REVIEWS

Elisabeth Kaplan, Editor

Serving History in a Changing World: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in the Twentieth Century

By Sally F. Griffith. Philadelphia: Historical Society of Philadelphia. Distributed by the University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. x, 539 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. Available from the Society of American Archivists, $55.00 members, $65.00 nonmembers. ISBN 0-910732-27-2.

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), founded in Philadelphia in 1825, is one of the premier research institutions in the United States, with unparalleled collections of manuscripts, books, pamphlets, maps, and, for most of its 175-year history, an equally impressive collection of art and artifacts. Yet the HSP has struggled in the past century, both financially and philosophically. In *Serving History in a Changing World,* Sally F. Griffith chronicles this esteemed organization, joining the recent trend in publishing the histories of the independent historical societies founded on the East Coast in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

Serving History is the story of competing constituencies and the rise and fall of each over the course of the Society's existence. "From the beginning there had been controversy even within the small group of founders over what kind of institution it ought to be" (p. 58). At the center of the story are the competing interests of the museum and the library, a fundamental dilemma faced by many similar institutions, perhaps most notably the New-York Historical Society. The question of who is allowed to do history—academic historians or a general public interested in history—has also held a central place in the Society's search for identity. Among the other themes discussed throughout the book are the professionalization of the library, museum, and archival fields; the inadequacies of the Society's building, including space and security problems; and questions surrounding the appropriate role of the director and board members, including the issue of whether those who serve should be drawn primarily from Philadelphia's elite, or if individuals with a more business-oriented approach to institutional management should be recruited. In short, the HSP has struggled with what Griffith calls "a fundamental problem of identity" (p. 301).

In his preface, Glenn Porter, director of the Hagley Museum and Library and former president of the Independent Research Libraries Association establishes the tone for the book by placing it in the context of other histories that have

come before it, most notably Kevin M. Guthrie's *The New-York Historical Society: Lessons from One Nonprofit's Long Struggle for Survival* (1996). Porter congratulates Susan Stitt, HSP's president from 1990 through 1998, for encouraging publication of a frank and candid analysis of the organization's difficulties and the successes achieved in spite of them. Commissioning Griffith, a professional historian, to write a history of the HSP that is not merely self-congratulation was just one of many bold and controversial decisions Stitt made during her tenure. The result is a complex story of an institution faced with increasing, and often conflicting, demands which have often "far outpaced institutional resources" (p. 2).

Although it was not published until 1940, HSP president Hampton L. Carson's two-volume *History of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania* chronicled the organization's first century. As a result, Griffith devotes only one chapter to those years, choosing instead to focus her analysis on the next seventy-five. Griffith spends the next several chapters discussing the ups and downs of the Society through the first two-thirds of the century. By the end of the 1920s, the Society had reached the end of its period as a gentlemen's club and suffered financially with the rest of the nation through the Great Depression. The middle decades again saw the Society as it attempted, at times, successfully, to bridge the gap between its various constituencies, most notably the academic historians and a wider public audience heavily represented by genealogists, who were seen as an important source of financial support.

Despite these minor highs and lows, however, the Society remained relatively stable, although underfunded for the range of activities it sought to provide. It was not until the years surrounding the celebration of the United States Bicentennial that the HSP began to reach a crisis point. Referring to this period as the "Bicentennial binge and hangover," Griffith describes how the plans for a major renovation to enlarge the exhibition space for the celebration called the institutional mission into question once again. The tension among board members, staff, and the director was further exacerbated when public funds that the Society counted on did not materialize. On an "act of faith" that the fundraising activities would cover the deficit, the Society moved forward with its renovation plans. The result was an even greater budget shortfall and an enlarged exhibition space that required the staff to fill it on a scale that placed additional burdens on an already overburdened workforce.

The financial difficulties deepened in the 1980s as that decade's economic downturn affected the income on investments and HSP's ability to raise funds. Plans for a permanent large-scale exhibition placed museum professionals at odds with a well-known historian serving as guest curator, while a long-range planning process resulted in increased dissension over the Society's mission. When the Society searched for a new director in 1984, Peter Parker, the acting director, explained the difficulty. The search committee, he wrote, would need to decide "what it is the new director is to direct. Is this a library, a museum, or a facility that combines both?" (p. 344).

When Susan Stitt was appointed president (as the office of director had been renamed) in 1990, she inherited an organization in deep financial trouble. After concerted efforts to control the downward spiral with cutbacks and other measures failed, Stitt proposed a controversial solution: the HSP should focus its energies on being a research library, not a museum. Her original plan involved the formation of a new museum in Philadelphia that would house and display materials from many of the city's cultural institutions. When the museum did not materialize, she proposed the deaccessioning of the Society's museum collection to allow the HSP to function to its full potential as a research library.

Deaccessioning was not a new idea at HSP; it had been discussed, in the early 1970s and again after the Bicentennial, as a way to increase the Society's endowment. But Stitt's solution was different. While some of the items might be sold, the majority would be given to another institution, which would allow the HSP to focus on its core operation: the library. In Stitt's opinion, HSP's low visibility, location, and limited assets meant that it would have to refocus if it were to survive. (Ironically, members of the library staff had questioned Stitt's appointment, fearing that her background as a museum professional would result in an emphasis on the museum at the expense of the library.) After an extremely contentious debate among staff and officers (leading to the resignation of several board members) and widespread negative publicity (which finally gave the Society the public it had always craved, albeit a negative one), the board approved the plan in 1994. Although the joint history museum never materialized, under the direction of new president David Moltke-Hansen, HSP did reach an agreement with the Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia in 1999 to transfer its art and artifacts. In late 2001, HSP continued to focus on the research library with the announcement that it would merge with the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies to bring together two of Philadelphia's most important research collections. Only time will tell what this will mean to the Society and its newly refocused mission.

Griffith concludes with an epilogue that places the HSP within the context of professional history, library, and museum administration and compares it with its counterparts in New York, Massachusetts, and elsewhere. Although she does not state so outright, Griffith seems to conclude that Stitt's decision to focus as a library was the right one.

Using HSP's institutional records, personal papers, and extensive oral history interviews with officers and staff, Griffith does an exemplary job of synthesizing the details of the day-to-day operations into clear phases of the institution's history and presents them within the context of trends in public history, libraries, and museums. She chronicles the events as they unfolded without criticism or defense. The result is an extremely well researched work that appears neither judgmental nor sugarcoated, despite the fact that it was commissioned and published by the HSP. Although the book is thoroughly indexed, it is in

great need of an appendix listing the officers and board members over the institution's long history. This is essential for anyone trying to keep up with the multitude of changing players; it would also enhance the book's value as a reference source.

Like Kevin Guthrie's history of the New-York Historical Society, *Serving History* makes an excellent case study for anyone interested in non-profit cultural institutions, and particularly for archival and library professionals and students working in these areas. It should also be a "must read" for every officer and board member who has fiduciary responsibilities at similar institutions.

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American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice

Edited by Randall C. Jimerson. Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2000. vii, 657 pp. Index. Available from the Society of American Archivists, $34.95 members, $44.95 nonmembers. ISBN 0-931828-41-4.

Compiling a useful volume of previously published articles is never an easy task. Should the works be a representative sample of writings or should they simply be the best? In *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice,* Randall C. Jimerson, associate professor of history and director of the Graduate Program in Archives and Records Management at Western Washington University, took the middle ground, making quite personal choices of articles representing some of the best writing by U.S. archivists, but aiming for comprehensive coverage. There has been no such compilation of articles directed at archivists in this country since the publication in 1984 of *A Modern Archives Reader,* edited by Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch. The 1992 publication *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance,* edited by Tom Nesmith, is a presentation of some of the best articles written by Canadian archivists and served as a model for Jimerson.

