

BOOK REVIEWS

Guide to Photographic Collections at the Smithsonian Institution, Volume III. By Diane Vogt O'Connor. Washington, DC and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. 390 pp. Introduction, notes, indexes, photographs. Softcover. \$49.95.

Being painfully aware of the criticism that archivists produce guides and other finding aids to amuse and impress other archivists and not the end user, I decided that I would approach the *Guide to Photographic Collections at the Smithsonian Institution, Volume III* from the perspective of a researcher. I further decided that my hypothetical researcher would be predisposed to dislike anything set before him. A profile typical, in my experience, of a good number of researchers.

In this persona I went in search of the idiosyncratic and the silly, knowing well that archivists possess a penchant for uniformity and standardization that accountants envy, which often as not produces guides which require the services of a cryptographer. I am pleased to report that my bilious phantom researcher found little about which to complain. I promise to flog, appropriately, those few things which were an obstacle to the use of the guide, but in all I found it quite serviceable. It accomplishes its mission as voiced in the introduction: "This volume provides a comprehensive overview of over 3.5 million photographs found in 180 collections within 7 Smithsonian art bureaus and one office."

The Introduction serves two purposes. Its first is to pay homage to the conventions of the profession. The archivist in me breathed a sigh of relief to find that the survey was based on MARC-VM and that subject terms were derived from appropriate authority sources. As a researcher, however, I was annoyed by having to read through arcane information that did not improve my ability to use the collections.

The researcher's annoyance quickly passed because most of the introduction is actually a cogent, well-written and approachable explanation of the practices that archivists use, of necessity, to harness information. In six short pages the user learns how to decipher the entries which follow, how to contact the repositories, and the rules by which access is provided. Further, the guide assumes nothing, and provides useful definitions for terms which archivists know innately, but users may find befuddling.

The introduction is followed by a delightful essay by the guide's author, Diane Vogt O'Connor, which relates the works held by the eight institutions to the history of photography. The essay travels the well-worn path of most survey histories of photography, but it approaches some well-known stories with a fresh eye. Because of that, it is both a good introduction for researchers ignorant of photography's convoluted past, and compelling reading for professionals

who have made a life's work of such a study. The essay also is well documented with notes leading the novice user to a great deal of fine extracurricular reading.

The essay is followed by the holdings list for the eight institutions: the National Museum of African Art, the National Museum of American Art, The Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Freer Gallery of Art, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Office of Horticulture, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. Each institution is introduced with a one page overview, and then dissected collection by collection.

As one might expect, reading each entry for each institution was as thrilling as reading a phone book, however it was enlightening to see a consistency in the coverage of each collection. Moreover, it was pleasing to discover that descriptions of even the least interesting of the collections could be written in a manner free of professional jargon and argot.

I was somewhat put off by citations to holdings from institutions which did not allow access to the photographs. One has to question the usefulness of including such holdings in a guide of this sort. I suppose it can be sufficiently apologized for under the rubric of inclusiveness.

The descriptions of the collections are followed by three useful indexes; one each for the creator, forms and processes, and subjects. The impressive consistency of the "assume nothing" attitude of this book appears even in the indexes. Each is introduced with a one page explanation of how each was created and how each was to be used. This is not so much a bow to the lowest common-denominator researcher as it is an acknowledgement of the variegated nature of those who might wish to use the guide.

The book ends with a portfolio of photographs from each of the collections. The exquisite quality of reproduction and the diverse nature of the various repositories from which the images came make each turn of the page a surprise and a distinct pleasure. This section is clearly unnecessary; the guide would stand well without it. But it is a homily of sorts, which reminds us of a fundamental truth that guides like this should not lead the user to other citations, but to the photographs.

John E. Carter
Nebraska State Historical Society

Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts. By F. Gerald Ham. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993. 106 pp. Illustrated. Bibliographies and Index. Hardcover. Available from the Society of American Archivists, \$19.00 members/\$25.00 nonmembers.

