

Hidden Treasures

The Archives in St. Peter's Seminary

Michael Prieur

Buried deep in St. Peter's Seminary's library lower level is the *Fr. Michael R. Prieur Archives*, dedicated on October 12, 2011, consisting of only two tiny rooms. These archives, however, did not always have such an excellent, climate-controlled berth. The story of the archives spans almost a century. Let the walk-down-memory-lane tour begin.

It All Began in a Vault

The present seminary building opened its doors in September, 1926 when the students in theology moved there from their temporary quarters since 1912 at the Bishop's residence next to St. Peter's Cathedral on Dufferin Avenue. The students in arts, called philosophers, having lived at 537 Queens Avenue since 1923, also moved into the new building. Finally, Bishop Fallon had consolidated all his seminarians at one site.

The new Seminary naturally had a vault located next to the Bursar's office on the main floor. Archival materials headed there from the very beginning. The "Archivist", a title probably bestowed from necessity rather than from training, perhaps began with Fr. Maxime Brisson, one of the first bursars of the Seminary. His successor, (then) Fr. Fergus Laverty, continued the post. He was known for his financial wizardry and his frugality.

When (now) Msgr. Laverty left the Seminary in the mid-sixties, other bursars followed, including (then) Fr. Marcel Gervais (only for two months!), Fr. Larry Mousseau, Fr. Jack Donohue, John O'Meara, and John Zadorsky, each inheriting the post of archivist. Bursars and archivists seemed to go together, especially when financial records and archival materials shared the same vault.

The vault contained all the seminary confidential files of the students, a lode of financial documents, various clerical accouterments, and what could be termed *res derelicta*, a term for abandoned property, as we learned in moral theology.

When I returned from my post-graduate studies at Sant'Anselmo Athenaeum in Rome in 1969, Fr. Jim Carrigan, the rector of the Seminary, added two interesting items to my faculty portfolio, "Secretary-Treasurer of the Alumni Association" and "Keeper of the Archives". He had the great insight to separate the role of bursar and archivist. As time passed, alumni materials would greatly enhance the archives. This young, eager, and well organized individual would fit the bill.

After my new titles had been bestowed, I was then ushered towards the vault. Having never been inside this mysterious location, I was wide-eyed as John Zadorsky's secretary deftly lined up the tumblers of the safe to open the solid steel door. The whole vault was definitely both fire-proof and earthquake-resistant. Inside, the tall shelves were stuffed with labeled seminary files, side by side with various bric-a-bac deemed valuable. Coloured roles of wrapping paper, old Christmas decorations, and broken china somehow qualified for vault protection (or, simply for storage).

I became *bouche bée*, mouth agape, when the rector opened up a tall, glass-enclosed book case at one end. Inside resided about a dozen chalices from deceased priests, many in their original, black cases. On the shelf, I immediately espied a tall, magnificent, gold chalice that had belonged to Bishop Michael Francis Fallon, O.M.I., the founder of the Seminary. I was stunned to see his own mother's wedding ring suffused at its base. Many of the other chalices had the names of their priestly owners engraved under the base of the chalice. Some of these priests were referred to in our seminary classes with the accolade, "*Gigantes fuerunt*", "They were giants". The chalices, and indeed the priests themselves, were truly archival material.

One other chalice caught my eye. It was engraved with a blessing by Pope Pius XI, and had been presented to the Seminary when the chapel was opened in 1930. It is now displayed in a special archive shelf in the reading room of the library. On this shelf next to it reigns another newer, papal-chalice partner, one from Pope Benedict XVI. It had arrived in London just in time in 2012 for the special Seminary 100th Anniversary Mass at St. Peter's Cathedral. An archive with two Vatican connections – not bad!

My eyes now turned in the vault to a large, glass-enclosed case on another shelf. Inside rested various relics of saints and martyrs, all neatly arranged in their own gold-case reliquaries. For years, this beautiful, reliquary case had been in the office of the then rector, Msgr. Andrew P. Mahoney. Over time, he had garnered a number of first-class relics ensconced in neat little, glass gold cases, their authenticity attested here by small cards mounted next to some of them in this glass case. About a dozen of these precious relics and artifacts adorned the elegant wood and glass case.

Subsequently, a woodworking friend of mine, Ilar Schroeder, crafted another, larger wooden case with a second glass door, to encase the original one. The whole ensemble is now enthroned on one wall in the seminary sacristy.



Inside this exquisite case, two items have always intrigued me, namely, a long silver spoon which was used at our newly-revived, concelebrated Masses right after Vatican Council II (1962-65), to put a drop of water into the wine in each chalice, and a silver, pen-like instrument which could contain a small amount of holy water for a visiting priest to bless a home. Few visitors can guess what they are.