The author has selected significant recent articles written only by archivists from the United States and arranged them into nine parts. Twenty of the twenty-eight articles were first published in the *American Archivist.* Seven of the parts are meant to supplement basic archival texts, particularly the Society of American Archivists' Archival Fundamentals Series ("Understanding Archives and Archivists," "Selection and Documentation," "Appraisal," "Arrangement and Description," "Reference and Use of Archives," "Preservation," and "Management.") Two other parts, "Electronic Records" and "Archival History," concern subjects not yet specifically addressed in the Archival Fundamentals Series.

About the topic of archival history, Jimerson (an historian and archival educator) notes that archivists need "from time to time to step back and examine the theory behind professional methodology and the historical development of archival principles" (p. 99). These writings, drawn together in a handy text, will likely be read by students in archival education programs. Budding archivists entering the profession at the end of two decades of great change and upheaval may quickly gain a sense of some important issues in the field and perhaps be inspired to conduct further research on various aspects of archival history. It is worth noting that two of the three articles selected by Jimerson for this part were written by students.

One could quibble with some of Jimerson's selections and omissions. However, in each of the introductory statements preceding the nine parts, Jimerson describes the difficult choices he had to make as well as his interpretation of the issues that led to his choices in each subject area. The introductory notes provide important analyses, and readers should not pass over Jimerson's critical and judicious summaries of major trends in the profession over the past two decades. For example, in part 3, "Selection and Documentation," Jimerson puts into context as diplomatically as one could the oft-contentious struggle of the late 1980s over concepts such as "documentation strategy." In part 4, "Appraisal," Jimerson explains his choices noting that appraisal "generated a great deal of thought and analysis" that "has not always been translated into specific appraisal methodology." In part 8, "Electronic Records," he provides much needed context for the passionate debate on theoretical and methodological approaches to managing electronic records, as argued by David Bearman and Margaret Hedstrom in "Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records: Alternative Service Delivery Options" and Linda Henry's "Schellenberg in Cyberspace." Jimerson's explanation of why Bearman's and Richard H. Lytle's "The Power of the Principles of Provenance" was published in the Canadian journal *Archivaria* will be useful to those rereading this work fifteen years later or for the first time.

With only one real exception, each of the nine parts is a blend of "best" and "supplemental" writing on a subject. The one exception is part nine, "Management," which contains only two articles and does not do justice to a topic of such importance. This, however, is not the fault of the editor; as Jimerson observes, this is an area vastly underrepresented in the archival literature.

In addition to these nine parts, there is an introduction and a list of contributors. The list of contributors is quite useful, including a bit more background on each author than one usually finds in most compilations of essays. This information provides important context for the readings.

What deserves a very careful reading, however, is Jimerson's seventeen-page introduction. It is brilliant and worth the price of the entire volume. In it, Jimerson lays the groundwork for a commanding understanding of the thought and development of the profession in the two decades of the 1980s and 1990s. While some may consider the most striking features of the profession in recent

years to be the quest for solutions to documentation issues, the debates of theory versus practice, or the yearning for an understanding of electronic records issues, the author views events differently. Jimerson puts forth the notion that most of the important developments in the field since the early 1980s derive from the quest for professional identity and recognition and the search for public acceptance of archival work as a socially significant profession. By examining three broad manifestations—the development of internal standards for professional recognition, enhancing the public image of archives and archivists, and strengthening the research and theoretical foundations of the profession—Jimerson shows how intimately linked have been the challenges of the past two decades to the goals of creating professionalism and gaining public recognition. Jimerson draws his conclusions from new readings on SAA initiatives (e.g. the Task Force on Goals and Priorities), ongoing professional debates (e.g. articles by Frank Burke and Lester J. Cappon that appeared in the *American Archivist* in 1981 and 1982), and an "American" interpretation of Canadian and European thinking on the state of the archival profession in the United States. The author opens the door to let in some fresh air after two decades of sometimes contentious growth and change. Although he may stretch a bit too far at this early stage in drawing conclusions about the lowering of archival boundaries in an age of increased globalization, he has set the stage for a deeper understanding of what it means to be an archivist who works within the cultural bounds of the United States.

A careful reading of the general introduction and the introductions to each of the nine parts in *American Archival Studies* will assist the reader in understanding the hard but personal choices made in compiling this work. Implicit in the introduction is a research agenda that calls for a deeper understanding not only of the profession's growth in the past two decades but also of the broader history of the archival profession in the United States. Let's hope that he or others follow up sometime soon.

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Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives

Edited by Anne Bruner Eales and Robert M. Kvasnicka. 3rd edition. Washington, D.C: National Archives Trust Fund Board for the National Archives and Records Administration, 2000. vii, 411 pp. Bibliography. Index. Cloth, $39.00. ISBN 1-880875-21-7. Paper, $25.00. ISBN 1-880875-24-1.

The National Archives deserves high praise for the publication of this much expanded and greatly needed guide to records of genealogical value in its hold-

ings. Following the same format as the earlier editions, this volume includes descriptions of records series, research strategies to use the records, illustrations of records described, and extensive tables delineating specific holdings or related secondary reference sources. An enlarged index increases ease of access and use.

The volume is divided into four sections, each with a number of chapters: population and immigration records include censuses, passenger arrivals and naturalizations; military records explore records of the regular army, volunteers, naval and marine service, pensions, bounty land warrants, and other records; records relating to particular groups include those concerning civilians during wartime, Native Americans, African Americans, merchant seamen, and civilian government employees; and other useful records encompass land records, claims records, records of the District of Columbia, miscellaneous records, and cartographic records. Within each of these chapters individual records series may be described in a single sentence or several paragraphs and may consist of a single item (an 1886 census of Sioux Indians living on the Lake Traverse Reservation in the Dakotas) or thousands of rolls of microfilm (nearly 2800 rolls for the main series of letters received by the Adjutant General's Office between 1822 and 1889).

Record descriptions are clear, concise, and contain additional information that may assist in the use of the records, including the presence of indexes, microfilm publications, or related printed works or archival collections. Series titles are in bold type to enable faster identification. For especially large or complex record groups (census, naturalization, United States District Courts, individual agencies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and local offices of the General Land Office) expanded state-by-state descriptions enable the editors to give very specific information about special cases that may apply to only one specific state.

Much of the text and almost all of the illustrations from the nearly twenty-year-old previous edition have been reused in this edition. There was no reason to change what worked (and still works) well. However, many records descriptions have been added or expanded, including an entirely new description of the 1920 census, an expanded and clearer description of the Soundex indexing system, and greater detail in describing the special schedules that accompany the censuses. Especially significant are the additions of many new records series relating to Native Americans and the inclusion of records relating to specific tribes and field offices.

Throughout the volume, narrative search strategies and 'helpful hints' for the genealogist/user are included in the text. The expansion of these descriptions is most welcome. These guidelines not only direct researchers to more series, but also permit them to filter out less useful ones. As genealogists generally move away from simply completing ancestral and descendancy charts to compiling data about the historical context in which their ancestors lived and worked, such search strategies become even more necessary. The inclusion of numerous lists of reference information papers, expanded descriptions avail-

able in published form, and other related works will assist many researchers in developing their own research strategies. Finally, the inclusion of information about events affecting the access to, or preservation of, records (e.g., the fire in the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis) adds to the timeliness of this volume.

Other improvements enhance the value of this volume. The inclusion of many more records that are housed in the regional branches of the National Archives, some relating to a small geographic area and others having more nationwide significance, is a wonderful asset to researchers. Some of these additions are undoubtedly new acquisitions, but others appear to reflect a greater recognition of the importance, value, and potential use of records created by federal field offices and local federal district courts. Expanded historical sketches of agencies place many more records in a clearer administrative context. Lastly, the use of white paper stock, rather than the cream color of the previous edition, makes the volume easier to read.

