

REVIEWS

Elisabeth Kaplan, Editor

Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society

Edited by Richard J. Cox and David A. Wallace. Westport, Conn. & London: Quorum Books, 2002. vi, 340 pp. Index. Available from the Society of American Archivists, \$60 members, \$70 nonmembers. ISBN 1-56720-469-4.

The modern publishing industry fights a constant battle to convince consumers that the old cliché, “you can’t tell a book by the cover,” is untrue. Design and marketing people look for pictures and color schemes that will make the book leap off the sales table at Barnes and Noble. Publicists twist arms to get blurbs from big names proclaiming, “This book changed my life.” And editors press authors to accept a properly enticing title, preferably with a number in it, such as *Seven Highly Effective Ways to Lose 100 Pounds in Less than 8 Days*.

What, then, do we make of a book that arrives in the mail with a plain maroon cover (no pictures, no blurbs, nothing but the title and the author) and an almost deliberately bland title consisting of nondescript words and phrases like “accountability,” “records,” “public good,” and “modern society”? That the book is about archives would only seem to reinforce another cliché: that archives are a boring and bland topic. Yet, in fact, the book disproves at least this cliché since the nondescript packaging hides a remarkably lively book about a remarkably lively topic. The medium is definitely not the message here.

What *is* the message? The title proves only partially helpful. Editors Richard Cox and David Wallace explain that they sought to assemble case studies “focusing on the intersection between record keeping and accountability,” which presumably explains the subtitle (although the title’s reference to the “public good” is not similarly explicated). “Accountability” offers an accurate but too capacious framework for the volume. While most of the essays address the theme of “accountability,” the word doesn’t explain the selection of articles. Technical studies of how credit card companies or the Social Security Administration maintain backup copies of their records in safe locations deal with “accountability” but not in ways that would make them candidates for inclusion here.

A more helpful gloss on the book's content comes when the editors describe how their collaboration grew, in part, out of their shared conviction "about the importance of records in our society and the need to educate professionals . . . that records are not only artifacts for use by historians and genealogists but . . . the glue that holds together, and sometimes the agent that unravels, organizations, governments, communities, and societies" (p. 1). In other words, while the cover and title whisper that archives and records are unimportant, dead, and safely left to others, the fourteen essays (and eighteen authors) collected here scream the opposite: records matter deeply, they affect our lives in the present, and you ignore records at your peril.

The editors accomplish this through persuasive and readable case studies of the ways that records do matter and how they can become the sites of active contention in the present. One way they matter is in determining whether people will go to jail. Co-editor Wallace—in one of the strongest essays in the book—provides a compelling overview of the role of records in the Iran-Contra scandal—a subject he knows well from his dissertation on the White House e-mail "PROFS" case. Throughout the scandal, key developments centered on efforts to suppress documents as well as on the discovery of documents. Over and over, "elected and appointed federal officials worked aggressively to hide, destroy, and manipulate the documentary trail bearing on the scandal." They shredded, hid, and lied about documents and tried to keep classified anything that they failed to destroy. Oliver North and John Poindexter deleted almost 6,000 e-mail messages—a time-consuming task in the absence of any mass delete option in their primitive e-mail system. In one afternoon, North, his secretary Fawn Hall, and another staffer destroyed an eighteen-inch stack of documents, and North continued his energetic shredding even while nearby Justice Department officials were looking for documents.

Though distressing to watch government officials obliterating the past, this tale also offers a slightly more encouraging lesson: documentation so pervades modern society that even dedicated shredders like North and Poindexter find it hard to sanitize the historical record completely. North, for example, forgot to destroy a key memo that spelled out the diversion of funds that was central to the scandal. North and Hall doctored documents, but Hall—distracted by the festival of shredding—neglected to destroy her file copies of originals. And, perhaps most disastrously for them, North and Poindexter's e-mail deletions came a cropper because they didn't realize that the White House Communication Agency kept backup tapes. Lest we draw too happy a moral from this, keep in mind that the shredding, classifying, and hiding of documents dragged out Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh's investigation for six years, limited the scope of the prosecutions, and forced him to drop his key conspiracy charges against North and Poindexter.

