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## Obituary--Charles W. Polzer

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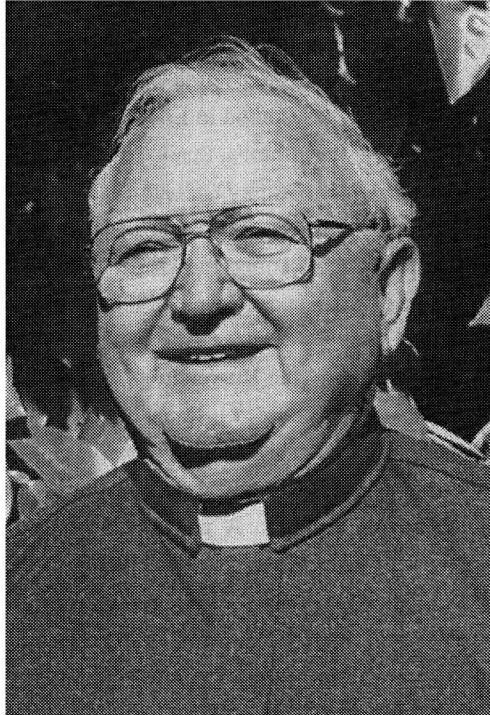
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## Charles W. Polzer

Charles W. Polzer, S.J., died in Los Gatos, CA on Tuesday, November 4, 2003, at age 72. Dr. Polzer was born in San Diego, where he attended St. Augustine High School. Upon graduation from Santa Clara University in 1952, he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Los Gatos, CA. His course of studies took him to St. Louis University, MO, and Alma College of Santa Clara University, in Los Gatos, CA. Following his ordination into the priesthood in Los Angeles in 1964, he undertook a period of post-ordination studies in Córdoba, Spain. From 1958 to 1961, while studying for the priesthood, he taught at Brophy College Preparatory School in Phoenix, Arizona, where he developed the keen interest in the history of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico that became his life's work. Polzer continued his education at the University of Arizona, receiving a Ph.D. in history and anthropology in 1972.

In 1973, he joined the faculty at the University of Arizona and served as curator of ethnohistory at the Arizona State Museum. In 1975, he established the Documentary Relations of the Southwest (DRSW) program, a project dedicated to assembling the enormous but widely dispersed documentary record generated by the Spanish empire and Mexican republic. A pioneer in electronic management of archival data, Polzer developed computerized databases that include summaries of Spanish documents, keyed for retrieval of individuals, places, and ethnic groups. At the present time, the DRSW Master Index is accessible online and contains more than 17,000 entries, covering approximately a half million pages of primary documentation from the Spanish colonial period (1530s–1821).

Polzer also initiated an ambitious documentary publication program, with a series of edited volumes containing transcriptions and translations of documents concerning the military presidios and militias on the northern frontier of New Spain. A second series presents documents about particular tribal groups encountered by the Spanish, such as the Comcaác (Seri), the Rarámuri (Tarahumara) and, currently in preparation, the Hopi. The document collections and publications have received consistent, generous support from the NEH and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The DRSW project has vastly increased the accessibility of Spanish and Mexican documents concerning the portions of the United States and northern Mexico formerly part of the Spanish empire. While directing the DRSW project for almost 25 years, Polzer mentored, trained and supported over 200 graduate students and dozens



Charles W. Polzer

of undergraduates at the University of Arizona. A long-standing member of the ADE, Polzer insisted that all of his long-term editorial assistants attend the Institute for the Editing of Historical Documents at Madison, WI.

Polzer focused his personal scholarly research on the 17th- and 18th-century Jesuit missions of Sonora, Baja California, California, and Arizona, with a special emphasis on the life of Father Eusebio Kino, S.J., the founder of the Jesuit missions of northwestern New Spain. He wrote or edited twelve books and numerous articles on borderland history; a preliminary bibliography includes approximately 50 entries. Polzer participated in the successful international search for Kino's grave in Magdalena, Sonora, and spearheaded the effort to promote Kino's beatification. He was a member of the American Division of the Jesuit Historical Institute (JHI) and was instrumental in bringing part of the JHI's extensive library of books and micro-filmed documents relating to the history of northern New Spain to the Arizona State Museum. In 1978, Polzer was honored by the University of Sonora, and in 1982, by the State of Arizona, for fostering goodwill between the people of Arizona and Mexico. In 1985, President Reagan appointed him commissioner on the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission, sponsored by the U.S. Congress. In 1987, King Juan Carlos of Spain made him a member of the Order of Isabela La Catolica, in recognition of distinguished research on the history and culture of Spain in the Americas.

In addition to scholarly work, Polzer was a strong supporter of public interest in borderland history. In 1965, he was among the founding members of the Southwestern Mission Research Center (SMRC), a non-profit corporation dedicated to support and encouragement of research and publication on the history of the southwestern borderlands. The *SMRC Newsletter*, now called the *SMRC Revista*, has been published continually since February 1967, featuring brief articles, book reviews and announcements of events of interest. Polzer participated in the development of the ever-popular SMRC Mission Tours to the missions of Sonora founded by Father Kino. A pilot, gardener, golfer, and gourmet cook, Polzer's main recreation was travel throughout Mexico and the Southwest, as well as to Spain, and the valleys of northern Italy where Kino lived as a child. An intrepid traveler, he often camped in remote areas of his beloved borderland deserts and mountains accessible only by four-wheel drive vehicles. Polzer enjoyed saying Mass in unusual settings. Participants in his tours will never forget dramatic, moonlit masses amidst the stone ruins of a Spanish mission or before a snow-capped Mexican volcano. In the early 1970s, Polzer founded Kino House, a Jesuit residence in Tucson, where he and his trusted dachshunds and beagles offered gracious Southwestern hospitality to visitors from all points of the globe. Polzer, who now joins the company of distinguished Jesuit schol-

ars of the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico, will be remembered for modernizing the methodology of ethnohistorical research on the Spanish colonial New World.

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Diana Hadley, Director, Office of Ethnohistorical Research, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, with contributions by Father John Martin, S.J., of Los Gatos, California, and Raymond H. Thompson, Director Emeritus, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona.