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## Reviews

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## Reviews

*The Records of American Business*. Edited by James M. O'Toole. Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1997. Index. 411 pp. Hardcover, \$28.00.

In reading this book, one does well to remember that it was published in 1997 and its preparatory work done even earlier. This is said as both a caution and a celebration; a caution because the technological discussions cannot, of necessity, be the latest, yet a celebration because the insights and analyses in the book are timely indeed. *The Records of American Business (RAB)* is a compilation of fourteen essays by practitioners and academic specialists in the archival field, most of whom come from academic and museum settings. Only four seem to be currently employed as corporate archivists.

In a penetrating foreword, editor James O'Toole offers an intelligent discussion of the burgeoning parameters of corporate archives and the often contested and paradoxical territory within which they exist. The book culminates the work of the Records of American Business Project, which, in turn, rests heavily upon the holdings, policies, outlooks, and procedures of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Hagley Museum and Library, the two institutions in North America with the largest holdings of business archives. The

book explores a wide range of topics from the relationship of corporate archives to business history, the role of oral history in corporate archives, the challenges of technology in particular and the Information Age in general, and the prospects for the future. Designed to be of service to any archive that seeks to collect business records, the *RAB* volume may be most effective in educating the members of the profession at-large.

*The Records of American Business* contains lively discussions and sometimes opposition theories and professional sentiments. On the one hand, many of the contributors describe the antipathy between the history/archival professions and business which has hamstrung much archival progress. In this view, the rule of the bottom line exercises disinterest at best in something as non-operational (non-income producing) as archives and history tend to be. Most agree that historical research, as a rationale for corporate archives, has been not a hard sell and a functional failure in corporate settings. On the other hand, many contributors vigorously agree that the future of corporate archives rests more on the understanding of the archivist of his/her company than any other single feature. That understanding seems to lie along all the "traditional" archival functions (litigation support, marketing protections, communication history and reference) and in the direction of corporate essence itself—its logos, images, culture, trademarks, brand equity, and identity. Those with this view see a bright future for corporate archives.

The analyses in the *RAB* book take on the challenges of technology and of the Information Age itself that seem to offer both consternating difficulties and unexplored opportunities for archivists. In the opinion of some of the contributors, archivists should become techno-nerds in the extreme, while others recommend manipulating the utilization of the evidence of the corporate memory, regardless of its media, and to accept the fact that electronic records keeping

is here to stay. On the one hand, several of the contributors say that the pure size of modern records defeats a profession that is so attached to paper records, while yet again, there are expressions of optimism that new forms and new appraisals techniques will serve to ameliorate the problems though not eliminate them. Several of the contributors tout the importance of the archivist becoming a more proactive agent in information management and in communication management, inside and outside the corporation.

The wisdom of this book lies in its balance—between research-based archival practices and corporate-based needs, between corporate archives as a marginal operation and corporate archives as an essential vehicle to create corporate enlightenment, between the views that the future is dim and those where it is unlimited. There could be more understanding of latest corporate theory and business philosophy (there is a tendency to cite archival literature primarily, not business literature). There could be much more information coming directly from corporate archives. The archivist from Coca-Cola is almost a lone voice for corporate realism and archival success. There could be more understanding of the importance of three-dimensional objects within the corporate archives setting, where the distance between material culture and documents is no further than that between documents and photographs in most historical societies. There are, it should be remembered, stagecoaches at Wells Fargo, coke bottles at Coca-Cola, cereal boxes at Kellogg's, and airplanes at Delta Air Lines.

The discussions here are so vital, in the sense that they lie at the center of the profession's growth and development, that this book is a recommended volume in any library where corporate or business history is remotely of interest. As the profession allows itself to be led by its users, not just its perpetrators, the more it will succeed in environments like the corporation. As to the variety of viewpoint, it stands as perhaps the most promising thing about the volume, for it is

true that any archivist who sees incomprehensible challenge ahead will find plenty of that in the book as will the archivist who sees unending opportunities to be of service. What this indicates is clearly the message of this book: the future of business history lies very much in the hands of the people who maintain the corporate archives.

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*Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science.* By Luciana Duranti. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1998. Index. 186 pp. Hardcover, \$45.00.

