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Reviews, Critiques, and Annotations

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Paul F. Wells, Wayne Flynt, Kaye Lanning, Lynn Roundtree, Philip F. Mooney, and Ellen Garrison

Reviews, Critiques, and Annotations

The Management of Oral History Sound Archives. By Frederick J. Stielow. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986. Pp. xviii, 158. Appendices, illustrations, bibliographies (for each chapter), index. Cloth. \$35.00.

This relatively brief work, of six chapters and as many appendices, strives to provide "the practical information necessary for organizing and managing a sound archive, as well as the theoretical concepts that should underlie such an endeavor (xvi)." The work is not a comparison of existing systems, but rather "presents an idealized system that is drawn from the information sciences and the small universe of sound archives" (3). The focus is on the medium of magnetic tape and, as indicated by the title, on repositories which consist primarily of unique field recordings--the author's frequent mis-use of the general term "sound archive" notwithstanding. Following an introductory, perspective-setting chapter, Stielow includes chapters dealing with the theoretical basis of sound "archivy"; questions of legality and public relations; technical processing and organization of collections; microcomputer applications; and conservation.

As Stielow recognizes, many folklore and oral history collections are staffed by non- or semiprofessionals, or by "professional archivists and librarians who . . . are somewhat baffled by the lack of standardization and training" (3) in

the field. His book addresses this need for standardization. Though not uniformly successful in meeting this goal, there is much in this small book that is useful in codifying, or at least giving initial structure to, much homegrown and still-developing archival theory and practice.

Most valuable are the chapters entitled "Relations with the Public and the Law" and "Conservation Management." In the first, Stielow laudably argues for an active role on the part of the archives/archivist in the projects which generate material for deposit. "Lamentably," he writes "the archive is most often at the end of a conveyor belt, receiving deposits but having little input in their formulation" (36). Rather than allowing this situation to continue, archivists should become aware of themselves as "conscious intermediaries and stewards of a cultural heritage, who promote communication within a complex chain of informants, interviewers, researchers, the public, tapes, machines, and a bureaucracy" (3). He continues this plea in discussing the role the archives should play in the community, by stating that the repository "can play a larger cultural role in building a community's identity and sense of self-worth" (40). This chapter also contains brief discussions of copyright and of ethics, which, if not comprehensive, provide good basic information and guidelines.

The chapter "Conservation Management" consists of a concise discussion of the basics of conservation of magnetic tape. Stielow includes an extremely brief history of sound recording; a quick rundown on hardware, with the assumption that the cassette recorder is the norm in collecting equipment; a basic treatment of the storage requirements for magnetic tape; and an outline of a program for the creation of preservation masters and user copies from original recordings. Again, the material given in this chapter is not exhaustive, but it provides solid, basic information for someone with little knowledge of or experience with magnetic recordings.

The chapter entitled "The Processing and Organization of Collections" is of mixed usefulness. Part of the chapter is devoted to presenting and discussing some sample forms and flowcharts which are quite valuable, particularly for the untrained audience that Stielow is striving to reach. Yet, he also leads the reader into the murky "alphabet soup" of contemporary cataloging--MARC, AMC, AACR2, etc.--a move which is guaranteed to frustrate and confound the uninitiated. At the same time, the discussion is too superficial to be of much value to the seasoned professional who knows the processing systems but needs specific help in dealing with oral history materials.

The chapter on microcomputer applications is likewise of limited value, though generally not through any fault of the author's. Pity the poor writer who has to deal with the ever-changing field of microcomputers for the academic press, with obsolescence virtually guaranteed by the time his words see the light of print! Writing in 1984, Stielow was working in a world where a microcomputer with 256K of random access memory was considered to be on the high side of adequate. Apart from equipment discussions, however, the overview of database management systems is, like the cataloging discussion, too general to be really useful for either the experienced professional or the neophyte.

In addition to the chapters dealing with practical matters, Stielow gives, in the chapter "Toward a Theory of Sound Archives," a brief but valuable account of the development of both the folkloristic and oral historical perspectives on sound archives. Stielow, who, through his training, has a foot in both camps, notes that the concerns of the two fields have converged through time, as oral historians have moved away from a focus on the elite and folklorists have expanded their horizons beyond simple collecting of genre items to broader studies of community and creativity.

All in all, the book has much to recommend it. It must be noted, however, that the price is nothing short of outrageous.

Paul F. Wells

Middle Tennessee State University

Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History. By C. Vann Woodward. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986. Pp. x, 158. Bibliography, index. \$12.95.

