SCANNING IN SAN ANTONIO

History: In the late 1940’s there was a problem of people burning down churches and the loss of records. Archbishop Lucey knew of the canon law for copying the records but the technology was not there. He heard of microfilming from the military bases here and thought that would be the answer. There were several attempts at organizing this but none worked. Then came a company from El Paso in 1956 and offered to do the organizing and filming at a very low price. He took the bait and almost at the end of the project, 1957, he found that it was a straw company for the Mormon Church. He tried to get all the copies back but they had written an ironclad contract. What we did get were two copies , one positive and one negative. Both were stored away as no one knew what to do with the film.

In 1974 Sister Gertrude Cook from the diocesan order of St. Anthony saw the documents in the chancery basement being eaten by rats and went to Archbishop Furey and proposed to found an archives . She had been the wife of a prominent doctor and when he died she joined this religious order. She had many friends from her past social life and called upon them as volunteers. Among the people she recruited was a retired microfilmer. Mr. Batto. Thus the 1976 filming of the previous 20 years was done in excellent quality. In 1985 another filming was made of the past ten years but with a woman who had less skill. I followed her in June of 1986. One of my hobbies was photography. I found that there were skips and also incorrect exposures. I had to review all her work and pick out the most glaring errors and then get the material back from the parishes to refilm them and cross reference them, which set me back a good six months. I have done three more filmings of the records, 1994, 2000, 2008 and even finding a few items that the Mormons missed.

At the meeting here at Mundelein in 2012 Jack Traynor told me that microfilming was a dodo and that I should go into scanning. I really hated the idea of taking the leap into the digital age. Several things pushed me into the new age – Kodak went bankrupt and before that spun off the microfilm section into a separate company. The price of the film jumped. The Second Instance court had started the scanning of its cases and there was the blessing of the Vatican on this. The first instance followed suit and no longer needed to use my rotary machines. I used up all the 35mm film and I really did not want to run up the expense of buying a whole case of 35 which was the only way it was offered. We do our own microfilming as Archbishop Lucey had been burned by a vendor and there were serious security concerns. The furthest ever the film was out of our hands was at the processor. The present company we use is connected with the Opus Dei and Archbishop Gomez knew these people. The machines have to be adjusted occasionally and there is but one man for south Texas left in the business of doing repairs. I have done as much in repairs as possible as I have to pay transportation costs plus $100 just to have him enter the door. Rather than tempt fate I decided we had to make the jump. The next step was in convincing the bosses and then what machine would we use and how much this was going to cost.

I had seen some at various meetings that I attended and had heard of others. The Opus Dei people had one in mind and I listened to them. The Indus 9000 was their choice. The next thing I did was get references and they all were positive. The Glen Ellen Historical Society of Illinois was most helpful. The cost would be about $30,000 which I could cover as I had built up a Preservation Fund through the Annual Appeal. I had a grant for $25,000 to redo the airconditioning/humidity control in the archives but Archbishop Gomez beat me to the punch. He has allergies and one of his first things was to re-do entirely the HVAC system, even replacing all the ducts. We have the same system as the AT&T Center where the Spurs play. I found out I could re-purpose the money for the machine – preserving our documents digitally. The problem arose that the Ikon Company which has the duplicating contract for the archdiocese smelled money and wanted to be our vendor. There were several meetings and they proposed they would buy the Indus 9000 themselves and provide the worker. The cost would be $75,000 per year for three years and then re-negotiate the contract. I had the plan to use volunteers or pay someone for the part time work. I did put a line in the budget to handle this.

The last time I filmed I hired part time the nephew of one of the staff and he did good work. I knew I did not want to do it myself and it requires concentration and with a telephone constantly ringing, people dropping in for research, requests from other offices and parishes, such would not be feasible. I was praying fervently for someone with the technical ability and time to do this on a steady basis. One day while I was in the tribunal on business a young man, a seminarian from a religious order came looking for work. I overheard his request and questioned him about computers and he seemed to know a lot so I sent him up to the HR department and after they ran the background check declared him ok. He was to work no more than three hours a day, five days a week. He took to the machine like a duck to water. I do the organizing , the preparing of the books and putting in the date stamp of the archives, date, span, and where it is to be found. A finding aid is prepared and I have another volunteer typing the information from that, on the card system that was begun by the Mormons.

How this is organized: What was city in 1956 has become much larger. The city is considered one entity and the rural the other. The archdiocese has lost some counties to the new dioceses of Victoria and Laredo. We maintain the records of what was our territory up to the creation of the new dioceses. Some new parishes have been founded and added to the city list. I film the city by deanery, and the parishes alphabetically in the deanery. For the rural again I use the deanery and then the cities alphabetically. Two towns have three parishes each and another two. If there is a scheduling problem now with the digital it is easy to simply move the whole parish entry around on the screen.

With the Indus we can see what the image is immediately on the screen. If we do not like it, we can adjust (control panel) to the point of handling pink and blue on the same page. Inspite of our requesting frequently that only a black pen (not a felt one at that as it bleeds through) is used , one parish made a different color for each entry on a page. Also we decided that we would shoot the whole volume as it was turned in, thus recopying what might have been in two or three microfilmings. The light blue ink that just would not come out well in the microfilming, now it is quite legible. With the microfilming it might be two or three weeks from when we filmed until we got the film back from the processor. Then the choice would be to either accept the bad copy or try to get the volume back from the parish to re-film, hoping for better results. Now we can see the result immediately and make the adjustments.

I have the Indus on one side of the room, not connected in any way to the internet or the intranet of the Pastoral Center. All the work is in the computer. But we have three external hard drives (cost about $70 each) and each day’s work is added to the hard drives. Two are hidden somewhere in the building at night, the third comes home with me and is locked up. Also as we finish each deanery we make an archival quality disc and that is stored off site. When we need to use the work we have done we can use a thumb drive and take out just what we need – the book or the page or the entry and then three steps across the room to the archive computer and bring it up on the screen, make a disc copy, e-mail it or print it on the archive printer. When it is no longer needed everything is erased from the computer, the thumb drive or the disc. One parish brought in an old combination book, 1908-1939 which was falling apart and the pastor wanted to know how to preserve it. We copied it in color (tiff color takes ten times the space as black and white, pdf) and then made him a disc copy and he uses that at his rectory and we store his little book. At the parish he can extract whatever he needs and the book is now safe.

I demonstrate the machine to each secretary when she brings in the books for scanning. They are impressed. It is good PR with the parishes and with the pastors. If a pastor brings in the books, I am happy to show him also.

When money comes available I will go back and digitize the entire collection of each parish. The image is so much better than the microfilm and easier to duplicate. When I am not using the machine, it is possible to have other archives come and use it for their purposes. I have copied Glen Ellen’s rate schedule so that the machine also begins to raise money for the archives.

The Indus 9000 has only 300 and 400 dps resolution but for what we are doing, it it fine. We do most of the scanning at 300 and in black and white. We have found that trying for 400 we get a lot of cloudiness, especially on books that have turned yellow or brown with age. With a little more playing with the control panel even this problem can be eliminated.

The Indus is the only scanning machine made in the USA – La Crosse WI. The parts are available here and technical help is close at hand. It is simple enough to be used in school libraries by the students themselves. It is also possible to have a microfilm print be made from the scanned image. As things change in the digital world I am sure that we can upgrade what we have done and this effort will not be in vain. Bro. Ed Loch SM