In Canada in the 1980s, the absence of adequate records also hindered a prosecution—in this case of Nazi war criminals who had slipped into Canada after World War II. There, the public “scandal” initially focused on the archivists, who it was charged—either through a deliberate cover-up or in a “monumental blunder”—had recently destroyed the immigration records needed to convict and deport the ex-Nazis. But, in one of the most thoughtful and complex essays in the book, Terry Cook shows that the destruction of the records followed normal procedures and, in any case, those records would not have been of any real assistance to prosecutors. Cook, however, does not stop at defending himself and his colleagues; he also acknowledges that the harshest critics of the National Archives of Canada had a point in arguing that records retentions policies, as a whole, reflected “the lack of enthusiasm by the government in pursuing war criminals vigorously” at the end of World War II.

Such—often belated—efforts to come to terms with crimes of the past result in previously neglected records mattering a great deal. Greg Bradsher provides a detailed chronicle of how the (U.S.) National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) records relating to “Nazi gold” suddenly became extremely popular in the mid-1990s. Individual claimants, their lawyers, and representatives of foreign governments and companies (as well as journalists, authors, and historians) crowded Archives II in College Park, Maryland, trying to determine who was owed what, who was going to have to pay, and who was to blame. “Not since the ‘Roots’ phenomenon of the mid-1970s,” he writes, “has NARA experienced such a large and sustained research activity on a single topic” (pp. 177–78). Records were similarly crucial to compensating the victims of the infamous “Tuskegee Syphilis Study,” which left African American men with syphilis untreated. According to Tywana Whorley, “the government did not begin to discuss the possibility of a settlement until after the records concerning the study were found in the National Archives” (p. 169).

While these cases involve grievous historical injustices, they also reveal how records come to matter when large sums of money are at stake. David Gracy describes some fascinating cases of document forgery where money was often the motive. James Addison Reavis concocted an incredibly elaborate set of document forgeries as the basis of his claim to eleven million acres of land in the Southwest. Equally large sums of money were at stake for the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company, which (unsuccessfully) sued the library at the University of California, San Francisco, to remove a collection of damaging documents from its reading room and to block it from posting them on the Internet—a story ably told by Robin L. Chandler and Susan Storch. Records also led to enormous financial consequences in the collapse of Jamaica’s indigenous commercial banks in the late 1990s, which set off a continuing economic and social crisis for that island nation. As Victoria L. Lemieux explains, inadequate records creation and recordkeeping practices were crucial factors

in the bank failures. (Think microfilming technique is unimportant? Well, part of the problem in Jamaica was that poorly trained microfilm camera operators produced black or blank films that made it impossible to track suspected fraud.)

Records also matter when they emerge at the center of historical, rather than just financial, accounting. Nowhere has this been more true in recent times than in South Africa, which initiated an extraordinary public process of historical reckoning known as the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” But, as Verne Harris shows in his rich study, that search for “truth” was hampered by the systematic destruction of records relating to the state security apparatus that took place in the final, dying years of the apartheid regime—a record of record destruction that would surely leave Oliver North and Fawn Hall green with envy. When the new democratically elected government took power in May 1994, it found that “a massive deletion of state documentary memory had taken place.” The protracted demise of the regime meant, “unlike counterparts in the former East Germany, Kampuchea and other countries, South Africa’s apartheid leaders had had plenty of time to do the job thoroughly.” Still, as with Iran-Contra, “surprising pockets of public records survived the process, even within the security establishment” (p. 218).

And, finally, sometimes records turn out to matter so much that they lead to bitter disputes over ownership or control. James O’Toole engagingly recounts “the strange case of the Martin Luther King, Jr., papers,” in which Coretta Scott King and her allies at the Center for the Study of Non-Violent Social Change sued Boston University (BU) to get back the papers her husband had given to the university before his death. In her essay, Shelley Davis offers a lively, but depressing, tale of her crusade—largely unsuccessful, alas—to get the Internal Revenue Service to retain and make available its historical records.

One of the reasons that most of these case studies are so detailed and compelling is that more than half of them come from insiders. Given the IRS’s mania for secrecy, only someone like Davis, who spent eight years as its official historian, could take us “inside the secret culture of the IRS” (to quote the subtitle of the book she wrote about her experiences). Similarly, the extraordinary detail in Verne Harris’s account reflects not only his work as member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s investigative team with responsibility for investigating the destruction of records, but also his earlier role as the person who leaked the word of the record destruction to the African National Congress.