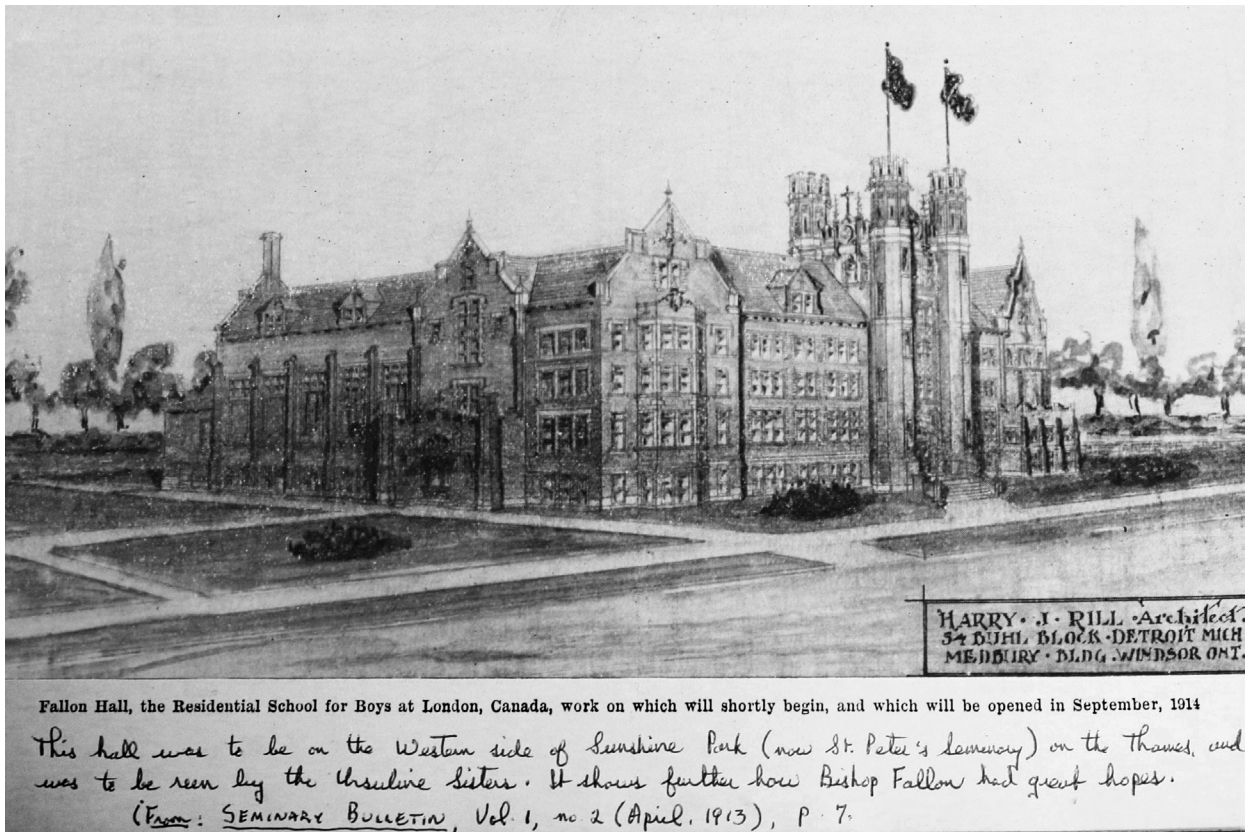
Two more items attracted my attention in the old vault. On another shelf rested a pile of *The Seminary Bulletin*. Bishop Fallon had started to publish this quarterly in 1913, only one year after founding his fledgling seminary in downtown London. The dates stopped at 1918, and some of the years were incomplete. Several years later, I sent out an all-points search for them, and one person's attic delivered one of these missing, archival treasures. Are any more attics nearby begging for a rainy afternoon search-and-rescue? My phone awaits a call. (519-204-3327).

Perusing these 60-80 page *Bulletins* provides an exceptional insight into the mind of Bishop Fallon at the very beginning of his remarkable episcopal career. He noted in the very first issue that his bulletin, "... does not pretend to be a theological, philosophical, scientific or literary magazine. Neither is it a review or a newspaper. It is merely an *Opportunity* and a *Convenience*." (Vol. 1, no. 1, p. 7) He described "opportunity" as a chance for the bishop to keep in touch with all his generous donors supporting the project of his new Diocesan Seminary. "Convenience" establishes a simple way to distribute all necessary information about the Seminary, allowing the cost of the *Bulletin* to be covered by the many ads inside. Bishop Fallon concluded that the pages will be filled with useful and edifying reading.

