

## **The Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto**

by Reverend Gordon A. BEAN

During the past few years, an effort has been made by the Archdiocese of Toronto to reorganize its collection of archival material, the better to serve its own reference needs, as well as to make available to historians a great deal of resource material regarding the Catholic Church in the western part of Upper Canada.

The archives, located in the Archdiocesan Chancery Office at 55 Gould Street in Toronto, contain the written record of the administrations of the nine Bishops and Archbishops who have been entrusted with the See of Toronto since its founding and the appointment of Bishop Michael Power in December of 1841. This record takes the form of original letters, letter books, papers, registers, photographs, and some printed material. A fire-proof vault has been provided for the protection of these records. As the material is organized it is placed in acid-free storage envelopes which are in turn packed in vertical file transfer cases. Most of the original letters are preserved in very good condition, although some of the letter book copies are badly faded.

Microfilm copy of all baptismal and marriage records in the Archdiocese has more recently been added. Each parish is required to have its registers filmed every five years, and to submit a copy to the archives. This work is completed to 1970. The purpose of this microfilm collection is to assure the preservation of these records and, ordinarily, enquiries regarding individual records are directed to the parish of origin.

For the most part, the archives are arranged chronologically with the administration of each Bishop constituting a separate unit. By way of exception to the general plan, material relating to parishes, institutions, and certain other major subject areas that span the administration of more than one Bishop, will be found in a separate series.

As well as the record of its own history, Toronto has a notable collection of material pre-dating its founding as a diocese. From 1826 to 1841, the area now comprising the Archdiocese of Toronto, together with the Dioceses of Hamilton, London, and St. Catharines, was simply the western part of the Diocese of Upper Canada, presided over by the first Bishop of Kingston,

Alexander Macdonell. While the major collection of the *Macdonell Papers* is to be found in the archives of the Archdiocese of Kingston, the Toronto collection forms a valuable supplement, especially in matters pertaining to the churches from York westward to Sandwich (now Windsor).

Material of the period from 1826 to 1841 is described in a recently completed finding guide which attempts to provide a content note for almost every item in the collection. More than twelve hundred items are included. These have been divided into two general sections, the first dealing with the administration of Bishop Alexander Macdonell from the founding of the Diocese of Upper Canada in 1826 to his death in 1840, and the second covering the brief period of the administration of Bishop Rémi Gaulin from July 14th, 1840, to the founding of Toronto Diocese on December 17th, 1841. Bishop Gaulin had been Coadjutor to Bishop Alexander Macdonell since 1833, and consequently the two parts of this collection are complementary, and many of Bishop Gaulin's earlier letters will be found with those of Bishop Macdonell.

The papers from the Macdonell administration are divided into five sections. The first of these contains biographical material about the Bishop including a copy of the *Reminiscences of the late Hon. and Rt. Rev. Alexander Macdonell* published in Toronto in 1888. A series of 61 letters written by the Bishop to his Vicar General, the Reverend William Peter MacDonald, from 1828 to 1838 are also included in this section.

The second section of the *Macdonell Papers* consists of 526 letters of 35 priests and prominent laymen, addressed chiefly to Bishop Macdonell, but including a number of letters to his Coadjutor, Bishop Gaulin. These letters are arranged by correspondent. Here we see letters from such people as the Honourable James Baby (24 letters), the Honourable John Elmsley (59 letters) and the Honourable and Rt. Reverend John Strachan (4 letters), as well as letters from the priests who worked in the missions of western Upper Canada.

A third section divides material according to the various missions in the Diocese at the time. Here one will find letters, parish reports and other material related to a specific place such as York, Penetanguishene, Sandwich or the Indian Missions at Amherstburg. There are 178 items in the section. A great deal more material related to each mission can easily be located through the finding guide by checking the letters of the priests who served in each mission.

A fourth section consists of fifty-four letters to Bishop Macdonell from various people during the period from 1820 to 1839.

The final section under the Macdonell administration is made up of the letters and papers of the Very Reverend William Peter MacDonald, Vicar

General to Bishop Macdonell, and editor of *The Catholic*. While this collection contains only nine letters from the Vicar General himself, more than 110 letters directed to him are preserved, covering the period from 1809 to 1842. There is also a Manuscript volume of his hymns and poems, and an autographed copy of his *The Protestant or negative faith refuted* published at Kingston in 1836.

The historical coverage of the period prior to the founding of the Diocese of Toronto is completed with a fifth section, the *Bishop Gaulin Papers*. Bishop Gaulin was named Coadjutor to Bishop Macdonell in 1833 and became the second Bishop of Upper Canada upon the death of Bishop Macdonell in 1840. Thirteen letters of Bishop Gaulin to Vicar General William Peter MacDonald will be found in this part of the collection. As has been mentioned above, a great many of Bishop Gaulin's letters from the time of his appointment as Coadjutor to Bishop Macdonell to the time of his becoming Bishop of Kingston in 1840 will be found among the *Macdonell Papers*, but can quite easily be extracted with the help of the finding guide. There are also 195 letters addressed to the Bishop, mostly from priests working in the western part of the Diocese from York to Sandwich, as well as a number of items related to various missions during Bishop Gaulin's administration.

In an effort to bring together the letters of Bishop Macdonell, a copy of the finding guide has been placed in the Provincial Archives and work is about to begin on filming the letters themselves, so that the entire block of material will be available in Queen's Park. The Provincial Archives had already acquired typescript copies of the *Macdonell Papers* existing in the Archives of Kingston Archdiocese, which collection is also provided with a finding guide.

A comparison of the two guides indicates that the collections are indeed complementary. In some cases, letter book copies will be found in one collection and the actual postmarked letter will be found in the other. In other cases, a reply may be found in one collection to a letter located in the other. For example, on September 4th, 1832, John Bell wrote to Bishop Macdonell, then at York, to enquire about the results of the Bishop's application for land for the church at Penetanguishene. On the 11th of September, John Berkis advised the Bishop that an Order in Council had assigned 200 acres for the church at Penetanguishene. On the same day, the Bishop replied to John Bell's letter advising him that the 200 acres had been obtained, and that deeds would be issued upon payment of the patent fee. The first two of the above-mentioned letters are to be found in the Toronto collection, while the reply to John Bell is found in the Kingston collection. The Provincial Archives can provide access to both.

Now that the *Macdonell* and *Gaulin Papers* have been organized and made available, work has begun on the papers of Bishop Michael Power, the first Bishop of Toronto. Present plans call for the continuation of the work of organizing and describing the collection.