Yet inside accounts do not always provide a fully rounded story. O’Toole amusingly informs us that BU had much more carefully cataloged the papers of Roddy McDowell than those of Martin Luther King even though the former were restricted until the year 2100. (Is there a scandal about the making of

Planet of the Apes that we don't know about yet?) But we never learn why BU was so careless with such an important collection—information not available to O'Toole as the expert witness for the King family. Davis scathingly indicts historians and archivists for failing to back her up, but missing is an explanation by the professional societies for this lapse. At times, the firsthand accounts appear self-congratulatory, as when Greg Bradsher quotes Stuart E. Eizenstat saying, "Mr. Bradsher of the National Archives has really done truly heroic work in opening and indexing and cataloging . . . all of this information" (p. 190). But, at their best, insiders like Terry Cooke offer thoughtful self-reflections on their own roles in the events being described.

If the book has a larger theme than "records matter," it is that openness and access are good things. "[A]ggressive oversight and power to seize the documentary records provides one of the few means by which democratic accountability can be secured," writes Wallace. "Let the people know the facts and the country will be saved," concludes Anne Van Camp by way of quoting Abraham Lincoln in her review of the State Department's move toward greater openness. Such sentiments are surely shared by most readers of this journal. But as most readers also know, other factors often come into tension with the commitment to preserve records and make them available. But studies of egregious cases of the destruction or suppression records—as in Iran-Contra, South Africa, or the IRS—are not necessarily the best forum for engaging these dilemmas. Still, they do emerge periodically in this volume. For example, Terry Cooke notes how space pressures undercut the desire for a complete historical record. And Whorley's study of Tuskegee raises the difficult problem of privacy. She argues that African Americans will continue to distrust government accounts "until the government grants access to all the information it has on the study" (p. 170). Yet fully opening the record would expose the patient records of still-living men with syphilis and their families.

But the volume is not really intended to provide fully rounded histories of these archival episodes or to engage philosophical or technical issues in archival practice. Rather, the editors sought to "provide powerful narratives for the classroom" that would communicate "the significance of the roles records play in constituting society" (pp. 1, 2). In this, they have succeeded wonderfully. This would be perfect volume to assign to beginning students in archives or public history courses—except for the small matter of the hefty price tag. A paperback version is badly needed, and while they are at it, they might try a new title. How about *Fourteen Ways Records Matter: Tales from Eighteen Archivists Who Are Saving the Past for the Future*?

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Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination

Edited by Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan. London & New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2003. xiv, 354 pp. Illustrations. \$27.50. ISBN 1-86064-752-9. Available from the Society of American Archivists.

The twelve scholarly essays that make up *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* underscore the vast intellectual distance traveled from William Henry Fox Talbot's 1844 assertion that his invention was the "pencil of nature." Nor is the medium conceived of in this collection as the "bastard of science left on the doorstep of art," to borrow a phrase from curator Peter Galassi. Rather, editors Joan Schwartz and James Ryan pluck photography from the swirl of simplistic either/or art versus science debates to demonstrate the ways in which photographs have historically insinuated themselves into every conceivable aspect of people's lives, and thus powerfully influencing our perceptions of the world. The focus of the volume, as the editors describe it, is to present photography as a "socially constructed, culturally constituted and historically situated practice, and photographs as visual images, historical documents and material objects."

To be sure, editors Schwartz and Ryan are in a position to know. Schwartz was until recently a senior photography specialist at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa. A long-time member of the Society of American Archivists and its Visual Materials Section, Schwartz recently became associate professor in the Department of Art at Queen's University. Ryan, a lecturer in human geography in the School of Geography at Queen's University Belfast, scoured photographic archives while researching his influential book on colonial encounters in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

The editorial conceit of this book is that photography has been the "bastard child" not of science but of academia, its sheer ubiquity rendering it perversely invisible in discussions about space and place. *Picturing Place* strives to right this imbalance by making photography central to discourses on the "geographical imagination." What does this term mean, appearing as it does with varying degrees of clarity throughout the volume? Broadly conceived, "geographical imagination" describes the complex ways people come to understand the world and situate themselves in it. Photographs—in both their content and context—are at the core of each author's argument.

Three thematic sections (Picturing Place, Framing the Nation, Colonial Encounters) and an epilogue provide the book's framework. As becomes quickly apparent, there is, as the editors attest, no unifying theoretical or methodological approach across essays, with more than half concentrating on

the nineteenth century. All authors used photographs as primary source documents, and the volume uncovers a wealth of archival material. A dozen separate analyses of photographs made by amateurs and professionals, commercial photographers, and artists, and those appearing in government reports, personal albums, museums, and scientific surveys make for an engaging overview of the extent and variety of photography's uses throughout its 150-year history. This survey is the book's decided strength.

