

January 1987

Reviews, Critiques and Annotations

Linda M. Matthews
Emory University

Les Hough
Georgia State University

Terry S. Latour
University of Southern Mississippi

Martin I. Elzy
Carter Presidential Library

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Matthews, Linda M.; Hough, Les; Latour, Terry S.; and Elzy, Martin I., "Reviews, Critiques and Annotations," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 5 no. 1 (1987).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol5/iss1/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

REVIEWS, CRITIQUES, AND ANNOTATIONS

Archives and Manuscripts: Law. By Gary M. Peterson and Trudy Huskamp Peterson. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1985. Pp. 112. Paper. \$9 SAA members, \$13 nonmembers.

This manual fills a void in the literature of archival administration and should be on every archivist's shelf of essential reference works. Much of the information found here is not available in any other convenient or easily accessible form, and it is certainly not obtainable in a prose style so easily understood by a nonspecialist readership.

Organized broadly around basic archival operations that have legal implications (acquisitions, appraisal, accessioning, donation and purchase, access, and reference services), the volume presents various legal issues and questions that may arise in the course of archival work, discusses the applicable laws and their possible impact, and outlines the major legal considerations involved. The authors clearly state that their aim is not to answer all questions--an impossible task--but to present the legal questions that may confront archivists, provide information on the "major types of laws governing archives," and "discuss some reasonable means of analyzing and resolving issues." The manual accomplishes these aims admirably.

It is impossible, in a brief review, to mention all of the useful and important information to be found in this excellent publication in the SAA's Basic Manual Series. An introduction on the "context of law" describes succinctly the interrelationships of

federal and state law and statutory and case law in making up the judicial structure in the United States. There is a thorough discussion, in the opening chapter, of the laws that may define records in a public agency and, in some cases, the creation and retention, if not ultimate disposition, of records in a private agency. Archivists who collect private papers will profit from the chapter on donations and purchases, which includes a treatment of tax implications and a comprehensible explanation of the tax provisions that relate to deductions for personal papers.

Considerable space, over thirty pages, is devoted to issues of access to records and the administration of access restrictions. Although much of this discussion pertains primarily to public, and mainly federal, records, the authors also treat such access issues as privacy and libel in private papers and point out the potential impact of federal laws on the administration of public documents that may reside in nonfederal repositories. There is an extensive treatment of the Freedom of Information Acts, their impact on access to federal records, and the administration of the provisions of these acts by archives.

Every member of an archives's reference staff would benefit from the discussion of legal implications of various aspects of reference services, from researcher registration and reading room surveillance to publication and copyright. Chapters on "Special Problems" and "Working with the Lawyer" deserve special mention since they present valuable summaries and explanations of topics that are either treated previously mainly in episodic or personal narratives, or not fully covered in the archival literature. The law covering authenticity of documents, particularly for use in legal proceedings, receives a brief and cogent review. In "Working with the Lawyer," the authors discuss three scenarios in which archivists may have contact with lawyers: (1) through a lawsuit, either as plaintiff or defendant, (2) through lawyers' use of an archives for legal

research, and (3) through a subpoena of certain records from an archives. Their explication goes far toward demystifying the workings of the legal process in its relationship with the archives.

Valuable citations to laws and legal cases, model forms for purchase agreements, gift and deposit agreements, and restriction and access statements, and diagrams for analyzing legal dilemmas (as in the application of the copyright act to duplication of archival materials) are found throughout the manual. There are several useful appendices, among them the American Library Association-Society of American Archivists joint statement on access to archival materials, code citations to all state open records and privacy laws, and the sections of the copyright act that relate to the use and reproduction of materials by a library or archives. A glossary of legal terms, a bibliographical essay, and explanations of the form for legal citations all add to the manual's value as a reference tool.

Archivists owe the authors, one an experienced archivist and the other an attorney knowledgeable about archival issues, a debt of gratitude for this well-written and well-organized volume packed with information, clear and sound analysis, and practical advice. They have taken a complex subject and made it intelligible, collecting and codifying a voluminous store of knowledge and published material from legal and archival sources. Some topics are not covered as thoroughly as all archivists would wish (copyright being a topic that could have taken at least half the volume), and as the authors warned, all the answers are not here. But the user is provided with legal citations and with methods of analyzing legal problems that should help resolve many potential difficulties. Larger archives should have several copies of this manual and may wish to present a copy to the institution's legal counsel.