Perusing these treasures is a delight. The ads alone give us a clue that the Bishop had exquisite taste, and remarkable connections with the business world of his day, including *haute couture*. The ads tried to extract money from his readers for, “...wholesale China, Crockery, Glassware China” of French, Austrian, and German manufacturers. Numerous local banks trumpeted their financial advantages. The articles covered everything from political commentaries on, “the Irish Connection”, the role of the Dominion of Canada, and the politics in Europe. Occasional treatises written by his seminary faculty raise the spiritual optic of the publication. All were a feast for a polymath intellect, as well as an informed farmer or factory worker. This local, historical treasure is probably totally unknown to modern Church historians.



One further item deserves our attention. Just a year after founding his seminary, Bishop Fallon inserted what must have been an astonishing announcement and architectural drawing in his third publication, “Fallon Hall – The New Residential School for Boys in London”, *The Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (July, 1913), p. 5 with picture on p. 7. His article described how important he viewed educating young boys to equip them adequately to meet the challenges of the times. The building would occupy land just west of his proposed new seminary to be built in “Sunshine Park” on the corner of Huron and Waterloo streets. It is a most impressive building inspired by a bishop, just ordained in 1910, now spreading his new Episcopal wings.



Probably, the beginning of World War I put a big pause on his vision. Ironically, his dream did become an educational reality with the building of Christ the King (now Kings University) College on almost the same property in 1953.

We do not know why his *Bulletin* ceased publication in 1918. Yet, another shelf in the old vault takes up the seminary publication mantle. On it rests a neat pile displaying *The Alumni Bulletin*. These began in 1939, curiously just when World War II began. The Seminary at that time obviously did not think such a cataclysmic war was imminent. Nevertheless, the publication continues uninterrupted to this very day.

The early contents of these Bulletins, humbly weighing in at a mere 10-15 pages of black and white content, mostly featured extensive obituaries of deceased Alumni members. Their content gradually increased to include extensive, well-illustrated coverage of the triennial alumni reunions, various student events, multiple student involvements in mission activities abroad, and lay student activities as well as the permanent deacons, both officially recognized as alumni members in the *Alumni Constitution*.

I conclude our tour of the vault by mentioning a few other notable items on their steel shelves. One is the huge, rolled-up architect's plans for the seminary building, a remarkable landscape

architect's schemata for the more than 3,000 trees and shrubs planted on the Seminary's 35 (14.2 ha) acres in the 1930s. Another is the about a dozen marble altar stones which might rest someday in a square recess on top of an altar. A third is a box of relic bones probably transported from Italy by a diocesan official to be inserted in the marble altar stones. Then there is the former tabernacle door from the Seminary's high altar before the liturgical renovations of the chapel in 1969. Finally, we have the *chapeau* of Sir Philip Pocock, a prominent donor to the seminary, who was made a Knight of St. Gregory by Pope Pius X.

The Archives in the Vault Go Walking Down the Hall

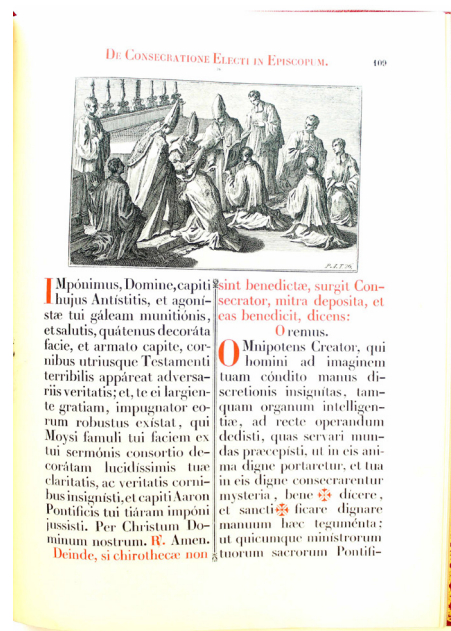
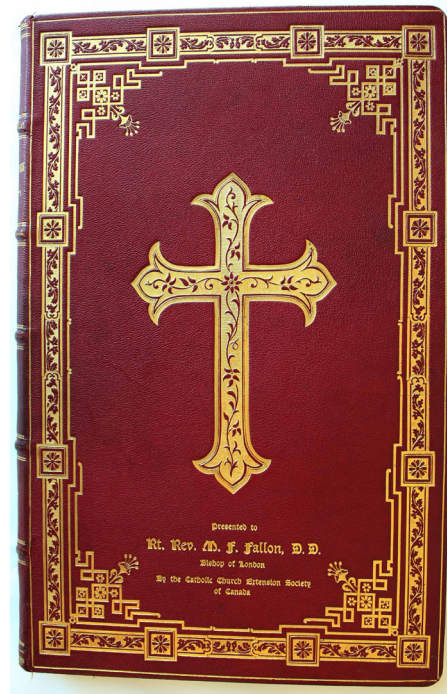
In the 1980s, the rector of the Seminary, (then) Fr. Fred Henry, realized that the vault needed more space. It took only a few hours to transfer all the archival materials to a small room in the basement next to the antiquated seminary freight elevator. In this tiny basement enclave, there were three, small rooms used in the 40s and 50s to house several workers at the Seminary who were displaced from their European homes after World War II.