The decision of which series to include and which to exclude in a volume such as this is not an enviable one. The editors have done a good job of including what appear to be the most useful series among the massive quantity of records in the federal archives system. However, many genealogists, including this reviewer, always wish for more. Even though the release of the 1930 census was two years away from the publication date of this volume, it would have been nice to include some data about its size, scope, and imminent availability. Expanded descriptions of the information relating to individuals that can be found in the general correspondence files of agencies, especially in the nineteenth century, could have received greater emphasis. And, finally, notwithstanding the inclusion of the naturalization records of the U.S. district courts, other records created by those bodies also have substantial genealogical value.

The text and tables appear accurate. However, I noted that Table 22 omits Colorado, Mississippi, and Oregon as public land states. Researchers should keep this in mind as they peruse the volume.

A more serious limitation is the lack of description of many electronic databases that either assist access to or correlate with some of the federal records. Some are briefly mentioned; others are not mentioned at all. Even though several of these (e.g., the database of Ellis Island immigrants) were not operational at the time of publication, their eventual availability was known and much anticipated within the genealogical community. It would have been useful to at least mention the possibility of these potential access tools.

One cautionary thought about the use of this volume is in order. The volume is dense and the narrative is packed with specifics. This is not a volume that one sits down to read for a length of time. Even the most dedicated genealogist will need to approach it in small portions to absorb the vast amount of detail, both about the records and about the bureaucracy that created them. As an archivist and an avid genealogist, this reviewer required numerous timeouts just to let the

enormous amount of information be processed into research strategies and into how a particular records series might be useful in one's own research.

Because genealogists form such an important user group for most archives, this volume should be invaluable to archivists in serving that constituency. Many state and local archives will have records that correlate with, or at least, complement these holdings. Furthermore, archivists would do well to study this volume as an appraisal tool. This guide graphically demonstrates the breadth of records that agencies have created over time and that can now be valuable for research. To these ends, this volume belongs on the reference shelf of each archives and local history society serving the public.

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The Myth of the Paperless Office

By Abigail J. Sellen and Richard H. R. Harper. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2001. xi, 231 pp. Index. Bibliography. Available from The Society of American Archivists, $23.00 members, $30.00 nonmembers. ISBN 0-262-19464-3.

On the day I first started to work on this review, the *New York Times* had a front page article on the anxieties generated by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's (USPTO) decision to discard paper files after their digitization. Entitled "Ingenuity's blueprints, into history's dustbins," the piece hit some familiar notes: Thomas A. Edison, heritage, marginalia, history being lost, Nicholson Baker. No archivist was quoted or consulted, but a representative of the American Library Association supplied a carefully qualified, if somewhat ungrammatical, claim, "If in fact some if this information is being thrown away and it has not been completely digitalized, that's an issue for us."[1]

The very next day, the *Times,* carefree of any corporate memory, published an article about why the USPTO must reduce the amount of time it takes to process a patent application, which the paper of record deemed a critical issue in the age of fast developing technology. Among other things, it noted, "Automation of the entire patent application system is a central tactic in the agency's effort to reduce pending time."[2] As I pondered the familiar difficulties of serving two masters, both Ned Ludd and George Jetson, what suddenly came to mind was the realization that, again, no archivist was quoted or consulted. Two days, two articles, two prominent instances of recordkeeping quandaries that archivists could help to solve and, yet, there was no reference to us.

[1] Alison Mitchell, "Ingenuity's Blueprints, into History's Dustbins," *New York Times,* December 30, 2001.

[2] Sabra Chartrand, "New Patent Office Has Old Goal," *New York Times,* December 31, 2001.

Our inconspicuous absence also haunted my reading of *The Myth of the Paperless Office*. In this book, the authors seek to answer the question of why paper usage and consumption has gone up steadily during all the years when information technology developments and information technology prognostications have led us to believe that paper was on its way out. Studying work places, work processes, and work flows in a number of organizations, the authors come to the conclusion that paper has certain functionalities ("affordances" is the term used) that make it desirable, valuable, and necessary. We can make better use of paper, they argue, and, by studying its qualities and its applications, we can make much better use of information technology, but we have no reason yet to make a "paperless office" a practical goal.[3]

This assessment has some especially interesting implications for those of us involved with electronic records. The implications of this particular book for everyone in the archival profession, though, should be noted immediately, because of the eerie resonance with the *Times'* articles about patents. Despite dealing with a host of issues intimately involved in our special area of expertise, Sellen and Harper seem unaware that we exist. This is a research project into a topic that totally neglects all that we have done in the field. All the paraphernalia of our particular intellectual expertise—journals, programs, Ph.D.s, etc.—are so much undiscovered territory.[4]

The authors, of course, are not archivists, and they work here primarily on an anthropological model—they go into the field to study records creators in their native habitats—so their lack of awareness of any archival literature might be understandable.[5] But what seems staggering is that in none of the workplaces they visit does any informant mention archivists or records managers or refer to archival or records management practices and policies. Of course, not every organization has a formal records management program, but every organization has some sort of de facto policy in place, if only to deal with financial or human resources records that have high legal profiles. But apparently either nobody said anything at all or nobody said anything that Sellen and Harper thought worth recording. This isn't like the Sherlock Holmes story of the dog

[3] Some of Sellen's and Harper's earlier work is analyzed and reviewed in Ann Balough, "How Paper Facilitates the Way People Work," *Records and Information Management Report* no. 17, no. 7(2001). She notes, "Abigail Sellen and Richard Harper are among the foremost researchers examining the role of paper in organizational life" (p. 3).

[4] With one exception: Joanne Yates's *Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management* is mentioned on page 186 in a reference to the impact of the filing cabinet. Harper's book on the International Monetary Fund, *Inside the IMF: An Ethnography of Documents, Technology and Organisational Action* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1998), is one source that is further explicated in *The Myth of the Paperless Office*. In the acknowledgements, he thanks the archivist at the IMF, but it certainly is not clear from the text how influential she was. There are no references in the bibliography to archival resources and the critical first chapter, "What is a Document?", is overwhelmingly based on sociological analyses of bureaucracies, tempered by current work on information technology, communication, and epistemology.

[5] Sellen is a cognitive psychologist, working for Hewlett-Packard, and Harper is a sociologist at the University of Surrey, UK. He has a detailed website at <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/dwrc/harper.html>.

that didn't bark. This is more like some alternative universe, where the young Jenkinson was hit by a bus or Schellenberg got into law school, and archivists never left the rare books room.

In our absence, and this is where the book gets really interesting, Sellen and Harper do not neglect records and the concerns they raise; they note them and deal with them—*they invent a wheel,* even going so far as to devise a graphic of the document life cycle (p. 203). They had to come up with something, as the situations they encountered were so dire: "Banks, law firms, and records offices require enormous amounts of space for their archives. Much of this is to preserve a paper trail of past actions and events. Every letter, every transaction is kept just in case it may ever be needed. In fact, most of these documents are never accessed and never needed. Some of these paper files are kept as legal necessity. Many are kept because they provide a kind of emotional security blanket" (p. 28).

In some ways, this is comfort, albeit cold. Pace Voltaire, it seems, even if archivists didn't exist, it would be necessary to invent them. Just as a practical matter, Sellen and Harper demonstrate that somebody has to resolve that costly tension between legal necessity and angst-driven obsession. And on that intriguing note, this book presents us with the opportunity to evaluate a novel perspective on archival functions. What, we can ask, did these two authors write on their blank slate?

