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Book Reviews

Joshua Kitchens
Clayton State University

Erin Lawrimore
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Pamela Nye
Lewis H. Beck Archives, The Westminster Schools

Cheryl Oestreicher
Boise State University

Martin T. Olliff
Wiregrass Archives, Troy University Dothan Campus

See next page for additional authors

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Book Reviews

Authors

Joshua Kitchens, Erin Lawrimore, Pamela Nye, Cheryl Oestreicher, Martin T. Olliff, Amanda Pellerin, and Kay Strahan

BOOK REVIEWS

Archival Futures. Edited by Caroline Brown. (London, UK: Facet Books, 2018. 176pp.)

Caroline Brown's *Archival Futures* asks archivists to consider the future of their profession. This work is not a practical guide. Rather, Brown has edited a nine-article volume of speculation and theory that presents numerous challenges--and opportunities—by such stellar archival thinkers as Kate Theimer, Luciana Duranti, and Geoffrey Yeo. Brown's preface sets the tone for the rest of the work stating, "This is a future in which our skills are needed, but, as the authors in this book show, it is also a future which will require us to be adaptive and to embrace new circumstances and challenges" (p. xix).

While parts of the book have a positive outlook on the prospect for archives, Luciana Duranti's "Records and Archives as Evidence" anticipates a bleaker future. Duranti discusses opportunities and threats to archives as evidence. Her most shocking warning is that "Records—their creation, maintenance, and preservation—are falling victim to politicians and administrators who fear being held accountable for their actions" (p. 21).

Craig Gauld's article "The End of Archival Ideas" presents a more positive perspective. While the title suggests a negative take, Gauld's article is supportive of prevailing archival theory and practice. He sees these as necessary for working with electronic records and does not suggest a radical departure from our current modes of thinking. Gauld postulates that "should a societal backlash to the misuse of information continue and flourish then it may be we will see an increase in validation of the archival role with a role to recontextualization..." (p. 150). The prospect of the continuity of our shared experiences should give any archivist hope for the future of our profession.

A notable issue with this book is that it is primarily a theoretical framework from which to consider archives and does not take into account the reality of many repositories. Victoria Lemieux's article "The Future of Archives as Networked, Decentralised, Autonomous and Global" is a fascinating exploration of the future of archives and the possible uses of blockchain

technologies. Lemieux states of blockchain, “Any technology that purports to produce immutable records of transactions is of interest to records and archives professionals” (p. 37). While this discussion of blockchain is interesting, it may be beyond what many archivists are able to experiment with given their institutional situation.

While *Archival Futures* is a thought-provoking work of deep scholarship, it does not provide practical guidance for the working archivist. However, the book is a valuable tool in spurring conversation about the purpose of archives moving forward.

Joshua Kitchens
Clayton State University

The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving. Edited by Brianna H. Marshall. (Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2018. xxii + 276 pp.)

The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving takes a practical and inspirational approach to the world of managing born-digital and digitized personal records. Instead of serving as a resource for members of the public, the volume focuses on educating librarians and archivists about personal digital archiving (PDA) issues and providing them with effective ways to take action and educate their community members. As editor Brianna H. Marshall notes in her preface, “the chapters are intentionally practitioner-focused so that after finishing this book, readers will feel ready to start conversations and make amazing things happen within their communities” (p. x).

The introduction by Chelsea Gunn provides a general overview of personal digital archiving (PDA), outlining definitions of key concepts and situating personal digital archiving within the larger context of archives and records management. She also sets the stage for a recurrent theme in the book—the need for flexibility in practice to meet the needs of individuals users. Gunn writes “the best PDA strategy is not necessarily the same preservation policy adhered

to within professional archives, but rather the preservation policy that an individual can consistently implement and sustain" (p. xviii).

