Finding Aid to the Thomas J. Cahill Papers 1936-2002 SFH 15

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2010
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Creator: Cahill, Thomas J.
Physical Description: 7 cartons, 2 oversize flat boxes (10.7 Cubic Feet)
Contributing Institution: San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library
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Abstract: Cahill's papers document his professional and public life from the 1940s-until his death in 2001, tracing the trajectory of his career as a San Francisco Police Department officer, homicide inspector, deputy chief of police, and chief of police; as well as his public life after he retired from SFPD, when he continued to be a prominent public figure and public speaker. The collection consists of police records, mainly from an undercover vice investigation from the 1950s; correspondence; scheduling diaries; speech materials; papers from conferences and events; certificates and awards; newspaper clippings and publications, the bulk of which feature or include Cahill; photographs, and audiorecordings.

Physical Location: The collection is stored onsite.
Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English.

Access
The collection is open for research. Photographs may be viewed during the San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection's open hours.

Publication Rights
All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the City Archivist.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Thomas J. Cahill Papers (SFH 15), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Provenance

Related Materials
Researchers are encouraged to see also the San Francisco History Center’s Biography Files for a file on Cahill and the Mayoral Papers of George Christopher, Jack Shelley, and Joseph Alioto for further documents concerning issues and events of the time.

Processing Information

Separated Materials
Photographs have been transferred to the San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection.

The following publications have been transferred to the San Francisco History Center’s book collection and may be found in the online catalog: The San Francisco Committee on Crime, Moses Lasky and William H. Orrick, Jr., Co-Chairmen. A Report on the San Francisco Police Department, Part I: The Eighth Report of the Committee. San Francisco: June 9, 1971. 163 pp.

Biography
Thomas J. Cahill started his working life humbly as an ice-delivery man in San Francisco in 1931. By 1958 he had become San Francisco's Chief of Police, responsible for the oldest police force west of the Mississippi River. Cahill focused his ambitions on making San Francisco a safer city, instituting novel and sometimes controversial approaches, working with the FBI and U.S. Congress, and addressing scores of audiences throughout his career and retirement to discuss crime control and prevention.
Cahill was born in Chicago in 1910, though he spent most of his early life in Ballylarkin, County Kilkenny, Ireland, where his grandfather had a 165-acre farm. Cahill's father left Ireland for Chicago as a young man but decided shortly after Cahill
turned two to return to Ireland. Cahill was educated at Callan Christian Boys School and also at Ring College, in County Waterford, Ireland, where he trained as a teacher. Cahill also learned to speak, read, and write Gaelic fluently. Even though he was raised in Ireland, Cahill grew up listening to his father enthral neighbors and friends with stories about America. Cahill promised himself he would return one day.

On February 2, 1930, when he was nineteen, Cahill began his journey to the U.S., traveling with a cousin who was returning to his father's ranch in Alhambra, California. The Great Depression had only recently begun but was still causing record unemployment, and Cahill found few jobs on his own. He worked on his uncle's ranch before heading north to San Francisco, where he tried to join the police force. However, regulations required applicants to have lived in San Francisco for at least five years before applying.

Instead, Cahill found work delivering ice blocks. In this job, Cahill learned "every nook and cranney" of San Francisco (O'Riordan), knowledge that became handy when he served as a patrol officer. After Cahill realized electric refrigerators would soon replace iceboxes, and with the encouragement of his new wife, Margaret, he entered the police academy, starting the six-week course in July 1942.

At the police academy, Cahill's fellow cadets named him likeliest to become police chief (see Series 3, Public Relations and Research). After graduating from the academy, Cahill patrolled streets as an officer in the Potrero Division. By 1950 he had become an inspector in the SFPD's homicide detail, working on at least one important case with the man who would become the next police chief, Francis (Frank) Ahern.

Mafia-related crime, such as murders and bookmaking, were one of Cahill's concerns as a police officer and, later, as a homicide inspector. After a man's garroted body was found inside a car trunk in the Marina, Cahill and Ahern educated themselves thoroughly in Mafia connections, names, and activities in the U.S. The two believed that the murder had been a Mafia killing.

Their investigative work earned them nationwide attention. In 1950, Cahill and Ahern testified in the San Francisco visit by the Senate Crime Investigating Committee, an inquiry instigated by Senator Estes Kefauver (Tenn.). Both inspectors won high praise from Kefauver's committee, having compiled the most extensive collection of information about the Mafia that the committee had seen.

Frank Ahern became Chief of Police in 1956, naming Cahill his Deputy Chief of Police shortly after. Ahern's tenure as chief was brief, ending on September 1, 1958, when he died at a baseball game at the now-demolished Seal Stadium. Mayor George Christopher named Cahill Chief of Police shortly after Ahern's death, on September 5, 1958.