The first note is that, here, records are considered proprietary, in the same sense as a proprietary software application or file format. They are so inextricably linked to their creators that they cannot easily be shared. For example, in a study of records at a chocolate manufacturer, files are deemed so idiosyncratic that "anyone other than the owner would not be able to glean much from the file without the owner's being present to tell them about what was in it and how it was put together." This was because the records "*supported* rather than *constituted* the expertise" of the owners (italics in the original) (p. 129). In another company, Sellen and Harper learned the same lesson. Records were of little use (and, in fact, little used) without their creators: "When workers moved on to a new project, the knowledge was in their heads, not in the documents . . . leveraging this knowledge was best done by bringing together effective project teams as and when necessary" (p. 39). As a result, simply saving files is purposeless, as "documents do not speak for themselves." To create some value, to realize the potential knowledge a record may have, it takes "work to make its meaning, provenance, and importance clear to others" (pp. 133–34).

Sellen and Harper do not spell out how to do that, although they do stress the difficulties. As a result, while not introducing any specifically postmodern gloss to their work, they do hint at records' essential indeterminacy. This comes up in a number of instances. In a discussion of "information ecologies," the authors note that "different forms of information are made useful by their interdependence with other forms of information." Those other forms are various, covering anything from a report, a file, a wall chart or a work plan, but especially

"the minds of the people using" the records (pp. 188–89). Those cannot all be retained as archives, so, at this point, we have reached an understanding of a context that cannot easily be captured, with the consequence that fixing meaning to any record becomes entirely problematic or, at least, arbitrary. That possibility is also raised in the discussion of the creation of records. In a study of the compilation of police crime reports, the authors conclude that "accurate crime reporting is a process that by its very nature needs to unfold over time," with numerous participants, phases and considerations (p. 121). What results is an artificial document—not simply evidence of what happened that night, say, but a complex construct of research, dialogue, and social work.

By now, one could reasonably ask, "What's the point of saving anything?" There are, as the book notes, some legal requirements that organizations must respect, regardless of whether the results warrant the effort. Above all, though, Sellen and Harper draw attention to the fact that indeterminacy is a quality that may frustrate objectivity, but can promote use. In that context, what constitutes the archives is less important than how the archives are maintained. Therein lie the disadvantages of paper. "Paper simply does not afford widespread awareness and access for a large audience of potential consumers . . . paper is an outdated, unsuitable technology for preserving and leveraging knowledge of the past" (p. 169). In contrast, technology tells a different story. It fosters widespread and remote access over networks; fast, exhaustive searches of large volumes of information; flexible organization and reorganization of information; links to related material; and easy modification of content (pp. 170–72).

All these qualities promote use, particularly in the sense of establishing a new sense of ownership and of assigning new meaning to information within a new context. They also throw some light on the document life cycle proposed in this work. Sellen and Harper categorize records in terms of "hot, warm, or cold." Hot records are in use now, serve multiple and immediate purposes, need to be readily at hand, and are best utilized in a paper format. Warm records have just served or are just about to serve an immediate need, should also be kept readily at hand and, again, are best in paper (pp. 132–33). Cold records are the "dusty archives" (p. 169). As paper, they have no immediate purpose, nor, as time passes, people leave, and memory fades, do they have advocates in or value to the organization. As represented in the book's vision of a document life cycle, it is only some enabling technology and a conversion to digital form that allows cold records to once again become hot and to reemerge as knowledge, to be researched and recreated for use in other activities and other records (p. 203).

With this, we reach the definition of an archives that justifies its costs, particularly in terms of the return on investment necessary to implement information technology on a significant scale. The authors argue that a retention schedule based on use—hot, warm, cold—lends itself to the intelligent adaptation of technology and work practices. In this schema, paper records always

have a place, so we will not at any time soon see a paperless office. But we can and we should, Sellen and Harper think, start seeing paperless archives.

This conclusion does have some tendentious aspects. As noted, the authors are not subject matter experts, particularly in the area of archives; they are acting as ethnographers and thus are largely hostage to the quality of their informants. Obviously, their informants have some faults. None, for example, mentioned any of the larger social issues that animate archivists and routinely justify our work—accountability, heritage, history, etc. None, seemingly, was an archivist or a records manager. What can we gain from reading this book, then?

While we can certainly dispute the fine points and even many of the broad ones, we should appreciate the work's potential value as a medium—it conveys to us the views and opinions of the people we have to work with in any large organization. Sellen's and Harper's informants are the constituents any archivist in a large organization has to reach, especially to ensure that new recordkeeping systems address archival concerns. Their emphasis on the internal usage of records and on return on investment, as the rationale for recordkeeping and for implementing technology, are starting points for discussion and negotiation. If we read this book as a report from a focus group, unmediated by our preconceptions, then we can use it as evidence of the expectations our partners have. Our absence in the picture can give us a clearer view of the landscape into which we have to fit and allow us to refine our analysis of how to implement appropriate recordkeeping strategies.

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Historical Accounting Records: A Guide for Archivists and Researchers

By Rosemary E. Boyns, Trevor Boyns, and John Richard Edwards. London: Society of Archivists, 2000. x, 109 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Glossary. £15.00. ISBN 0-902886-58-4.

Historical Accounting Records is an introductory guide to that most perplexing of archival documents, the accounting record. In this archivist's twenty-plus years of experience, accounting records are the most misunderstood and underutilized of archival documents. Frequently, they are dismissed as only providing low-level detail, the use of which is confined to a handful of graduate students engaged in esoteric research. The authors of *Historical Accounting Records* aim to set the record straight, and they do have impressive credentials for their task. Rosemary Boyns is an archivist at the Glamorgan Record Office. Trevor Boyns and John Richard Edwards teach at the Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, and they are also the editors of the journal *Accounting, Business and Financial History*. Their efforts have produced a useful guide to the

understanding of historical accounting records, but they have been less successful in arguing for the retention of this document type in the first place.

This slim volume consists of five chapters. The first introduces the subject by outlining the nature of the accounting process. The next two chapters present basic summaries of the two standard forms of historical accounts that archivists and researchers are liable to encounter: single entry and double entry bookkeeping. The final chapter deals with the appraisal and use of accounting records. North American archivists will note that *Historical Accounting Records* is aimed at a British audience, hence some of the technical accounting language may differ from the terms used on this side of the Atlantic, but this is not a significant problem.

Single entry bookkeeping, sometimes known as the charge and discharge system, was the first widely used accounting system in medieval Europe and, later, in the American colonies. The authors provide only a cursory explanation of single entry bookkeeping, and this is unfortunate because the method was commonly used by small shopkeepers and artisans well into the twentieth century. The heart of the guide, which is reminiscent of introductory accounting textbooks, begins in chapter three with an initiation into the mysteries of double entry bookkeeping. Here we are given the basics by means of a series of vignettes that illustrate various elementary business transactions and how they are recorded. With its straightforward explanations of standard accounting practises, chapter three should be required reading for all neophyte archivists. Indeed, the transactions of the South American Wine Company, Maskey's Ltd., and Peter White & Co. may be lifted in toto by this reviewer for his next seminar on accounting records. For most archivists and researchers, this chapter is the most important in the book.

Chapter four presents three examples of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century accounting records from the Glamorgan Record Office. These records are analyzed from the accountant's perspective to illustrate how a double entry bookkeeping system worked in practice. The first example is drawn from Rhymney Iron Company fonds. These accounts date from 1836 to 1901. While the iron company's accounts are far from complete, it is possible to explain the firm's bookkeeping methods from the surviving records. The remainder of the chapter examines the development of financial reporting techniques. Here, balance sheets, profit and loss accounts, and unpublished revenue accounts drawn from the Powell Duffryn Steam Coal Co. Ltd. collection and the Cardiff Steam Collieries Ltd./Cardiff Collieries Ltd. fonds are analyzed to show the development of financial reporting techniques. To aid in their description, the authors have provided quality reproductions of the records used in the chapter. This adds to the clarity of their presentation.