Jerry Ham has contributed a fine addition to SAA's "Archival Fundamentals Series" with this introductory manual on appraisal. In writing a basic manual, volume editor Frank Boles admonished Ham, "We aren't out on the archival edge exploring, we're back in the center of the galaxy explaining basic concepts" (v.). Well said. Though earthbound enough to teach fundamentals, *Selecting and Appraising* has enough reach to also challenge the novice or undertrained archivists for whom it is primarily intended.

The manual is the first of the Archival Fundamentals Series to be issued in hardcover, which permits it to lie open better than the softcovers and which also should prove more durable. *Selecting and Appraising* is thoughtfully organized into 11 chapters: a definition of appraisal and an introduction to why it is a “demanding” but necessary task that *archivists* must perform; an overview of important appraisal theory from Schellenberg to Bearman; the importance of acquisition policies as a “framework” for appraisal; two chapters on “identifying potential accessions”: one covering records management in institutional archives, and one covering solicitation and fieldwork for collecting repositories; specific “appraisal guidelines and criteria”; procedural and administrative steps in conducting an appraisal; “the use of sampling” in appraisal; donor agreements and accessioning; reappraisal and deaccessioning; and “new directions” in appraisal theory.

Ham does a particularly good job of creating a manual that will serve the institutional archivist and the collecting curator equally well. Though the actual acquisition methods in the two types of repositories are obviously different (and discussed in two separate chapters), the manual rightly insists that virtually all other aspects of appraisal are shared by archives and repositories in the modern era. And though Ham notes (laments?) that most of his “sermons” were excised by his editors, the manual benefits from being appropriately opinionated. The “Observations and Caveats” on page 72, for example, may well stand as Ham’s five commandments of appraisal:

“The goal of the appraiser is to make an informed decision, not an infallible one.

Today’s information-laden world has lessened the value of any single set of records; the documents may be unique but the information is usually not. This lessens the importance of individual appraisal decisions.

There should be a ‘definite and compelling justification’ for the retention of records.

Appraisal cannot be done from an archival cookbook with lists of what records are always important, usually important, or occasionally important, because institutional goals and records that help achieve those goals differ. Each appraisal decision is unique....

Appraisal is only part analysis; for the skilled and creative appraiser, it is also an art.”

The basic approach and content of the manual draws most heavily from the work of Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young, with a notable bow to Helen Samuels’ recent work on functional analysis. Many archivists may consider Ham’s approach to be too traditional or conservative, since it gives relatively short shrift to documentation strategy, macro appraisal, and other “archival edge” discussions, but *Selecting and Appraising* will provide its readers with the fundamental grounding they need to make sense of the current debates.

That being said, one of the few weaknesses of the manual is the last chapter on “new directions.” Of the four concepts presented, one is the Boles-Young taxonomy which, eight years after the publication of their “Black Box” article, is hardly new or very controversial. Besides, much of their taxonomy is incorporated into the manual’s chapter on appraisal guidelines and criteria. Much of the rest of this chapter could have been incorporated into previous chapters as

well. Inherently, a "new directions" chapter will quickly date any book, since directions do not stay new for long.

Two other small criticisms bear mention. Instead of a unified bibliography, the manual lists "selected readings" at the end of each chapter. This is a cumbersome device after the first reading because it is difficult to find a particular citation if it might logically be lodged after more than one chapter. The sum of the selected readings is a solid bibliography on appraisal, and should have been presented as a whole. Finally, a pet peeve. The manual contains 37 photographs, of which no more than six actually add anything to a reader's understanding of the text. The 24 "figures," on the other hand—everything from sample transfer forms to donor contact records—are substantive and uniformly helpful. Better, instead, to have eliminated most of the photos and added two or three more figures.

These are the proverbial minor flaws in an otherwise commendable book. *Selecting and Appraising* should be essential reading for beginning archivists, and a useful review and reference work for more experienced professionals.

