

**William Breton Catholic last rites prayer shadow box
MCC-00447**

Total boxes: 1
Cubic feet: 1.6ft

Prepared by
Anne Chamberland
Acadian Archives / Archives acadiennes
University of Maine at Fort Kent
Fort Kent, Maine
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William Breton Catholic last rites prayer shadow box (MCC-00447)

Shelf List Number: AX-447

Collection Overview

Creator

William Breton

Dates

Circa 1900

Extent

1 large box

Provenance

Material was acquired from William Breton from Fort Kent, Maine

Language

English

French

Italian

Conservation Notes

Individual items were wrapped in tissue paper for protection. The last rites prayer box was placed in a large archival box.

Conditions Governing Access and Use

Restrictions

Access: No restrictions

Physical: No restrictions

Technical: No restrictions

Rights Statement

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Recommended Citation

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Collection Description

Historical and Biographical Information

Among the material items that might occupy the pre-Vatican II American Catholic home, regardless for the most part of the occupant's ethnicity or familial nation of origin. The last rites

cabinet or viaticum (Latin for “supply of provisions for a journey”) asserted a powerful daily and nightly presence. Located usually in the bedroom, these pictorial objects stored utensils to provide for the postmortem transit of faithful Catholics from this world to the next. Over the course of a lifetime, these cabinets reminded beholders of the religious care of human bodies; of associations with the physical pains suffered by Jesus; of divine sustenance in time of illness, trial, and death; and of the hope of bodily resurrection. By the late nineteenth century, domestic viaticum cabinets took several shapes, some intended to be installed in or hung from the bedroom wall, others designed to sit on top of a bureau or dresser, in either case creating a home shrine or altar. The cabinets were made in numerous materials, with wood, metal, glass, and plaster, most often in some combination, numbering among frequent media of construction.

While these cabinets and sets could be acquired through commercial ecclesiastical supply catalogs, they could also be individualized. Surviving sets indicate that they both lost and gained items over time. Small glass bottles for holy water and oil, candles, absorbent cotton, a linen napkin, a spoon, a cup, a crucifix, and one or two small plates, often bearing the IHS monogram of Jesus, numbered among the objects generally included at time of purchase, along with a sheet of instructions for use. Consumers made their own contributions to the sets as well. Bottles of purportedly healing waters from the site of the Marian visitation at Lourdes, France, show up in some sets. Devotional or prayer cards are another frequent addition, as are religious medals.¹[\[1\]](#)

The Last Rites are officially called the Viaticum, the sacrament of the dying. In Roman Catholicism, the Last Rites consist of a priest administering the Eucharist to a dying person. A lay person who has been designated an Eucharist Minister can also offer the Viaticum. According to the Church's Canon Law, the Christian faithful who are in danger of death from any cause are to be nourished by Holy Communion in the form of Viaticum. Even if they have been nourished by Holy Communion on the same day, however, those in danger of death are strongly urged to receive communion again.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of a “Catholic Last Rites Prayer Shadow Box” also called “Last Rites cabinet” that is used by Catholic priests to administer the last rite, which is the Sacrament of the Anointing of the sick also called Extreme Unction. In many Catholic homes, a last rite box was made available to a priest visiting a sick or a dying person. This Last Rites cabinet measures about 23 inches long by 13 inches wide by 3¼ inches deep. It is made of brown stained wood and is in good condition. In the enclosed glass-front of the [display case](#) is the exhibition of Mary holding her son, Jesus, after he was brought down from the cross. The box has a compartment in the bottom showing a scene of the Last Supper and holding necessary items for the priest to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing

Arrangement

Not applicable

Separated Materials (If Applicable)

Not applicable

¹ <https://maycor.yale.edu/conversations/constellations/viaticum-last-rites-cabinet-sick-call-set>. Sally M. Promey, "Viaticum, Last Rites Cabinet, Sick Call Set," Constellation, in *Conversations: An Online Journal of the Center for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion* (2014), [doi:10.22332/con.cons.2014.1](https://doi.org/10.22332/con.cons.2014.1)

Subject Headings

Catholic church

Christian antiques

Sacraments

Sacraments--Extreme unction

Spiritual life

Viaticum--Catholic church

Related Materials

Not applicable

Collection Inventory

The compartment holds the following:

- 1 spoon, 5 ³/₄ in. long with the imprint of a shell and a crucifix.
- 1 small rounded glass bottle to hold holy water imprinted with a crucifix and the host in the background, 3 in. x 2¹/₂ in.
- 1 small elongated bottle for Holy Water, 3 ¹/₈ in. high.
- 1 black wooden crucifix, 6 in. x 3 in.
- 1 small stainless steel plate 4 ⁷/₈ inch in diameter.
- 1 small box for 'absorbent cotton'.
- 2 small candles.
- 2 candle holders painted gold to be placed in the holders on the front of the box.
- 2 long candles in a box with inscription "Chandelles Sacramentelles pour la Sainte Communion et l'Extrême-onction.