

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Developing a Premier National Institution: A Report from the User Community to the National Archives.* By Page Putnam Miller. Washington, D.C.: The National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, 1989. 39 pp. Single copies free from the Committee, 400 A St. S.E., Washington, DC 20003.

The quality of research at the National Archives suffers, according to author Page Putnam Miller, from a set of problems woven together by inappropriate management and staffing, scarce resources, and low morale among both archivists and the patrons they serve. Rather than choosing to direct blame or dwell on the cumulative effect of perpetual shortcomings, Miller moves briskly to advocate improvements in a compact and stimulating report that resembles a consultant's packaged findings in its streamlined appearance. The prognosis is uncertain since improvements depend much on successful lobbying of legislators for their support, but the treatment prescribed is as aggressive and professionally sound as one could hope for. To the benefit of archival administrators and researchers elsewhere, this monograph offers a prescription for enhancing research services beyond the National Archives.

Acting on behalf of the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, Miller conducted a series of over two hundred interviews and other, unspecified research in order to "increase the level of informed and constructive communication between the users and supporters of the National Archives and the congressional committees, and to promote our joint endeavors for determining future directions for the National Archives." According to Miller's preface, she decided to undertake this research in order to address the malaise and frustration shared by the research community and NARA staff. Despite the advances at the National Archives in its autonomy and physical facilities, it was obvious that user services at NARA were suffering. Nothing had compensated for severe staff cuts made almost a decade ago, nor was there enough effort to convey accumulated staff knowledge to researchers.

Reference archivists and administrators in many settings will agree with some of Miller's recommended goals, including an enhanced "subject matter knowledge base of the staff," and increased attention to users and their needs through user surveys and studies of reference interviews and letters. All would no doubt agree that "one must go beyond head counts to focus on the quality of services." Yet Miller's report leaves her readers wondering what to do after problems have been outlined and goals established. The trim format of the publication does not allow her to elaborate on the suggested tactics. She does, however, touch on some intriguing approaches to the problems, like visiting peer review committees, consulting with researchers on access to electronic records and computerized finding aids, establishing a more formal mentoring system between senior archivists and their novice colleagues, and operating a

computer bulletin board for all to use in sharing actual and potential research subject areas at the National Archives.

In an admirable effort to balance her scrutiny with respect and discretion for the archivists as well as researchers at the National Archives, Miller cites none of her 200-plus informants by name. The anonymity does not invalidate her assessment, but it does reinforce the mystique about staff operations at the hub of the federal archives system. Because much reference expertise at NARA and elsewhere is still conveyed individually from the experienced to the novice, one wonders to what extent the anonymous NARA staff members mentor—and are mentored by—archival colleagues outside Washington, as the author advocates. Miller does not elaborate upon staff retention, but by recommending even greater use of acquired staff knowledge she assumes long careers among a loyal staff.

Miller claims that “staff members and most users...stand ready to assist in a major campaign to raise the funds necessary to support a strong knowledge-based staff at the National Archives.” Her 39-page document gives these promoters convincing evidence that NARA’s serious problems, now well analyzed, merit prompt and effective attention.

Nancy Bartlett  
Bentley Historical Library

*Teaching with Documents: Using Primary Sources from the National Archives.* National Archives and Records Administration and National Council for the Social Studies. Washington, D.C.: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1989. 241 pp. Paper. \$15.

Many secondary-level social studies and history instructors long for teaching materials like this assortment of primary source documents from the National Archives. Included are 52 documents spanning U.S. history from the Continental Congress to Watergate: letters, photographs, maps, political cartoons, posters, census records, ship passenger lists, and much more. They draw attention to a wide variety of historical topics: foreign affairs, politics, economics, social conditions, and popular culture.

The book is a compilation of the highly successful feature article, “Document of the Month,” published regularly in *Social Education*, the journal of the National Council for the Social Studies. Such quality curriculum materials are often too expensive for many school districts, but this bargain-priced book will provide history teachers with dozens of engaging classroom activities and topics for discussion, serving as a companion for lectures and reading assignments.

