career of writing and editing.

In 1854, Shea married Sophie Savage. They had two daughters.

Shea produced an astounding number of books, articles, and pamphlets while working as an editor for several periodicals. His writings amount a veritable library of works, focusing mostly on American Catholic History and important topics such as Native American linguistics. In 1852, Shea published "Discovery and Exploration of the Mississippi Valley," which he dedicated to Jared Sparks and for which he won admittance into several prominent historical societies. In 1854, he compiled "History of the Catholic Missions Among the Indian Tribes of the United States, 1529-1854." Meanwhile, he published articles in "U.S. Catholic Magazine," "Catholic World," "U.S. Historical Magazine," and "American Catholic Quarterly Review." From 1855 through 1867, Shea worked on the "Historical Magazine." From 1858 through 1890, he edited Sadlier's "General Catholic Directory." From 1860 to 1874, he edited the valuable "Library of American Linguistics." He worked for a time for the publishing house of Frank Leslie. From 1887 to 1889, Shea served as editor for the U.S. Catholic Historical Society, an organization which he founded. Between 1886 and 1892, Shea published his "History of the Catholic Church in the United States," the four-volume capstone to his distinguished career.

Shea also published "History of Georgetown College" (New York: P. F. Collier, 1891) in honor of the school's centenary celebration in 1889. Georgetown awarded Shea an honorary degree (LL.D.) and a medal for his service in 1889.

John Gilmary Shea died in Elizabeth, New Jersey, on February 22, 1892. In that year, his books, manuscripts, periodicals, and personal papers were donated to Georgetown College. In return, Georgetown College purchased 500 sets of Shea's "History of the Catholic Church in the United States."

Shea's career is chronicled in more detail by his biographer Peter Guilday in "John Gilmary Shea: Father of American Catholic History, 1824-1892" (New York: United States Catholic Historical Society, 1926).

Note: The following book was extremely useful in cataloging the Native American documents in the Shea Papers: "Handbook of North American Indians," Volume 17, "Languages," edited by Ives Goddard (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1996).

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SYNOPSIS:

SERIES 1 - Correspondence from Shea. Contains outgoing correspondence from John Gilmary Shea. Mostly to Edmond Mallet. Arranged alphabetically by recipient.

SERIES 2 - Correspondence to Shea. Contains incoming correspondence to John Gilmary Shea. Includes letters from such notables as P. T. Barnum, Frederick Douglass, Thomas Edison, Edward Everett, O. O. Howard, John Hughes, Robert Todd Lincoln, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, among others. Many letters Shea received while working for Frank Leslie's publishing house are present, as are letters to Leslie himself. D.& J. Sadlier & Company correspondence is also contained. All letters in this series arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

SERIES 3 - Native American Linguistics and History. Contains documents, mostly grammars and vocabularies, in Native American languages and about various Native American tribes. Includes correspondence and manuscripts of Lewis Cass, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, and William Wadden Turner. Arranged alphabetically by Native American language/tribe.

SERIES 4 - U.S. Catholic Church History. Contains correspondence, manuscripts, and documents relating to American Catholic Church History. Documents by and about notable individuals in U.S. Catholic History are placed alphabetically into Boxes 12 and 13. Files on Frederic Baraga, John Joseph Hughes, Elizabeth Ann Seton, and many other notables are maintained. Documents regarding the history of the Church in various geographic areas in America are stored alphabetically by geographic area or subject in Boxes 14 through 20. Coverage is given to the colonial era down through the late 1800s, with particular attention to California, Canada, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Mexico, and New York.

SERIES 5 - Shea Manuscripts Collection. Contains the personal manuscripts collection of John Gilmary Shea. Original documents from many popes, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Lewis Cass, William Henry Harrison, Patrick Henry, Louis XIV, and others. Arranged alphabetically.

SERIES 6 - John Carroll Collection. Contains transcripts of John Carroll correspondence. Shea used this material to compile his "Life and Times of the Most Rev. John Carroll" (1888). Arranged in rough chronological order.

SERIES 7 - Georgetown College Material. Contains material relating to Georgetown College found among the papers of John Gilmary Shea. Mostly letters from Shea's daughter, Isabelle Shea, to Georgetown College President Joseph Havens Richards, S.J. Letters arranged chronologically.