If *Historical Accounting Records* had ended with chapter four, we would have a valuable introduction to pre-machine-readable bookkeeping records. But the authors go further by adding a final chapter on the non-monetary appraisal and

use of accounting records. Here, experienced archivists will find *Historical Accounting Records* more controversial and a bit disappointing. The authors emphasize the use of accounting records in accounting and business history, with a focus on corporate profitability and costing systems. This is far too narrow a focus. The authors recognize that account books provide more than just evidence for business and accounting historians, but they do not stress enough the importance of other user groups. The usage of accounting records by nontraditional research communities can be at least as important as usage by accounting and business historians. For example, accounting records from banks worldwide have been used to trace gold looted by the Nazi's during the Second World War. On a more academic plane, the authors themselves bring religion into the picture by noting that the Rhymney Iron Company accounts "show that the company played an important role in the local community" (p. 92): it paid the salary of the local curate. One does not have to be a Marxist to wonder about relationships between the miners' employer and the stern Methodism of a nineteenth-century Welsh coal mining village. In contrast, the authors' discussion of sampling accounting records is quite balanced. Here, the key is for the archivist to make as careful and as considered a study of the firm's accounting system as time will allow before making any selection.

As an introduction to the subject, *Historical Accounting Records* is highly recommended for archivists and researchers alike. Its first four chapters provide a clear and succinct primer on this most misunderstood of archival records. However, the final chapter on use and appraisal of accounting records gives short shrift to the majority of researchers who exploit these records with profit. With this caveat, the authors are to be congratulated for producing a practical introduction to accounting records.

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Trusting Records: Legal, Historical and Diplomatic Perspectives

By Heather MacNeil. Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000. xiv, 163 pp. Bibliography. Index. Available from the Society of American Archivists, $65.00 members, $75.00 nonmembers. ISBN 0-7923-6599-2.

In 1945 Margaret Cross Norton remarked, "It would be profitable and interesting, if time permitted, to compare the lawyer's methods of appraising veracity of the contents of documents with the historian's."[1] While time never

[1] "Legal Aspects of Archives," in *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival & Records Management*, edited by Thornton W. Mitchell, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), 31–38. Originally published as "Some Legal Aspects of Archives," *American Archivist* 8 (January 1945): 1–11.

did permit Norton herself to undertake such a study, Heather MacNeil's recent book, *Trusting Records,* does exactly that. The book is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation that MacNeil completed at the University of British Columbia, where she now serves as assistant professor at the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies. Those who have followed the work on archival studies at UBC in recent years will find many familiar concepts in this monograph; those who are interested in digging deeper will find the endnotes and bibliography quite helpful.

MacNeil tells a story of the "complementary relationship" between the development of principles and the methods for determining record trustworthiness in law and history from the sixth century to the present. In chapter 1, she begins with a description of the Justinian Code, with its dual concepts of perpetual memory and public faith. The former had to do with fixing the content of records in a way that would ensure their "continuity, stability, endurance, and trustworthiness," while the latter was ensured by preserving records in an officially recognized public place. Documents that were deposited in a public archives were given a special proof value that "private instruments" did not have. Widespread forgery, however, demonstrated that archival custody was not, in itself, sufficient to ensure the veracity of documents. Formal procedures of attaching seals, requiring witnesses, imposing punishments for forgery, and conforming to legally prescribed documentary forms gained increasing prominence. According to MacNeil, this trend continued through the Middle Ages, with official seals and notaries both playing important roles.

MacNeil reports that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw major efforts to "supplant irrational means of proof with rational ones and to transform judicial proceedings into rational investigations of the truth of conflicting allegations" (p. 7). The Renaissance is characterized by the concept of historical difference and the need to understand documents in their original context. Many documents were exposed as forgeries, based on "cultural anachronisms, linguistic discrepancies, and geographical oddities" (p. 11). One famous example is Lorenzo Valla's debunking of the Donation of Constantine. Scholars in the next few hundred years contributed numerous additional refinements to standards of good historical research. MacNeil's account of this period is largely one of increasing skepticism toward the veracity of individual documents.

A major turning point in MacNeil's story is Jean Mabillon's introduction of "the new science of diplomatic" in the late seventeenth century. Mabillon "looked at the document conceptually as embodying a system of both external and internal elements consisting of *acts,* which are the determinant cause of documentary creation; *persons* who concur in its formation; *procedures,* which are the means by which acts are carried out; and the *documentary form* itself which binds all the elements together" (p. 21, emphasis in original). MacNeil argues for a strong connection between the notion of evidence implied by Mabillon's diplomatics and epistemological writings by empiricists of the time, such as John Locke. Both sup-

ported the view that one's degree of confidence in the truth of a statement should be based on the strength of the evidence in support of that statement. MacNeil argues that this tradition strongly influenced eighteenth- and nineteenth-century legal evidence scholarship and nineteenth-century historiography. In both cases, she emphasizes what is effectively a propositional epistemology, i.e., belief that knowledge is based on the identification and justification of specific statements about the world based on empirical evidence and chains of logical inference.

The second chapter of the book focuses on common law rules of evidence. MacNeil explains that, by the eighteenth century, "jurors [in England] were no longer the main witnesses to the facts in dispute and so courts could no longer rely on the authority of their personal knowledge" to render verdicts (p. 32). This made rules about the admissibility of testimonial and documentary evidence increasingly important. She contrasts this with civil law jurisdictions on the Continent, which were expected to follow more specific, formal procedures for weighing the probative value of each item, and thus had less concern about the admission of potentially misleading evidence.

MacNeil explains that the increasing introduction of documentary evidence into common law courts created a tension with the hearsay rule. Under this rule, a person testifying in court must be subjected to confrontation and cross-examination. If Alice witnessed a crime and told Bob all about it, it is not acceptable for Bob to then testify on behalf of Alice in court, because this would not allow the disputing parties to accurately critique and clarify the details of Alice's story. They could only find out the limited details of the account that Alice conveyed to Bob. Using documents as evidence of Alice's activities or experiences is also problematic, since documents cannot answer questions posed to them. The legal system must, therefore, offer some exceptions to the hearsay rule if documents are to be admitted as evidence. The two conditions that they should meet are probability of trustworthiness and necessity.

MacNeil explains the business records and the public documents exceptions to the hearsay rule. The rationale behind the first exception is that a business record will tend to be reliable, since those creating the records depend on the regularity and accuracy of the "habit and system" for creating them, errors will generally be detected in the "regular course of business transactions," and employees do not want to risk the "censure and disgrace" of their supervisors as the result of creating inaccurate records. During the twentieth century, many of the traditional requirements for satisfying the business records exception have been dropped. MacNeil cites a Supreme Court of Canada case from 1970, for example, which eliminated the requirement that an individual must be deceased in order for a document to be used in place of her testimony and allowed for the admission of records expressing opinions, provided that the opinions "fall within the declarant's normal scope of duty." On the other hand, MacNeil also provides examples of case law that have defined important boundaries on the applicability of the exception. The public documents exception,

which MacNeil only mentions briefly, allows for the admissibility of records created by public officers in pursuance of official duties. She also describes provisions for authenticity, such as the ancient documents and best evidence rules. She points out that these rules are subject to significant limitations, based on the inconvenience or risk that they might impose.

