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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

A History of Archival Practice. Paul Delsalle. Translated and revised by Margaret Procter. (New York: Routledge, 2018. 245 pp.)

With the publication of *Archives in the Ancient World* nearly a half century ago, Ernst Posner became the standard-bearer for aspiring archivists and historians who wished to research and write about the history of archives and the archives profession. Since that time scholars such as Richard Cox, Randall Jimerson, James O'Toole, and others have published numerous books and dozens of journal articles related to archival history.

Paul Delsalle's *A History of Archival Practice*, newly revised and translated from the original 1998 French-language publication into English by Margaret Procter, adds to this growing body of scholarship. Delsalle, a professor of history at the Université de Franche-Comté in Besançon, France, provides a relatively brief synthesis of archival history and practice from antiquity to the modern era. The author notes that the archives profession often suffers from a crisis of identity arising from real or perceived differences that exist between the role of archivists and that of records managers. To counter this problem, he argues that archivists must gain a better understanding of "the cultural and historical foundations of their discipline and the organization of professional methods and techniques" (p. xi) handed down through centuries of archival practice.

Delsalle begins by examining the archival importance of Mesopotamian tablets and tablet fragments dating from around 3500 BC, the vast majority of which were created specifically for administrative purposes. While ancient civilizations did not establish archives in the modern sense, they did control, manage, and preserve their "archival" records for practical purposes. The record-keeping practices of the Greeks and Romans similarly supported the political and economic role of the state and adopted archival-like practices to preserve these records. Conversely, the ancient Chinese appear to have preserved records for both administrative *and* historical purposes. The author also argues that African and Mesoamerican oral

history traditions satisfy the definition of archives, thus creating an “oral archives” as a substitute for the traditional written word.

The author explores the Catholic Church’s role in establishing religious scriptoria. By doing so the church made great strides in preserving important legal documents, ecclesiastical land rights, and sacred texts. During the late medieval period European monarchs began building and maintaining archival facilities to protect state papers—in some cases royal officials, with no apparent alternative at the time, deposited state papers in church archives for safekeeping. Importantly, the author argues that advances in archival practice in sixteenth-century Portugal and Spain, the centralization of state archives in France during and after the revolution, and the widespread adoption of the principle of *respect des fonds* in the nineteenth century all stand as watershed moments in archival history.

Delsalle organizes his book into 16 relatively concise chapters organized chronologically from antiquity to modern times. While the author attempts to include information on archival practices from around the world, he focuses primarily upon European influences. Each chapter is further divided numerically by topic and subtopic making it easy to navigate. Indeed, the book’s scope and organization makes it an excellent choice as a survey text for masters students enrolled in archival studies programs or for those working toward the MLIS with archives concentration. The book is well researched and the translator, a senior lecturer and former archivist, makes a valiant effort to include English-language bibliographic sources where possible, no small task for a work that covers thousands of years of history. In a time when the professional literature is understandably dominated by how-to manuals, theory, management, and the latest trends in digitization, it is refreshing to read a volume dedicated entirely to archival history.

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Archival Arrangement and Description: Analog to Digital. Lois Hamill. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littman, 2017. 197 pp.)

As archivists begin to confront hybrid and born-digital collections on a regular basis, we must also expand our skill sets—most notably, by learning how to modify existing archival workflows or to implement new ones that account for the different characteristics of digital records. In this practical-minded publication, Lois Hamill provides much-needed guidance on appraising, accessioning, arranging, describing, and making accessible archival records in digital formats.

Following two introductory chapters about the history and application of arrangement and description practices for analog records, Hamill dives into digital records. Every chapter is structured in the same way—first, summary information about each phase of processing, followed by detailed workflows, and concluding with “program considerations.” This final section is the author’s opportunity to pose questions to the reader and provide suggestions on best practices when setting up a digital records program. For example, in thinking about the long-term preservation of digital files, she encourages asking the following questions of your institution’s information technology (IT) department: What is IT’s policy regarding backup for servers storing digital materials? What is IT’s disaster recovery plan? Can IT run system-level fixity checks for server locations? (p. 102). These types of reminders should be particularly instructive for archivists in the early stages of program development.

