

Reviews

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Archival Finding Aids: An Essay Review of Recent Titles

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1. Directories to Repositories

Archival and Manuscript Repositories in North Carolina: A Directory. Second edition. Raleigh: Society of North Carolina Archivists, 1993. xi, 149 pp. Index.

Capital District Library Council Documentary Heritage Program Directory of Repositories. Second edition. Compiled and edited by J. James Mancuso for the Council. Albany, N.Y.: 1995. 69 pp. Index.

Research Guide to Libraries and Archives in the Low Countries. Compiled by Martha L. Brogan. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1991. x, 546 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-313-25466-4. ∞

2. Multi-Institutional Guides to Holdings

Elizabeth Bishop: An Archival Guide to Her Life in Nova Scotia. By Sandra Barry. The Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia, 1996. 226 pp. ISBN: 0-88999-628-8.

Guida Generale Degli Archivi Di Stato Italiani, Vol. IV, S-Z. Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1994. xv, 1411 pp. Index.

Guide to Sources for History of Solid State Physics. By Joan Warnow-Blewett and Jurgen Teichmann. International Catalog of Sources for History of Physics and Allied Sciences, Report No. 6. New York: Center for History of Physics, American Institute of Physics, 1992. xi, 156 pp. Index. ISBN: 1-56396-068-0.

About the author: Karen Baumann has been on the archives staff of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in various capacities since 1967. Her current duties focus on providing on-line descriptions of the government records and manuscript holdings of the Archives Division.

Guide to the Manuscript Papers of British Scientists Catalogued by the Contemporary Scientific Archives Centre and the National Cataloguing Unit for the Archives of Contemporary Scientists, 1973–1993. By Peter Harper. Bath: NCUACS, University of Bath, 1993. xv, 111 pp. Index. ISBN: 0952200902.

The History of the Health Sciences in Michigan: A Guide to Research Sources 1994–1995 edition. By Anne J. Gilliland-Swetland. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Historical Center for the Health Sciences, University of Michigan, 1994. ix, 252 pp. Index.

The Longman Guide to Sources in Contemporary British History: 2: Individuals. Compiled by Chris Cook, Jane Leonard, and Peter Leese. London and New York: Longman, 1994. xii, 383 pp. ISBN: 0-582-20972-2.

The Making of Modern Africa: A Guide to Archives. Compiled by Chris Cook. New York: Facts on File, 1995. 218 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-8160-2071-X. ∞

Manuscripts and Government Records in the United Kingdom and Ireland Relating to Canada. By Bruce G. Wilson and Anita Burdett. Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1992. xxxi, 705 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-660-57424-1. ∞

La Seconde Guerre Mondiale: Guide des sources conservees en France, 1939–1945. By Brigitt Blan, Henry Rouso, and Chantal de Tourtier-Bonazzi. Paris: Archives Nationales, 1994. xxii, 1217 pp. Index. ISBN: 2860002359.

3. Single-Institution Guides to Holdings

The Board of Regents of the University of Michigan: A Guide to the Resources in the Bentley Historical Library. Compiled by Kathleen Koehler, Christine Weideman, and Marjorie Barrit. Guide Series No. 1. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Bentley Historical Library, 1996. 36 pp.

Collections Guide: Moving Image Collections of Northeast Historic Film. By Patricia Burdick, Crystal Hall Cole, and Karan Sheldon. Bucksport, Me.: Northeast Historic Film, 1995. 58 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-9646933-0-5.

Government and Art: A Guide to Sources in the Archives of American Art. Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art, 1995. xiii, 206 pp. Index. ISBN: 1-880193-07-8.

A Guide to the Archival Collections in the Niels Bohr Library at the American Institute of Physics. International Catalog of Sources for History of Physics and Allied Sciences, Report No. 7. College Park, Md.: American Institute of Physics, 1994. xix, 575 pp. Index. ISBN: 1-56396-379-5.

A Guide to the Archives of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University Archives and Records Service, 1995. xiii, 102 pp. Index.

Guide to Records in the New York State Archives. Albany, N.Y.: State Archives and Records Administration, 1993. x, 497 pp. Index.