One of the innovative approaches Cahill took as police chief was to introduce police community relations programs, which allowed citizens an official, public forum in which to discuss their opinions – negative or positive – about the police force. The first such programs in San Francisco were in the Potrero, Northern, and Haight Ashbury-Golden Gate Park Divisions, the latter being introduced in January 1963. Cahill also introduced Tactical Crime Prevention Squads and a Canine Unit, explaining that dogs were much easier to stop than bullets.

Cahill was active in safety and crime-related concerns outside the SFPD. He served on President Lyndon B. Johnson's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice from July 1965 to June 1967, appearing on Meet the Press to discuss the Commission's findings. He also served as president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police from October 1968 to the following October.

Urban rioting, increasingly violent protests, armed militias, rising crime, and the lowering level of respect held for police officers challenged Cahill in his final years as police chief. Reacting to rising crime rates, Cahill encouraged the public to "rise up and support law enforcement" and urged the press to publicize police accomplishments rather than failures ("Chief Cahill in Strong Talk"). However, Cahill's exhortations no longer resonated so strongly with audiences. In the 1950s, Cahill told high school students they could choose one of two paths – one path leading to an upstanding life and the other to the electric chair. By the mid-1960s, such speeches were no longer successful.

Yet Cahill did not rely on pleas to the public to reduce crime and violence. He also researched possible sources and ramifications of civil unrest, preparing a remarkable report, The Outlook for Civil Disobedience, in 1967. In addition, the SFPD prepared 128 Hours: A Report of the Civil Disturbance in the City & County of San Francisco. This report presents the SFPD's examination of police, government, and individual action that occurred after a police officer fatally shot an African-American youth in Hunter's Point on September 27, 1966.

Cahill retired as police chief on February 4, 1970. Then-mayor Joseph Alioto had requested Cahill's retirement, as the mayor sought to infuse the police department with "new blood" (Raudebaugh). San Francisco, like almost every major U.S. city, had been experiencing a relentless increase in crime; its police force had also not changed enough under Cahill to attract and retain qualified police officers. Under the existing seniority system, new recruits faced seven or eight years of night duty. This system also required new recruits to wait twelve to fifteen years before being promoted to sergeant.
After leaving the SFPD, Cahill continued to work in the law-enforcement field and serve the public. He joined the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company as Chief Special Agent, a position he held until July 1, 1975, shortly after he reached his mandatory retirement age. He also ran successfully for a position on the San Francisco Charter Revision Committee. Cahill lived a highly public life, accepting frequent offers to address various civic, community, and professional groups.

Cahill died of heart failure on October 12, 2002, at age 92. Despite his advancing years, he continued to be actively involved in public concerns until his death, making speeches and writing letters. He was survived by his third wife, Elizabeth (Wright), and four children: Thomas, Jr.; John; Edward; and Elizabeth.

Sources:
O'Riordan, Mikel. "Pillars of the Community," The Irish Herald, October 1996.
Ostrow, Al. "Detective Team on Trail of the Mafia," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, February 20, 1951.
"Stage Is Set for the Kefauver Committee's Big Show", New York World-Telegram and Sun, March 10, 1951.

Scope and Contents
Cahill's papers document his professional and public life from the 1940s until his death in 2001, tracing the trajectory of his career as a San Francisco Police Department officer, homicide inspector, deputy chief of police, and chief of police; as well as his public life after he retired from SFPD, when he continued to be a prominent public figure and public speaker. The collection consists of police records, mainly from an undercover vice investigation from the 1950s; correspondence; scheduling diaries; speech materials; papers from conferences and events; certificates and awards; newspaper clippings and publications, the bulk of which feature or include Cahill; photographs, and audiorecordings.

Most of the photographs document events held in honor of Cahill, with a few photographs from trips or enclosed with correspondence. Occasions include a testimonial dinner on June 23, 1967, the Hall of Justice rededication ceremony of March 10, 1994, and Cahill's 90th birthday party. A small number of photos are unidentified and/or undated and have been arranged in a separate series. Many of the photographs have been removed from scrapbooks and photo albums: photographs from the testimonial dinner, June 23, 1967 were originally housed in two albums; the Hall of Justice rededication ceremony photos were housed in three albums; and photos from Cahill's trip to Buenos Aires, Dec. 1-18, 1968 are still mounted on the disbound album pages.

Sound recordings are included in the police records of Series 1 and as part of Cahill's professional activities in Series 3. While much of the material is partially or completely unidentified, portions that have been identified are described below in Series descriptions.