Part I of *The Complete Guide* jumps into archiving practices for specific record formats, with each chapter focusing on a single format. Chapter foci include best practices for archiving digital photographs, social media, web content, and audiovisual materials. A final chapter titled "Assess, Annotate, Export: Quick Recipes for Archiving Your Personal Digital Life" includes a series of eight one-page instruction sheets for archiving specific formats. This chapter is particularly helpful, as the instruction sheets are formatted in an easy-to-read chart that could readily be reproduced for PDA workshops. Overall, Part I stands as an excellent resource for educating users about preserving materials in some of the most common digital formats. This section, however, could benefit from an additional chapter focused more broadly on the overarching basics of digital preservation, including the importance of backups, off-site storage, etc. Such information is included in some chapters, but not in others. A chapter with a format-agnostic overview would provide an excellent foundation for these more detailed, format-specific chapters.

Part II introduces case studies of librarians and archivists who have taken different approaches to teaching and facilitating personal digital archiving. Chapters focus on the development of the Washington, DC Public Library's Memory Lab, the work of Queens Library and Queens College, CUNY, to create the Queens Memory project, and the creation of the Plateau Peoples' Web Portal at Washington State University. Each project takes a different approach and has different intended outcomes, but all are tied to the preservation of cultural heritage through personal digital archiving. The common theme that runs through every chapter is the importance of centering community needs in project development, assessment, and growth. The section provides strong examples of the variety of approaches one can take to providing PDA resources and training, distilling these approaches in ways that make them extensible and applicable in a range of libraries.

Part III presents case studies of personal digital archiving training in academic institutions. The first chapter, "Personal Digital Archives Programming at Liberal Arts Colleges," explores the authors' development of "Personal Digital Archiving Days" at their

academic libraries. These days are effective outreach and educational tools, increasing awareness of the resources available in the library and providing attendees with a set of best practices for managing their personal records. The second chapter examines the Learning from Artists' Archives project, an ILMS-funded collaboration between the Art Department and the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, that focused on artists' needs and workflows in developing recommendations for personal digital archiving. The final chapter, "Personal Digital Archiving as a Bridge to Research Data Management," illustrates how PDA can be used as a means of introducing graduate students to concepts of research data management. This chapter is particularly strong, as it includes examples of activities and assignments that can help instructors debrief and assess the workshop's goals and values.

The concluding section, Part IV, focuses on social and ethical issues associated with personal digital archiving. These issues are not only vital to PDA workshop administration: they are also key concepts for librarians to convey to the attendees of their PDA workshops. The first chapter examines concepts of information ownership in the digital world. The second chapter looks at embedded metadata in digital photographs and the ways in which librarians can educate their audiences on this data and the privacy issues it may present. The third chapter takes an autoethnographic approach, as author Camille Thomas explicates how she and other black Millennials have created and explored identity and collective memory through the creation of digital records. She proposes a holistic approach to personal digital archiving, in which librarians "provide their users with a sense of agency for their personal records" (p. 222) and concentrate their practices on the individual's or community's needs and wants. The book concludes with a chapter on digital rights after death and ways in which archivists can work with individuals to map digital estates for long-term preservation.

The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving is a useful resource for librarians and archivists who are interested in assisting their community members with PDA but who may not be well-versed in digital preservation. The book does seem a bit disjointed at times, as edited volumes sometimes do. Key concepts are repeated multiple times across different chapters. Authors sometime use

different terminology to refer to the same core concept, potentially confusing readers unfamiliar with the world of archives. Overall, however, *The Complete Guide* does contain useful information that can help anyone who wants to lead a PDA workshop or assist patrons with personal digital archiving issues and concerns. More than that, it effectively explores how PDA can be incorporated into instructional and reference practices in a wide range of institutions with varied budgets and resources.

Erin Lawrimore
University Archivist
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The No-Nonsense Guide to Born-Digital Content. By Heather Ryan and Walker Sampson (London: Facet Publishing, 2018. 207 pp.)