Guide to Research Materials in the North Carolina State Archives: State Agency Records. Raleigh, N.C.: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1995. ix, 855 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-86526-277-2.

Poliomyelitis and the Salk Vaccine: A Guide to the Resources in the Bentley Historical Library. Compiled by Thomas E. Powers and Brian A. Williams. Guide Series No. 2. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Bentley Historical Library, 1996. 19 pp.

Revealing Documents: A Guide to African American Manuscript Sources in the Schlesinger Library and the Radcliffe College Archives. Compiled by Susan J. von Salis. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1993. xxv, 174 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-8161-0613-4.

Les Sources de l'Histoire de l'Architecture Religieuse aux Archives Nationales de la Revolution a la Separation, 1789-1905. By Jeannine Charon-Bordas. Paris: Archives Nationales, 1994. 196 pp. Index. ISBN: 2-86000-216-2.

The Trans-Mississippi West, 1804-1912. Part I: A Guide to Records of the Department of State for the Territorial Period. Compiled by Robert M. Kvasnicka. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1993. ix, 131 pp. Index. ISBN: 1-880875-00-4. ☉

The Trans-Mississippi West, 1804-1912. Part II: A Guide to Records of the Department of Justice for the Territorial Period. Compiled by Robert M. Kvasnicka. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1994. ix, 128 pp. Index. ISBN: 1-880875-00-4. ☉

A Checklist of Video & Sound Recordings in the Department of Special Collections. Washington University Libraries. St. Louis: 1992. 129 pp. Index.

4. Finding Aids to Single Collections

Amiraute de Guyenne: A Source for the History of New France. By Nicole Chamberland, Jane McLeod, and Christine Turgeon. Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1993. Text in English and French on inverted pages. x, 93 pp. and 99 pp. plus appendices. ISBN: 0-662-58544-5.

Archives de la Famille et des Entreprises de Wendel (sous-series 189 AQ et 190 AQ). By Bertrand Joly. Paris: Archives Nationales, 1994. 334 pp. Index. ISBN: 2-86000-233-2.

A Guide to the Papers of Pierre Clement Laussat, Napoleon's Prefect for the Colony of Louisiana, and of General Claude Perrin Victor at the Historic New Orleans Collection. Edited by Jon Kukla; compiled by Angelita Rosal, Margaret Katz, and Renee Peck. New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1993. xi, 178 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-917860-33-0. ☉

Guide to the Spanish and Mexican Manuscript Collection at the Catholic Archives of Texas. Compiled by Dedra S. McDonald; edited by Kinga Perzynska. Austin: Catholic Archives of Texas, 1994. 140 pp.

Guide to the James A. Van Allen Papers and Related Collections. By Christine D. Halas. Iowa City: University of Iowa Archives, 1993. 335 pp.

The Jane Addams Papers, A Comprehensive Guide. By Mary Lynn McCree Bryan, Nancy Slote, and Maree de Angury. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996. 674 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-253-21036-4.

John Keats, 1795-1995, with a Catalogue of the Harvard Keats Collection. Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Library, 1995. 126 pp. ISBN: 0941630712.

The John Metcalf Papers, An Inventory of the Archive at the University of Calgary Library. Compiled by Jean M. Moore and Marlys Chevrefils; edited by Apollonia Steele. Canadian Archival Inventory Series: Literary Papers. No. 16. Calgary: University of Calgary, 1996. xlii, 245 pp. Index. ISBN: 1-895176-71-9. ☺

The Michael Cook Papers, First Accession and Second Accession, An Inventory of the Archive at the University of Calgary Library. Compiled by Marlys Chevrefils; edited by Apollonia Steele. Canadian Archival Inventory Series: Literary Papers. No. 24. Calgary: University of Calgary, 1994. xlii, 249 pp. Index. ISBN: 1-895176-52-2.

Papiers Rene Pleven, 560 AP. By Agnes Callu. Paris: Archives Nationale, 1995. 63 pp. Index. ISBN: 2-86000-246-4.