No name has figured larger in the interpretation of southern history during the past half century than C. Vann Woodward. Many young historians gained their initial insights to the South by reading *Origins of the New South* or *Burden of Southern History*. Woodward's *Strange Career of Jim Crow* influenced the entire nation's understanding of racial segregation, its origins and influence. More than any other historian, living or dead, Woodward established the contours of how one approaches and understands the South, its society and culture. Whether his persistent influence resulted more from the extent of his research, the brilliance of his analysis, or the skill of his prose is still debated, but almost no one denies his influence.

During the past thirty years many have challenged his basic conclusions. They have denied that the "New South" which came into being after 1865 was really a sharp break with the South's past. They have challenged the extent of radicalism that the Populists represented. They have denied the extent of racial diversity. All, however, acknowledge their debt to him.

In *Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History* one reads Woodward in his most erudite and reflective mood. The writing is excellent, witty, and almost like an informal chat. His rebuttal of his critics is uniformly kind and good spirited; usually, it is convincing.

The format of this book is a series of chapters explaining the context of the author's life from which each earlier book came and a summary of the current disagreement or criticism of it. Finally, he states his modifications or defense. Are there any books quite like this one? In order to appreciate fully the book, familiarity with some of Woodward's books is necessary. For those readers who are, this volume will prove a treasure.

Unfortunately, Woodward deals little with southern religion either in his original volumes or in this one. When he began his career, scholars largely ignored religion, and Woodward fits that pattern. When discussing religion during the Progressive era, for instance, he argues that the three major influences on religion nationally--ecumenism, liberal theology, and the social gospel--largely missed the South. Despite the lasting influence of his premise, it remains unconvincing. Southern churches, colleges, seminaries, and ministers demonstrate a great deal more diversity than Woodward supposes, although scholars are only now exploring the full range of that diversity.

Despite such quibbles, the reader who enjoys southern history or simply wonderful English prose should read this book.

Wayne Flynt

Auburn University

On Doing Local History: Reflections on What Local Historians Do, Why, and What it Means. By Carol Kammen. Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1986. Pp. 184. Bibliographies, index. Paper. \$13.50.

A good novel makes the reader wait anxiously for the sequel; a good movie makes the viewer want to know more about the characters; a good book on doing local history inspires the researcher to investigate a community and share the details with neighbors. Carol Kammen achieves just this effect with her new book *On Doing Local History*. The volume is filled with notes about what makes good local history and good local historians. The American Association for State and Local History has performed a service to the historical profession by publishing this reference volume, which all local historians should read before researching or writing about the past of their community.

Although very little of the information in this book is new, local historians have never before had such a well-written, understandable guide to follow. Certainly, newcomers to the field (from ages twenty to eighty) should find the book invaluable. All local historians can benefit from the discussions about "what it is we do and the conditions and traditions in which we labor" (2). Kammen also reminds the reader that "local history" is part of "history." Regardless of its perceived greatness or uniqueness, a community is not an isolated unit into itself. Its past should be examined in a larger regional and national context to be understood properly.

This book should be of interest to most local historians whether they are college professors, as Kammen herself is, local historical society staff, county historians, graduate students, and even the stereotypical "blue-haired ladies in tennis shoes." Local history has traditionally attracted people from all walks of life. Studying the heritage of an area

contributed to community pride and to the growing social and public history movements. From China, where the earliest local history dates back 2,000 years, to the United States, where *Foxfire* and *Roots* did much to popularize such studies, the value of local history is becoming more apparent to everyone.

In this volume, Kammen discusses the variety of sources available for researching local history and the kinds of questions researchers need to ask to get the whole picture. Going beyond Chamber of Commerce "boosterism" takes in-depth research and critical, questioning minds. The author then progresses to the often burdensome task of communicating what was learned. Writings about local history then might be used for speeches to civic clubs, exhibit labels at local museums, newspaper columns, or books. Kammen points up the dangers of writing only about the positive aspects of the good old days and of describing life as if only white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males had ever inhabited the area. Amateur historians owe the field and their community more than such a narrow view. Local historians also owe their readers clearly written, informative accounts with judicious use of footnotes indicating where the facts came from and where the reader can go for more information.

Later chapters examine local history in the popular press--the countless newspapers and magazine stories which appear throughout the nation. Kammen offers suggestions for getting these materials accepted for publication; warnings about the hardships (weekly deadlines for little or no pay and high burn-out rates); and assurances as to the joys of being successful. Enlightening unseen faces about the past and preserving part of this heritage are the most local historians can hope to achieve.

Carol Kammen obviously enjoys local history and has fun both learning more about localities and meeting people along the way. The final paragraph of *On Doing Local*

History begins "Finally, enjoy." Reading this volume should help all local historians (and, it is hoped, their readers and listeners) have more fun as they go about their task of documenting an area's heritage.