Luciana Duranti's *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* is timely and appropriate reading for both archivists and records/information managers as they encounter old and new forms of documentary evidence in the workplace. Originally published in six consecutive journal articles of *Archivaria* (numbers 28–33), the journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Duranti has added new life to a discipline originally developed in seventeenth-century France as a science for the purpose of proving authenticity of archival documents. In the twentieth century, diplomatics is being used for proving authority of research sources of medieval and early modern documents, comprised of concepts and procedures for studying the nature, formation, analyzation of their creation and transmission, and their relationships to facts and their creators.

While heavy in definition, Duranti uses an unusually large introductory segment to present successfully her education and application of the discipline in European settings, and eventual teaching of the concept to enthusiastic students, who,

along with collegial support, encouraged her modern day effort to make the discipline attractive to other eager learners, and applicable to them as young professionals. This narrative portion of the text is refreshing as these young, inquisitive, and enthusiastic archivists will soon begin filling the ranks of an aging professional body.

After an exhaustive journey through the history of diplomatics and its evolution to the modern day form, Duranti invites the reader into her writing to understand how the records in question are both dissected and analyzed, step-by-step, to investigate the origin, development, and eventual application of the diplomatic concepts and their effectiveness on both archival records and systems of any century. Her ability to transgress time, when appropriate, to introduce applications that are pertinent to modern day archival thinking and their concrete applications is impressive.

A later chapter of the text thoroughly discusses the relationship between originality and authenticity in records and the importance of knowing both. This portion proved inspirational as I began to see the applications to modern day records that have been effected by the multiple copies created by mimeograph machines, proliferation of facsimile use, and electronic documents that are constantly changing with the touch of a button.

Duranti finishes strong with two concise discussions on the importance of the physical and intellectual forms of records and clear explanations for the use diplomatic criticism in an archival setting. While this may have been the most inspiring of all six segments, Duranti's writing style will hold one's attention throughout the text so that the reader may enjoy the fruits of her laborious efforts with this final, thought-provoking discussion.

While critics will cite that a diplomatics revival had already started in the twentieth century, Duranti has gone much further by making the study of diplomatics readable (while sometimes very technical reading) and worthwhile to

multiple generations of archivists and records/information managers.

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*Hurricane! Surviving the Big One: A Primer for Libraries, Museums, and Archives.* By Michael Trinkley. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. A copublication of SOLINET and Chicora Foundation, 1998. 102 pp., accompanied by a free packet of information on recovery from water damage, provided by Heritage Preservation. \$15 postpaid; prepayment required. Order from SOLINET Preservation Services (800/999-8558 or 404/892-0943).

In recent memory, Hurricanes Hugo, Andrew, Alberto, and Mitch brought devastating destruction to individuals, businesses, and institutions, including libraries, museums, and archives. There are practical procedures that can be taken before a hurricane hits that can increase an institution's probability of survival and minimize immoderate damage. This guide focuses on general issues in developing a disaster plan, the nature and effects of hurricanes, making buildings more storm-proof, disaster preparation, what to expect after a storm, recovery procedures for various materials, rebuilding, and available assistance.

Much space in the guide is spent on how an institution can prepare for a hurricane disaster. The author consistently brings the point that there must be discussion with staff, building architects, local authorities, consultants, and disaster recovery firms long before their services are needed. There

will always be confusion and emotion during any crisis, but by planning early some issues will be already resolved. Transition from preparation to recovery will flow more smoothly.

Planning for disaster takes time and effort, but the end results are worth it. In addition to developing a telephone tree, an institution needs to investigate services in the area that will be beneficial in the face of a major disaster. This would include disaster recovery services, freezer trucks, grocery stores, and other institutions outside the area that may be of assistance during a crisis. Opening lines of communication with the fire marshal, police department, and local authorities can only benefit an institution. When disaster strikes, there is little time to try to locate services and individuals that could be of assistance to an institution. By developing these relationships in less stressful times, an institution should have a quicker response and not lose time trying to explain who it is and what its needs are. Also, it is important to talk with conservators ahead of time who can assist in recovery and answer questions about special problems. By inviting a consultant or conservator to visit, they can get to know the collection and be prepared to assist if or when a need arises.

Trinkley also focuses on storm-proofing buildings long before hurricane watches are ever issued. By securing the structure of the building, an institution is helping ensure the survival of the collections held inside. Trinkley provides many tips on how to strengthen the structure against strong winds.

Information in this primer is provided in a nontechnical language. This guide would be enhanced if an index were included since this an essential feature for the nonspecialist. Also, more information and clarification on the health risks of mold would be beneficial. A glossary of undefined terms would also be helpful. This is a good, basic manual for



disaster planning and recovery. Those who live in hurricane-prone areas will benefit from the information provided in this primer.