Repertoire numerique du Fonds Francois-Xavier-Garneau, du Fonds Alfred-Garneau, de la Collection Alfred-Garneau et du Fonds Hector-Garneau. By Jean-Marc Barrette. Documents de travail, #37. Ottawa: Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-francaise, 1995. xx, 115 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-88927-003-1.

Repertoire numerique du Fonds Association des scouts du Canada, Federation des scouts de l'Ontario, district d'Ottawa et Scogestion. By Lucie Page. Documents de travail, #38. Ottawa: Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-francaise, 1995. xxii, 239 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-88927-005-8.

Repertoire numerique du Fonds Gaston-Vincent. By Colette Michaud. Documents de travail, #39. Ottawa: Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-francaise, 1995. xiv, 61 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-88927-009-0.

5. Other

The African-American Mosaic. A Library of Congress Resource Guide for the Study of Black History and Culture. Edited by Deborah Newman Ham. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1993. 300 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-8444-0800-X. ☺

Genealogical Research in England's Public Record Office: A Guide for North Americans. By Judith Prowse Reid. Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1996. xiv, 148 pp. Appendices. Index. ISBN: 0-8063-1504-0.

Gin Das Winan: Documenting Aboriginal History in Ontario. Edited by Dale Standen and David McNab. Occasional Papers of The Champlain Society, No. 2. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1996. v, 66 pp. ISBN: 0-9693425-6-X.

Guides to Archives and Manuscript Collections in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography. Compiled by Donald L. DeWitt. Bibliographies and Indexes in Library and Information Science, No. 8. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994. xi, 478 pp. Index. ISBN: 0-313-28499-7. ☺

Manuscript Division. General Guide Series. By Grace Hyam with the assistance of Paul Fortier and Lawrence F. Tapper. Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, [1994]. Text in English and French on inverted pages. 44 and 41 pp. ISBN: 0-662-59689-7.

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: An Assessment of Archival Sources Documenting 20th Century New York City Social History. Edited by Debra Bernhardt and Rachel Bernstein. New York: Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, 1994. 104 pp.

THOUGH THE ARCHIVAL PROFESSION seems to have immersed itself in websites on the Internet and finding aids accessible in HTML or SGML marked-up versions, we have not abandoned more traditional methods of providing information on the rich resources in our custody. Production of published guides and inventories in book form continues both on this continent and abroad, as evidenced by the many examples received by SAA for review.

Physically the examples range from typographically sophisticated, illustrated, and expensively produced volumes to single-size font products done on the word processor with a sturdy cover attached. They are being produced by a variety of institutions, associations, academic centers, and commercial publishers, for a variety of audiences, for purposes which go beyond just letting researchers know what is available, and sometimes with creative additional features of use to the reader. And often they are just one component of a descriptive system which incorporates bibliographic utilities, OPACs, websites, and other approaches to providing access.

While NUCMC has turned from print to bibliographic databases to cope with its constantly expanding number of manuscript collection descriptions, the producers of these items chose traditional publication. This choice may have been made for various reasons—more stable collection to describe, an intended audience not in an on-line environment, a product intended more for perusal than for occasional checking, a production effort with no provision for ongoing responsibility, or stakeholders more attuned to traditional and tangible products. Access to expertise may make the one production method more appealing than the other, as might access to dedicated financial resources, or to the differing production technologies. The hypertext environment may be critical to some kinds of products but redundant to others. (Indeed, how many finding aids on the Web actually take advantage of hypertext abilities?)

Given the varieties of working environments in which we archivists find ourselves, we need to maintain all our options. We also need to ask, however, why a particular product should be produced in a particular format. A publication which presents the same information as exists in an OPAC needs to define its purpose clearly. And then it needs to be sure that its content and presentation further that purpose. One size does not necessarily fit all.

According to the glossary published by SAA in 1992, “finding aid” is a very inclusive term covering virtually anything produced to establish physical or intellectual control. Like certain political parties, the archival profession is a big tent. Among our members are those who deal with thousands of boxes of records and produce finding aids at the record group, record series, or collection level, noting quantities in cubic feet with a paragraph of content information. Other members work in a rare books and manuscripts environment and describe each item in terms of pages, attached seals, and specific, even exhaustive, content detail. Despite this already wide range, we have expanded this review’s scope to include a few items which don’t meet the finding aids definition but which do provide significant information on archival holdings.