SERIES 8 - Bound Manuscripts. Contains a few bound manuscripts found among the papers of John Gilmary Shea. Features Shea's editor's copy of the Doway Bible, which is stored in Box 25.

SERIES 9 - Pamphlets. Contains a few pamphlets found among the papers of John Gilmary Shea. Almost all of the numerous pamphlets from Shea's library are cataloged with the Shea Book Collection in Georgetown University Library Special Collections Division.

SERIES 10 - Visual Materials. Contains mostly photographs and engravings found among the papers of John Gilmary Shea. Of note are images of George Bancroft, Nicholas Biddle, Native Americans, and New Mexico. Two photographs of John Gilmary Shea are retained. Arranged alphabetically.

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ABBREVIATIONS:

AC - Autograph Card

ACS - Autograph Card Signed

AD - Autograph Document

ADS - Autograph Document Signed

AL - Autograph Letter

ALS - Autograph Letter Signed

AM - Autograph Manuscript

AMS - Autograph Manuscript Signed

AN - Autograph Note

ANS - Autograph Note Signed

LS - Letter Signed

TEL - Telegram

TL - Typed Letter

TLS - Typed Letter Signed

TM - Typed Manuscript

TMS - Typed Manuscript Signed

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ACCESSION DATA: Status: Open access. Photocopying not permitted (condition of documents too fragile). Provenance: Gift of Sophie S. Shea and Elizabeth Shea, 1892. Processed by Scott S. Taylor, February 2000.

BULK DATES: 1700 - 1890

SPAN DATES: 1600 - 1892

EXTENT: 26 boxes, 11.5 l.f.

SERIES

SERIES: 1. Correspondence from Shea

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Contains outgoing correspondence from John Gilmary Shea. Mostly letters to Edmond Mallet. Arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

SERIES: 2. Correspondence to Shea

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Contains incoming correspondence to John Gilmary Shea. Arranged alphabetically by last name of correspondent.

SERIES: 3. Native American Linguistics and History

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Contains manuscripts, correspondence, and other documents relating to Native American linguistics and history. Includes many original documents. Numerous grammars and vocabularies are retained. Arranged alphabetically by name of Native American language/tribe. This series comprises boxes 7-11 of the Shea Papers.

SERIES: 4. U.S. Catholic Church History

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Contains correspondence, manuscripts, transcripts, and other documents pertaining to U.S. Catholic Church History. Boxes 12 and 13, which deal with notable individuals in U.S. Catholic History, are arranged alphabetically by last name of individual. Boxes 14 through 20 contain documents which focus on the history of Catholicism in particular geographic places in America, and they are arranged alphabetically by geographic area.

SERIES: 5. Shea Manuscripts Collection

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Contains documents comprising the personal manuscripts collection of John Gilmary Shea. This series consists of Boxes 21 and 22 and is arranged alphabetically by individual.

SERIES: 6. John Carroll Collection

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Consists of transcripts of John Carroll correspondence. Shea used these transcripts to write "Life and Times of Most Rev. John Carroll," volume two of his four-volume history of the Catholic Church in America. The transcripts are arranged in rough chronological order.

SERIES: 7. Georgetown College Material

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Contains correspondence relating to Georgetown College. Mostly correspondence from Shea's daughter Isabelle Shea to Georgetown College President Joseph Havens Richards, S.J. Letters arranged chronologically.

SERIES: 8. Bound Manuscripts

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Contains a few bound manuscripts found among the papers of John Gilmary Shea. Of particular interest is Shea's editor's copy of the Doway Bible, which is preserved in six folders in Box 25.

SERIES: 9. Pamphlets

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Contains 4 folders with pamphlets. Note that almost all of the pamphlets from the library of John Gilmary Shea have been cataloged with the Shea books in the Georgetown University Library Special Collections Division.

SERIES: 10. Visual Materials

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Contains visual materials, mostly engravings and photographs, found among the papers of John Gilmary Shea. Stored in Box 26 of the Shea Papers. Arranged alphabetically by individual or subject depicted.

SERIES: 11. Newspaper Clippings

SERIES DESCRIPTION: Newspaper clippings.

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