

CHURCH ARCHIVES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

by

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This article is written from information held in the J. S. Battye Library; research has not been undertaken in the various churches to investigate their holdings or policies. These have only been included where a note about them has been filed in the Library.

Only two denominations have deposited their records with this Library – the Congregational Union and the Methodist Church; there are substantial deposits from both sources.

The first Congregational group was formed in Perth in 1845 and a second congregation began in Fremantle after the arrival of the Rev. Joseph Johnston in 1853. Few early records survive. The earliest relate to the Church in Fremantle later known as the Johnston Memorial Church. Their chapel committee minutes date back to 1867 and minutes of Church meetings to 1869. The collection consists of 44 volumes in all including minutes up to 1951, correspondence, financial records and personal and miscellaneous items. Records relating to the Perth congregation, which later became Trinity Church, consist of correspondence only and date from 1878 running through to 1958. A *History of Trinity Church, 1845-1916*, was compiled by the Rev. Sydney Herbert Cox and published in Perth in 1916.

Records of the Congregational Union of Western Australia are held in two separate accessions, having been received at different times and having originated as separate series. They have been listed under the following headings:- assemblies, local activities and correspondence, federal activities and correspondence, interstate and overseas correspondence, personal papers, minutes, reports and miscellaneous and published material. The period covered is 1896-1962 and a detailed listing of the material has been made.

Supplementary sources of information on Congregationalism in Western Australia which should not be overlooked are personal records such as diaries of the Rev. Joseph Johnston (1853-71) and a letter from Henry Trigg on the beginnings of the movement in Western Australia written in 1846, as well as photographs and contemporary printed sources such as newspapers and the Union's own publications.

The Methodist Church in Western Australia appointed an archivist about five years ago and he has been searching out and sorting the records as well as compiling historical data. Most of the early material has been deposited in the Battye Library on indefinite loan.

Methodism in Western Australia dates from the services held by the Hardey brothers and other Methodists who arrived in the "Tranby" in February, 1830. The earliest extant record is a letterbook of correspondence between the Executive of the Swan River Colony and the Wesleyan Community, 1840-1893. Western Australian District Synod minutes cover the period 1866-1922, and 1944-66 and Synod journals the period 1894-1921. Records of the Western Australian Conference begin in 1900 but there are a few gaps. Numerous

sequences of subsidiary minutes are also included such as the Eastern District Synod minutes, 1899-1946, Northern District annual conferences, 1933-62, Chinese Mission minutes, 1900-18, and the Local Preachers' Association minutes, 1909-19. Records from a number of parishes have also been deposited, the earliest being from Perth where minute books are extant from 1852; others are Kalgoorlie (from 1896), Bunbury (from 1890), Guildford (from 1881) and York (from 1878).

There are still records held at the central Methodist office and possibly some in private hands, but most of the early material has now been located and listed. A microfilm copy of records relating to Western Australia held by the Methodist Missionary Society in London, 1830-87, has also been acquired. Published sources include *A century of Methodism in Western Australia, 1830-1930*, by C. A. Jenkins (published in Perth, by the Methodist Book Depot, 1930), and "The Methodist Church in Western Australia", by A. F. Sampson, in *University Studies*, October 1958, and based on his thesis for an M. A. degree. There are also a number of pamphlets, programmes, journals and newspapers issued by the church.

With the exception of a few parish registers and other minor items no original records of the Anglican Church have been deposited in the Battye Library; what is extant is held in the Church Office and in various parishes. As long ago as 1953 an archivist for the Diocese of Perth was appointed and he circularised all parishes on the importance of preserving records. During the period in which he held this office, the Rev. Edward Doncaster made an important contribution to church history by compiling a *Guide to churches and parishes in Western Australia, 1829-1950*, in which he listed all the Anglican churches in Western Australia whether still functioning or not, giving their dates of building, dedication, opening and consecration. A microfilm copy of this is held in the Battye Library.

The position of archivist lapsed when the incumbent was sent to a country diocese and other duties became more pressing. In 1970 a further move was made towards formulating a records policy and the State Archivist was requested to help. A number of valuable early church periodicals were transferred to the Battye Library but owing to the departure for another State of the person primarily responsible for the negotiations nothing was done about the records. A Committee still exists however to advise the Diocesan Council and the matter is still pending.

Official records of the Colonial Secretary's Office contain ecclesiastical series. The early period relates mainly to the Church of England though the series covers all denominations in the Colony.

A number of private records are relevant, notably the diaries and other papers of the Rev. M. B. Hale, 1856-75, and the Rev. J. R. Wollaston, 1840-56, and of Archbishop C. O. L. Riley, 1875-1914. There are numerous pamphlets and published sources, the most substantial being *Church beginnings in the West*, by Canon A. Burton (published in Perth, 1941), *The availing struggle*, by C. L. M. Hawtrey (published in Perth by Patersons in 1949) and *Four bishops and their see* edited by F. Alexander (published in Perth by the University of Western Australia Press in 1957). Records of individual missions and societies are of interest, especially the important English societies such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

The Roman Catholic archives are kept in the Archbishop's Palace. For a long time the archivist in charge of them was Father Moynihan and he sorted them and put them into boxes and began making transcripts of the more important

documents. Since his death there have been two subsequent part-time archivists who have been working on a catalogue of the records but owing to lack of time this has not progressed very far. The collection is rich in early documents and in fact its full wealth will not be known until the material is brought under control.

Roman Catholicism in Western Australia began with the arrival in 1846 of Bishop Brady and his party of twenty missionaries. Amongst this number was Dom Salvado, who in the same year founded a Benedictine mission at New Norcia, sixty miles north of Perth. An important collection of records is still held at the mission, including a series of diaries kept by Dom Salvado. A good deal of this material is in Spanish.

Some of the records have been copied by research workers and deposited in the Batty Library, but only in a fragmentary manner. Negotiations are under way at the present time for a systematic microfilming project to be undertaken so that copies of the documents will be available at the Batty Library.

Some three years ago a Catholic Historical Society was formed in Perth. One of its objects was to locate and make available to research workers records which are held by different orders and institutions. This society is a flourishing concern and has an annual exhibition of church records.

A number of monographs are worthy of mention here: *One hundred years*, by J. T. McMahon (published in Perth by Patersons in 1946), *New Norcia: the tribute of an Irish secular priest* (published in London by Burns and Oates in 1908), *Memoires historiques sur l'Australie*, by R. Salvado (published in Paris in 1854), and two theses, a *History of Catholic education in Western Australia*, by P. D. Tannock, and *The foundations of Catholicism in Western Australia*, by P. McCarthy. The Church's own newspaper, *The record*, periodicals, pamphlets and other publications are of historical value.

Little is known of the records of the Presbyterian Church, though one of the clergy has recently been appointed to the position of archivist. He has stated that few records exist prior to 1900, but at least one volume is known to be extant, dating back to the 1870's. Until he has been able to sort and list the records it is not known what has survived.

Thanks to the coverage of the exhibition held by the Catholic Historical Society this year¹, where each denomination was invited to show material relevant to the first ten years of its ministry in Western Australia, an interest in church history and records was stimulated. It is to be hoped that the stimulus will lead to practical action in the safe-keeping, organisation and availability of church records.

1. That is, in 1972, when this article was written. See *Archives and Manuscripts*, 4 (8) August 1972, p.34 "An Oecumenical Exhibition".