Hamill devotes her final chapter, “Parting Thoughts,” toward a few areas of debate in the field affecting the future of archival arrangement and description. One topic is the ongoing conversation about archival public interfaces and the level of archival literacy required for researchers to successfully interact with our preferred systems. Archivists continue to think critically about how our finding aids translate to users. Hamill warns against creating a “great descriptive divide” in which institutions with more resources automate finding aids through collection management software and engage with linked open data while smaller archives are unable to achieve the same level of compliance with accepted standards (p. 137). She says, “Those forging ahead must realize not everyone can

keep the same pace. If they shoulder some of the extra burden, they can help raise the boat for everyone” (p. 140).

Hamill recommends her book to archivists in training as well as to experienced professionals currently in the process of establishing digital records programs at their own institutions (p. xii). Those familiar with the Society of American Archivists’ Digital Archives Specialist (DAS) program will find this covers similar territory—although with the added benefit of being contained in a single publication, rather than spread throughout disparate course materials. In fact, a good number of the book’s useful charts and workflows represent information shared in the DAS classes Hamill attended. Archivists already managing full-scale programs may not discover much new here, but could use the book as a reference tool or refresher.

Other readers will notice overlap with “Module 2: Processing Digital Records and Manuscripts” by J. Gordon Daines, III in *Archival Arrangement and Description*, one of the titles in SAA’s Trends in Archives Practice series. Hamill builds upon Daines’ foundational text from 2013, but is able to go into more detail in her book, particularly in appendices such as a chronology of technology changes since the 1960s, a glossary of archival terms, an extensive bibliography, and an index of tools and software for working with digital records.

Throughout the text, Hamill successfully presents a comprehensive look at the tasks necessary to process digital records, while taking a realistic approach to the application of such tasks at smaller shops with less financial and technical support. One of the author’s most important take-aways is a reminder that arrangement and description is iterative. It is unreasonable to expect institutions—even large academic archives—to implement every aspect of a digital records program at once. She advises archivists to “assess risks, make decisions, document them, and then proceed. Better to set realistic goals, achieve them, set new goals, and repeat” than do nothing at all (p. 140). We must accept this mindset if we want to be successful in preserving digital records.

As an archivist who has completed the DAS certificate, but has yet to make the leap into fully processing digital records, I recommend *Archival Arrangement and Description: Analog to Digital* whole-heartedly. Hamill’s logical viewpoint and her

thoughtful program recommendations along the way will help archivists evaluate their current digital records practices and make reasonable, achievable plans for the future.

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Participatory Heritage. Andrea Copeland and Henriette Roued-Cunliffe. (London: Facet Publishing, 2017. 240 pp.)

Often in archival literature, we are confronted with books and articles that present interesting ideas, but deal only with theory. Roued-Cunliffe's and Copeland's *Participatory Heritage* does not make this mistake. The book provides background on working with heritage organizations on archival projects, but is presented as a series of case studies. The one failing of *Participatory Heritage* is that it could have provided a chapter-length overview of the concepts of community archives and participatory heritage.

Each chapter is a case study of a different project that involved archivists, graduate students and other professionals who have worked with or researched organizations collecting archival material outside traditional archival settings. The term participatory heritage is used in this piece as many of us would use the term community archives. For those familiar with that term, consider thinking of the two as interchangeable in the context of this work. The term heritage can be problematic and evoke institutions that practice a counter-factual understanding of the past, but in the case of *Participatory Heritage* should be understood as related to community understandings of history and place. The book is divided into three primary sections with a brief introductory chapter. These sections cover participants in heritage projects, challenges, and solutions.

A strong feature of this book is that it includes international perspectives. The author presents United States and European case

studies alongside each other. Also, the work details various other types of collaborative projects, including digitized collections, data archiving, and creating virtual streetscapes. Beyond the diverse projects, this book covers working with different kinds of groups, both mainstream and marginalized.