The lay staff installed new steel shelves in one of these rooms to house our precious archival treasures. But amazingly, everything in this tiny room was *topped by water and steam pipes running along the ceiling*, very "fitting" for an archive! Somehow, this amateur archivist blithely acquiesced to such a totally inappropriate venue. At least, however, our archives had a home all to itself. And there was a lock on the door opened by an old-fashioned long, iron key. Anyone remember this?

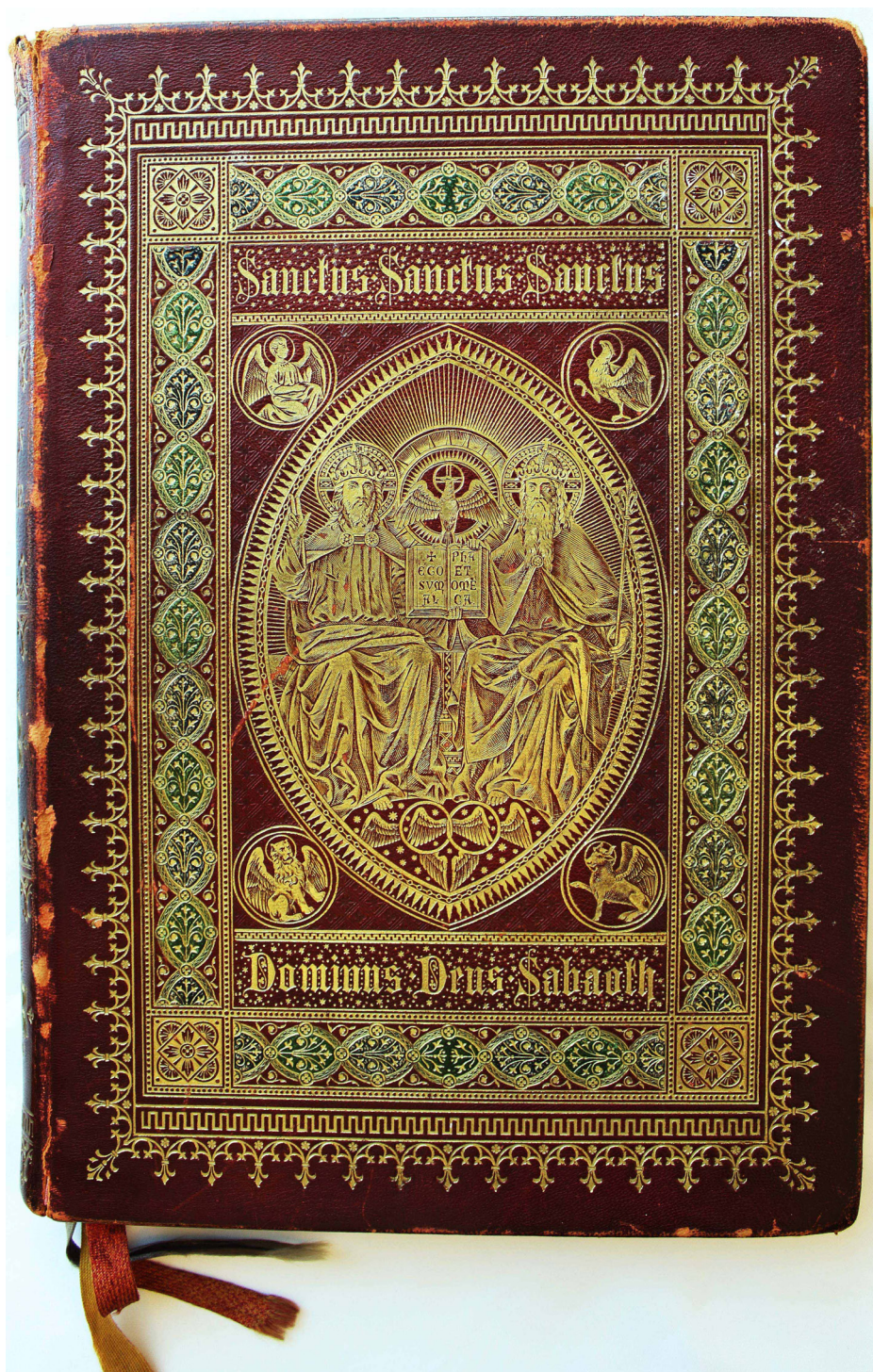
Now we continue our tour of the treasures at that time, which remain to this day in another venue, to be discussed later.