MacNeil argues that courts are still struggling to determine how best to apply the best evidence rule to electronic records, often with inconsistent results. She describes the Uniform Electronic Evidence Act of 1998 in Canada as a recent attempt to clarify such issues. Instead of providing for the physical original of a record—a concept that has little utility in an electronic environment—the UEEA focuses on the integrity of the electronic recordkeeping system as a whole. The model legislation does not endorse any particular industry standard, but instead relies on the ability of the legal adversarial process to expose potential recordkeeping concerns through cross-examination. MacNeil is skeptical of such an approach, since she does not think it will lead to the production of the "epistemically best evidence."

In the third chapter, MacNeil provides her characterization of modern historical methods. While recognizing that there is no single canonical concept of historical proof, she does argue that "there are certain generally accepted procedural checks and controls" that guide historians. Her primary argument is that many of the same standards that hold for legal evidence also hold for historical research. In both cases, for example, there is a preference for primary sources, which are "most nearly immediate to the event itself." MacNeil contends that both arenas also rely heavily on constraints that have been built into organizational recordkeeping systems and ensure greater reliability. "The bureaucratic controls exercised over observation and recording constitute, in effect, an additional level of observation in which the bureaucracy itself watches over observers and recorders." MacNeil describes several critiques of positivist epistemology, but ultimately concludes that postmodernism suffers from "a rather simplistic assumption that the relationship between evidence and reality is a straightforward one" (p. 71) and does not have much effect on the actual practice of history. She takes more seriously the "practical challenge" introduced by electronic records, which often lose important elements of context and appearance when not managed appropriately.

MacNeil gives considerable attention to two prominent U.S. court cases related to electronic records: *Armstrong v. Executive Office of the President* and *Public Citizen v. John Carlin*. The cases involve disputes over the essential characteristics of electronic records, and whether reliance on a print-to-paper policy is sufficient for preserving and providing access to records. MacNeil is critical of the plaintiff in both cases, since she believes they focus too heavily on the "live" versions of records as they exist in their original creation environment, rather than insisting on appropriate recordkeeping systems. She is also critical of the National Archives and Records Administration's position, since it "underestimates the

extent to which the technological context in which electronic records are originally created and used may contribute to their completeness" (p. 83). MacNeil once again lays blame on the adversarial system of legal decision making, which "can be antithetical to meaningful dialogue." (Readers might then wonder what to make of MacNeil's own considerable reliance on case law as sources throughout the rest of the book.) Instead of relying on the strategically chosen positions of parties to specific legal disputes, we should attempt to definitively characterize "what constitutes a reliable and authentic record" in general.

The fourth chapter provides the punch line to MacNeil's story. She advocates diplomatics as the solution to modern recordkeeping problems and cites the University of British Columbia project entitled "The Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records"[2] as an important move in this direction. According to MacNeil, diplomatics allows us to identify "eight fundamental components of an electronic records, i.e., *medium, content, physical form, intellectual form, action, persons, archival bond,* and *context*" (p. 91). She presents an extremely demanding and daunting "ideal" procedure for how these considerations are to be integrated into a recordkeeping system. She quotes Luciana Duranti's statement that "the more rigorous and detailed the rules, the more established the routine, the more reliable the records resulting from their application will be" (p. 101). An ideal recordkeeping environment would thus be a depersonalized Weberian bureaucracy, with an unambiguous authority structure, rationalization of offices, specialized labor, and highly formalized rules, policies, and procedures.

From a theoretical perspective, I have reservations about several points in MacNeil's book. Her account is based on the triumvirate of rationalist thinking about legal evidence, modernist historiography, and a strictly Weberian model of bureaucratic organizations, all three of which have been called into question in recent decades. At a higher level of abstraction, she ties diplomatics to a very specific ontological view that assumes a world composed of objective events and an epistemological view that seems to base knowledge on the truth value of declarative statements about those events. This seems like a great deal of intellectual baggage for one to take on simply to engage in discussions about the management and preservation of records.

I would have also appreciated a somewhat more inclusive historical account of document creation and retention practices. From at least the medieval period to the present, collections of artifacts have played a significant role in forming the identity of the collector, not just documenting activities. Such artifacts increasingly included written materials. MacNeil emphasizes that the move from state to individual custody called for new forms of evaluation of

[2] See Luciana Duranti and Heather MacNeil, "The Protection of the Integrity of Electronic Records: An Overview of the UBC-MAS Research Project," *Archivaria* 42 (Fall 1996): 46–67; Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, and Heather MacNeil, *The Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records.* <http://www.interpares.org/UBCProject/>.

documents, based on specific intrinsic and extrinsic elements. What she does not emphasize, however, is the change in meaning that such distributed custody implies. Rather than seeing records as simply instruments of the state, we must recognize that that are created and retained for a variety of reasons. Making meaning of historical documents requires an understanding of not simply juridical context but also the personal, social, political, spiritual, and symbolic context in which those documents played a role. It would seem that MacNeil's advocacy of diplomatics neglects many of these issues in order to get at a single, definitive definition of the record. She says, "By decontextualising and universalising all the elements of documentary creation, Mabillon established a methodology for determining the authenticity of documents across juridical systems and over centuries" (p. 21). This would seem to run counter to most contemporary historiography, which suggests that no such universal methodology is possible.

From a more practical perspective, I would also take issue with several of MacNeil's arguments about how best to approach electronic records. First, I believe she often draws too sharp a distinction between original source systems and the records they contain. Preservation of digital objects must be sensitive not only to elements of context and simple appearance (e.g., font size, color) but also to a wide range of functional and behavioral characteristics that are embedded in the original hardware and software environment. While it is important to ensure the integrity of record copies of documents, this does not mean that we must completely abandon the "live" systems in which they were created or received.

My second concern is one of general strategy. It would seem that carrying out the sort of recordkeeping that MacNeil advocates would involve business process reengineering on a massive scale. Organizations would need to reconceive of all their activities in terms of juridical systems, acts, persons, and forms. They would need to undertake a hyperrefined analysis, based on terminology and distinctions that are completely unfamiliar to most archivists, let alone business managers, software developers, information technology administrators, or auditors. This would include such efforts as breaking "each procedure down into six phases, i.e., initiative, inquiry, consultation, deliberation, deliberation control, and execution" (p. 99). While I strongly agree that archivists and records managers must be more actively involved in the design and implementation of new systems and policies, I am quite skeptical about the approach that MacNeil advocates. Buy-in is a major concern, since MacNeil provides no indication of what business or performance advantages would be gained by an organization that adopted diplomatics. In fact, there is considerable literature on the disadvantages of trying to implement systems that assume rigidly defined procedures and require users to explicitly declare the intent of all statements. Genres of communication and documentation have fuzzy boundaries and are constantly evolving. Assuming otherwise leads to bad design decisions that hinder, rather

than assist, the work of users. It also threatens to remove from recordkeeping systems one of the most cherished elements of historical scholarship, the intentionality and voices of human beings.

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The Island of Lost Maps: A True Story of Cartographic Crime

By Miles Harvey. New York: Random House, 2000. xxiii, 405 pp. Ill. $24.95. ISBN 0-3755-01517.

For archivists, *The Island of Lost Maps* is a dark, but by no means unfamiliar, tale. It is, in part, the story of Gilbert Bland, a man with a history of petty crime who apparently somewhat haphazardly stumbled upon the lucrative and relatively safe occupation of hacking maps out of old books in research repositories and selling them at enormous profit. Bland's chief assets in his nefarious activities were a personal demeanor that did not raise the suspicions of his victims, and the seeming inability of curatorial professionals to protect their collections.