One of the shining chapters was Dongshee Sinn's "No Gun Ri Digital Archive: Challenges in Archiving Memory for a Historically Marginalized Incident." In this chapter, Sinn describes the University of Albany's project to document the No Gun Ri massacre that occurred during the Korean War through a digital archive. This case demonstrates that even with sensitive, complex issues, archivists can make an impact in helping preserve and provide access to records. Sinn found what many archivists know well in conducting these kinds of projects: that although those involved were "aware that what they experienced is an important historical incident in many ways; they understand little about historical and archival literacy" (p. 111). The need to educate communities is a common theme throughout *Participatory Heritage*. This section demonstrates that despite this difficulty, it is possible to train groups we are working with on archival topics.

The only significant deficiency with this book is that there is not a thorough explanation of the theoretical issues involving participatory archives. The only real discussion of what constitutes participatory heritage comes from the introduction where the authors describe it as "a space in which individuals engage in cultural activities outside of formal institutions for the purpose of knowledge sharing and co-creating with others" (p. xv). While this a good starter definition, it does not place this concept in the framework of community archives as the field has been discussing it over the last few years. This issue is a minor complaint, but will impact those looking for a single work that will explain the major issues in collaborating with organizations that collect outside of the bounds of professional practice.

In summary, this work is a good primer for any repository considering partnering with nonprofessionals on a project to

document or aid in the documentation of their heritage. This book is a must-read for archivists involved with their local communities. Despite small issues with the overview, this is a practically focused text that will be a beneficial read.

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Managing Local Government Archives. John H. Slate and Kaye Lanning Minchew. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. 166 pp.)

In the foreword to *Managing Local Government Archives*, H. G. Jones notes that it has been 35 years since the publication of his book *Local Government Records* focusing on the legal obligations of repositories (p. ix). A new resource has been needed to help local officials and custodians of records to understand the obligation one undertakes in setting up a records management and archives program. Will this book fill this gap?

Chapter one contains a very informative history of the development of federal record keeping and the various forms of county governments that have evolved in the United States as a result of our “multinational governmental heritage” (p. 6). It is a must read for anyone doing research using county records such as legal scholars and genealogy researchers.

The book discusses the standard archival terms and theories encountered by anyone in the profession. Brief overviews of establishing and planning an archives, as well as archival facilities, are discussed in a concise manner. Examples of two successful programs at Seattle, Washington, and Dallas, Texas, are described. Slate and Minchew make one of the most important statements in chapter four: “there is no single model for a local government archives” (p.45).

Managing the size of collections can be overwhelming and advice is given regarding appraisal of items and whether to keep or

discard material depending upon on their value. In chapter six a good comparison of the fiscal, historical, intrinsic, legal and monetary value of records is given (pp. 78-79). Along with selection consideration, the time spent processing a collection has become more of an issue. Thus, the theory of “More Product, Less Process” is briefly mentioned. The authors state that “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing” by Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner “is perhaps the single most significant article published on archival theory and practice in the last thirty years” (p. 88).

Specific computer programs are not covered in the book because of the ever-changing world of information environments. Electronic records are an important component of any local government archives. Slate and Minchew explain that the three basic areas of knowledge an archivist should understand about electronic records “are the initial control of records, their continuing control (policy and oversight), and their sustainability” (p. 94).

The book covers all aspects of an archival program, from reference to outreach. The importance of, and how to conduct, a good reference interview is covered as well as the need for written policies regarding how researchers are expected to conduct themselves. Security is an important consideration. Thanks to social media, outreach demands more dynamic marketing. Archivists must be prepared to do creative exhibits in-house or online.

Appendix 1 has examples of legislative documents needed to establish an archives and shows the complexity and the difficulty of the process. It helps to avoid problems further down the road if all of the issues are addressed in the formative stages. Appendix 2 has a small number of sample forms for use in a local government archives, but I would have liked seen more types of sample forms.

One of the book’s great strengths is the authors’ extensive experience with archival development and management. John H. Slate, a city archivist, and Kaye Lanning Minchew, a consultant in archives and historic preservation, have brought a balanced approach to this book as a result of the knowledge gained in their respective 16 years and 30 years in the profession.

This book is highly recommended for beginning or seasoned archivists or anyone who wants to understand what a local government archives entails. It is a comprehensive overview of

records management and archives. Well-organized information is presented in a logical order with definitions of terminology given on the same page. It should be a standard textbook for library science and archival students, as well as for a government records management programs, as it does not overwhelm with unnecessary information. It meets H. G. Jones' hopes for a new tool to assist local officials and custodians. This book is essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the basic ins and outs of managing a local government archives.