We begin with the *Pontificals* of Bishop Michael Francis Fallon (+1931) and Bishop John Christopher Cody (+1963), dated 1848 (Cody) and 1892 (Fallon). These mighty tomes, weighing almost ten pounds (3.7 kg) each, are the official, liturgical texts used by a bishop in solemn religious ceremonies such as ordinations and the blessing of altars. The guiding rubrics, or ceremonial instructions, are always printed in red, while the actual prayers are in black. (Occasionally, a non-focused bishop has been heard to say, "Now with hands extended, the Bishop says, O God ..."!) The 1848 version also contains many remarkably clear, black and white, engravings illustrating what should be happening in the ceremony at that point. Very pastoral.

These magnificent, folio-size volumes, bound in lush, red leather were piled up on the shelves. No less than 12 of these tomes sat there in episcopal splendor. Most are engraved in gold lettering with each bishop's name on the cover. The liturgical texts inside are all in Latin, and about font 20 in size, most helpful for ageing bishops in dim cathedrals! Full-colour calligraphy abounds in the exquisite margins and the opening letters of texts on the pages. The monastic printing tradition kept many a monk busy in drafty, old monasteries for centuries.



I must mention another extremely beautiful episcopal liturgical Pontifical, *Canon Missae ad usum Episcoporum ac Praelatorum (Canon of the Mass for use by Bishops and Prelates)* (1900), containing the prayers for the Mass of the old Tridentine rite. It has a stunning, gold-and-green leaf, embossed front cover, replete with a Trinitarian mandorla surrounded by the traditional symbols –lion, ox, man, and eagle– of the four evangelists.



Before electricity, a server called a “bougie bearer”, held a candle next to the celebrant at Mass to assist the bishop in reading from these mighty tomes. Unfortunately, our archives do not have such a treasure. Holding the *Pontifical* for the Bishop was a challenging duty, requiring calm balance and careful calculation to get the correct distance for easy reading, or singing, the sacred texts.

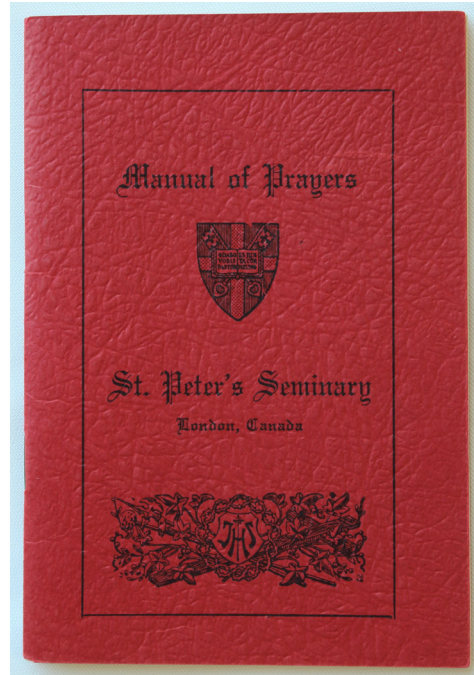
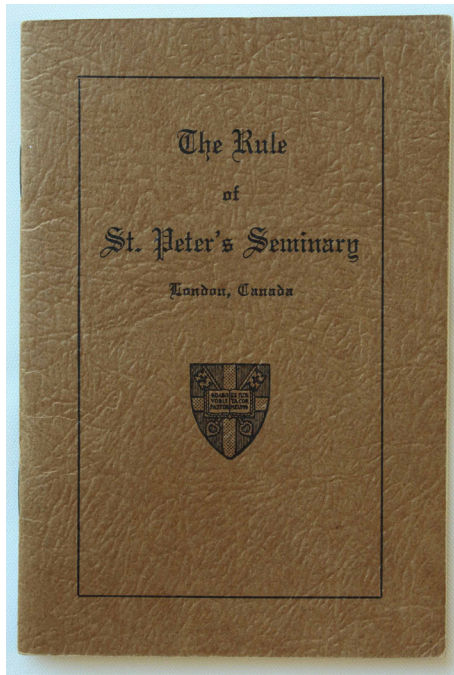


Also translated from the original vault was a magnificent clock originally ensconced on top of a bookcase in Msgr. Mahoney's office. His lore had it that it had belonged to John Henry Cardinal Newman, now a canonized saint. Recent efforts to have it appraised were unsuccessful.