Bland (as our author, Miles Harvey, holds) was also successful because of the effortlessness with which he set himself up as a legitimate dealer of antique maps. In this guise, he was able to ply his ill-gotten gains not only to an ignorant public but also to his somewhat more suspicious but often greedy new colleagues. In one of the more chilling passages in the book, the author quotes an anonymous map dealer to this effect: "I'm sure a number of people closed their eyes. It is very easy to do when there is a chance to make money." These dealers, the author asserts, "were driven by what antiquarians sometimes describe as 'a need not to know'" (p. 232).

Since Bland absolutely refused to cooperate with his would-be biographer, Harvey's insights in the Bland case were gleaned the hard way, by spending years reviewing relevant newspaper accounts, military records, court documents, criminal records, and other public documentation. He also interviewed almost all of the other principals in the case—librarians, archivists, map dealers, police, FBI officers, and judges, as well as those members of Bland's family and friends who would talk to him. Bland's story takes up about one-third of the volume. For the rest, the history of map making, map collecting and marketing, and map theft in general are interwoven, with various degrees of literary success, with Bland's capers.

For those knowledgeable about the history of crimes against cultural institutions (presently the third most lucrative international criminal activity after the drug trade and arms smuggling), there are relatively few new insights to be gleaned from Harvey's work on the subject. In reality, the epic of the "Al Capone of cartography, the greatest map thief in American history" (p. xxi) is but another

example of a sad story that is all too familiar to longtime archival practitioners. It is, alas, a tale that apparently has not motivated us to reform by its periodic retelling. In his description of the institutional reactions to Bland's mutilation and thefts of valuable maps from a number of library and archival repositories, Harvey tries to balance his appreciation of the professionalism of individual archivists such as Jennifer Bryan, whose acute curatorial instincts led to Bland's denouncement, with his justifiable dismay with our seeming inability to protect humanity's printed and written treasures from the depredations of the Blands of the world.

Archival professionals must share the author's disappointment with the continued reluctance of our legal system to vigorously punish the crimes of the theft and evisceration of library and archival material. Harvey, however, is also quite correct to point out that, with regard to Bland's crimes, only four of the nineteen institutions victimized felt it worthwhile to press charges against this mutilator of their treasures.

Harvey's intimation that some curatorial staff do not begin to comprehend the extent of their losses to such criminal activities is somewhat borne out in the 1999 publication, by C. Wesley Cowan, of an auction catalog of 516 unclaimed items recovered by the FBI from the stash of an even more notorious book thief, Stephen Carrie Blumberg. Although most of the nineteen tons of books and manuscripts were recovered from Blumberg through an extraordinary effort by librarians and archivists working in concert with Federal authorities, the origins of the materials auctioned off three years ago could never be identified. Too many of us simply do not know what we lose or lack the wherewithal to property mark what we do have so others may return our valuable property to us when it goes astray.

While the practicality of property marking is a controversial subject, especially among modern manuscript and some rare book curators, there can be few exculpatory arguments for not adhering to the other best practices in archival and library security. These are presently available to us in the series of works produced by the Association of College and Research Libraries' Rare Books and Manuscript Section Security Committee, most notably the "Guidelines for the Security of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Other Special Collections," approved in 1999. They are included, as well, in the second manual on archival security commissioned by the Society of American Archivists, Gregor Trinkaus-Randall's *Protecting Your Collections: A Manual of Archival Security,* published in 1995.

Security threats to archival collections have been the subject of a growing number of sessions at SAA meetings in recent years, and the Society now has a roundtable devoted to the subject. Yet the recently approved SAA *Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies* make no specific mention of the study of the principles of archival security as part of the suggested curriculum, and relatively few graduate programs discuss the matter at length. We need to do more to make contemplation of archival and library theft and its prevention an essential part of the training of every archival professional.

Miles Harvey is a freelance writer and book columnist. He has written a sprightly book that has had enough popularity to cause it to be recently reissued in paperback. If his subject were not so very interesting, however, the author's frequent tendency toward semi-tangential excursions away from the heart of his subject would be off-putting to some readers. The most successful of these by-ways is his second chapter, "The Map Mogul" in which Harvey describes the vastly successful career of W. Graham Arader III. Harvey uses the colorful Arader's career as a map dealer to illustrate the spectacular rise in the market for antique maps that has occurred over the last third of the twentieth century.

Of far less relevance is Harvey's preoccupation with his own psychological motivations for writing *The Island of Lost Maps*. These ruminations occur too frequently and belong in a diary and not this book. Even when one is willing to subscribe to the value of literary allusion, moreover, the author's frequent reference to such esoterica as his invention of Mr. Peabody's ghost (it was the Peabody Library in which Bland met Jennifer Bryan) and his Hardy Boys reminiscences, not to mention two pages of "CliffsNotes" on *Treasure Island,* add little to the substance of this narrative and eventually cloy.

Harvey's success in describing the career of one who was highly successful at stealing from libraries and archives must also be viewed as a mixed blessing. Perhaps Harvey's work will succeed in sufficiently enlightening some members of our boards of trustees to the point that they will be inspired to provide the comparatively reasonable additional resources required to optimally protect our collections. More likely, however, *The Island of Lost Maps* will encourage copycatting among the more morally challenged of his readers.

Until society is prepared to devote appropriate resources to protect cultural treasures and more severely punish crimes committed against the institutions that preserve them, our collections will continue to be in jeopardy from individuals such as Bland and Blumberg. We archivists and our library colleagues must continue to be vigilant against such threats; and, as Harvey would be the first to agree, we must do much more to protect humanity's written legacy against such vandals than we have been able to do in the recent past.

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Boswell's Presumptuous Task: The Making of the Life of Dr. Johnson

By Adam Sisman. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000. xxii, 351 pp. Ill. $25.00. ISBN 0-374-11561-3.

In 1763 James Boswell, a young Scot of twenty-two, met Samuel Johnson, then fifty-three and the most famous literary figure in London. From then until

Johnson's death in 1784, Boswell was a frequent companion of the great man and, as he proved in his biography published in 1791, Johnson's documenter as well. After reading a couple of sentences of such description of this relationship, one could easily dismiss this as a minor literary event. Yet, Boswell's Life of Johnson was a pioneering biography, and, astonishingly, the book has stayed in print and been read by generations over the past two centuries. James Boswell's scholarship, methodology, and his own papers constitute an interesting story for archivists and other records professionals. Adam Sisman's study provides insights into how journals were conceived and created, glimpses into earlier perceptions of archives, the connection of archives to individual reputation, and a miscellany of other aspects of the formation of documents that demonstrate why archivists need to read outside their own professional literature.

We already possess good biographies of James Boswell, such as Peter Martin's *A Life of James Boswell.*[1] But *Boswell's Presumptuous Task,* by Adam Sisman, is a study of Boswell's writing of the biography, albeit one that builds around Boswell's tempestuous and tortured efforts to make a success of himself. As the title suggests, Boswell was an unlikely candidate for writing such a major literary milestone, and *Boswell's Presumptuous Task* is a moving, well-written account of an individual struggling to find himself and fame in the eighteenth century. The focus on the writing of the biography provides some interesting insights into the nature of archives, documents, and the use of evidence in an era characterized by the establishment, in Europe and the United States, of specialized institutions to collect and care for historical materials of all kinds.

For a very long time there was confusion about how someone like James Boswell, seemingly unsuccessful or undistinguished in nearly every aspect of his life, could write a biography of such excellence—indeed, could invent the art of modern biography. Most scholars writing about Boswell have shown how his reputation has improved as his personal papers became more available to researchers and a curious public, a century after his death. The nature of Boswell's personal archives, indeed his self-conscious approach to forming his archives, seemed designed to seal, ultimately, his reputation. While Boswell may never have achieved the respect, public acclaim, fame, and fortune he desired during his lifetime, the documentary residue in the form of his journals, correspondence, and collection of Johnson materials worked to correct these omissions. Boswell's grating personality, his licentiousness, and his character flaws are memorialized in these archives as well, but now these traits pale besides the achievements of his biography and the construction of his journals.