Linda M. Matthews
Emory University

Manuscripts: The First Twenty Years. Edited by Priscilla S. Taylor. (Coedited by Herbert E. Klingelhofer, Kenneth W. Rendell, and John M. Taylor.) Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1984. Illustrations. Pp. xi, 429. \$35. Hardcover distributed by the Society of American Archivists: \$29 members, \$35 nonmembers.

Signs of the changes manifest in contemporary life are everywhere. The volume Manuscripts: The First Twenty Years presents a marvelous tool for understanding the changes in the world of the archivist and manuscript curator over the last generation and more. These essays, from the journal of the same name, describe a world in which collectors and curators lavish loving attention, often for a lifetime, on a modest body of manuscripts created either by a single individual, or a small group of individuals, often united by power or creative talent.

This world is alien to most archivists and manuscript curators of today. Much has changed since many of these articles were written in the early 1950s. Today, few repositories collect only historical materials of a narrow elite, be it political, artistic or otherwise. A far greater number and diversity of collectors and institutions are seeking to gather this wider range of historical materials. Many repositories, whether new or old, have experienced periods of financial stringency in recent years. Finally, the sheer bulk of documentation created by individuals, especially those in institutions of the late twentieth century, present unique problems for those with responsibilities for their care.

The world of the collector or curator, as presented in this volume has its strengths, along with its weaknesses. Many of the writers of this edited volume evidence a level of knowledge of the subjects of their collections to which only the researchers in the reading room of the archives of today could lay claim. In turn, this level of intimacy with a subject can result in an antiquarian obsession with detail,

which even the biographer or other scholar would find unnecessary.

Similarly, this volume evidences both strengths and weaknesses. The selections of articles for the work are excellent. Here is really a series of case studies, most treating a particular collection of manuscripts. The editor has sought to arrange the book topically, rather than chronologically, around subjects thought to be of value to the collector or curator, such as collecting practices and collecting policies. Unfortunately, several of the topics are ambiguous, with one titled "Historical Documents" and another "Manuscripts as a Key to Biography and History," and there is little difference between the nature of the contents of the two sections. This type of work does not lend itself to arrangement by broad functional areas, since nearly all the essays are narrowly focused and descriptive in nature.

Unfortunately, the volume suffers, so far as its use in answering questions on specific topics, from the absence of an index. Since most of the articles are brief and narrowly topical, this is not a serious omission, because the table of contents is both clear and complete. A more serious weakness of the volume is the lack of clarity in the reproduction of illustrations of the original manuscripts. The costs associated with photographic reproduction of such illustrations might be prohibitive, but this volume will not be as useful as it could be to many, due to this weakness. Attention to detail has been the essence of the professional life of the manuscript collectors and curators who created these essays; it is regrettable that detail is lost in this reproduction of their published work.

Despite its limiting weaknesses, this volume is a useful addition to the bookshelf of the archives, manuscript repository, or research library. The well-chosen articles introduce the reader to the world of the collector and curator, prompting thought about what changes the flood of twentieth century historical documentation has caused.

Les Hough
Georgia State University

Toward Descriptive Standards: Report and Recommendations of the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards. Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1985. Pp. 192. Paper.

As twentieth century society has become more complex and sophisticated, the records it has generated have also become more complex and increasingly voluminous. Archivists have had to abandon older, more labor intensive forms of descriptive control in favor of newer methods better suited to manage the prodigious quantity of records created. The archival profession sought relief through the use of modern technologies and computers. Yet, no panaceas were found, and the transition has been laborious and has seemingly opened a Pandora's box of problems. Many of these problems were not new; they had simply never received the attention they should have. Toward Descriptive Standards is an effort by the Bureau of Canadian Archivists to address some of these problems in the area of archival description.

The root of this effort can be traced to the report of the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives which was published in 1980. The report noted that the lack of standards for the description of archives "seriously hinders the creation of an information system at the national level." As a result, the Bureau of Canadian Archivists sought and received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to establish a Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards. The goal of this body was "to produce a set of proposals for adoption by the Canadian archival community in the area of developing standards and guidelines for the description of archival materials." In its one year of existence, the group did not achieve this goal. It discovered that the complex nature of archival description necessitated an effort beyond anything they were capable of accomplishing in such a short span of time. Therefore, the group modified its goals

and instead produced a set of recommendations which should help to establish a solid basis for the future development of descriptive standards in Canada.