Ryan and Sampson's *No-Nonsense Guide* is an easy-to-read introductory text for archivists and others new to working with digital records. They argue that archivists need to move beyond the concept of digital records as a niche field of study; all professionals should have a baseline of knowledge. There are three key premises underlying the book: given the volume of digital content, we will never catch up; inaction is the biggest risk factor for digital records, and archivists need to understand what is happening beyond the screen. "We are moving further away from the idea that digital preservation is a technical problem that the right system can solve and toward the realisation that ensuring long-term access to digital information is a craft that we practise and refine by doing the work" (Foreword, xiii).

Today's society is overwhelmingly digital, and the digital objects it produces will need to be managed in their native habitat. In order to do that, the archivist needs to understand what is going on under the hood, or "beyond the screen." However, the prospect of this, for the electronic records novice, can seem daunting. With so many resources available from both archives professionals and the

information technology sector, it is hard to know where to start, or what would be of most immediate use given one's institutional context. The technical requirements and tools vary at each repository, so there cannot be a one-size-fits-all training system. What is common, though, are the underlying principles of how digital records are created and stored. Learning how this works takes the mystery and unknown out of the equation, leading to a useful set of skills that can be applied in many situations.

The chapters within this book include information on digital information basics; record selection, acquisition, description, and access; digital preservation storage; workflow design and implementation; and finally new and emerging areas in born-digital materials. A list of abbreviations for the alphabet soup of standards and formats is included, as well as a glossary and list of basic UNIX command line prompts, which are located in the front of the book for easy reference by those reading the book and working through the included exercises and case studies. The appendices list resources for further study, broken into sections for suggested books, journals, reports, technical registries, websites, conferences, and communities. These invaluable resources—both general and technical—are solid options for further study.

Each chapter contains subheadings that enable readers to easily locate specific information. The chapters conclude with a review of the main points and suggesting further reading pertaining to the topic. Helpful illustrations and tables allow an archivist working through these concepts to check to see if what is on their screen matches the process being described in the book.

I appreciate the overall tone of the book, succinctly described in the conclusion: “It is through states of playfulness and playful curiosity that we will work through the challenges that continue to evolve before us and build the new knowledge and skills that we need in order to collect, preserve, and provide access to our collective digital histories,” (Conclusion). The book is written as if the authors were having a conversation with the reader, or as if it were the text of a workshop. It convincingly argues that we must be continually open to learning new skills and sharing knowledge with one another—especially in the born-digital realm.

Pamela Nye, CA
Lewis H. Beck Archives
The Westminster Schools

Archive That, Comrade! Left Legacies and the Counter Culture of Remembrance. By Phil Cohen (Oakland, CA: PM Press/Kairos, 2018. 160 pp.)

Archivists have a strong desire to understand users, and I personally seek out scholarship from non-archivists who offer their perspectives on who archivists are, what archives do, and our efforts to preserve the historical record. In particular, I appreciate the insights into how to define the archive and their personal experiences.

Unfortunately, *Archive That Comrade! Left Legacies and the Counter Culture of Remembrance* by Phil Cohen does not merit inclusion with such scholarship. In his introduction, Cohen, who admits that he is not an archivist, states that his reason for writing the book is to address how “scholar activists” research marginalized groups within contexts of economic and social change. His examples of scholar archivists include ethnographers, cultural geographers, and visual artists, among others, but notably does not mention historians or archivists. He claims that his goal is to persuade his readers that archives “constitute an increasingly important site of struggle over not just the past but the future” instead of “dim and dusty places only frequented by academic zombies” (p. xvii). His sentiment that archives are important to the past and the future is correct. Yet his outdated stereotypical reference discounts that archivists are extremely vocal and active in educating others about our importance to society. And his lack of knowledge about how archivists approach collecting, education, and activism pervades the entire book.