What can archivists gain from *Teaching with Documents*? As many of us know, too many high school and postsecondary teachers will not take the time to gather documents for classroom use (see the *New England Archivists Newsletter*, July 1990). But teaching packets prepared by archivists are still an option, and this book is filled with excellent examples that will be useful to anyone interested in developing such an academic outreach project.

Each document is introduced with an essay that reviews the historical background and other important issues. Often a brief bibliography is included as

well. Accompanying each document are numerous teaching suggestions and activities, suited for varying ability levels and skills, ranging from vocabulary-building to problem-solving and analysis. Introductory lessons give students the opportunity to clarify archaic language. *Teaching with Documents* also includes an array of standard worksheets and puzzles. Teachers may have mixed reactions to such assignments. Nevertheless, there are still plenty of excellent suggestions for classroom activities and research topics.

Several other notable features should be mentioned. *Teaching with Documents* could support development of a special focus teaching unit: it includes a collection of eight primary sources on civil rights, beginning with the 14th Amendment and concluding with the Allan Bakke case. The authors also understand how students enjoy examining documents written by or about teenagers. For example, photographs of children working in textile mills and coal mines are used in a sample lesson on turn-of-the-century labor practices. Finally, the reader is reminded to select documents that can be duplicated on overhead transparencies. Students will prefer to handle documents but budgetary constraints may require some teachers to use an overhead projector.

*Teaching with Documents* is an important book that can help bring together social studies and history teachers and archivists who are interested in developing school outreach programs. At the very least, professionals should be familiar with this book so that they can better assist patrons who might be interested in obtaining primary source teaching materials.

Matt Blessing  
State Historical Society of Wisconsin

*Chicago City Council Proceedings Files, 1833-1871: An Inventory.* Edited by Robert E. Bailey, Elaine Shemoney Evans, and Ruth Hutchcraft. Compiled by Daniel Cantrall and Martha Woods. Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Archives, 1987. 989 pp. Hardcover.

*Chicago City Council Proceedings Files, 1833-1871: An Index.* Edited by Robert E. Bailey and Elaine Shemoney Evans. Springfield, Ill.: 1987. 93 microfiches. \$35 for both.

Just two weeks before I received the *Inventory* and *Index* for review, an engineering company involved in a construction project in the city of Grand Rapids asked me to check the Common Council proceedings to verify that an alley had been officially vacated by the city so that it could file legal papers with the state of Michigan. Having first consulted other records, the company provided several dates between 1857 and 1859 when the alley possibly might have been vacated. Because early proceedings are not indexed, it was necessary to scan many handwritten pages that included only marginal notes such as "licenses," "sidewalks," and "alleys" as guides to the subjects of the file entries. I had to read each reference to "alleys" to find the one sought. A search that took about two hours probably could have been done in about two minutes with a finding aid like the *Chicago Index*. By simply using the term "alleys" paired with

"vacating" I quickly could have found a chronological list of all vacated alleys. Unnecessary wear on some of the city's oldest records could also have been avoided.

In the past few years, much has been written and said about the deplorable condition of local government records; thus, it is encouraging to see what is being accomplished with the records of the city of Chicago. In 1982 a major project was begun under the guidance of the Illinois State Archives to inventory records and establish records retention schedules. Apparently it was not widely known that City Council proceedings and related working papers such as correspondence, reports, and poll books had survived the Great Fire of 1871 when many of Chicago's records were lost. These important documents are now housed at the new records depository at Northeastern Illinois University where they can be accessed using the *Inventory* and *Index*.

The *Inventory* is a chronological list of 35,650 file titles that briefly describe original documents presented to the City Council for consideration. Each entry was allowed as many as 220 characters in the database and original wording was preserved as much as possible. The filing year, number, month, and day are included with each title. Original filing errors and irregularities are clearly explained in the introduction and a file structure table. The volume is nicely bound with appropriate margins and spacing between entries for easy scanning and photocopying.