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Archiving Websites: A Practical Guide for Information Management Professionals. Adrian Brown. (London: Facet Publishing, 2006. 256 pp.)

Archiving Websites: A Practical Guide for Information Management Professionals is a foundational guide aimed at orienting resource managers on how to develop a web archiving program. Brown offers a comprehensive history of the genesis of website harvesting, strategies and tools for capturing data for permanent access, and outlines intellectual property rights for content collection. The target audience and tools available for digital data collection have greatly expanded since 2006 when the book was published. The preservation of social media content and the ethical collection, use, and preservation of born-digital material require informational professionals to constantly update our standards and "best practices." Merging fundamental theory and praxis, Brown's basic instructions on workflow management, selection criteria, and technical infrastructure can be reused and reinterpreted in our ever-changing digital landscape.

Archiving Websites opens with a glossary of technological terms readers may be familiar with from regular web use. The book does well to provide terms and concepts many of us already know but breaks them down, presenting easy to understand definitions contextualized specifically to their role in web archiving. The content of *Archiving Websites* is thematically organized into ten sections. Each chapter includes at least one case study which allows readers to compare and examine the development of programs over time, including those engineered by the National Library of Australia, UK Government Web Archive, and Cornell University.

Section two, The Development of Web Archiving, provides a history of web archiving as an international, multidisciplinary initiative, beginning with origin of remote web harvesting and web crawling software created by the Internet Archive. In this study of early approaches to archiving websites, Brown notes the accessibility of the web as both a complication and opportunity for capturing content for perpetuity, “The ease with which information may be presented and altered creates a uniquely transitory environment” (p. 25).

A discussion of Selection Policies focuses the essays in section three. Archivists charged with appraisal and reappraisal will find parallels between the considerations for physical materials and web resources like extent and time (frequency of collection). Section four, Collection Methods, summarizes the technical methods for archiving web content: direct transfer, remote harvesting, database archiving and transaction based web archiving, and server-side web archiving. Readers are briefed on the pros and cons of each method relative their ability to be carried out remotely, collaboratively, or on a case-by-case basis. Sections on Quality Assurance, Preservation, Delivery to Users, Legal Issues, and Managing a Web Archiving Programme, stipulate how to optimize websites for archiving and assessing deliverables, especially with regards to protecting the rights of content creators.

The book concludes with Future Trends, a chapter emphasizing the development of new preservation tools and strategies to meet the challenges of, and take advantage of, developing information technologies (p. 192). Brown contends that international collaboration and shared standards will be crucial to the creation of smarter web crawling tools which could identify content

and autonomously support the entire web's archiving process. Archivists have seen resource sharing result in increasingly sophisticated storage systems and capacity for standardized metadata and the expansion of web capture tools. This chapter also projects archivist's contemporary use and research surrounding crawl software: documenting the evolution of website features and capturing public participation during specific events.

Archiving Websites accomplishes Brown's objective to provide a "broader introduction and overview, specifically for those who may be considering taking their first steps into the world of web archiving, or who may simply wish to gain an understanding of issues" (p. 4). A reader with a casual interest in the subject could also benefit from this approachable reference aid. Contents within each section follow a repetitive "introduction, concept, conclusion, reference" structure that aids understanding and offers continuity. Thumbnails of featured web archive programs and tailored workflows in easy to follow charts are also included in each chapter.

The strength of *Archiving Websites* is its catalog of case studies featuring persistent links to a variety of well known, stable and regularly assessed archiving programs. Readers are encouraged to consult the list of notes and references provided at the end of each section for more information about highlighted tools and projects. This book will be useful for early career archivists and any persons working in the cultural heritage sector who is familiar with basic web technology but would benefit from deeper exploration of the vocabulary, properties, and qualities of archiving websites. It is also a great manual for those tasked with making policy decisions regarding the implementation of web archiving programs, including senior managers who may be removed from the day-to-day tasks of capturing content. Archivists who maintain a web presence through blogging platforms and hosted personal websites will also benefit from Brown's instruction to facilitate archiving of their own content.

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