

## Archives and Recordkeeping: Theory into Practice

Edited by Caroline Brown. London: Facet Publishing, 2013. Softcover, 260 pp. SAA members £39.95, nonmembers £49.95. ISBN: 978-1-85604-825-5.

This innovative and important collection, edited by Caroline Brown, deputy archivist at the University of Dundee, provides a much-needed discussion on the applicability of archival theory. The book offers readers intelligent and useful assessments of how theory can be made practical. Brown begins her introduction with a justification for applying theory to the archival profession. She explains why the book is important both for those already in the profession and for those beginning to enter the archival world. While I worried that this beginning would set a tone of forceful rhetoric throughout the book, my concerns were needless. Just as needless, I dare say, as Brown's overly defensive approach. While Brown is concerned that readers may see theory as "impractical, irrelevant, costly . . . and of no interest or consequence" (p. xi), the book that she has edited makes it very clear that this is not the case. The essays collected in *Archives and Recordkeeping* make the best argument for why this book should be read: for the betterment of those entering or already in the profession.

With this book, Brown has assembled an all-star lineup of archival and records management professionals. The essays are as strong and well regarded as the individuals who wrote them. Brown's editorial decision making is on display throughout, particularly in the formatting of the essays. When dealing with a topic that is as potentially weighty as archival theory, it is important to maintain as much clarity in the content as possible. Brown fosters such clarity in two distinct ways: first, each essay in the book is highly organized and segmented for easy reading and, if desired, skimming. Second, at the end of each chapter is a list of references and recommendations for further reading on each particular topic.

Chapter 1 begins by establishing a baseline for the reader through a discussion of archival concepts, roles, and definitions that will appear throughout the upcoming chapters. This helpful guide is put together by Caroline Williams and considers the ways in which archivists and records managers could and should gain a better understanding of the core aspects of their profession. In particular, Williams does a good job of balancing definitions from multiple institutions (say, from the SAA *Glossary*<sup>1</sup> and from the Information and Records Management Society) to offer clarity and unity. I found the chapter to be a very helpful guide that I reflected on as I read through the other chapters.

In chapter 2, Anne J. Gilliland explores what she considers to be the most difficult of archival challenges: appraisal. She explores and explains the theoretical context for appraisal, particularly in terms of modern recordkeeping and

information technology. She provides a brief discussion of appraisal methods, touching upon the works of Jenkinson and Schellenberg in particular. Following this overview, Gilliland dives into the history of appraisal beginning with the three Dutchmen (Muller, Feith, and Fruin) before eventually bringing the discussion into the twenty-first century with a summary of the current debate over the appraisal of born-digital records. Finally, Gilliland provides the reader with a series of key questions to think about in terms of appraisal in today's environment. While this leaves the chapter somewhat open-ended, Gilliland offers the theoretical and historical context for readers to draw their own conclusions about the appraisal process.

In chapter 3, Jennifer Meehan provides a detailed discussion of arrangement and description. Similar to Gilliland, Meehan begins with a historical perspective on the topic. Her text is extremely accessible and almost reads like a reference text. The chapter introduces a great number of terms related to arrangement and description, which Meehan handles very well and with clarity. Each of these terms is bolded and bulleted for easy access and reference. Meehan assumes that her audience is fairly unfamiliar with some of the foundational terms of archives and recordkeeping (such as *provenance* and *original order*), but her short, precise definitions don't make them feel unnecessary or burdensome to those who are already well versed in the profession. She then discusses a variety of conceptual models of arrangement and description with which the reader should be familiar, adeptly addressing their strengths and weaknesses. Meehan also spends a good part of her text on the practical applicability of arrangement and description practices, including a discussion of classifications, content standards, and types of metadata. She discusses ways in which the profession can make these practical tools more effective and efficient for users, offers practical advice, and concludes with conceptual challenges to the "business-as-usual" way that the profession works.

Jeannette A. Bastian explores the ethical side of archives in chapter 4. Bastian begins her text with the idea that ethics in archives and recordkeeping are a core aspect of the profession; it is, in fact, a categorical imperative. She addresses the fact that there are ethical codes of conduct within the profession, but that ethics function at the individual level. Bastian discusses the need for an ethical perspective within the profession and looks at ethics in both theory and practice. An interesting issue she addresses is the fact that while archivists and records managers may be ethical, the documents and records they work with are not ethical themselves. Bastian explores a variety of ethical issues related to documents, including access, preservation, and copyright issues. The chapter also includes a review of different ethical standards that can be found worldwide: from professional organizations to corporations to government bodies. Bastian concludes her chapter by looking at specific areas of ethical concern including issues of social justice, rights of indigenous peoples, and digital issues.