The *Index* includes a thesaurus of 8,781 subject terms, a "conventional index" consisting of an alphabetical list of subject descriptors, and a "paired index" comprising all possible combinations of two terms. Each file was assigned up to six subject terms and each term was limited to twenty-five characters. No *see* or *see also* references are included so the user must carefully search the thesaurus to make sure that all relevant subject terms are found. The *Inventory* and *Index* are companion works but one can be used without the other because each includes complete citations to the proceedings.

There are numerous entries related to such mundane subjects as sidewalks, curbs, and lampposts. In view of what Chicago has become, some files elicit a chuckle: "1866/67 0762 A 12/17 REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON FINANCE ON PETITION OF WINENS AND CO. TO REMIT A FINE IMPOSED FOR THROWING DAMAGED PRAIRIE CHICKENS INTO THE STREET." Others illustrate important events and changes in American History, such as the following two: "1857/58 0071 A 03/23 REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY ON PETITION OF JOHN SMITH, ET AL., TO SELL THE PERSONS AND PROPERTY OF ALL COLORED CITIZENS TO PAY OFF THE CITY DEBT" and "1864/65 0119 A 07/28 REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY ON PETITION OF THE LADIES LOYAL LEAGUE FOR THE FREE LEASE OF A NUMBER OF ACRES OF UNOCCUPIED LAND FOR A NEGRO SETTLEMENT."

The *Inventory* and *Index* could be used for various research topics. All files related to the Civil War, blacks, women, public health, and other subjects can easily be retrieved.

One cannot help wondering about access to City Council proceedings after 1871. Although it is unfortunate that there are no plans to continue with the indexing project, it is perhaps understandable because of the cost and complexity of such an undertaking. Production of the *Inventory* and *Index* required the

cooperation of several institutions and many individuals including computer programmers, database designers, editors, compilers, publishers, the city of Chicago, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, and the Illinois State Archives. All are to be commended for what they accomplished.

William Cunningham  
Grand Rapids [Michigan] City Archives

*From the Ashes, 1872-1900: A Selection of Documents from the Proceedings Files of the Chicago City Council.* Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Archives, 1990.

This is the Illinois State Archives' third publication of reproduced documents, and it begins where the second, *Early Chicago, 1833-1871*, ended. It contains fifty photographically reproduced documents, a selection from the 100,000 items in the files of the Chicago City Council for the years 1872 through 1900. The documents reflect the overall economic, political, and social conditions of the period, illustrated in the public business of the city: fire and police protection, sanitation, public utilities, streets and sidewalks, public works, licensing, taxation and finance, schools, and elected and appointed officials.

The documents are beautifully reproduced on good quality, sturdy paper stock. The selection is excellent. The documents evoke the time period, cover a wide variety of topics, and should engage and excite the lucky students who will use them. This is also the best bargain in the archival, educational, and publishing world: free to Illinois educational institutions and \$10 to others.

A transcription is printed on the back of each facsimile, which seems unnecessary since almost all are quite readable. It also encourages reading the transcription first, possibly defeating the purpose of working with facsimiles.

A teacher's manual accompanies the documents and provides good historical background for the period, information about each document, another transcription, and suggested questions. Even so, the manual is of limited use to the teacher. The only activity suggested is to ask questions, and too many of the examples simply solicit factual information. While it is important to get the facts straight, a major benefit of using archival documents is to promote critical thinking skills, such as identifying assumptions, recognizing bias, and distinguishing fact from opinion. Documents also can be tools for teaching historical methodology, which might involve questions with more than one answer or identifying and interpreting evidence.

The facsimile documents are arranged chronologically. Related documents are noted, but students work with only one document at a time. Alternatively, to encourage more analysis, teachers might group the documents by subject and ask questions relating to one or more documents, comparing or contrasting them. To use these documents to promote critical thinking and to teach historical methodology, teachers will have to devise questions and activities on their own with little help from the manual.