Kaye Lanning
Troup County Archives

Archives and Public History: Issues, Problems, Prospects. Edited by Bruce W. Dearstyne. Vol. 8, No. 3 of *The Public Historian*, Summer 1986. 123 pp.

In *Archives and Public History: Issues, Problems, Prospects*, guest editor Bruce Dearstyne endeavors to "evangelize" to American public historians about the "good news" of professional growth in the field of archives in the United States and Canada. In many ways, however, this special issue of *The Public Historian* reveals to the reflective archivist even more about himself and the field at this moment in history--a snapshot of "public history."

Mr. Dearstyne, a frequent speaker and writer on matters archival, is well qualified for this cross-fertilization effort. This most recent work attempts a "searching analysis" and interpretation of recent developments in archives in order to increase communication, improve cooperation, and stimulate discussion between archivists and the public history community.

Archives and Public History contains articles by a number of archivists with expertise in the areas of government records and national archival affairs. Essays on government records; the development of archives and public history as disciplines; organization and advocacy among the historical and archival disciplines; and national planning for archives in Canada are framed by retrospective and prospective essays

on American archives. Eleven book reviews of recent works on archives, historical documentation, local history, and historic preservation conclude the work.

Dearstyne's introduction sets the tone for the entire issue: "The world of archives, sometimes viewed as placid and complacent by outsiders, is today spirited and alive with change" (6). The focus is on archivists as a community and on their progress in understanding and organizing themselves as a professional group. Archival work is progressing from an erstwhile "calling, field of specialization, and a proud occupation" to an organized national system and an established profession. Similarly, Dearstyne sees "a growing number [of] . . . concerned, forward-looking archivists [bringing] to their field a growing sense of energy, of deliberation, and of self-understanding" (6).

Larry J. Hackman's lead article carefully frames the succession of institutional developments and new systems--automated and otherwise--with which archivists have dealt. Richard J. Cox's essay locates the source of the friction between archivists and public historians in the latter's inadequate perspective and analysis of the disciplines it presumes to subsume and reminds public history educators that their own curriculum is not the final word on the education and training of archivists.

Edie Hedlin's survey of government records finds America's documentary heritage at risk because of cycle of poverty, brought on by a failure of leadership and of understanding, while Page Putnam Miller's chronicle details the progress made in organizing an advocacy coalition for government records and the rest of the nation's documentary heritage. Terry Eastwood limns a portrait of Canada's unique federal-provincial-territorial planning for archives since the 1970s and the similar importance of archival advocacy, and Larry Hackman concludes the issue with both a diagnosis of important trends and current barriers, and a prescription for a healthier American archival community.

Critics will point out that the editor's viewpoint lends a progressivist tinge to the issue; the emphasis on growing and dramatic change at times suggests embarkation into a golden age of American archives. In addition, the articles are heavily weighted toward government and public records; manuscripts per se are scarcely mentioned. Finally, it is curious that no mention is made of experience of the library world in its own efforts at professional development and fulfillment of its mission to preserve historical and cultural records of enduring value.

Archives and Public History is a fine summary of recent developments in public archives and the archival profession for public historians, archivists, and manuscript curators.

Lynn Roundtree
Louisiana State University

A Culture at Risk: Who Cares for America's Heritage. By Charles Phillips and Patricia Hogan. Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1984. Pp. xxi, 95. Illustrations, bibliography. Paper. \$10.

A Culture at Risk represents the published findings of a 1983 survey of American historical agencies sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Using a random sampling technique of 1,000 institutions represented in the *AASLH Directory of Historical Societies and Agencies in the United States and Canada*, the research attempted to accumulate data on a wide range of issues important to historical organizations. While previous profiles of museums, historical societies, libraries, and archives have appeared in print, their scope was limited to

larger, more recognizable, and well-established institutions. *A Culture at Risk* casts a much wider net and attempts to suggest the broader patterns of practice that characterize those smaller programs that numerically dominate the local history field.

The survey results present a distressing picture of the current state of the private historical society and offer little prospect for marked improvement in the future. While the local history movement has experienced rapid growth and expansion over the last quarter century, the resources required to support these historical agencies have lagged far behind. More than 60 percent of privately funded organizations were established after 1960, but the vast majority had no more than a single staff member and operated on annual budgets of less than \$50,000. More than half of the surveyed institutions were located in towns with a population of less than 25,000, sustained by a small membership and shaky financial resources. Most open their doors on a sporadic basis, yet many attempt to provide the full range of historical services to their constituents including exhibits, library and archives programs, lectures, tours, publications, and educational materials.