Our new archives by now had acquired a number of other valuable treasures. Copies of the annual *Alumni Bulletin* had piled up. In 2012, we published, *Shepherds According To My Heart – A History of St. Peter's Seminary*, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its opening in the Cathedral rectory. We discovered that these *Alumni Bulletins* were a primary source chronicling the key events in seminary life as well as in the careers of its graduates. Their size had increased to almost 80 pages for a few of them, and they were now in full colour. The *Bulletin* in 1986, celebrating the 75th anniversary of the seminary, contained a remarkable center-fold outlining many of the major influences the seminary curriculum had on the life of the Catholic Church in Canada. These

included areas of sacred scripture, liturgy, social justice, bioethics, sacramental theology, church history, and others. The pastoral optic of the seminary, part of Bishop Fallon's original vision for his seminary, are clearly in evidence.

Other neat items include the tiny, brown *The Rule of St. Peter's Seminary*, a 19-page masterpiece of pithiness. For three weeks at the beginning of the academic year in September, Msgr. Mahoney, the Rector, spent four, half-hour spiritual lectures explicating this rule in often minute detail. We listened like canon lawyers to see what conditions would get us permission to go downtown in the afternoon (doctor's appointment? new shoes? toothbrush?), whether the prohibition against ice-flowing on the Thames River would be repeated, and whether there was any loosening-up of Saturday night "long-recs". We were well trained in "hair-splitting". Our spirituality was simple: "You keep the Rule, and the Rule will keep you." It was all in the Seminary Rule.

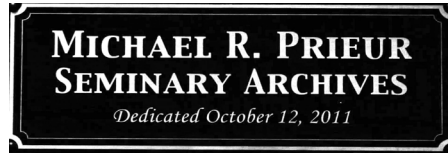


Another treasure was the red, *Manual of Prayers – St. Peter's Seminary*, London, Ontario, 1932, again a masterpiece in tininess. A clang of bells jolted the seminarians out of bed at 5:30 a.m. We had only a half-hour to be in chapel by 6:00 a.m. for morning prayers. Having individual sinks in every student room helped to speed up a quick shave. These prayers added quite a bit to what we were used to at home, often simply an *Our Father*, *Hail Mary*, *Glory be to the Father...*, and “*God bless Mom, Dad, etc.*”, which would be repeated at night.

Now our prayer repertoire was pepped up to include Acts of Adoration, Faith, Hope, Charity, Thanksgiving, along with Prayers for Benefactors, the Founder, Guide to Meditation, the Angelus, the Alumni, and occasional prayers and various litanies. Several of these dog-eared prayer books came to the archives on the death of an old priest, who had continued to use it long after his ordination.

I must mention a curious red volume edited by Bishop Fallon himself, *Shorter Poems by Catholics*, London, Ontario, Canada, The Catholic Record, 1930. It is beautifully bound, with short bibliographies of each poet printed in red. The choice of poems shows someone well-versed in poetry, including the classic poem by John McCrae, *In Flanders Fields*. Sad to say, the book was never put on sale. The bishop, perhaps suffering from memory loss owing to his severe diabetic condition without the aid of insulin, forgot to obtain any permission to publish these poems. Subsequently, our huge stock of these books gave us an excellent, “complimentary” book to give to anyone who spent more than \$10 at our annual seminary book sales. Bishop Fallon must have been turning over in our seminary crypt where he is buried!

The Archives Goes Moving Once Again



In 2011, the Archives made another journey in the seminary. By then, this author boasted about holding the all-time record for living in the seminary building, which included seven years as a seminarian, namely 49 years. (By retirement in 2016, another record for being on faculty tumbled, namely, 50 years. On retirement, one student wryly remarked to me, “Congratulations, Father Mickey. You finally figured out how to get out!”)

Of course, the seminary wanted to do something memorable for this long-time archivist. The (then) rector, Fr. Steve Wlusek, engineered a major archival decision. Two small, climate-controlled rooms occupied a segment of the seminary library in the basement. They would be more than enough to house our valued archival treasures. Finally, they would enjoy a safe harbour. On October 12, 2011, a small ceremony celebrated both the archival move and the faculty longevity of the archivist. A plaque on the wall outside these rooms documents the event.