Mark A. Greene
Minnesota Historical Society

Non-Standard Collection Management. Edited by Michael Pearce. Aldershot, England, and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1992. 236 pp. Bibliography and Index. Hardcover.

Written in England by a variety of contributors, the intent of this volume is to provide management guidance to librarians who may encounter materials within their collections which fall outside the scope of their experience. The authors of the topical sections are recognized practitioners in their fields, many with impressive credentials in British and international librarianship.

Sections are included on manuscripts, out-of-print books, newspapers, serials, cartographic materials, music and drama sets, ephemera, slides and microforms, and audio/visual recorded sources (film, videotape, audiotape, compact discs, optical discs, and vinyl recordings). However, there is no treatment of the problems of photograph collections, architectural drawings, or machine-readable records. Although of limited value for organizational references and bibliographic citations (most of which are British), the work does provide an interesting contrast of practice and philosophy in several areas.

In summarizing the area of newspaper collections, the book contains a brief discussion of the British program NEWSPLAN, which seems to correspond with the United States Newspaper Program, particularly in its goals of planning for preservation of UK newspapers through cooperative resource sharing and microfilming. Space is also given to microfilm, including consideration of formats, polarity, storage, readers/printers, and even a discussion of issues related to in-house filming of newspapers.

The chapter devoted to manuscripts stresses conservation and preservation questions, copyright concerns, collection security, user fees, and even the use of computers to provide improved subject access, but issues of processing and cat-

aloging are barely treated, alluding to AACR2 and archival administration works, such as Schellenberg, only in footnotes. With the emphasis on British literary manuscripts, extensive discussion is also given to acquisition, particularly through purchase, stating that, unlike an archivist, "the librarian, especially with some access to funds, is a collector."

The volume is not aimed at archival users, nor even at an American audience. Except for purposes of comparing British library practice, an archival repository or library seeking management information on distinct formats would be better served by consulting a specialized guide, such as the SAA Basic Manual or Archival Fundamentals Series or even one of the Library of Congress cataloging guides to graphic materials or archival moving images. The perspective of this work is definitely focused on application in British libraries, with little of substance to recommend it for general archives use.

Marilyn I. Levinson
Bowling Green State University

American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States. By Richard J. Cox. Metuchen, NJ, and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1990. 347 pp. Index. Hardcover. Available from the Society of American Archivists, \$36.00 members/\$40.00 nonmembers.

The title, *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* is misleading. It is not "a comprehensive portrait of the archival profession in the 1980's" (vii), but a collection of "semi-autobiographical" (vii) essays about several issues and Cox's views about how archivists should deal with these issues and relate to other professions.

The preface's subtitle, "The Personal Odyssey of an Archivist," is also inapt. These essays are not about a journey home, but the opposite: the maturation of a person as an archivist and of archivists as a profession. They suggest a pilgrimage away from a home in the discipline/profession of history toward the "heavenly city" of archives as a profession like other professions—strong, respected, successful, well-paid, and influential.

After the first-person preface summarizing Cox's career and telling how the book's essays grew out of his experiences, the other sixteen (seven previously unpublished) essays are impersonal, analytical advocacy pieces which follow the same pattern. Cox surveys the existing literature to define a problem. Then he tells archivists how they should deal with it.

Cox admits that the essays "do represent a rut" and "are somewhat repetitive" (xi). He did change some essays "to transform [them] into a book" (xi), e.g., summarizing, updating, and grouping them and giving cross references. But he did not go far enough in tempering his prescriptive, "preachy" tone or excising the too frequent repetition of the same information and citations.

Cox's introductory essay describes the "Precarious Condition of America's Historical Records and the Archival Profession in the 1980s" (pp. 1-21). He cites several studies of national, state, and local public, private, and institutional records showing that they are in serious trouble. He then tells archivists what to do to remedy the situation.