The diversity of information in the chapter provides insight into a wide range of ethical issues and guidelines that affect the profession on a macro level.

In chapter 5, Eric Ketelaar discusses the role of archives as memory institutions. He explores issues related to memory, heritage, and identity and the role of archives in their formation. As part of this exploration, Ketelaar discusses in depth the development of memory theory, including separate discussions of individual, group, and collective memory. Archives are, according to Ketelaar, a component of cultural memory. This enables archivists to aid in the construction and transmission of individual and collective memories and identities. Ketelaar's text is at times somewhat convoluted, but the conclusions he draws about the importance and impact of archives on memory are solid. In particular, he carefully shows both the positive *and* negative possibilities of archives. They can be valuable assets for the support and encouragement of community identity, but they can also be seen as appropriating or portraying the cultural memory of a group without its consent. As Ketelaar concludes, it is essential for archivists to understand the connection between archives and the construction of memory and identity, for both good and bad.

In chapter 6, Rachel Hardiman presents a wonderfully crafted discussion of the influence of philosophy on archives and records management. Over the course of forty pages, Hardiman manages to summarize nearly three hundred years of philosophy with impressive clarity, brevity, and depth. Following a similar layout to Jennifer Meehan's chapter, Hardiman introduces, defines, and contextualizes dozens of philosophical terms and individuals in a well-organized and easy-to-read manner. While the chapter could be seen as a crib sheet for a philosophy midterm, Hardiman offers much more by placing each of the philosophical movements in the context of archives and recordkeeping, ensuring that the text doesn't feel too encyclopedic. After introducing and explaining each philosopher or school of philosophy, Hardiman includes a brief bibliography and suggestions for further reading. This is in addition to nine pages of suggested works at the end of the chapter. Hardiman does a tremendous job of summarizing hundreds of years of philosophical work and placing it within the archival context. This chapter was, for me, the highlight of the book and worth a read by students, educators, and professionals alike. The book may have been better served by placing this chapter after Caroline Williams' foundation-setting first chapter. Hardiman's text would have nicely contextualized some philosophers (Derrida and Foucault in particular) mentioned later in the book.

The final chapter of the book is Alan R. Bell's discussion of the tension between technological change and recordkeeping. In this brief concluding chapter, Bell raises the issue of how technology has changed both the creation and keeping of records. Beyond that, it has changed how people both inside and outside of the profession think about records. Those who create files on computers,

according to Bell, have thought of themselves as records creators since the advent of graphical user interfaces. Once people could create documents and place them in folders on their computers, they began to see their work as almost archival. This, in part, has led to a new understanding and definition of records. Bell explores the issues, both positive and negative, with this new way of thinking and addresses how archivists and records managers must deal with digital objects and their organization. To face the challenges that technology presents, archivists and records managers need to face these issues head-on and take steps to bring the creators, keepers, and users of records closer together. In both theory and practice, Bell concludes, recordkeeping should not be static.

*Archives and Recordkeeping: Theory into Practice* is described on its back cover as “essential reading for students and educators” in the field. I could not agree with this more. If you are a professor of archives or recordkeeping courses, put this book on your syllabus. If you are a student preparing to enter the profession, pick this book up. In addition, those of us who are already working in the archival profession should look at the essays in this text to expand our own understanding of the historical and theoretical contexts of the world in which we work. In particular, current professionals should closely read Jennifer Meehan’s chapter on arrangement and description and Rachel Hardiman’s fabulous discussion of philosophy in chapter 6. These two chapters are the cream of a very good crop.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Richard Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), <http://www2.archivists.org/glossary>.

## Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections: Reducing Processing Backlogs

By Daniel A. Santamaria. Chicago: American Library Association, 2015. 235 pp.  
Softcover. \$75.00. ISBN 978-0-8389-1257-7.

A book called *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections: Reducing Processing Backlogs* might not seem like it is going to be an emotional experience. Among other things, there are chapters devoted to reimagining processing workflows, obliterating backlogs, and making digitization part of the