



BELIZE MISSION COLLECTION,
1847-2011 (BULK 1895-2005)

MIS.3.001

JESUIT ARCHIVES: CENTRAL UNITED STATES

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Collection Summary

Collection number: MIS.3.001

Repository code: MoSIJA

Repository: Jesuit Archives: Central United States

Title: Belize Mission collection

Date [bulk]: 1895-2005

Date [inclusive]: 1847-2011

Extent: 35 linear feet (33 boxes)

Creator: Jesuits. Missouri Province

Language of material: English and Latin with some Spanish, Garifuna, and Q'eqchi.

Abstract: The Belize Mission was officially established by the Society of Jesus in 1851 by Father Eustace Du Peyron, S.J. in response to requests for priests made by the nation's new Catholic population. The mission was originally under the administration of the Society's Province of England, and was transferred to the Missouri Province of the Midwestern United States in 1894. The Belize Mission collection documents the ministry of the Jesuits of the Missouri Province in the former colony of British Honduras and current day nation of Belize from 1895 to 2011. Included in this collection are the administrative records of the mission region, publications, as well as photographs and prints.

Processing history: Originally processed by Missouri Province Archives staff. Additional processing completed by Alexandra M. Bisio in 2015.

Conditions governing access: This collection is open for research.

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The Belize Mission was officially established by the Society of Jesus in 1851. Between 1847 and 1855, following the Caste War of the Yucatan, thousands of Spanish and Mestizo Catholic refugees fled Balcalar, Mexico to Belize. At that time, the Central American nation of Belize was under the administrative jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of Jamaica, Reverend Benito Fernandez O.S.F. In 1851, Fernandez traveled to Belize accompanied by Father Eustace Du Peyron, S.J. in response to requests for priests made by the nation's new Catholic population. In December of that year, Du Peyron oversaw the construction of Belize's first Catholic Church, now Holy Redeemer parish, in Belize City. A member of the Lyon Province of the Society of Jesus in France, Du Peyron became the nation's first resident Jesuit, though other members of the Society from several different provinces in Europe soon joined him.

The Jesuits established several early parishes along the coast. The parish in Corozal, established in 1859, primarily served Catholics originally from the Yucatan, while the Punta Gorda and Stann Creek parishes, established in 1862 and 1867 respectively, primarily served the Afro-Caribbean Garifuna communities.

In 1862, Great Britain formally declared Belize a British Crown Colony, British Honduras, and instituted English as the colony's official language. As part of the Vicar Apostolic of Jamaica, the Belize Mission had been administrated by the Society's Province of England since its founding in the 1850s. After the official colonization of Belize by the British, the European Jesuits in Belize requested more English speaking priests and brothers. These Jesuits were encouraged to teach in the Catholic school system. One of these schools, a boarding and day school for boys, St. John's College, established in 1887 by Father Cassian Gillet, S.J., would become one of the largest and most prestigious educational institutions in the country.

By the 1890s, the English Province found itself greatly overextended, and decided to transfer responsibility for the Belize Mission over to the United States' Missouri Province. The first two Missouri Province Jesuits, Fathers C.J. Leit and C.M. Charroppin arrived in Belize on April 5, 1894. The Missouri Province Jesuits continued to expand the mission, establishing parishes in west central Belize among the indigenous Maya people. The Parish at Benque Viejo del Carmen was the first of these parishes, established in 1905, while the parish of San Ignacio was established later in 1909.

In the 20th century, the Jesuits of the Missouri Province stationed in Belize not only continued to run parishes and schools, but also began to become active in the economic and social lives of their parishioners and students. The Catholic Social Movement of the 1930s and 1940s, for example, inspired Jesuits to introduce organizations such as credit unions and cooperatives for the benefit of Belizean farmers and merchants, as well as religious social clubs and scout troops for Belizean youth.

The Jesuits of the Missouri province stationed in Belize in the 21st century continue to be committed to education and social justice matters.

Scope and content note

The Belize Mission collection documents the ministry of the Jesuits of the Missouri Province in the former colony of British Honduras and current day nation of Belize from 1895 to 2011. The collection consists records and materials created by both missionaries in Belize and by the Missouri Province office in St. Louis. Included in this collection are the general administrative records of the mission region, as well as the administrative records of specific parishes, schools, and services run by the Society of Jesus; publications produced by and about the Belize Mission and missionaries; as well as photographs and prints that illustrate the ministry of the Jesuits, showcase the beauty of the Belizean landscape, and reveal the lives and customs of the people of Belize.

Administrative records in the collection include a variety of materials related to the of the mission region as a whole, individual Jesuit parishes in the mission region, and schools and college run by Jesuits in the region. The records contain meeting minutes, financial records, correspondence, memoranda, statistical reports and charts, building and property documents, reports, newsletters, clippings, as well as narrative mission, parish, and house histories. The publications in the collection include research, reading, and informational material produced by and about the Belize mission and missionaries. Topics covered in Belize mission publications include Catholic education, Belizean studies, Belizean independence, catechism, mission history, as well as Garifuna and Maya languages. Photographs and prints in this collection include images created by members of the Jesuit Mission Bureau, as well as photos taken by missionaries themselves. Negatives, oversize prints, film and glass lantern slides are also included in this series.