The next seven essays deal with archives as a profession. Cox uses sociological models to show how archives is relatively underdeveloped compared to other professions. He cites the Society of American Archivists' Goals and Priorities Task Force (later a standing committee) and its report as an example of the kind of leadership and planning the profession needs. By contrast, he shows how the lack of professional and political leadership has left America's local governmental (especially municipal) records in terrible condition. He concludes with essays on what American archival education has been and should become. Stressing the value of individual certification and institutional accreditation of graduate programs in archival studies, he describes a "Research Agenda for Archival Education" (pp. 113-63) to develop a strong knowledge base, calls for more and better "Archival Research and Writing" (pp. 164-81), and stresses the importance of archival history.

The next section discusses how archivists and other professions could and should work together. Archivists and public historians are "the most closely related in nature [with] the greatest potential for cooperation" (p. 220). Archivists and librarians can cooperate on dealing with government documents and on developing ways to choose items with sufficient enduring value to preserve. He shows possibilities for cooperation between archivists and rare books librarians and ways archivists can use documentation strategies and new appraisal techniques to work with many professions or disciplines. Before calling for archivists to be more active advocates in shaping national information policy, Cox concedes that "it might seem presumptuous, even foolish...to suggest what the archival profession must do." But, as in the rest of the book, his sense of "urgency" (p. 324) compels him to do so, adding advocacy to his analysis.

Cox concludes with a bibliographical essay on archival issues of the 1980s. This chapter is especially valuable for its citation and discussion of differing views on each issue.

Non-archivists might prefer a more comprehensive, less repetitive and prescriptive study. Beginning archivists will find no help for their daily tasks. Practicing archivists, even if they agree (as does this reviewer) that the profession would be better off following Cox's recommendations, are probably already doing all they can. But for those who want to reform and strengthen archives and, especially, graduate students in archival masters programs—people full of idealism and ambition studying their chosen profession, one of its most influential leaders, and its literature—this book may be the basic (and, many will hope, most influential) textbook on professionalism.

Robert G. Sherer
Tulane University

Libraries and Archives: Design and Renovation with a Preservation Perspective. By Susan Garretson Swartzburg and Holly Bussey with Frank Garretson. Metuchen, NJ, and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1991. 225 pp. Indexed. Bibliographies and appendixes. Hardcover. Available from the Society of American Archivists, \$27.00 members/\$35.00 nonmembers.

During the past few years there has been a growing concern that the buildings housing library and archival collections have not been designed with preservation issues in mind. Concurrently, preservation administrators and conservators have begun to make their concerns known to their administrators and architects as new buildings have been designed and constructed, as well as renovations performed or additions built onto older structures. Unfortunately, such information, advice, and input is all too often ignored.

This volume has attempted to fill a void by presenting information on how various aspects of library and archival buildings and operations can impact preservation. The book began as the compilation of a selective bibliography on library buildings and preservation for a specific building project at Rutgers University. The bibliography has been accomplished admirably, with some interesting omissions. However, the text that is intended to complete this volume is sparse and disappointing. These people obviously have more to say but have chosen not to do so here. While the historical narrative in the beginning does an excellent job of putting the evolution of library and archival buildings—and the concerns of the librarians and designers for their collections—into perspective, the rest of the volume's text attempts to cover far too much in too little space. The result is that the reader is left with barely a glimpse of the complex preservation issues that need to be examined in the context of these specific building programs. In numerous instances the preservation issues are mentioned, but the text then moves on to something else. As they are presented here, a reader might well not consider them to be of much importance in the general scheme of things relating to library and archival buildings. The problem with this approach is that the reader could easily think that he or she has now acquired a decent knowledge of the field and not pursue the topic further by reading one or more of the many sources cited in this volume. It would have been better if the authors had more strongly emphasized that the text was really meant only as an introduction to the bibliographies it provides, so that this volume would then be considered and listed as a bibliography, a role it accomplishes admirably.

If this book is considered as a bibliography of preservation issues as they relate to library and archival buildings, then its importance increases significantly. The authors have brought together an impressive, though not exhaustive, compilation of sources in areas that most librarians and archivists tend to ignore when addressing their buildings. This is particularly true when one considers that many of the issues touched upon are not often treated in depth in any one volume.