The compiler of a bibliography of finding aids complains that compilers and editors ignore the definition of a “guide.” The glossary’s definition is “A finding aid giving a general account of all or part of the holdings of one or several archives and/or manuscript repositories. A guide is usually arranged by collection, fonds, or record group.” The complaint is legitimate; we do sometimes use “guide” when describing a single fonds. More precision would be desirable.

With finding aid production pre-dating the archival profession (as early as 1738, according to a citation by Terry Abraham in a paper presented at the 1996 SAA annual

meeting), we might anticipate relatively standardized types of products. And indeed, at first glance, the examples received for review do fall into several seemingly clear categories.

There are directories of repositories, multi-institution guides to holdings, single-institution guides to holdings, finding aids to single collections, and the ubiquitous “other.” But as one examines the publications in each category, the lines become blurred. Multi-institution guides that focus on a specific topic have much in common with single-institution guides to a topical portion of an institution’s holdings. A single-institution topical guide, when its topic is defined as a collection area and given a name, could be considered a finding aid to a single collection. The five categories listed above will be used to structure this article but the labels applied are not always clear-cut.

1. Directories to Repositories

This category contains the smallest number of publications received, but they exemplify the variety of producers—a professional association, a government program, and a commercial publisher with compilation support from an academic center. The North Carolina directory interestingly notes staffing levels along with the standard information on location and holdings. The Capital District directory includes the extra feature of a listing of names and addresses of town and village historians in its ten New York counties. The last page is an update form, a useful technique when there is an office with an ongoing information responsibility.

Martha Brogan went beyond questionnaires and personal research in compiling her guide; she also gathered input from fifty scholars about their research needs, experiences abroad, and the relative significance of specific collections to their research. Part I contains details on union catalogs, information on biographical dictionaries, and bibliographies of other tools. Part II is the directory of institutions, with relatively extensive descriptions of holdings.

2. Multi-Institution Guides to Holdings

Most volumes in this category focus on a specific topic and usually include an explanation of selection criteria. While in some cases, entries describe entire collections or series, more often they concern only the portions relevant to the topic so they tend to provide a fairly specific level of detail.

Most unusual in this category is the work on poet Elizabeth Bishop. Written by Bishop scholar Sandra Barry, the volume is a candidate for perusal in a soft chair before a warm fire. It is professional in its technique, providing a multi-level description of the family fonds using the Rules for Archival Description. But when Barry moves on to repositories with more tangential sources, she offers narratives on the significance in Bishop’s life of the materials one might find. For example, an entry for the Yarmouth County Museum in Massachusetts notes its holdings on nautical history and Bishop’s lifelong interest in the sea, her youthful trips between Nova Scotia and Massachusetts which took her through Yarmouth, and a major shipwreck nearby which must have caught her attention. Throughout the volume, Barry evidences an openness to all kinds of documentation and an eagerness to use it to explore Bishop’s personal history as Bishop herself might remember it. Beyond this particular volume, two different approaches to presenting information are exemplified in this category. The volume on World War II and the one on records relating to Canada in the U.K. and Ireland resemble the repository guides in

being organized by institution, with entries for individual fonds found at each. The others arrange entries by creator, providing a brief biographical identification and then information on papers of the individual held at one or more institutions. The influence of cataloging rules is clear in several of these publications. For example, the physics book and the Michigan health sciences volume present information in separate fields corresponding to USMARC data elements. The physics volume notes that it followed AACR2 rules and Library of Congress authorities and that the entries were subsequently added to RLIN. The Michigan volume also exists in a hypertext version with links to images and artifact records at <http://www.med.umich.edu/HCHS/>.

The Canada volume serves an additional purpose as a guide for the National Archives of Canada's program for copying resources held elsewhere, and as a record of the availability of copies produced so far. This volume also contains a most informative explanation of the methods of collecting the data, caveats about what data is not included, and a caution about the "impression of definitiveness" that such a massive publication may impart.