Boswell's biography of Johnson has had enduring value for us. Charles McGrath provides this insight into his significance: "Not only did Boswell invent the biography as we know it, he was also, in effect, the father of feature jour-

[1] Peter Martin, *A Life of James Boswell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

nalism, and for good and ill he created many of the conventions we still observe. The celebrity profile . . . oral history, documentary reporting, novelistic scene-setting a la the New Journalism . . . the buddy story, the travel yarn, the high-powered-dinner-party piece—the list of forms that he mastered or invented goes on and on."[2] Boswell did an unheard of thing; he placed himself into the biography and wrote from his own perspective, enlivened by the direct conversations of Johnson and his companions. This combination of documents and conversation to give form to a life was different, and it has made the biography continually accessible to later readers.

Boswell's approach to biography is of interest to us today. Johnson himself was a biographer, but the point of his work was to use the subject to be an example, make a point, or serve as a moral example. In his biographical technique, Boswell wished to allow the subject to speak for himself, and this was the reason why he was so assiduous in taking notes, checking facts, and replicating dialogue. Sisman demonstrates effectively in his study that we might never have such a biography again, given the close relationship between Boswell and Johnson for two decades, and Boswell's prodigious memory and dedication to copious note taking. Building the biography around scenes in Johnson's life required an accurate and detailed accounting of Johnson's words and conversations (otherwise it would be an exercise in fiction), and that is precisely what Boswell had available to him.

The records professional will learn much about the nature of journal writing as conceived in the eighteenth century and the subsequent use of these journals for biography writing. Sisman recounts that Johnson suggested to Boswell that he keep a journal to help him remember and to exercise his mind. Boswell had already begun to do precisely that, maintaining a journal to develop his style and to write a kind of history of his own mind. In fact, Boswell was so dedicated to his journal writing that he often cut into his time with Johnson and other activities in order to keep it up. As Sisman describes the process, "Reading Boswell's journal would be like reading his mind; reviewing his journal at a later date would enable Boswell to relive the events he had recorded. The effect was spontaneous and natural, even artless; but it resulted from conscious effort" (p. 28). As a result of Boswell's diligence and memory, his journal played a critical role in his writing of the biography: "Boswell had a remarkable memory; often only a brief note would be sufficient to prompt his recall of a long conversation, and he was able to write it up into a passage ten or twenty times its length. The practice of keeping a journal over many years had trained him to formulate in advance what he might write" (p. 138). In fact, Sisman's account of Boswell's technique is close to the heart of what his book is about, rescuing Boswell from the image that he was merely a recorder of what Johnson said enabling the reader to understand that Boswell's was a "much more complex process."

[2] Charles McGrath, "The First Real Biographer," *New York Times Book Review* August 19, 2001, p. 12.

"Boswell's skill was to sustain the illusion that what he wrote was just what Johnson had said. In this sleight of hand, he was triumphantly successful. His artistry concealed the extent of his invention. The naïveté he betrayed reinforced the sense of authenticity he wished to convey" (p. 139).

The descriptions of Boswell creating his journal are quite interesting. He viewed his journal as a "vast hoard of memory," compulsively taking down as much as he could and demonstrating absolutely no regard for privacy or secrecy (p. 33). Boswell made self-conscious references to his journal and other notes as his "archive" (p. 34) in an era when there was no real public sense of archives. Sisman speculates that Boswell was driven by a terror of oblivion, noting that he daydreamed about his papers being discovered some two thousand years in the future (it only took a little less than a century for the discovery to be made). Boswell's sense of the archival record as a memory device was ahead of his time. It is a concept drawn upon in the late twentieth century by scholars and others trying to understand evidence and collective memory.

Boswell's warm-up to writing the biography of Johnson was his publication of the *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides,* the description of an earlier trip with Johnson. The public had a difficult time with the volume's "record of private conversations" (p.102), resulting in a professional literary success but a personal disaster. People wanted to keep their distance from Boswell, fearing that he might record even their most off-hand comments. And here we have a major difference between manuscript journal and published book. "It was one thing to record private remarks in a journal: quite another to publish them in a book" (p. 109). This enters directly into a long ongoing debate about whether diaries and journals are written for private use only or whether they are really written with the intention of being read in the future by someone else. This may be something that can only be decided by examining individual cases, considering each individual's aims and intentions. Even then it is sometimes difficult to determine what the actual aim was in the compiling of a diary. My own sense is that more diaries and journals are written for public than just private use, ending the argument that somehow diaries and journals are not records as defined in more modern times. And here we see a fundamental tension in journal writing. According to Sisman, "Boswell once wrote that he wanted nothing about himself to be secret. In his journal he described behaviour that would be damaging if revealed, but left the journal about so that it could easily be read. Was this exhibitionism? Or confession? Sometimes he wrote in code, but at other times he provided explanatory details which strongly suggested that he was writing (perhaps subconsciously) for readers other than himself. His attitude to the possibility that others might read his journal remained equivocal throughout his life" (p. 33).

We also learn about Boswell's strong sensibility about facts. He solicited letters and documents from and about Johnson, and he compiled special notebooks of reminiscences about Johnson from his acquaintances. Many of the collected letters and other documents would appear in his biography. Boswell

exhibited the characteristics of a persistent collector, as many in this time before well-established institutional archives would have to do if they wished to pursue their research. Boswell "continued to receive parcels of letters and collections of anecdotes; sometimes the information revealed in these would inspire a fresh round of inquiries to those who had already contributed material for the *Life*. Boswell found that specific questions were more fruitful than general ones, and he adopted a technique of approaching his interviewees with a prepared list of topics—which he referred to as a 'catechism'" (p. 144). Boswell was a pioneer oral historian, predating other pioneers by at least half a century. What is also interesting is that these efforts by Boswell were often employed in order to fill in missing information or to check disputed facts, a commitment to accuracy which seems almost out of character with the kind of person Boswell was—constantly seeking favors, making bad investments, often visiting whorehouses, and so forth.

Boswell's biography also fits into the eighteenth century's approach to preserving archival materials through their publication. Sisman describes how Boswell would often receive unsolicited letters and other documents from "people who felt that their own importance had been understated, or who wished to make use of this opportunity to flatter a patron. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* was likely to be widely read; it was rumoured to be encyclopaedic; its scope suggested that it might become, as Boswell intended, a permanent record of life and letters in the middle years of the century. Those wishing to present themselves to posterity in a flattering light knew that Boswell controlled the illumination" (p. 232). We can view this either as an early celebrity biography or the eighteenth-century precursor to *People* magazine, but we can also detect how closely related, at times, such documentary publication and the archival function can become. What is notable, of course, is that many other lesser publications appeared in the late eighteenth century and afterward intending to preserve documentary materials, but achieved the quality of blending documents with dialogue and reminiscences.

Finally, Sisman's study is an example of a nonpostmodern approach to literary analysis and what it can do for advancing our understanding of documents. Early on in the book Sisman states that his purpose is to "deconstruct" the writing of *The Life of Johnson*. This, however, is not some convoluted or theoretical exercise, but a close analysis of Boswell's work. Reading Sisman's book gives us a greater understanding of the writing of journals, the collecting of documents, the uses of evidence, and the role of oral history and reminiscences. *Boswell's Presumptuous Task* is a highly readable work, and the inclusion of a history of Boswell's papers makes it all the more useful for archivists and other records professionals.

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