Cohen expresses frustration with lost and misunderstood documentation, as well as the public’s lack of recognition of the

past's influence on current society. Archivists can sympathize with his argument about how much historical evidence goes unpreserved and the challenges of research with incomplete records divorced from the context of their creation, and without representation of all perspectives. There are certain points Cohen makes throughout the book that reflect what archivists know and actively communicate to patrons: that relics from the past have many stories yet to be told (p. 13), the importance of placing materials within a broader context (p. 14), and that personal and outside perspectives must both be considered to understand the story (p. 17). However, his discussion implies that archivists are unaware of these points.

Cohen sets out to "moot" theories of archives as a democratic space. He cites Theodor Adorno, Wolfgang Ernst, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and others that describe archives' purposes for memory, participation, and access. These players make appearances throughout the text, but again, not once does he reference any archival literature or theories. Cohen also propagates inaccurate definitions of archives. He claims that there are six types: academic, institutional, heritage, conjunctural, hagiographic, and "dark archive." He does not cite any source for this typology, instead creating his own inaccurate characterizations. His definitions are narrow, and do not reflect the complexity of how archives determine what to collect. For example, he states that academic archives focus on one subject area, when in fact it is generally understood that academic archives collect around multiple subject areas, including local history and institutional records, in addition to being very active in seeking underrepresented groups to counteract the history of "dead white men."

Cohen's arguments are exiguous because he uses the lens of Left counterculture ideologies and ignores modern-day archival strategies. He begrudgingly recognizes that archives are vital to document and maintain history and memory but his ideas of how that process works are inaccurate. His writing presents archives as if they were monoliths rather than considering the individuals that make up these institutions. He latches on to the unsubstantiated notion that archives do not adequately address multiple perspectives and instead choose to focus on the dominant narrative, a singular perspective, heroism, the elite, or the "winners." He entirely overlooks the emergence of social history in the 1970s, and its reliance upon the

non-dominant narrative that already existed in archives. Since then, many archives have actively focused their collection development upon further documenting multiple perspectives and underrepresented groups. However, Cohen offers no credit to the decades of work archivists have done, and continue to do, to extend the historical record beyond the dominant voices.

As a member of a non-dominant community, Cohen has maintained his own personal “archive,” the challenges of which he discusses in the book. For example, he describes a scrapbook commemorating his participation in a hippie commune in London that was eventually raided by police, lamenting that it contains mostly sensationalized press that does not accurately capture the real story. Correctly, he notes that one cannot form an adequate interpretation of events using only the contents of his scrapbook. Cohen appears to be more focused on bemoaning the fading of his fame from the sixties and departs from his argument with a tangent about how younger generations are not intelligent or motivated enough to learn or respect the activities of previous generations. My impression is that he is trying to come to terms with his own eventual mortality, fearing that his contributions to the sixties counterculture will be completely forgotten upon his death, if not sooner. Though his explanations are a bit self-indulgent, the essence of this emotional process is familiar to archivists. When archives accession a given collection, they are helping donors preserve their legacies and contributions that will enable them to live on and have their stories told by future generations.

Cohen notes the importance of donating materials to an archives so that they are maintained in perpetuity. However, he also laments that the “symbolic death,” suffered by content removed from the “world which sustained it” and instead secreted into “a special place, a kind of crypt where they are coded and reborn in the form of a public document” (p. 24). Cohen does not fully trust archives to collect and preserve records nor to do justice to full meaning of the donor or their legacy. At times, he thinly veils his blame on archives for the gaps in representation without acknowledging that perhaps records do not exist, or the people purposely chose not to preserve them.

He states, without evidence, that many archivists argue “what really sustains archival research” is “the place itself, the building

housing the archive.” He makes the wrongful claim that there is no “ethnographic perspective” about “what these sites feel to be in, what explicit and covert messages are conveyed by their spatial arrangements, technical facilities, and administrative protocols and how their public profile is shaped by and in turn influences their physical and social location” (p. 63). However, there is ample scholarship that discusses archives as “place” and address many of those issues. Kate Eichhorn, Antoinette Burton, Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan, Carrie Smith and Lisa Stead, and others do an excellent job of discussing archives beyond their purpose for research, and explore how preservation, selection and acquisition, and other archival functions contribute to a deeper understanding and respect for archives and archivists. It is especially difficult to understand why he did not once reference *Archives Power* by Rand Jimerson. His ignorance of existing explorations of archives as a space and beyond invalidates his perspective.

