



The following is the finding aid for the Archbishop Michael Heiss collection located at the Archdiocese of Milwaukee Archives. A finding aid is a catalog tool used in archives that briefly describes the material found in a collection. These records are not available digitally.

[Researchers must make an appointment with an archivist to view the material.](#)

Michael Heiss, 1818-1890

Papers, 1839-1900

MC 16

Access

Open/unrestricted

Scope and Content *a brief description of the types of materials in the collection.*

This collection of Milwaukee's second Archbishop (1881-1890) contains materials on the Bennett Law, biographical information, correspondence (1839-1891), financial records (1845-1885), legal documents (1870-1900), a manuscript on St. Peter Damian, several pastorals (1875-1887), and a folder of miscellaneous items. While the majority of the collection is in German, there are also English materials.

A large part of the collection consists of correspondence written by Heiss to his former classmate Kilian Kleiner (1839-1890). Within these lengthy letters, Heiss comments on mutual friends, work, studies, his surroundings, and relationships with others. Several letters written by Kleiner are also found within these files. All of the letters are in German. A book of newspaper clippings of published letters to Kleiner (1843-1890) and microline copies of letters from 1839-1842 are also found in the collection.

The financial records consist of miscellaneous bills and receipts. The legal document file contains deeds, Heiss' will, and the Wisconsin Supreme Court case (1882-1884) regarding the destruction of the Sinsinawa Mound church.

Biographical Note

Born in Pfahldorf, Bavaria, on April 12, 1818, Michael Heiss was ordained on October 18, 1840, in Munich, Germany. He came to Milwaukee as Archbishop Martin Henni's secretary in 1844. During his early years in Milwaukee, he erected Old St. Mary's Church and served as its pastor. He was known to make frequent, though hazardous, visits on horseback to Catholics in surrounding cities. Henni also chose Heiss to organize Saint Francis Seminary and serve as its first rector. At Saint Francis, Heiss trained German-speaking priests to serve German Catholics of the archdiocese. Following his 12 years at the seminary, he was named the first bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse in 1868.

Amid controversy between the German-speaking and English-speaking Catholics of the Milwaukee archdiocese, who fought over German control of the archdiocese, he was named coadjutor of Milwaukee on April 9, 1880, and succeeded Archbishop Henni on September 7, 1881.

During his administration, Heiss stabilized the finances of the archdiocese, introduced the parish tax, regularized the legal status of parishes, and formed the first archdiocesan school board. He also encouraged American-born women in the archdiocese to enter religious communities and allowed more English to be taught in parish schools.

Archbishop Heiss died on March 26, 1890, after nine years in office. He is buried, according to his own wishes, beneath the chapel at Saint Francis Seminary. His Motto was: Gratia et Pax. "Grace and Peace"

General Note

See The Salesianum, 1914-1919, and 1960-1963 for translated copies of Heiss' letters to Kilian Kleiner. Also consult bishop's circular letters in Chancery files.

Box and Folder List *This is a list of folders names within the collection. The folders have been arranged alphabetically. "B" is an abbreviation for box and "F" is an abbreviation for folder. This list will help the researcher narrow down exactly what folder they want to look at.*

Box	Folder	Folder Title
B 1	F 1	Bennett Law
B 1	F 2	Biographical Information
B 1	F 3	Correspondence, n.d., 1868-1891
B 1	F 4	Correspondence, Copies and Translations, 1867-1886
B 1	F 5	Correspondence, Kilian Kleiner, 1839-1859 (In German)
B 1	F 6	Correspondence, Kilian Kleiner, 1860-1890 (In German)
B 1	F 7	Correspondence, Kilian Kleiner, published letters, book of newspaper clippings, 1843-1890 (In German)
B 1	F 8	Correspondence, Kilian Kleiner, 1839-1842, Microline Copies
B 1	F 9	Financial records, n.d., 1845-1885
B 1	F 10	Legal documents, 1870-1900
B 1	F 11	Manuscript, St. Peter Damian, n.d., pages 1-50 (In German)
B 2	F 1	Manuscript, St. Peter Damian, n.d., pages 51-142 (In German)
B 2	F 2	Miscellaneous
B 2	F 3	Pastorals, 1875, 1885, 1887