Despite the limitation of the teacher's guide, this excellent publication exemplifies archival outreach and should substantially promote the use of archival

documents in the classroom. The Illinois State Archives deserves commendation for outstanding public service.

Linda Henry  
National Archives and Records Administration

*Sci-Tech Archives and Manuscript Collections*. Edited by Ellis Mount. New York: The Haworth Press, 1989. 144 pp. Hardcover. \$29.95.

Not all works that concern themselves with archives will be of great interest to archivists. That is certainly the case with this book, the tenth in the *Science & Technology Libraries* series published by Haworth Press. Although the book contains some information useful to archivists, especially concerning the sci-tech archival holdings and recent documentary projects of several U.S. repositories, its target audience is the library community. Its goal is to make sci-tech librarians aware of the important role that archival materials play in documenting sci-tech history and to acquaint them with a few of the more important repositories, collections, and projects in the sci-tech arena of the archival community.

The book is not a focused piece summarizing archival documentation; instead, it is a collection of short, freestanding papers—most of them by archivists—describing collections and projects in several repositories. The overall effect of these stylistically unmatched papers is to give the reader a sense that sci-tech archival documentation is necessary for thorough research, and that there are a number of repositories holding valuable collections of institutional records and personal papers. An introductory overview by Helen Samuels (MIT) about the value of the archival record in sci-tech documentation sets the general tone of the book: it is a diplomatic mission by the archival community to sci-tech librarians.

Samuels' overview is followed by five chapters summarizing the histories, missions, immediate goals, important sci-tech holdings, and, occasionally, the finding aid systems of several repositories: the Edison Archives (Mary B. Bowling), the American Museum of Natural History Library (Valerie Wheat and Mary E. Genett), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Mark A. Vargas), the National Archives (Susan Huver Karren), and the Dard Hunter Paper Museum (George Boeck). These articles all provide useful repository synopses, but they are quite short and the information is therefore necessarily general.

The next two chapters take a different approach. The first, by Linda Rohr, a librarian at the Metropolitan Boston Zoos, reports on a survey of American zoo and aquarium archives that she conducted in 1986. She concludes that such archival collections are scanty and threatened. Following is a somewhat longer piece by Joan Warnow-Blewett of the Center for the History of Physics of the American Institute of Physics. It describes an important ongoing project to develop and extend the International Catalog of Sources for the History of Physics and Allied Sciences, which is maintained by the AIP Center. The author also recounts the important role played by sci-tech discipline centers in preserving and disseminating the archival record.

The remainder of the book—nearly one-third of it—contains regular short features of the *Science & Technology Libraries* series, none of which has anything to do with archives. These include a collection development piece on asbestos documentation, bibliographies, and brief reviews.

For sci-tech librarians this should be a very useful work, providing as it does strong and concise arguments for the preservation and use of archival sources in documenting modern science and technology, as well as imparting a general sense of the what collections exist and some of the more important repositories that hold them. But for most archivists the information is likely to be too little and too general. Archivists should turn instead to the JCAST final report (SAA, 1983) for a theoretical discussion of archival sci-tech documentation and a professional call-to-arms, and to the larger corpus of archival literature for broader and deeper characterizations of the relevant archival collections.

Dennis E. Meissner  
Minnesota Historical Society

*Directory of Business Archives in the United States and Canada.* Revision of fourth edition, compiled by the Business Archives Section of the Society of American Archivists. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990. 102 pp. Paper, spiral bound. \$9 to SAA members, \$12 to nonmembers.

“Strictly business” might be a description of this revision of the *Directory of Business Archives*. It contains 159 entries for corporate archives maintained by the businesses themselves. Unlike past directories, this directory “includes only institutions traditionally thought of as a business—that is organizations that are primarily engaged in providing goods or services, usually for a profit.” Some not-for-profit organizations are included, because they are “business-like” and would not be represented by another SAA forum. Therefore, unlike in past editions, foundations, some fraternal organizations, museums, and hospitals are not represented, nor are business archives held in other repositories.