The organization of the archival material in its new venue took a quantum leap when one of the seminarians, Victor de Gagne, had some spare time on his hands. Although untrained, he had a gift for minute detail, and an ability to organize. Guided by the tutelage of Debra Majer, the Diocesan Archivist, and the librarian, Frances Theilade, he purchased proper library boxes to protect many of the artifacts, pictures and documents. He numbered the shelves and decorated the walls with old pictures of the opening Mass of the Seminary on the front steps on September 29, 1926, as well as a rare picture of the Seminary taken

from the air in the 1930s. There were few buildings in Broughdale then. Other photos document that the Thames River meandered somewhat differently just behind the property embankment.

The most sought-after artifacts

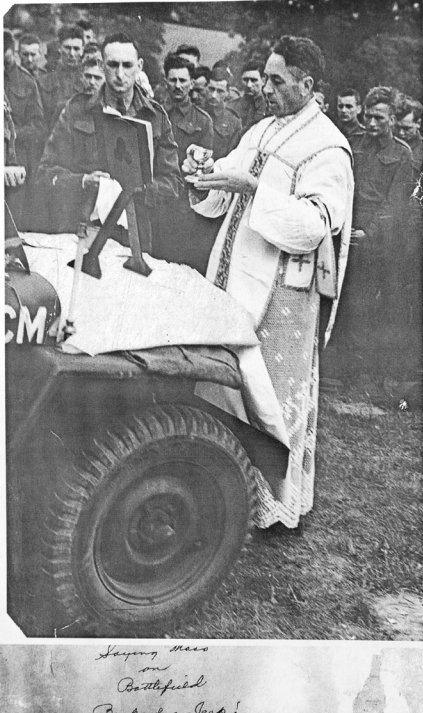
Frances Theilade enjoys the record for being the seminary's longest serving librarian, 42 years, retiring in 2021. Recently, I asked her what items she thinks I should write about for this article. She beamed. "What a great idea! Guess what? These are the most sought-after artifacts visitors want to inspect in our archives." And she immediately sped on with her list.

1. Two shell-cases from World War I turned into flower vases



I marvel at how such horrible tools of death and destruction can be turned into things to bring beauty and inspiration to their viewers. One of them has "SOUVENIR 1918" artistically engraved on the top, and on the bottom, "SOMME". Inscribed on its heel is, "MAM^ 121Δ17ΔSg". The other one has "SOUVENIR" on the top along with "1918". On its heel is a typed inscription, "Made from shells of the first world War given to Mother Philomena by her brother Rev. Thomas Hussey, a chaplain in World War I."

2. MAJ Rev. Mike Dalton, B.A., M.B.E, *Personal War Diary 1939-1946*



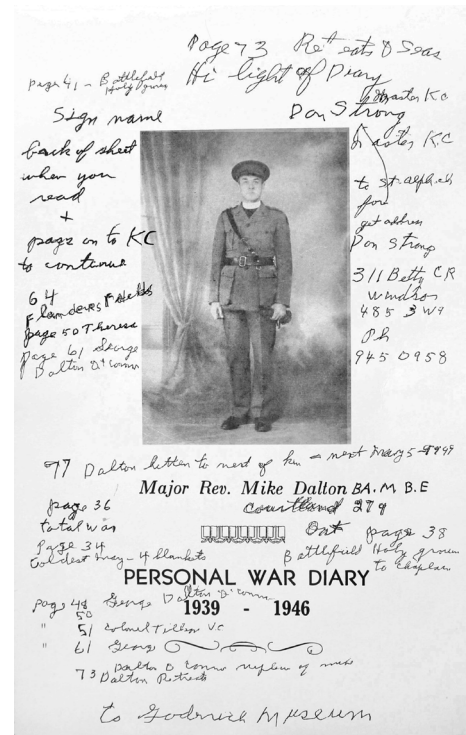
This legendary priest in our diocese of London, our local Methuselah, lived to the ripe old age of almost 107 years, dying in 2009. Hailing from Kingsbridge, Ontario, he was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1932. He served in several parishes in Windsor, before joining the Essex Scottish Regiment. He spent six and a half years in the European war theatre in World War II.

Fr. Dalton was a colourful Irishman who loved to tell his wartime stories, and to sing to anyone who would listen. He lived in a retirement home in Courtland, Ontario for 35 years. Imagine! He filled his room with his military memorabilia, such as one of his official outfits, his war medals, and his proudest picture of him celebrating Mass on the fender of a jeep near the front lines in the War. His longtime friend, Fr. Charlie McNabb, also a former military chaplain, once remarked about him, “He never really left the war.”

His war diary is a very personal, highly annotated story of his war-time experiences, replete with numerous pictures, newspaper photos, and invaluable commentary on everything.

- General Montgomery (“I met him twice.”): “I would sooner go into action without my artillery than without my Chaplains.”
- “Internal peace comes with prayer.”
- A Protestant under shell fire: “We are in the hollow of God’s hands.”
- “The war united people of all faiths.”
- “The army quickly changed my attitude towards rubrics.”