Of the surveyed institutions, only 3.6 percent identified archival work as the chief purpose of the agency, but the trends noted in the archives segment mirrored the larger historical picture. Nearly 60 percent of the archives emerged after 1960, and a large majority suffered from the same budgetary, staffing, and membership maladies that the survey found elsewhere. Archival agencies in the South constituted 10 percent of the survey, while 23.5 percent of the historical agencies polled hailed from this section.

A Culture at Risk does not offer any quick-fix solutions to the deep-seated problems of the small local history unit. Rather, it suggests that the long-term survival prospects for such groups are bleak. In a period of budgetary retrench-

ment, only the strong will be able to maintain their bases of support, while the collection and preservation of local history will suffer.

As with most surveys, one may question whether a 20 percent sampling of historical institutions provided an accurate picture of the field in its totality, but even allowing for some statistical aberrations, this volume raises such critical questions that it should be mandatory reading for any organization involved in the practice of history. The study further underscores the need for the historical profession as a whole to do a better job of defining their role in society and establishing realistic programs that their publics are willing to support.

Philip F. Mooney
The Coca-Cola Company

Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public. Edited by Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986. Pp. xxiv, 424. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$39.95.

Presenting the Past consists of eighteen essays which explore three aspects of public history: history as portrayed in popular culture; public sector history including preservation, museums, and archives; and people's history, especially community-based history projects. Well-chosen and often witty illustrations, which sometimes make the point better than the text, precede each article. The goal of these studies, most of which have previously appeared in the *Radical History Review*, is to encourage "a more pluralistic vision of the past" (xxii).

As might be expected, the quality of the presentation varies from author to author. Too often the content is marred by a style and viewpoint which is didactic, dogmatic, and strident. Roy Rosenzweig's essay on the evolution of *American Heritage* magazine and Michael Wallace's reflections on historic preservation prove notable and well-crafted exceptions. In spite of the prevailing dogmatism, most of the essays provide interesting information and insights into the interaction between cultural values and the presentation and uses of history. Surprisingly detailed notes, which supply content and source information as well as pungent comments on the historian's craft, supplement and complement each essay.

Archivists will want to ponder the relevance of Terence O'Donnell's analysis of the "pit falls of public history" to the profession's current preoccupation with our public image. And the essays in Section III, "People's History," especially Linda Shope's account of the Baltimore Neighborhood History Project, offer archivists both practical advice and thoughtful reflections on the how-tos and whyfores of community-oriented outreach projects.

The greatest value of this volume for archivists, however, lies in its exposition of the priorities and philosophy of the "new history" which in the last two decades has changed the nature of historical research. Once considered radical, "new history" has now become part of the mainstream, as the publication of this volume by a major university press indicates. Meeting the needs of those researchers has and will require archivists to rethink many aspects of their profession, especially appraisal and description, and to re-examine their relationship to other disciplines. *Presenting the Past* provides archivists a concise and enjoyable introduction to this revolution in historical philosophy and methodology.

Ellen Garrison

Middle Tennessee State University

Society of North Carolina Archivists. *Archival and Manuscript Repositories in North Carolina: A Directory*. Raleigh, North Carolina: Society of North Carolina Archivists, 1987. Pp. 109. Index. Paper. \$10 SNCA members, \$12 nonmembers.

The Society of North Carolina Archivists has published an attractive guide to archival and manuscript repositories in North Carolina. Most of the information for the guide was collected by a survey and includes 125 entries. The guide is arranged alphabetically by the name of the city and provides various information on the repository. This data includes hours of operation, need for prior arrangements, description of holdings, restrictions, types of material solicited, reference services provided, copy facilities, equipment allowed, availability of finding aids, and size of staff. The directory also includes an index by repository type and a subject index. The directory may be purchased from the Society of North Carolina Archivists.

Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. Public Records Division. *The Guide to Kentucky Archival and Manuscript Repositories*. Frankfort, Kentucky: Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, 1986. Pp. 127. Appendices, index. Paper. \$12.

The Kentucky Guide Project began in 1978 with major funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). This publication is the first in a series to be issued by the Public Records Division of the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives based on information gathered by the Kentucky Guide Project. The introductory volume provides a description of 285 repository-

ries in Kentucky. Plans call for subsequent publications to include detailed descriptions of the collections maintained by these repositories.

The guide's format is identical to the NHPRC's *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories*. Each entry includes basic information on the institution, hours of operation, user fees, restrictions, copy facilities, acquisition policy statement, size of holdings, inclusive dates, description of broad subject holdings, and references to any published finding aids. The guide also provides several very helpful appendices and an index. It is available from the Kentucky Department for Library and Archives.