



Redemptorist North American Historical Bulletin

Issue #33

ISSN 1480-5235

Fall 2011

Visit us at: www.redemptorists.com

Meehan Media Records Donated

By

M.C. Havey

Archivist of the Edmonton-Toronto Redemptorists

On a crisp, sunny December afternoon, the media records of Rev. Matthew Gerard Meehan, documenting 51 years, likely the longest continuous religious broadcasting career in Canada, were deposited at the Provincial Archives of Ontario.

It all started in the summer 2009 when the Archives staff was requested to clear out Fr. Meehan's records from his former office at the Toronto Provincial Offices so it could be converted into a conference room for the coming of the International Novitiate.

So that summer, all of Fr. Meehan's files, which were stored in cupboards, underwent weeks of archival culling, arranging and describing – from his student days at St. Mary's College, Brockville, ON, to his final newspaper columns in 1998, just before his death.



As the impressiveness of the media records was uncovered in terms of his longevity and variety, it was decided that these records should be preserved in the proper archival and environmental conditions and be more accessible in a public Archives.

Fr. Meehan's personal records as a Redemptorist remain in the Edmonton-Toronto Provincial Archives.

Fr. Meehan's media career began in 1947 when he accepted a request on behalf of the Redemptorists from the Toronto Archdiocese to provide five of the 20 programmes on the TransCanada Catholic Hour, a Sunday weekly series on CBC radio. Specializing on family and social issues, Fr. Meehan's annual radio broadcasts became instantly popular and continued until 1962.

Fr. Meehan's broadcasting came to the attention of Bishop Ryan of the southern Ontario Diocese of Hamilton, west of Toronto and Bishop Ryan invited Fr. Meehan to provide Catholic broadcasting on a local radio station. From 1950 to 1970, Fr. Meehan went on the air with a weekly one-hour talk and phone in show at CHML 900 in Hamilton, usually on Sundays from 10-11 p.m.

Fr. Meehan entered the world of television in 1957. His childhood neighbour Ken Soble, then owner of CHML, approached him to produce a weekly religious television show at CHCH-TV. As the shows evolved into 13 half-hour programmes, Fr. Meehan tackled a wide-variety of topics from Canadian ethnicity, "Faith of Canadian People", "What's New with Vatican Two", "Spiritual Laugh-In", "How's Your Marriage", "What's It All About Lord?", and "Living and Dying". In the early 1980s, he moved the production and the CHCH-TV crew from the studio to the peaceful setting of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton.

The archival files document Fr. Meehan's planning of all aspects of the programmes, including arranging guests and establishing production timing and publicity. In its

prime, Fr. Meehan's show on Sunday nights, featuring a cross-section of Ontario luminaries, including hockey star Red Kelly, artist William Kurelek, prominent Catholic politicians and clergy, Redemptorist confreres, families, male and women religious as well as local music talents. The series were lent to interested groups across the country as well as being aired on EWTN Satellite out of Texas in 1998.



The records also include Fr. Meehan's columns on scripture readings and "Question Box" for *The Canadian Catholic Register*, *Canadian Messenger* and *Challenge* as well as his contributions to *The Toronto Star*. From 1964 until his death, he wrote many of the scripts and columns in his office at the Toronto Province's headquarters in north Toronto.

As a journalist, Fr. Meehan attended the Second Vatican Council, the Synod of Bishops in 1980 and 1983, travelled with Pope John II on his 1979 tour of the United States and 1984 Canadian tour.

Once described as the poor man's Bishop Sheen, Fr. Meehan was born on April 27, 1913 and was baptized in the Redemptorist parish of St. Patrick's in the city's downtown. He attended the St. Mary's juvenate at Brockville, ON (1925-1931) before entering Novitiate at St. Peter's, Saint John in 1931. After studies at St. Alphonsus Seminary, Woodstock, ON and ordination there on June 20, 1937, he studied at Angelicum University in Rome (1938-1940), earning a licentiate and doctorate in philosophy.

His broadcasting career began while a professor of philosophy at St. Alphonsus Seminary (1940-1952) and continued while director and rector of St. Mary's College, Brockville (1952-1959) and rector of his home parish of St. Patrick's, Toronto (1959-1964).

After 1964, he devoted his time to broadcasting along with appointed positions as director of communications for the Toronto Redemptorists (1964-1988) and Director of Radio-TV Office for the Hamilton Diocese (1972-1984), where produced and served as commentator on major diocesan events from Christmas Eve Midnight Mass to its 125th anniversary. He still found time to teach homiletics to seminarians, preach parish missions, retreats, novenas and facilitate at encounter sessions for engaged and married couples and Retrouvaille weekends for separated and divorced Catholics.

When all of these newspaper columns, scripts, correspondence of Fr. Meehan's were boxed, they occupied 14 feet of shelving. Another 18 bankers' boxes contained the film reels, beta and VHS tapes of some of the television programs.

Following an inquiry to the Archives of Ontario in February 2010, a staff archivist with expertise in audio-visual records came

to assess the files of scripts and boxes of film and tapes at the Archives. Her subsequent report recommended that Fr. Meehan's media files were of historical significance to the Province of Ontario.



After a legal agreement was completed with CHCH-TV for the transfer of copyright to the Archives of Ontario, Carol Hopp, the staff archivist, returned to the Archives office with an agreement for the donation of the media files. As Director of Archives, Fr. James Mason, signed the agreement on November 26.

Two weeks later with the help of three novices, a total of 18 bankers' boxes was delivered to the Archives of Ontario, now located in a new state-of-the-art building on the campus of York University in north-west Toronto.

And I went home and toasted Fr. Meehan with a mellow glass of wine.

M.C. Havey

All photographs courtesy of the Redemptorist Archives of the Edmonton-Toronto Province.