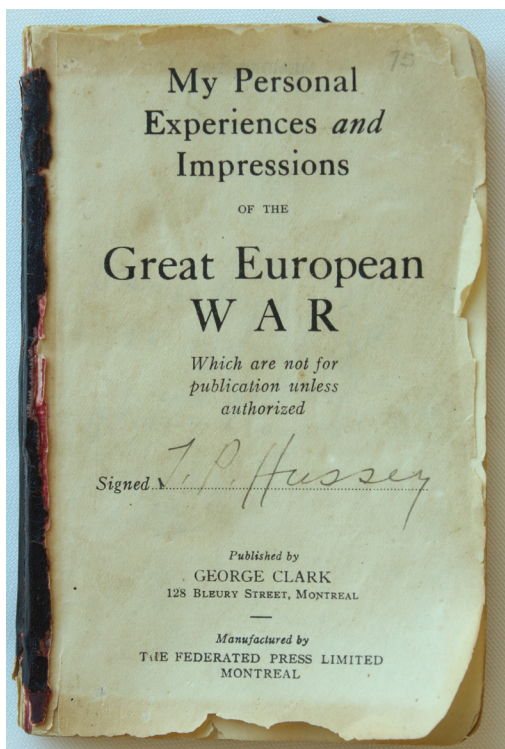
His short, choppy commentary is a remarkable window into life on the battlefield.



3. Fr. T. P. Hussey's World War I diary

Fr. Thomas Peter Hussey was from Ashfield, Ontario and ordained a priest for the Diocese of London in 1909. He served as a military chaplain in World War I with the 8th Canadian Railway Troops. His diary is small but deeply poignant. This obviously mass-produced diary titled, *My Personal Experiences and Impressions of the Great European War*, takes us right into the very soul of a chaplain serving in this horrendous war. To wit:

Sunday, August 12th, 1917	Monday September 24th, 1917
Mass in Fr. McKee's Church at 7 o'clock Visiting matron of Shorncliffe Hospital Visited Throoso Bk's Hospital Ward 14, 15, 16 Air raid in Marpole & Southard 30 killed, 50 injured	Air Raid
	Wednesday, September 26th, 1917
	Air raid German machines over head but dropped no bombs. Fierce gun fire – shrapnel falling like rain



His Mass kit contains the usual small chalice, paten, small cruets, and small candles



Frances Theilade also indicated that the papers and correspondence of **Fr. Anthony Durand** (+1999) is a gold-mine of source material for the extensive lectures and spiritual formation which he gave during his 30-plus years on the seminary faculty. Also included are his notes on his frequent visits from Dr. Charles de Konink, the renowned philosopher from Laval University in Quebec City.

I will only list a few more interesting items resting in the Archives: Bishop Fallon's episcopal crozier, his cane and umbrella, a set of china, all embossed with the seminary crest, a silver crucifix with a number of relics embedded in it, an original iron stamp with the seminary seal on it, various minute books of long-gone seminary groups like "The St. Peter's Seminary Patrician Society", shelves of *The Catholic Record*, bound, folio-size issues beginning in October 4, 1878 to 1911, from 1930-1948, and microfilm copies from 1885-1907 and 1912-1947, and of course, all the *oeuvres*, published and unpublished, of the author, including personal diaries, a world-tour diary, and countless slides of life in the 50s and 60s.

The Archives Forges Ahead

Presently, the Archives is benefiting from the expertise of Mark Richardson, who is voluntarily cataloging and digitalizing all the files in the boxes in the archives. In addition, Mark Ambrogio is also voluntarily digitalizing a *Finder's Aid* for everything on the Archive's shelves. Jordan Patterson, the present seminary librarian, has spiffed up the complete library basement, sprinkling it with various pictures of the Prodigal Son, rescued from their previous home in the deacon's classroom that was part of the huge seminary renovations.

As I reflect on my little archival tour, I think any archives demonstrates a present approach being recommended for our churches in epochal times. This is a "rowboat perspective" whereby we look backwards while rowing the boat, focusing on a distant landmark to assure a steady direction forward for our journey. Archives provide us with such wonderful landmarks to help us move ahead to a new destination. I do think my amateur archival experiences are helping me immensely benefit from these amazing "treasures" buried deep in the bowels of the seminary.

I hope my historical mini-tour of the seminary archives might whet the appetite of someone with a personal interest in my sources mentioned. Jordan would love to see anyone for further details about the Archives, including a possible visit. (Jpatterson@uwo.ca) Welcome to new amazement!

Credits

All photo credits Jordan Patterson, St. Peter Seminary librarian