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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM MANUAL. By William W. Moss. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974. Pp. ix+110. \$13.50)

The rapid growth of oral history during the last decade has caused those with established programs to share the lessons they have learned. Willa K. Baum of the Bancroft Library produced an excellent guide for local history projects in her *Oral History for the Local Historical Society* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1971), and Richard D. Curtiss edited *A Guide for Oral History Programs* (Fullerton: California State University Oral History Program and Southern California Local History Council, 1973). William Moss has now given us a manual that supplements these earlier efforts "by describing some of the concepts and practices of an oral history program in a Presidential Library. Although the example may be specialized, the concepts, practices and problems are instructive and may help in the planning and conduct of other programs." This important and well-written manual was drawn from the author's experience and service as an interviewer and director of the Kennedy Library oral history program. It definitely will benefit those institutions with an on-going program, as well as those planning to launch one.

After a brief description of the development of the Kennedy project, Moss gives "Some General Observations" about oral history. Defining oral history as "basically an information-collection technique," he discusses the ethics of oral history and its use as evidence, and provides some valuable legal advice on subpoena and access to interviews, libel and slander, and literary property rights.

Any beginning project will find the chapter on "Starting an Oral History Program" most helpful, while experienced oral historians can profit from the discussion of "Techniques for Interviewing." The other chapters focus on the practical aspects and routine procedures that are a part of any oral history project: "Processing Interviews," "Research Use of Oral History Tapes and Transcripts," "Processing Records," and "Staffing and Equipping a Major Project."

The procedures and methodologies described and used by Moss in the Kennedy oral history project will not serve all oral history programs, especially those with diverse subject series. The book fails to deal with many of the problems encountered by small programs, such as limited budget and staffs, volunteer projects, and donated tapes. The value of the book is enhanced, however, by a few sample processing forms (the Society of American Archivists' *Forms Manual* has the best collection of Oral History forms), a guide for transcribers, an outline of processing steps, and a "Preliminary Questionnaire to Determine Terms of Use of Oral History Tapes and Transcripts."

Although the book is overpriced by the publisher, it is a welcomed addition to the literature of the expanding field of oral history, and it belongs on the shelf of every institution or agency with an oral history program or project.

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THE USE OF MANUSCRIPTS IN LITERARY RESEARCH: PROBLEMS OF ACCESS AND LITERARY PROPERTY RIGHTS. By James Thorpe. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1974. Pp. 40. \$1.25)

This pamphlet is a guide to scholars working with manuscript sources. It is a practical work, avoids theoretical questions, and concentrates on the mechanics of everyday problems of the researcher. Conditions in the United States and several European countries are compared throughout.

The essay consists of three main divisions. The first section outlines the necessary activities which precede a successful research trip. The author emphasizes that scholars should be well prepared before confronting manuscript curators face-to-face. He instructs the uninitiated on the types of questions to write ahead about, and the kinds of information, in turn, to volunteer to the repository to be visited. There is also a description of the first encounter with the owner or curator of a coveted treasure--what to expect and how to react.

The second section deals with access to manuscripts. The author describes security measures at major repositories and offers instructions on how to handle documents so as not to incur the wrath of horrified curators. A discussion of photocopy policies and a description of how to obtain permission to publish portions of manuscript materials follow.

The final section deals with literary property rights. Of greatest significance is the discussion of common law protection of unpublished materials. This protection indefinitely precludes the publication of manuscripts without the permission of the holder of literary rights. On the other hand, this protection lapses once the materials are published. Furthermore, "publication" is often legally defined as making material available to the public. Thus, depositing manuscripts in a library is construed in some quarters as publishing the materials and, by inference, as surrendering common law protection of literary rights. To the misfortune of the researcher, however, this position is not universally accepted. Without giving any assurances (indeed, none can be given) to the by-now-confused and worried author, a useful rule-of-thumb for dealing with the problem of literary rights emerges: pre-nineteenth century materials provide no legal problems in the vast majority of cases, twentieth century manuscripts require careful investigation of the status of literary rights in all cases, while nineteenth century materials are in a middle ground where some writings are still protected by common law.

The only real weakness of the pamphlet is that it is actually two works: one on ways of dealing with manuscript repositories and collectors, the other on literary property rights. A rather adroit attempt at transition simply does not pull the work together into a single entity. This one criticism aside, it is a fine handbook. It is not exhaustive; it is not intended to be. It would be to the advantage of even experienced researchers to peruse it while working on a project, and it would make excellent required reading for entering graduate students in all fields where manuscript sources are used.

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