Entries were compiled from survey questionnaires sent to over three hundred businesses and from information sent in by businesses after the first *Directory*. Certainly there are more businesses in North American with historical records programs, but apparently an efficient way of contacting them all has not yet been devised. Businesses providing financial services make up the largest group represented (27 entries), with insurance companies and food and beverage companies the next largest. Law firms and printing, shipping, tire and rubber, and tobacco companies each have one entry. Volume of holdings listed range from 80 to 50,000 cubic feet.

Entries are arranged alphabetically by corporate name. Information contained in each entry apparently came from the business itself; it is not always consistent among entries. Each entry is supposed to contain a contact person’s name and telephone number, mailing address, hours of service, and holdings description (inclusive and predominant dates, volume, narrative description, and conditions of access). Even though some entries do not contain all the information (volume is often missing), they usually convey an adequate impression of the holdings or how to find out more about them.

Three complementary indexes are provided: business type, contact person, and geographic location (by province or state). Index reference is by corporate name rather than page number.

As with any directory, it is nearly obsolete as soon as it is published. Several telephone numbers and names already have changed. Better editing, however, could have eliminated some mistakes. For example, the change in area code for Chicago suburbs was announced well before the directory's publication date and could have been incorporated.

The directory is generally easy to read. Each entry begins with a bold-faced corporate name and address, but in several cases one entry runs right into another, apparently to save space. More sophisticated design would have saved space and made the directory more pleasing to the eye. Many typographical errors exist, but none significantly impairs intelligibility. Margins and spacing generally will accommodate the reader's notes and corrections.

Even though many of the collections are closed to outside researchers, the interests of sharing information and documenting history are served by this directory, which provides a reference source for who is keeping what. Any individual or repository concerned with those interests should have this directory.

Valerie A. Metzler  
Archivist/Historian

*A Future for the Past: An Assessment of Missouri's Historic Records Programs by the State Historic Records Advisory Board.* Jefferson City, Mo., 1988. 153 pp. Paper. Available from the Missouri Records Management and Archives Service, P.O. Box 778, 1001 Industrial Dr., Jefferson, MO 65102.

In 1982 the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) in conjunction with the National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators (NASARA), now the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA), supported 27 state historical assessment and reporting projects.

These 27 individual reports were, in turn, analyzed by a team of four consultants who issued reports on state government records programs, local government records programs, historical records repositories, and statewide functions and services. The consultants' reports were compiled and published (1984) by NASARA under the title *Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of the Historical Records in the States*.

Since *Documenting America*, the series of individual assessment reports has continued. One of the most recent is *A Future for the Past*. Like *Documenting America*, this report is organized into four principal chapters.

What is most notable about the Missouri report is that it reinforces what has been stated in the previous state reports. The issue that rings clearly throughout the Missouri report is that not enough resources are currently available to properly preserve Missouri's documentary heritage. Frankly, this is not at all surprising since it was a recurring theme throughout all the earlier assessment reports. Since 1982 the cry has been for more and more money.

Another dominant theme in the Missouri report is the poor condition of the Missouri State Archives, within which two major problems are cited. First, the records management activities and the archival activities are separate when they should be integrated. Second, staff positions at the middle level and below need to be changed from appointive to merit selection. The report implies that the State Archives is the weakest link in the Missouri documentary chain and needs to be strengthened. Unfortunately, this problem is not unique. Many of the other reports cite the same problem.

Reading the report, one is struck by the reality that it is just one more report that says the same thing as the numerous other state reports before it; and like the reports before it, it takes a very traditional approach to attempt to deal with the monumental problems cited. It goes back to, "if we only had more money." Well, colleagues, more money may not be coming. Even if it does come, it will not be enough to deal with all the problems we face as archivists. Maybe it is time for archivists to identify new and unique ways of doing business instead of simply crying for increased funding. Otherwise, we are all threatened with the very real possibility of being buried alive by the records we seek to preserve.

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