The work of the group proceeded on the premise that existing practice must be thoroughly understood before guidelines or standards can be formulated. To this end they studied the theories and principles of archival description, analyzed existing standards for descriptive practice in related disciplines, and studied the current practices of archival description in Canada. The results of this work are outlined in the first three chapters of the report.

Chapter 1 attempts to establish a conceptual framework of what archival description encompasses and what archivists hope to accomplish with it. Basic assumptions regarding both archival description and the idea of standards are outlined. While some of these assumptions appear to be basic, it becomes evident elsewhere in the report that they are either not universally accepted or applied.

Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of existing standards or de facto standards in related fields. Of particular interest is a bibliography of various international and national standards as well as an annotated bibliography of other types of related standards.

One of the most enlightening sections in this report is the chapter which reports on the study of descriptive practices in Canada. Not only does it confirm that "descriptive and indexing practice is highly idiosyncratic," but it also raises questions about the level of comprehension archivists have of archival theory. Moreover, it provides concrete information about the types of descriptive finding aids being created, which data elements they contain, and for what types of records or functions they are being prepared. A review of the data in this chapter clearly supports the need for adoption of descriptive standards.

The thirty-five recommendations made by the Working Group are categorized by the types of considerations to which they apply and seem to be

arranged in a general priority order. For instance, overall principles and concepts precede recommendations on specific types of descriptive standards. Various types of records and media are addressed, as are subject indexing, information exchange, and the process of development, adoption, maintenance and implementation. An explanation and justification is provided for each individual or series or recommendations. Bear in mind that these are not recommended standards. They are proposals, which are based on accepted archival concepts and practices, for the formulation of standards. In some cases they merely recommend the formation of a committee, while in other instances they are more specific.

An additional feature of this volume is a lengthy bibliography of works related to archival description as well as the development of standards in general. Nearly half the report is devoted to this annotated bibliography which contains 267 entries. This section alone should make the report of interest to any serious archivist.

Although there will be archivists who are disappointed with this report, it has a great deal of value to the profession. The Working Group did not achieve their original goals, but they have provided ample impetus, at least for the Canadian archival community, to continue the pursuit for descriptive standards. The report also has value for archivists outside of Canada. The information, survey results, and recommendations contained in this volume are applicable on a wider scale and should stimulate archivists elsewhere to evaluate their descriptive finding aids and practices.

Copies of the report may be obtained free of charge from Terry Eastwood, Co-chairman, Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards, School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of British Columbia; Vancouver, B.C., V6T 1Y3.

Terry S. Latour
University of Southern Mississippi

Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers. Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May. New York: The Free Press (A Division of Macmillan), 1986. Pp. xxii, 329. Table, appendices, notes, index. Hardcover, \$19.95.

The Vital Past: Writings on the Uses of History. Edited by Stephen Vaughn. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985. Pp. xiii, 406. Index. Paper, \$12.95.

"So, what's it good for anyway?" That common question which started haunting most liberal arts majors, plagues them still as archivists. David Gracy, now at the University of Texas, has endeavored with missionary zeal to convert archivists into self-promoters. The January, 1987, issue of the Society of American Archivists Newsletter includes these phrases: "educating records creators on the value of archival programs" and "increase public awareness of the importance of archives" (p. 3) and "manage historical records that can prove very useful to current decision making" (p. 8).

By now it should be clear to all archivists (and admittedly perhaps it always was) that they must persuade the public and those who control archival budgets and programs that the preservation and administration of archives is not a luxury, nor is it antiquarianism run amuck. Rather, historical records have value both to individuals and to society.

Mustering our arguments is difficult, and we must utilize all the resources that are available for that task. Fortunately, historians have faced the same difficulty in justifying their existence since the first human being sought public support for a life of contemplation of the past. The result is a genre of historical writing that can most easily be labeled "self-justification" if all who read this understand that the term is not meant to be deprecatory.

One recent example of the genre is Vaughn's The Vital Past. The format will be familiar to most

history majors, a series of collected essays in each of which the author has struggled to explain the value of the study of history. Thirty-four essays have been included by about the same number of authors. All were written in the twentieth century and most by American authors. Most of the essays are extracted from longer works.

