



Smithsonian
National Museum of Natural History

Guide to the White Fathers photograph collection

National Anthropological Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Anthropological Archives
Title:	White Fathers photograph collection
Date:	undated
Identifier:	NAA.1998-83
Creator:	White Fathers
Extent:	21.75 Linear feet
Language:	Photograph captions are in English and French.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was received from the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the Society of Missionaries of Africa in September 1998.

Separated Materials

118 titled 16mm film prints and related materials were transferred to the Human Studies Film Archives.

Related Materials

Another collection of photographs relating to the White Fathers is held by Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives at the National Museum of African Art.

Records of the Society are maintained by the White Fathers Generalate in Rome. For additional information, see: *Annexes des Archives de la Maison généralice des Pères blancs* (Rome: [s.n.], 1970) and René X. Lamey, "Archives de la Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique (Pères Blancs)" in *Guida delle fonti per la storia dell'Africa a sud del Sahara negli archivi della Santa Sede e negli archivi ecclesiastici d'Italia* / a cura di Lajos Pâasztor. (Zug, Switzerland: Inter Documentation Co., c1983, pp. 388-413).

Preferred Citation

White Father photograph collection, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

The White Fathers photograph collection is open for research.

Access to the White Fathers photograph collection requires an appointment.

Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

Historical Note

The Society of Missionaries of Africa, commonly known as the White Fathers or Pères blancs, was founded in 1868 by Cardinal Charles M. Lavigerie, the first Catholic Archbishop of Algiers. Nicknamed "White Fathers" for their distinctive habit resembling the white robes of the Algerian Arabs, their order was originally dedicated to the education and conversion of the people of Central and Northern Africa. In 1876 and 1881 two groups of missionaries were sent across the Sahara to open mission in the Sudan, but efforts failed when their African guides revolted. Over 23 missionaries died before a post was established in Timbuktu in 1890. The White Fathers also succeeded in establishing missions among the Berbers of Jurjura (Algeria), in the Sudan, Uganda, Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and the upper Congo by the 1880s. Despite resistance from local chiefs and governments, the society continued to expand, setting up hospitals, elementary, normal and technical schools and seminaries in Africa as well as training schools in Canada, Belgium, Holland, Germany and France. After World War II the society's influence declined, though it still operates today.

Scope and Contents

The collection includes approximately 20,000 black-and-white photographic prints, most ranging in size between 3x5 and 5x7 inches. The verso of many of the prints have English or French captions affixed to them. Crop marks and comments occasionally appear on the prints.

The original arrangement of the collection, which has been retained, was intended to facilitate the retrieval of images for the society's publications, such as *White Fathers Magazine*. The collection is divided into four series: 1) African prints arranged by subject; 2) prints of the society's missionaries arranged by name; 3) photographs of Europe and America, including the Washington, D.C. headquarters and its staff; and 4) miscellaneous materials, including commercial postcard collections in their original wrappings, photographic negatives (many arranged by photographer's name) and unlabeled rolls of negatives. This register describes only the photographs of Africa in Series 1, which comprise about 80% of the collection. The subject headings reproduced here were typed verbatim from the original file separators. The abbreviation s.f. refers to a subject file, while l.f. refers to a large file or broad category of prints. [The archivist's annotations are enclosed in square brackets.]

The photographs depict a wide variety of themes and subjects. Catholic religious life is well represented in the collection. Native African religious practices are also represented, but are found under subject headings such as Witch Doctors Witch Craft. A large number of images relate to education, construction projects, handicrafts, flora and fauna. African personalities, both religious and secular, are also depicted. Countries represented include: Algeria, Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rhodesia (check), Rwanda (Ruanda-Urundi), Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia The greatest number of prints concern Ghana, followed by Tanzania. A smaller number of prints concern Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Mozambique and Senegal.

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or National Anthropological Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Places:

Africa