Arrangement

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Vice control -- California -- San Francisco.
Law enforcement -- United States.
San Francisco (Calif.) -- Social conditions.
Sound recordings.
Police chiefs -- California -- San Francisco.
Police chiefs -- California -- San Francisco -- Photographs.
San Francisco (Calif.), Police Dept
Cahill, Thomas J.
Cahill, Thomas J. -- Archives

Technical Requirements
Audiorecordings recorded in multiple formats, including wire spools, Memovox, reel-to-reel tapes, and phonographic discs (33 1/3 and 78 rpm).  

Finding Aid to the Thomas J. Cahill Papers 1936-2002
San Francisco Police Department Records Series 1 1949-1970 bulk

Arrangement
Arranged by type of record, then chronologically.

Scope and Contents

The undercover vice investigation, led by Head of the Super Vice Squad Frank Ahern, (who was partners with Cahill as a homicide inspector and was later promoted to Chief) includes correspondence, transcripts, and partially-identified audio recordings. Most of the material seems to be documentation gathered by an undercover operative investigating prostitution and bookie rings, gambling, narcotics, and homosexuals. There were a series of public trials around 1956 based on the information obtained through the investigation's wiretaps, in which Mabel Malotte and Inez Burns both figure prominently.

Audio includes several partially-identified or unidentified wire spools and reel-to-reel tapes, including a set of seven reels housed in an envelope labeled "Homicide detail," with a note to Cahill enclosed from John B. Hood. Some of the audio might match up to the transcripts in this series.

Vice investigation: Internal Documents 1954-1959
Vice Investigation: Transcripts 1954-1959

Vice Investigation: Correspondence 1954-1959
Memos 1954-1970
Press Releases 1957-1970
Audiorecordings 1949-1956?

Scope and Contents
6/7 "Homicide detail" (7 reel-to-reels), [195?] Box 9 Memovox discs sent to Inspector Frank Ahern (11 discs), [195?]
6/8 "Hoodlum organization" (reel-to-reel), Apr. 22, 1956 6/9 "Tape of conversation with Chief" (reel-to-reel), undated 6/10 Unidentified recording (reel-to-reel), undated

Correspondence Series 2 1950-1999

Arrangement
Arranged chronologically.

Scope and Contents
Incoming and outgoing correspondence, mostly concerning Cahill's promotions and appointments, speaking engagements and public appearances, and work in professional associations and government commissions. Several folders contain letters, cards, and telegrams of congratulations on his appointment to Deputy Chief in 1956 and Chief in 1958, including one disbound scrapbook devoted to Cahill's appointment as Chief. Notable items include: a copy of General Order No. 69, dated Sept. 10, 1958 and a letter from Richard Nixon thanking Cahill for his letter regarding J. Edgar Hoover's death. The series includes a few photographs that were enclosed with correspondence, now filed separately: Visit to Waterford Garda Barracks, Ireland (Aug. 29, 1969), Cahill and unidentified man in antique car (undated), and John F. Kennedy, Caroline Kennedy, and John F. Kennedy, Jr. (undated). Please see Appendix B for corresponding folders.
Professional Activities Series 3 1951-2000

Arrangement
Arranged by type of activity or document, then chronologically.

Scope and Content
Scheduling diaries; speeches and interviews; papers documenting Cahill's attendance at conferences, events, and trips, as well as his bids for public office; typescripts; certificates and awards; biographical sketches, and SFPD ephemera. Includes photographs and audiorecordings documenting various speeches, interviews, events, and trips.

Scheduling Diaries 1957-1969
Physical Description: 7 folders
Scope and Contents
Includes one scheduling diary of Chief Ahern, 1958.

Speeches and Interviews 1951-1995
Scope and Contents
Speech materials consist mostly of undated handwritten notes, along with typescripts, drafts, and some speeches of other people. Includes a a few police photographs that accompanied a speech on crime from the 1950s; a phonograph recording of Cahill and Ahern with Senator Kefauver and Senate staffer George Reedy in March 1951 for the Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce; a transcript and phonograph recording of Cahill's appearance on Meet the Press on Feb. 19, 1967; a reel-to-reel audiorecording of a speech Cahill made at a testimonial dinner for Archbishop McGucken on June 16, 1967, at which Cahill was master of ceremonies; and a reel-to-reel audiorecording of an interview with Cahill conducted by a student at Red Bluff High School and published in the school newspaper on March 14, 1969.

Typescripts 1960-[1980]
Scope and Contents
Includes a typescript of Cahill's report, Outlook for Civil Disobedience, 1967.

Conferences 1955-1997
Conference: International Association of Chiefs of Police 1960
Conference: Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit 1963
Scope and Contents
This folder consists of photographs only.

Conference: California Disaster Council, Governor's Disaster Council Task Force Jan. 29, 1970
Events 1959-1994
Soviet Premier Khruschev's visit Sept. 1959
Testimonial dinner June 23, 1967
Scope and Contents
Includes materials from two scrapbooks, plus photographs from one small album and one Sheraton Hotel album.

