

The Father Yves Bertrais Collection

The Father Yves Bertrais Collection is a truly unique resource for Hmong studies. A Frenchman, Fr. Bertrais was a lifelong Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) missionary who worked with the Hmong for more than 55 years beginning in 1950, first in Laos until 1975, then, in particular, in China, French Guiana, the Philippines, and Thailand until his retirement due to ill health in December 2005, dying in France in May 2007.

Fr. Bertrais holds a very special place within Hmong studies as one of three co-creators in 1952 of the groundbreaking Hmong Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA), now the most widely used Hmong script worldwide. Moreover, he in particular most actively promoted cultural understanding and Hmong literacy by directing the publication of a seminal series of Hmong language/studies books from the 1960s on. His Collection is highlighted by copies (and drafts) of these, his diaries and handbooks, photographs, exhibit material, and maps, for example, as well as thousands of letters to him and/or his OMI mission, plus many copies of the replies to them.

Other notable aspects of the Collection include photo albums of Hmong life in French Guiana, first settled in 1977, and of trips to Hmong communities in China beginning in 1985, as well as audio tapes of some of the Radio Veritas broadcasts for Asia prepared under Fr. Bertrais' direction. Also of special mention are photographs of Father Bertrais and the other two RPA co-creators from the special Hmong RPA Founders celebration held in Milwaukee in 1997 honoring them.

The Collection, housed in the Special Collections unit in Memorial Library, was received by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries on a permanent loan basis from the OMI in August 2007.



Fr. Bertrais, Kiu Katiam village, Laos, 1957 (from the Joel M. Halpern Laotian Slide Collection)