Many libraries and archives are in need of replacement, renovation, or expansion either because of their construction date or because of the need to house expanding holdings. This volume can serve librarians and archivists well as an *initial point* in their search for information on building issues that relate to preservation. At the same time, it is crucial that they realize that this volume is

only the beginning of their search. In the long run, they will need to realize that the preservation of their collections will serve them well in the future and is worth further research. This, itself, may be a hard point to address as many librarians do not recognize the importance of preservation (collection maintenance) in providing service to their patrons, let alone how the building construction and layout can itself play an important preservation role.

Volumes such as this are important in expanding the knowledge base of librarians and archivists in the area of preservation, especially as it refers to the buildings in which we house our holdings. I only wish that there had been a greater effort either to make it clear that the text was essentially an introduction to the compiled bibliographies or to expand the text to address many of the issues in some depth. The bibliographies are excellent, but the authors' cursory treatment of many topics diminishes its overall value.

Gregor Trinkaus-Randall
Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners

Preservation Papers of the 1991 SAA Annual Conference. Compiled by Karen Garlick. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992. 155 pp. Illustrated. Softcover. Available from the Society of American Archivists, \$16.00 members/\$20.00 nonmembers.

As indicated in the introduction, these papers are the unjuried presentations related to preservation from the 1991 Society of American Archivists annual meeting in Philadelphia. Therefore, the reader should expect a variety of writing—from “overview” articles, with appropriate footnotes and bibliography, to the “how we did it good in our shop” type pieces. Of course, hearing the latter is one of the main reasons people attend professional conferences. Therefore, practical considerations of pursuing preservation activities are well covered in many of these papers and will be valuable to those facing related issues. Several papers address the pursuit, progress, and results of preservation grant projects, especially grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and will assist those contemplating grants themselves. The topics covered in these papers include appraisal, sound recordings, statewide preservation projects, grant case studies, mold prevention, paper permanence, detecting forged documents, archival buildings, educating users, preservation legislation, electronic records, and using new technology to preserve negatives and photographs. The introduction indicates that there are 31 papers, but at least four of these are the brief introductory remarks of session chairs or outlines submitted in place of formal papers by some participants. The majority are formal presentations, although some are fairly short in length, due likely to the SAA session format more than anything else. Some of the preservation presentations from the meeting were not included in this publication, but a full listing of all papers given at the meeting shows that approximately three-fourths are present.

The SAA Preservation Section had previously put together papers from the 1990 Seattle annual meeting, but these are now out of print. This is unfortunate since the same may be true of the 1991 volume before long, and there are many

articles that deserve wider distribution than in this form. While admittedly some of the information is less formal and there may be a time value on the practical advice available in the information presented, they are worth looking into for the average archival reader. Those who are expert in any given area will likely feel confirmed in their knowledge, but learn nothing new in the area of specific preservation techniques. The preservation experts would more likely benefit from the practical insights of what worked and what didn't which may, in turn, not be as useful to the non-experts or "generalists." People seeking workshop-type instructions on preservation techniques will find some in these papers, but will need to read much more in the preservation literature to augment their overall knowledge. In some cases, when new technology is discussed, all levels of preservationists may be hearing some new information. However, one would really need to attend SAA, MAC, or other professional meetings to be truly up-to-date on that type of information, since research and resulting improvements continue.

All in all, this publication is useful for those who wish to have yet another resource on recent developments in preservation, especially if they have an interest in hearing about a variety of topics from a variety of practitioners. While this type of publication may not be the most useful for all, it does provide an available resource within one year of the date of the presentations. This must have been the primary goal of the Preservation Section in preparing them for wider distribution, and they have achieved their goal. While the readings do not substitute entirely for having attended the sessions in Philadelphia—audience participation could not be included—they can be useful to both those who attended the meeting and those who did not if taken in the spirit that they were offered.

Elisabeth Wittman
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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