Testimonial dinner Mar. 17, 1970
Testimonial dinner June 5, 1975
Stockton Police Facility tenth anniversary 1980
Birthdays 1990-2001
90th birthday party June 8, 2000
Scope and Contents
Includes photographs of the event at United Irish Cultural Center.
Hall of Justice Rededication Ceremony March 10, 1994  
Scope and Contents  
Includes photographs from three albums plus some loose photos.

Hibernian Newman Club Luncheon March 27, 2000  
Trip to Hawaii Oct. 1968  
Scope and Contents  
Includes photographs.

Trip to Buenos Aires, Argentina Dec. 1-18, 1968  
Scope and Contents  
Include photographs, originally housed in a photo album embossed: Buenos Aires (Republic of Argentina), December 1-18, 1968.

Trip to Ireland Aug. 1969  
Professional service: International Association of Chiefs of Police 1962  
Professional service: San Francisco Charter Commission 1978  
Professional service: Bank Advisory Board [1978?]  
Certificates and awards (oversize) 1948 and 1958  
Certificates and awards 1951-1995 and [undated]  
Press releases 1970 and 1992  
SFPD ephemera  
Biographical sketches  
Clippings and Printed Material Series 4 1936-2002  
Physical Description: 35 folders, 1 flat box  
Arrangement  
Arranged by type of document, then chronologically.  
Scope and Contents  
Includes clippings about or sent to Cahill, as well as those concerning investigations in which he was involved or topics in which he was interested. Some clippings might have been used to prepare speeches. Clippings sent by the San Francisco Police Credit Union have orange tags glued to them. There is also a scrapbook/case file compiled by Pacific Telephone Company about the January 1954 kidnapping of Leonard Moskovitz, documenting the company's—and particularly Chief Special Agent Doug Hayden's—role in apprehending the kidnappers and effecting Moskovitz's release. 
Other printed materials include magazines, journals, government documents, and monographs that Cahill collected, containing articles about him or featuring topics about which he was concerned. A few items are written or co-written by him in his capacity as Police Chief or commission member, including: 128 Hours: A Report of the Civil Disturbance in the City and County of San Francisco (1966), published by the SFPD in the wake of the riots spurred by the police shooting of an African American youth in Hunters Point; and The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society and Supplemental Statement on Constitutional Limitations, both issued in 1967 by Lyndon B. Johnson's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, on which Cahill served.

Clippings 1936-2002 bulk  
Periodicals: Police Chief June 1958-2001  
Periodicals: Miscellaneous titles 1960-1968
Periodicals: University of San Francisco 1969-1980
Periodicals: San Francisco Police Department yearbook 1982
Government documents: 1960-1971
Newsletters and pamphlets 1940-1997 and [undated]
Government documents: 1960-1971
Newsletters and pamphlets 1940-1997 and [undated]

Physical Description: 4 folders, 1 oversize folder
Scope and Contents
Consists of photographs that are not identified as being part of other series. Most of the photographs are described as part of other series; please see other series descriptions and container list for further information.

Arrangement
Arranged chronologically.

Photographs transferred to San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection Appendix B

Visit to Waterford Garda Barracks, Ireland Aug. 29, 1969
General
Removed from Box 2 Folder 13.

Cahill and unidentified man in antique car, undated
General
Removed from Box 2 Folder 17.

John F. Kennedy, Caroline, and John F. Jr. Kennedy 2/18 undated
General
Removed from Box 2 Folder 18.

Police photographs from speech on crime 1950s
General

Removed from Box 3 Folder 3.

box 7, folder 5

**Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit 8th Annual Conference, Los Angeles April 1963**

General

Removed from Box 3.

box 7, folder 16

**Testimonial dinner, small album June 23, 1967**

General

Removed from Box 4 Folder 8

box 7, folder 7-8

**Testimonial dinner, Sheraton Hotel album June 23, 1967**

General

Removed from Box 4 Folder 8

box 7, folder 9-17

**Hall of Justice re-dedication ceremony albums 1-3 March 10, 1994**

General

Removed from Box 4 Folder 13

box 7, folder 18

**Hall of Justice re-dedication ceremony March 10, 1994**

box 7, folder 19

**90th birthday party at United Irish Cultural Center June 9, 2000**

General

Removed from Box 4 Folder 15.

box 7, folder 20

**Trip to Hawaii mid-October 1968**

General
Removed from Box 4 Folder 16

box 7, folder 21-22

Trip to Buenos Aires, Argentina from album) Dec. 1-18, 1968

General

Removed from Box 4 Folder 17

box 7, folder 23

Miscellaneous photographs 1962-2000

box 7, folder 24-26, box 8

Undated photographs

box 8

Oversized magazine and newspaper clippings Appendix C