With Me Every Step of the Way: The Library Behind My Senior Thesis

By Michael Boisture

Two weeks ago, I submitted my undergraduate senior thesis to Columbia's Department of History. My thesis, titled *The Faith of a Nation: The Catholic Church, Irish Nationalism, and Family Welfare During the Dublin Lockout and Beyond, 1913-1918*, offered a political and cultural examination of the Catholic Church's welfare-based institutions in Ireland and how they intertwined with Irish nationalist sentiments amidst a pivotal moment in modern Irish history – namely, the monumental labor dispute known as the 1913 Dublin Lockout. Thinking about this yearlong project, it cannot be understated how much help Columbia University Libraries provided me with throughout this endeavor. The library was there for me every step of the way, from my first meeting with librarians for brainstorming topics to finding last-minute materials from CLIO's digital collections.

My first point of contact with Columbia Libraries was simply talking to a librarian at Butler's "Ask a Librarian" drop-in hours. The librarian on duty not only talked over my ideas and brainstormed with me but also connected me with librarian John Tofanelli, the subject specialist in British history, and showed me the library's Guide to European and UK Libraries, Archives, and Research Centers. These resources were especially important because I had received the Department of History's Fellowship for Research in European Archives, which meant that I would spend six weeks during the summer of 2024 independently conducting research in Dublin. In preparation for this entirely new experience, Dr. Tofanelli and Ian Beilin hosted a workshop for those of us in the fellowship to teach us how to use the library's resources to seek out archives and primary source collections relevant to our projects. Dr. Tofanelli also consulted with me individually and showed me how to both access the Bibliography of British

and Irish History through CLIO and effectively search it for sources I could use. Furthermore, he informed me about one of the several archives in Dublin that I conducted my research at, the Irish Labour History Society. In other words, I could not have been as successful as I was in conducting research in Dublin without Columbia's librarians and the library's resources.

The library's more traditional resources – its extensive print and digital collections – were also particularly helpful for me. I checked out dozens of print books, sometimes venturing into the stacks myself but more often requesting pick-up from Butler's circulation desk. I obtained some books via Borrow Direct, such as *William Martin Murphy* by Thomas Morrissey, which came from the off-site shared collection with Harvard. When I went home for winter break, I used the Book Scan Center on the third floor of Butler to scan book chapters that I needed to read and consult while I worked on my thesis, thus allowing me to continue writing over break without having to bring an entire suitcase full of books home with me. Similarly, I requested scans of book sections like Kate Cowan's chapter in *A Capital in Conflict: Dublin City and the 1913 Lockout* which was lent through Interlibrary Loan from Washington State University. Columbia's digital collections were useful, too. Moreover, through CLIO, I found countless scholarly articles on JSTOR, the 1916-17 editions of the *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac*, and useful newspaper articles via ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Perhaps most useful of all was a library workshop I attended – "Citation Management with Zotero" – which taught me everything I needed to know about Zotero, a reference management software that was invaluable for organizing my secondary sources and creating my thesis's footnotes and bibliography. Throughout my project, I found myself thinking how lucky I was to have a library which could connect me to such a vast pool of resources, even with a topic as specific as mine.

Even now that I've completed my thesis, I'm reaping one last benefit from the library in the form of a free gym membership, when each day I haul a bag full of borrowed books from my dorm to Butler to return them. However, the impact Columbia University Libraries has had on me will extend beyond my time at Columbia. Ever since I got a work-study job as a library assistant at The Met's Watson Library, I have hoped to pursue a master's in library science after graduating and become a librarian myself. Now, writing this thesis has only made me more certain about choosing this career path. Now that I've experienced just how extensive and incredibly useful the library is, I want to be on the other side of the circulation desk and provide the same friendly service and expertise that I received throughout this project.