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A Review of Historical Dictionary of Librarianship by Mary Ellen Quinn

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Mary Ellen Quinn. *Historical Dictionary of Librarianship*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. xlv, 319 p., ISBN: 978-0-8108-7545-6, \$72.96 CAN.

In a time of upheaval in the profession it is not surprising to see a growing interest in its history. The *Historical Dictionary of Librarianship (HD)* is one title in a series of historical dictionaries of professions and industries, presenting “essential information on a broad range of topics... written by experts, all contain highly informative introductory essays of the topic and detailed chronologies....” Ms. Quinn has two decades of library experience and served as the editor and then manager of the Reference Book Bulletin section of *Booklist* for the American Library Association from 1997-2011. She is an accomplished writer and reviewer.

The title *Historical Dictionary* is a misnomer. Although some terms are defined, e.g. “Reader’s Advisory”, most entries are biographical or descriptive. This is a short encyclopedia or handbook. It includes an interesting chronology of librarianship and an excellent introduction. Although the chronology begins with the 3rd millennium BCE, the Reader’s Note explains that the focus is on the modern profession beginning in the 19th century, and that is evident in the coverage. The author admits to an Anglo-American bias, though I found entries for nearly seventy countries. The core is a collection of 300 essays on topics related to librarianship including persons - “Charles Ammi Cutter”, associations - “Association of College and Research Libraries”, events - “the Battle of the Books”, and general topics - “The French Revolution.” Librarianship is interpreted broadly to include all things library. The entries vary in length from a few lines to over a page. “Further reading” references are located in a final bibliography rather than at the end of each essay. It is well researched and the coverage for the post 19th century period is good. One significant limitation is the lack of clear selection rationale for the entries.

I compared the *HD* to several older single volume encyclopedias of librarianship and an encyclopedia of library history. It is notable that these were all collaboratively authored. They each had more and often longer essays. I also compared the *HD* to *Wikipedia*. Randomly selecting fifteen topics from the *HD*, I found ten comparable entries in *Wikipedia*. Although I have confidence in Quinn’s expertise, many of the articles in *Wikipedia* were excellent, and they often offered additional content such as images and links to key documents.

I was intrigued by this book, the chronology and bibliography are excellent, and it is current. I did feel the scope was too ambitious for a single authored work of its length, and consequently some topics were insufficiently covered. It could be a useful companion text in an introductory LIS course or a reference for a researcher studying the profession. However given that much of the content is available elsewhere, in print or online, the cost might be prohibitive.

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