As with any assemblage of essays, some stand out. In the first section, M. Christine Boyer wrests discussion of *Mission Héliographique*—the 1851 project sponsored by the French government to document the country's architectural legacy through images—away from a prevailing art historical emphasis on individual photographers and connoisseurship. Boyer acknowledges the aesthetic merits of these images, made by such luminaries as Gustave Le Gray, Henri Le Secq, and Édouard Baldus, while restoring a sense of context to the project. The photographs function beyond the realm of art, argues Boyer, and were perceived and used in myriad ways by French officials as they attempted to establish an architectural patrimony for the nation. David Nye explores an entirely different time and place in his essay concerning photography's role in bringing the Grand Canyon to national consciousness in the United States. Unlike Yosemite, a site embedded in the American psyche as early as 1860, the Grand Canyon arrived late to visual prominence. Nye traces an increased recognition of the Grand Canyon's grandeur to the circulation of photographs by the Santa Fe Railroad and the resulting influx of tourists. The corporation and its tourist customers focused their images on the view "from the rim." This look down into the glorious abyss represented, Nye claims, "the Kantian vastness of eternity" and was the dramatic, inverse equivalent of an earlier generation's views upward to thundering falls and the sublime mountaintops of the American West.

The book's second section—Framing the Nation—begins with an essay by Jens Jäger that contrasts Britain's and Germany's attitudes toward landscape imagery in the construction of national identity. Jens claims that whereas Britain embraced landscape photography to impart patriotic ideals, Germany shunned photography as too crudely factual to inform an ideological campaign. Brian S. Osbourne centers his essay on a group of immigrant photographs commissioned by the Canadian National Railway between 1925 and 1930. Osbourne explores these images through the respective Foucaultian gazes of the bureaucrat, the public, and the immigrant to highlight the nation's competing attitudes toward immigration practices.

In the third and final section, authors address the notion of the gaze further, specifically of the colonizer upon the colonized. In Derek Gregory's essay, this means the photographic distillation of nineteenth-century Egypt to a series of monuments and exotic "types" created for tourist consumption. Alison Blunt interprets the photographs of British elites in the 1856 *Lucknow Album* as oddly

sterile scenes of domesticity particularly when viewed against the backdrop of the bloody Indian “mutiny” that occurred just a year later. Finally, the epilogue by William J. Mitchell traces the trajectory of image production, dissemination, and storage from Talbot’s 1839 invention to the digital age and speculates on the archival challenges facing the digital generation.

With *Picturing Place*, Schwartz and Ryan admirably succeed in putting photography at the center of scholarly conversations about place. While the “imaginative geographies” of these essays range widely across centuries and countries, more work still needs to be done. This is one of only a handful of books beginning to take seriously the vital position of visual images within wider social and political contexts, but their numbers are growing. Archivists should applaud the creative approaches to cultural studies that these varied uses of photography invite. Alas, the primary weakness of this collection is the jargon and convoluted writing that mar some of the essays. One favorite example is “The spatiality of social interaction, naturalized, and indeed neutralized, within the realistic appearance of photographs, is inscribed by socio-political relations of which photographs were simultaneously a medium and a product.” Come again? If one has the patience to wade through this kind of language—including the current vogue for the terms “spatiality,” “discursive,” “mimetic,” “alterity,” and (my personal favorite) “facticity”—the effort is genuinely worthwhile. *Picturing Place* gives photography its due as primary source material, and this is reason enough for archivists to include it on their reference shelves. Schwartz is the model of a scholar-archivist, bringing her considerable experience to bear in a book that will undoubtedly inform academic and curatorial discussions on photographic imagery and geographic understandings for many years to come.

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Moving Archives: The Experiences of Eleven Archivists

Edited by John Newman and Walter Jones. Lanham, Md. & Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002. x, 124 pp. Available from the Society of American Archivists, \$30 members, \$35 nonmembers. ISBN 0-8108-4500-8.

Until the recent publication of *Moving Archives: The Experiences of Eleven Archivists*, resources for moving archival collections were scant. Published material on planning and executing moves included a few articles and preservation news bulletins, the occasional mention in archival manuals, and books that

address the library, but not archival, concerns. Our best resource was the irreplaceable advice received personally from expert colleagues. Archivists can now be grateful to John Newman, professor and university archivist at Colorado State University, and Walter Jones, assistant head of special collections at the University of Utah, for their initiative to produce and edit *Moving Archives*, the first volume on the subject of large-scale archival collection moves.

