

“All Shook Up”: The Archival Legacy of Terry Cook

Edited by Tom Nesmith, Greg Bak, and Joan M. Schwartz. Chicago: Society of American Archivists and the Association of Canadian Archivists, 2020. 538 pp. Softcover, EPUB, and PDF. \$39.00. Softcover ISBN 978-1-945246-30-2; EPUB ISBN 978-1-945246-31-9; PDF ISBN 978-1-945246-32-6.

Terry Cook was among the most profound, creative, and influential thinkers in the history of the archival profession. His articles and papers have shaped some of the most important work of a generation of archivists and historians relating to archives in the broadest sense of the term. It was, then, natural that at the time of his tragic and premature death from cancer in 2014 that there was talk of a volume dedicated to his work and memory. Tom Nesmith, Greg Bak, and Joan M. Schwartz, all close colleagues in the world of Canadian archives, took up the task and have produced a very impressive book.

“All Shook Up” is a wonderful title that is to be read in different ways. Cook, a man of widely varied interests, was a great admirer of the music of Elvis Presley. Possessed with a gregarious yet disciplined mind, he drew on a vast range of interests to formulate his ideas. And those ideas did indeed shake up the archival profession. His work pushed archivists to think in new ways; pushed archival institutions to consider new directions and self-assessments; and pulled the larger academic world toward a greater appreciation of the complexity of archival work and records generation. *“All Shook Up”* differs from the usual *festschrift*. Rather than a collection of unrelated articles authored in honor of Terry Cook, the editors have identified thirteen of the most important articles written by Cook himself and asked his former colleagues to introduce specific articles in a way that is both personal and academic. The result is really two volumes in one.

The first “volume” consists of the varied introductions that form a wonderful set of recollections and, at the same time, establish the importance and context of the particular article. I was struck by Barbara L. Craig’s penetrating analysis of Cook’s instructive article “Paper Trails: A Study in Northern Records and Northern Administration, 1898–1958.” This article was instrumental in informing her own work on the role of records and records administration in British government. Craig emphasizes the importance of Cook’s article in demonstrating the dynamic administrative environments that foster the generation of records and the consequent need for broad contextual knowledge. What goes on in the office is the essential question. How archivists then capture that context for those who research the records is an essential element to the dynamics of the archival research process. Eric Ketelaar introduces Cook’s

address to the International Council on Archives in Beijing in 1996, "What Is Past Is Prologue," and points out its importance in providing deep insights into the idea of the postcustodial archivist. Rather than keepers and arrangers of records, archivists, in their work, need to reflect the "... acts of creation and the functions of the creator" (p. 221). Archives not only document the past, they have a past themselves. Ketelaar traces the influence of this article through a variety of important studies. As with all of Cook's work, this article did not define a moment but rather spurred vigorous and continual conversation.

These are but two examples. All the introductions combine both the personal and the insightful. Chris Hurley, Heather MacNeil, Andrew Flinn, Ala Rekrut, Joanna Sassoon, Anne J. Gilliland, and Jennifer Douglas, among others, all important participants in the discourse on archives, interpret specific articles with depth, understanding, and appreciation. Then, too, this "volume" has a deeply personal part. Warm recollections by Nancy Bartlett, Verne Harris, and the three editors speak to the impact of Terry Cook on the lives of so many archivists and on understanding the power of records. Beyond his towering intellectual achievements, he was such a great person. What could be more delightful and intellectually stimulating than having dinner with Terry and Sharon Cook! As Ian E. Wilson notes in his introduction to the book, Cook was "... patient, respectful, and affable" (p. ix).

The second "volume" consists of the actual writings of Terry Cook. Jennifer Rutkair compiled a comprehensive bibliography of all his work; but I commend the editors for selecting thirteen of his most influential articles and for including the full texts in the book. Cook's preferred genre of communication was through journal articles published primarily in *Archivaria*. The articles chosen are extraordinarily varied in content. Certainly, Cook's explorations of postmodernism as it might relate to archives are among the most impressive. Nicely contextualized by Brien Brothman, Cook's article "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives" draws on the then-emerging discourse on larger questions of power and culture. Just as scholars began to question the underpinnings of the state, its institutions, and its diverse populations, Cook saw that these questions could challenge archivists to move beyond the certainties of procedure and practice to examine the larger purpose and origins of records. A historian as well as an archivist, he argues that records do not simply inform the process of historical inquiry, but rather are an integral part of the historical forces involved in the subject of that inquiry. With his academic training and predilections, Cook always searched for larger and deeper meanings. In his article "The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems, and Solutions," introduced by Geoffrey Yeo, he sees the "*fonds*" not so much as a physical entity, but rather primarily as an "intellectual construct" (p. 164). In a perceptive piece introduced by Michael

Piggott, “Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage,” Cook pushes for better access to extant records of Indigenous populations. He also presses for a distinction between records managers and archivists. Quoting Steven Lubar, he notes archives are “. . . active, not passive, as sites of power, not as recorders of power. Archives don’t simply *record* the work of culture; they *do* the work of culture” (p. 300).

Most striking in reading through the articles selected for this book is the range of questions Cook asked and the creative arguments he posed to address those questions. His command of writings on archives was comprehensive, but, beyond that, he found ideas in a wide variety of sources. He was widely read in philosophy, social science, literature, and modern technology. In that regard, every article is fresh, insightful, and remarkably relevant today. In all his work, Cook aimed to elevate to the highest level the issues and challenges facing archivists. In one of his final articles, “The Archives(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape,” nicely introduced by Randall C. Jimerson, Cook explores the drift between archivists and historians. He argues for more self-awareness among archivists of their true role. They are active mediators “self-consciously shaping society’s collective memory” (p. 428). Historians then need to better appreciate the processes by which the archives is formed. “The archives is thus transformed from source to subject” (p. 428). This theme of the changing dynamics of archival work runs through these articles. In that regard, then, the real value of this second “volume,” this compilation of Cook’s articles, is to see that the whole of his work as represented here is greater than the sum of its parts. Seeing the varied ways Cook looks at the practice and purpose of archives reveals a powerful unity.

All archivists, along with scholars interested in history and culture, should read both “volumes” of *All Shook Up*: first, either to renew an acquaintance with or to come to know for the first time Terry Cook: archivist, historian, scholar, teacher, and a true renaissance man of our time; second, to come to know his writing—to hear his voice. He calls us to see in the work of the archives—our work—tremendous possibilities, deeply complex questions, true interdisciplinary issues, challenging political entanglements, and a heritage of cultural activism. This truly is the archival legacy of Terry Cook, admirably captured in this important book.

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