3. Single-Institution Guides to Holdings

This category ranges from massive general guides (such as those to the New York and North Carolina state archives) describing institutional records at the record group and series level, to topical guides noting relevant individual letters or interviews within collections (as done by the Archives of American Art), to even briefer descriptions like the checklist providing just author, title, event, and date of recorded readings and lectures on the Washington University campus.

The Schlesinger/Radcliffe volume is particularly interesting in the details it provides on how staff gathered information for the guide. After checking the catalogs and collection registers, the compiler systematically searched the most likely parts of the collections themselves to locate many of the items described in the guide. This work is unusual in the extent to which it adds new knowledge, as well as consolidates existing descriptive information.

4. Finding Aids to Single Collections

This group includes the most variety encountered so far, with multiple added attractions included in the publications. The works from the French Archives, the Catholic Archives of Texas, the University of Calgary, and the Historic New Orleans Collection list, in the same order as they are arranged, individual items or physical folders or intellectual files with details on the items included. The James Van Allen finding aid does not go below the folder title in detail but contains several biographical tools: a chronology, a curriculum vitae, and a publication list. Dr. Van Allen himself wrote a preface and autobiographical note, making this volume unique in having the creator of the fonds contribute to its finding aid.

The Jane Addams book is a comprehensive supplement to a 1986 brief finding aid to an eighty-two-reel microfilm edition. It comprises a chronology, a genealogy, an essay on provenance and list of the institutions from which Addams papers were gathered, an essay on her writings, a writings index, and both a chronological and a textual bibliography. Over half the volume's pages contain indexes to the correspondence. There is also a list of organizations represented in the index grouped by the subject area of their activity, and appendices listing people connected to Addams in various ways. This would be excessive for most collections.

The Keats volume was issued for a bicentennial conference and is in part a catalog of an exhibit done for the conference. Also included are two concordances of Keats' writings. The finding aid portion of the volume reflects the literary collector's descriptive priorities: it includes an item list of the collection that stresses the physical appearance and the auction history of the item, with no mention of its subject matter. The documentary publication influence is apparent in the *Historic New Orleans* volume which describes each item in terms of its subject matter, identifies named individuals, and often supplies additional background information to provide context.

5. Other

As befits a catchall category like "Other," the items listed above have little in common. Indeed most really are not finding aids but are noted here because they do include information on resources. This is particularly true of *Gin Das Winan*, whose essays from a conference on Aboriginal history stress the importance of oral tradition, material objects, and pictorial records. Though one essay does explore documentary sources and include some general descriptions of sources, the volume's greater value is to awaken us to sources unlikely to be found in any research guide.

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives is a report by seven task forces participating in a documentation strategy assessment. The publication is included here because many of the reports note institutions creating records, institutions collecting records, and records in custody and available for use.

Both the Public Record Office guide and the Canadian Manuscript Division description are manuals for users who plan to visit these institutions. The Manuscript Division work provides descriptions of individual fonds only as examples of more general information on the holdings. The Public Records Office guide offers thorough descriptions of relevant series which are models of clarity and completeness. It goes far beyond the normal institutional guide in providing details on what knowledge to gather before a visit, and on practicalities such as how to get there. Helpful appendices provide information on local government records, useful addresses, and changes in county boundaries over time.

DeWitt's volume covers published directories, guides, inventories, registers, and calendars. Entries are arranged in subject categories. An index lists authors, repositories, and more specific topics.

And finally *The African-American Mosaic* consists of historical essays on Black history and culture which incorporate references to relevant published, manuscript, pictorial, and map holdings at the Library of Congress. Numerous illustrations add to the pleasure of examining the volume.

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The future of printed finding aids is hard to predict. Will we use SGML markup to promote easy paper publication as well as platform-independent electronic storage? Or will we all come to favor on-line products as our intended audiences increasingly have access to them? Will printing on demand substitute for all but the "collector's edition" kind of products? And perhaps most intriguingly, what new kinds of guides will creative archivists produce utilizing the features of hypertext? If we can produce better finding aids with these features, printed finding aids may well be so few that a shared review like this won't be repeated.