Moving Archives is a compilation of eleven narratives by archivists who have lived to tell about their unique and personal experiences with moving collections. John Newman provides an introduction and explains the evolution of the volume. *Moving Archives* developed from conversations between Newman and Jones on the scarcity of pertinent sources. These initial conversations led next to a conference session, and then to *Moving Archives*. Also in the introduction, Newman offers a cheering perspective: archival work and responsibilities have prepared us well for the challenges and opportunities of a move. As archivists, we “. . . often work in . . . haste, handling new collections and circumstances with little preparation and too few staff, and demonstrate qualities of energy, expediency and imagination” (p. vii). A move demands the same performance. Archivists’ skills, honed in everyday responsibilities, carry us well into the wide world of moving into, out of, or around our repositories. Newman’s point is sound. Whether moving collections or not, we are responsible for unusual materials (often in unusual settings). We supervise the handling of our collections. We effectively communicate the value of our collections to those not yet aware of this value, whether they are patrons, administrators, or a professional moving firm. The contributions contained within this slim volume support Newman’s line of reasoning and offer encouragement to the reader.

In *Moving Archives*, the editors succeed in their objective to provide helpful examples. They hope that the range of these accounts will provide readers with examples pertinent to their institutional settings and thus some wise advice (p. vii). The accounts depict in-house, crosstown, and cross-country moves. The contexts of each move vary, of course, and involve renovated and new buildings, disaster situations, and administrative changes. Some moves are exciting and singular, while others illustrate more common experiences.

Each author writes in his or her own voice, and each account is structured differently. Many contributors include descriptions of their holdings and administrative structure, planning activities, the actual moves, and their successes and failures. The variety of repository types and archival expertise is well represented. The book begins with a generalized account, by Lisa Backman, of experience with numerous moves. Archivists from academic institutions (Walter Jones, John Newman, Patrick Quinn, Russell C. Taylor, Cassandra M. Volpe) compose the majority of contributors. Government archivists (Gary Harrington, Joanne A. Mattern, Albin Wagner), archivists at historical societies (Patrick Quinn, Todd Welch), and a religious archivist (Monte Kniffen) are

included as well. The result is an interesting and readable volume, offering good advice and discussion of important issues.

The main value of this volume lies in its attention to management issues pertinent to any move. These include planning, moving personnel, building design and construction, public relations, staff morale, preservation, and security. Other helpful discussions concern contracting with professional moving firms, labeling and packing, the measuring of both collections and shelving, and transportation methods. Many contributors explain that a move provides a welcome opportunity to increase both physical and intellectual control of collections. The pervasive message is that planning, combined with flexibility, results in a successful move. Such wisdom is welcome and was previously missing from archival literature. However, other valid topics, such as resolving or avoiding problems with contracted moving firms, fostering staff morale, and ensuring staff safety are only briefly addressed. And necessary "post-move" projects such as shelf-reading, training, and promotional efforts receive little mention.

At points, unnecessary detail distracts from the sound management advice found within an account. Move-specific details are less useful and relevant to the reader, due to the uniqueness of every move. In addition, the varieties of structure and voice can make this volume difficult to absorb. Some contributions provide a general discussion, while others are extremely detailed. The accounts offer different forms of summary advice. While the uneven voices and various structures of the essays provide for a lively read, they can detract from comprehension and clarity. The lack of an index prevents easy or comprehensive access to topics, many of which are covered by more than one of the accounts. An index would have enhanced the book's value as a management and reference tool and would have helped to resolve the problem of access to specific subjects.

Even with the omissions, both novice and experienced "movers" will find *Moving Archives* of value. This volume will be a useful addition to the archival education curriculum, providing students with meaningful glimpses into the reality that is archival administration. While such windows into reality were previously available in articles, at conference sessions, and through discussion, *Moving Archives* offers us the convenience of case studies within one volume. In addition, the book as a whole sustains practitioners who must plan and execute moves.

Most importantly, perhaps, this book encourages the profession to publish further on the subject. In the introduction, Newman explains that the editors' goal "... is to provide an initial piece of professional literature in what we hope will become a growing body of modern information about moving archives" (p. vii). Certainly, with the number of archivists who move collections, and the frequent conference sessions concerned with moving, a comprehensive volume

is both desirable and feasible. A bibliography of relevant resources would be very helpful to the archival community, as well.

As Newman, Jones, and all of us who have faced the challenge of moving archival collections are well aware, pertinent professional literature before *Moving Archives* was meager at best. This volume eases our frustrations regarding the lack of published archival resources and invites further publication. We can be thankful to the authors who generously share with us their wisdom and experiences.