Arrangement note

The Belize Mission collection is arranged in three series:

- Series 1. Administrative records
- Series 2. Publications
- Series 3. Photographs and prints

Series 1. Administrative records is arranged in three subseries:

- Subseries 1.1. Mission region
- Subseries 1.2. Parishes
- Subseries 1.3. Schools and colleges

Series 3. Photographs and prints is arranged in four subseries:

- Subseries 3.1. Individuals
- Subseries 3.2. Locations
- Subseries 3.3. Topic files
- Subseries 3.4. Glass lantern slides

Collection contents

Series 1. Administrative records, 1847-2011

Scope and content: The Administrative records series contains materials related to the administration of the mission region as a whole, individual Jesuit parishes in the mission region, and schools and college run by Jesuits in the region. While dating back to 1847, the administrative records series primarily focuses on the years the Belize Mission fell under the direction of the Missouri Province, specifically 1895 to present. Records in this series were created by both missionaries in Belize and by the Missouri Province office in St. Louis. The records contain meeting minutes, financial records, correspondence, memoranda, statistical reports and charts, building and property documents, reports, newsletters, clippings, as well as narrative mission, parish, and house histories.

Arrangement: Administrative records have been arranged in topical groups.

Subseries 1.1. Mission region, 1847-2005 (bulk 1885-2005)

Boxes 196-203

Scope and content: The administration of the Mission region records subseries contain materials related to the general direction of the Belize mission by the Belize missionaries and Missouri Province office in St. Louis. Some early documents from the Province of England's administration of the region have also been included.

Subseries 1.2. Parishes, 1888-2011

Boxes 196, 207, 212-220

Scope and content: The administration of parishes records subseries contains the administrative records of individual parishes created by the parishes themselves, administrators of the mission region in Belize, and the Missouri Province office in St. Louis. Parishes represented in this collection include Holy Redeemer Cathedral, Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Sacred Heart, San Luis Rey, San Pedro, St. Francis Xavier, St. Ignatius, St. Joseph, St. Martin de Porres, and St. Peter Claver.

Subseries 1.3 Schools and colleges, 1888-2009

Boxes 207-211, 219, 220

Scope and content: The administration of schools and colleges records subseries contain contains the administrative records of individual schools and college created by schools and colleges themselves, administrators of the mission region in Belize, and the Missouri Province office in St. Louis. The majority of records in this subseries concern the administration of St. John's College in Belize City. Other schools represented in this collection include Lynam Agricultural College and Claver College.

Series 2. Publications, 1870-2006

Boxes 204-206

Scope and content: The publications series includes research, reading, and informational material produced by and about the Belize Mission and missionaries between 1870 and 2006. Topics covered in Belize mission publications include Catholic education, Belizean studies, Belizean independence, catechism, mission history, as well as Garifuna and Maya languages.

Arrangement: Publications have been arranged in topical groups.

Series 3. Photographs and Prints, circa 1890s-2010s

Scope and content: The photographs and prints series contains material that illustrates the ministry of the Jesuits, showcase the beauty of the Belizean landscape, and reveal the lives and customs of the people of Belize. While many of the photographs in this series were taken by members of the Jesuit Mission Bureau, especially those dating from the 1940s to 1960s, there are also a large number of informal snapshots that may have been taken by missionaries themselves. Negatives, oversize prints, film and glass lantern slides are also included in this series.

Arrangement: Photographs have been arranged in topical groups.

Access: Materials in the glass lantern slide subseries have been digitized and are available online via the Jesuit Archives' [Digital Collections and Resources](#). A sample of other photographs have also been digitized, and are available on the [finding guide main page](#).

Subseries 3.1. Individuals and groups, circa 1890s-2010s

Boxes 690-691, 842 oversize

Scope and content: The individuals and groups subseries contains images of specific bishops and diocesan priests. This subseries also contains group portraits of Jesuits and Belize natives. Oversize prints and negatives are included in this subseries.

Subseries 3.2. Locations, circa 1890s-2010s

Boxes 690-691, 694-696,
842 oversize

Scope and content: The locations subseries contains images of churches and other buildings, parishes, schools, street scene, landscapes and seascapes, and ruins. Also found in this series are architectural renderings of the Loyola Park campus of St. John's College. Oversize prints and negatives are included in this subseries.

Subseries 3.3. Topic files, circa 1890s-2010s

Boxes 692-693, 842 oversize

Scope and content: The topic files subseries contains photographs, negatives, and oversize prints divided into subject categories. Examples of subjects found in this series are: Boy Scouts troops, cooperatives, credit unions, hurricanes, Jonkonnu festivals, lay ministries, pageants, sacraments and family celebrations, and Pope Saint John Paul II visit to Belize among others. Oversize prints and negatives are included in this subseries.

Arrangement: Topical files are arranged in alphabetical order.

Scope and Content: The Belize Mission glass lantern slide subseries consists of ninety-one, hand-colored and black and white photographs, on a variety of Belizean subjects, developed on glass plates for projection viewing. Likely created between 1915 and 1920, the slides capture the missionary work of a small group of religious sisters and Jesuits, including Fathers Louis J. Fusz, Joseph P. Lynam, Joseph Kemper, Rickard Rooney, Arthur F. Versavel, and Brother Michael J. Hanrahan; the life and customs of the people of Belize, including Maya and Garifuna communities; industries of the nation of Belize, including logging and farming; interior and exterior view of churches and school buildings, including Holy Redeemer Parish and St. John's College; as well as landscapes and seascapes of inland and coastal Belize. Many of these photographs feature Father Louis J. Fusz and may have been taken by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, which published a Sunday magazine article about Fusz's ministry in 1916, or the slides may have been commissioned by the Fusz family. While all the slides were created in the early twentieth century, it is possible that two or more collections of slides by different photographers were combined by Belize missionaries or Missouri Province staff.

Access: Access to the original slide is limited to special appointments because the images are fragile. Materials in this subseries have been digitized and are available online via the Jesuit Archives' [Digital Collections and Resources](#).