Editor Stephen Vaughn's arrangement of the essays is interesting and suggests the content of the essays. Part I deals with "History and the Individual" with sections on expansion of experience; maturity and wisdom; values, self-knowledge, and identity; and stimulus of imagination and instrument of freedom. Part II is devoted to "History and Society" with sections on civic virtue and the schools; the present, the future, and policymaking.

Vaughn has chosen his essays well and has provided valuable introductions to each section and brief biographies of all the authors. The book is best read by dipping into it from time to time rather than devouring it as a whole. The volume will be in wide use in college historical methods and historiography courses.

Had Vaughn waited a couple of years to publish his volume, he undoubtedly would have included an excerpt from Thinking in Time, which would fit comfortably in the policymaking section on the value of history to society. Authors Neustadt and May come to their task with impressive credentials. Both have served as consultants to various government agencies, and May earlier focused on one aspect of the use of history in his "Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy. For about a decade they have cooperated in teaching a course on the uses of history at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. It is from that course that this book has developed.

Written for those who govern and those who assist them, the volume is based on the presumption that all decision makers use history. The purpose of the course at Harvard and this book is to train decision makers in the most profitable use of history. The

authors point out various common abuses of history and suggest how to escape those traps. They also suggest a number of positive steps to utilize history more fully to improve decision making.

Although the authors emphasize that this is not a work of history, interest in the volume is notably enhanced by the case studies they offer to illustrate wide use and misuse of history by high-level United States government officials. These vignettes are lively and full of judgments by the authors, making this a book that can be read from cover to cover.

If The Vital Past was written with historical methods and historiography courses in mind, and if Thinking in Time was written for government officials and their aides, why will archivists find them useful? First, archivists are decision makers, and they do or should use history in making those decisions. No solicitation should be made without consideration of the history of the archivist's institution. No preservation action should be taken without evaluation of past failed conservation techniques. Arrangement and description must reflect the history of the record creators. Reference service must be based on the long history of custodian/researcher relations.

Second, archivists should appeal to researchers by promoting the use of history. A county clerk may help form a county historical society to encourage use of the county's records. A university archivist may point out to the university's historians that students can learn about research methods, the history of the university, the history of the region, and even the history of American education by utilizing the university archives.

Third, archivists must persuade those who control their budgets that history can be used in very practical ways. Whereas archivists usually perform well the first two tasks above, the recent Society of American Archivists study The Image of Archivists: Resource Allocators' Perceptions (the Levy Report) has shown that archivists have failed in this final responsibility. Thoughtful reading of The Vital

Past and Thinking in Time will enhance archivists' skills in justifying their existence.

Martin I. Elzy
Carter Presidential Library

* * *

Encyclopedia of Religion in the South. By Samuel S. Hill. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984. Pp. 887. \$60.

Bibliography of Religion in the South. By Charles H. Lippy. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985. Pp. 498. \$49.95.

Mercer University Press continues to publish valuable resources related to the study of Southern religion. Lippy's bibliography is an important tool, not only for religious institutions, but for university libraries and other research collections. The bibliography includes a guide to archival, manuscript, and research collections that document Southern religion. The volume is topically and institutionally divided. The first section of each chapter is a critical analysis of the secondary literature for that area of study. The second contains the standard bibliographical entries for these works and hundreds of additional books, articles, dissertations and theses.

The Encyclopedia of Religion in the South has its value in its handiness. It is a quick source of information to a variety of topics, people, institutions and events.

Both volumes are solid reference tools for most libraries and research institutions.

Archival and Manuscript Repositories in the Metropolitan Chicago and Calumet Region of Northwest Indiana. Chicago: Chicago Area Archivists, 1986. Pp. 129. Spiral bound.

The directory, published by the Chicago Area Archivists, is an attempt "to assist in the location of valuable archival and manuscript material in the Chicago area and Calumet region of Northwest Indiana." The information for the directory was compiled by the use of a questionnaire. The directory includes information on 183 libraries, archives, museums, and historical institutions. The entries provide the name, address, and telephone number of the institution as well as information on operating hours, a brief description of the holdings, restrictions, size of the collection, dates, and the availability of finding aids. The directory includes an index of repository types and an index of proper names found in the entries.