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Dust: The Archive and Cultural History

By Carolyn Steedman. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002. xi, 195 pp. Bibliography. Index. Cloth, \$59. ISBN 0-8135-3046-6. Soft cover edition available from the Society of American Archivists, \$18 members, \$23 non-members. ISBN 0-8135-3047-4.

Before you sit down to read *Dust*, I strongly suggest you pour yourself a tall glass of favorite liquid refreshment, take a few cleansing breaths, or do whatever else might serve as your routine for instilling calm and forbearance. This little book will test you.

To begin with, *Dust* is heavily steeped in the academic brew of postmodernist semiotics. For the gleefully uninitiated, semiotics involves seeing human experience, in all its minute expression, as signs or symbols. The word “refrigerator” does not identify an appliance, it connotes humanity’s desire/need to safeguard foodstuffs. To a degree, this perspective enlivens one’s insights on the world. But all too often, semiotics is to humanities scholarship what Schoenberg is to classical music. It is dominated by abstruse, disconnected passages that must be reread several times.

Author Carolyn Steedman is a historian at the University of Warwick in Great Britain. Her ample scholarly repertoire defies easy classification but centers mainly around eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British cultural studies. She has written on childhood, servants, legal structures, autobiography, national identity, and memory. *Dust* incorporates a patchwork of elements from these and other research interests, which might have been a fascinating and satisfying accomplishment if the connecting thread were truly visible.

One of the greatest challenges in reviewing this book is simply describing its contents. Looking at the synopsis offered by the publisher, I’m comforted to

know it's not just me. Perhaps the easiest way to characterize it is as a set of meditations on the act of deriving meaning from the past and communicating it to others. Steedman begins with observations on Jacques Derrida's influential 1994 paper (later book) *Archive Fever*, which she uses as a launching pad for a series of headfirst catapults into the muck of deconstruction. To wade through, she summons diverse, nuanced research insights on eighteenth-century British judicial practice, the experiences of nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet, George Eliot's book *Middlemarch*, domestic space and belongings in Victorian England, the poetry of W. H. Auden, and more. But I would be on the thinnest ice if I were to try to portray the narrative more fully or to conjecture on its essential message. It's perhaps more than ironic that the book's last sentence is a question.

What *Dust* is *not* about (as is probably apparent by now) is the administration and development of archives. Nor is it even really about the use of archives by advanced scholars or others. Instead, it falls in the emerging genre of academic reflection on the purpose and nature of societal remembering. Archives, of course, figure into this picture as institutions and instruments of memory. And archives do figure into *Dust*—in fact, part of the book even ruminates on the physical presence of dust among historical records—but archives are of less interest to the author than the individual historian's reconstruction and telling of the past. Probably the most meaningful chapter from an archivist's vantage point is "The Space of Memory: In an Archive," though even here, the meaning will be much in the eye of the beholder.

Reading *Dust* is a bit like experiencing an overwrought Sunday sermon, where one's attention is occasionally captured by a pearl but is usually sent adrift by verbiage and syntax meant to please the preacher more than the congregation. A prime illustration of this is the chapter "The Meaning of Rag Rugs." Contained is a parable of the author's realization of her own misassumptions in recounting history. Part way through, it includes the following passage: "The rag rug carries with it the irreducible traces of an actual history, and that history *cannot be made to go away*; but ways of writing it and wanting it (and what it represents) are actually somebody else's story." Okay, I noted, this seems to be an elegant metaphor on the idea that the telling of history is more about the teller than about the past. But then the text meanders into a "coda" on the socio-economic history and "romance" of rags. And I was no longer sure I got the inspirational word, if there was one.

Steedman introduces the penultimate chapter of *Dust* with segments of Auden's poem "Homage to Clio" and adds the following commentary: "You can never be quite sure whether Auden has seen something of very profound importance, or whether what you have before you is an extraordinarily moving string of phonemes." Substitute Steedman's name for Auden's and change "extraordinarily" to "occasionally" and you have an apt depiction of my ambiva-

R E V I E W S

lence and discouragement in reading *Dust*. Archivists who have delved into previous postmodernist writings on the social phenomenon of memory will, I expect, find tantalizing bits to mull over. However, those who wish to experiment anew with this scholarship would be better served to start with the consciousness raising of archival colleagues such as Terry Cook, Heather MacNeil, and Brien Brothman (*Archivaria* 51, Spring 2001); Mark Greene and Tom Nesmith (*American Archivist* 65, Spring/Summer 2002); and Fran Blouin (*Archival Issues* 24, no. 2, 1999) and let them light the way.

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