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*Cost Analysis Concepts and Methods for Records Management Projects*. By William Saffady. Prairie Village, KS: ARMA International, 1998. 128pp. Softcover, \$59.00.

Every administrative-level records manager or archivist has at one time been confronted with and partially overwhelmed by budgeting, cost justifying programs, or preparing and evaluating bids for a new project. Their dilemma can cause the most competent archivist or records manager to be at a loss as to where to start. Bill Saffady's *Cost Analysis Concepts and Methods for Records Management Projects* is unquestionably where to begin. Whether the project is preservation microfilming, digitizing documents, records center operations, or processing and describing archival collections, Saffady's excellent book provides both the theoretical basis for cost analysis and projection and gives useful and easily applied examples of how such complex operations can be analyzed, evaluated, and presented. The book is at once a detailed and a selective treatment of the most widely discussed and useful cost analysis approaches likely to be encountered by or useful to records managers and archivists. Saffady's short and practical monograph allows the records professional both to comprehend and speak the language of the cost accountant and budget analyst with

confidence and to make a more compelling case for resource allocation.

The purpose of the book is to make the planning, budgeting, proposal evaluation, and decision making in records and information management projects understandable and useful to archivists and records managers. The volume accomplishes this goal in two major chapters or parts. Part One of the book, entitled "Categorizing Records Management Costs," is a more theoretical discussion of how cost accounting principles are used and the types of analysis that are possible in records-related projects. Cost accounting concepts and relationships—such as, direct vs. indirect costs, variable vs. fixed costs, controllable vs. uncontrollable costs, total vs. unit costs, standard vs. actual costs, and start-up vs. ongoing costs—are clearly defined, articulately explained, and elucidated through records-related examples. The first part of the work also shows how both capital and operating budgets are constructed using the classification and sorting of costs. Excellent and clearly detailed examples, using records reformatting, are developed for both fixed and flexible (multiple contingency) budgeting.

Part Two of the Saffady book, entitled "Justifying Records Management Costs," deals with cost justification concepts and methods that most records specialists and archivists are likely to encounter and find useful in acquiring sufficient resources. The work only briefly discusses Cost-Benefit Analysis. Saffady explains that the decision to treat the analytical framework most familiar to records managers and archivists in a superficial way was due to Cost-Benefit Analysis's focus upon intangible benefits and goals that may be primary-based on the mission of the organization. Cost-Benefit Analysis may be financial or nonfinancial, quantitative or nonquantitative, objective or subjective and, thus, too broad in methods and considerations to be treated fully in this small work.

This section of the book invests much space and attention to describing and demonstrating the use of Cost-Effective

Analysis and Return on Investment Analysis (ROI). Cost-Effective Analysis, the author explains, always involves an economic comparison of possible alternatives. For most government and not-for-profit organizations, Cost-Effective Analysis, a comparison between competing alternatives to accomplish the same or similar results, is more relevant and useful than ROI analysis. Through the Cost-Effective Analysis techniques of Differential Analysis, decisions can be screened for the most efficient and cost justifiable alternative. Break-Even Analysis, a type of Cost-Effective Analysis, determines the cost-effectiveness of replacement alternatives. It allows the records manager, archivist, or resource allocator to ascertain how much time or how much activity will be needed to justify the change from an existing system or process to a new one.

Return on Investment Analysis involves an evaluation of how good an investment a particular records program or project is. ROI compares the expense and returns of records project or program to other investment alternatives available to a for-profit organization. As the author notes, ROI methods of analysis are likely to have little impact on records and archival programs outside of the corporate world, and hopefully little use within commercial organizations. There are few records and archival activities that can provide the same type of monetary return on expenditures that stock buy-backs, equity purchases, and debt pay-downs can provide, yet properly managed and retained records can provide a great many benefits to an organization.

*Cost Analysis Concepts and Methods for Records Management Projects* is a very useful book, and belying its title, it is not only for a few practitioners at the highest organizational levels. Although its \$59 price tag may seem expensive, it is worth every dollar to the archivist facing budget preparation, bid selection, and cost justification. The work rescues the archivist and records manager from having to acquire an extensive accounting proficiency in order to

make the argument for project and program funding in the language of the resource allocators. There are more detailed works on cost accounting, but there are none specific to records and archives. I highly recommend this book to every records manager and management-level archivist.

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