Perpetuating the bygone view of archives as dusty environments, Cohen asserts that archives exist to serve a “privileged hermeneutic role and the ivory tower scholarship it supports” (p. 50). Archivists understand the wide variety of researchers they actually serve, but Cohen makes the unsubstantiated allegation that archives are not open to new interpretations and are for academics only. He states that scholars’ “work is driven by a restless quest for authenticity, if only one rooted in its immediate mode of production which is endlessly archived in footnotes, in ever-more-ritualistic displays of academic scholarship” (pp. 40-41). He clearly has no knowledge that archives exist for citizens. Indeed, the Archives & Records Association’s (United Kingdom and Ireland) mission statement states that the organization exists to foster and promote archives for the “effective functioning of governance and administration; for education and enjoyment; for economic prosperity; and for posterity and the public interest” (<https://www.archives.org.uk/about/vision-mission-business-plan.html>). I am unable to comprehend how an emeritus professor and urban ethnographer is oblivious to the plethora of projects that go well beyond academia with the purposeful intent to reach public audiences.

As a thin basis for his argument, he describes visits to two community archives in London. He admits to an overall good

experience at the first institution, but still inappropriately chastises the repository for their lack of an acquisitions budget, small exhibit spaces, and modest reading room, in addition to alleging that they are only committed to “the promotion of positive images.” At the second archives, he enjoyed browsing the open shelves, finding materials he had also once owned, and conversing with the archivists. It is not unusual to have disparate experiences at different repositories, but what is markedly frustrating is that he is not a member of the community the first archives documents, while the second institution directly pertains to his activism. Based on his descriptions, both archives have similar struggles with funding, location, and collecting, yet he admitted to being much more supportive and sympathetic to the archives housing materials that represent his own Leftist counterculture ideologies. His sanctimonious attitude offers little credit to the hard work the first institution does as a community archives.

Cohen’s ideological prejudices extend to digital content. He contends that digital spaces, such as social media, will neither be fully captured nor adequately represent the historical record, asserting that the digital arena is only available to the “privileged cultural elites” and will not include the voices of the non-elite. He tries to argue that the digital world is taking over the print and physical remnants of bygone eras, going so far as to predict that someday the physical will cease to exist. Indeed, he makes the incorrect assumption that libraries discard all books that they digitize. He mischaracterizes archivists as being “suspicious” of technological developments, somehow missing the extensive accomplishments and efforts archives have made in using technology to reach new audiences, preserve content, and actively acquire digital records from all voices.

Archive That, Comrade! is essentially one long, antagonistic essay wherein Cohen claims expertise when, in fact, his framework for understanding the mission and purpose of archives is based solely on his opinions, which have been formed at the purposeful exclusion of the archivist’s perspective. Mostly, Cohen’s work is a lament of his own forgotten fame and uncertain legacy. He undermines his own arguments by doing exactly what he abhors throughout the book. He repeatedly argues that a variety of voices should be represented in archives, yet he uses only his own perspective to determine what

archives are and what they should do. By ignoring archival literature and practices, he refuses to try to work *with* archives instead of against them. There is little merit to this book and as both a historian and archivist, I cannot think of an appropriate audience. I do not recommend the book for use in any archival context.

Cheryl Oestreicher
Head of Special Collections and Archives
Boise State University

Engaging with Records and Archives: Histories and Theories. By Fiorella Foscarini, Heather MacNeil, Bonnie Mak, and Gillian Oliver. (London, UK: Facet Publishing, 2016. 241 pp.)

Engaging with Records and Archives is composed of essays first presented at the 2015 International Conference on History of Records and Archives in Amsterdam (I-CHORA 7), which sought to "historicize and theorize records making, recordkeeping, and archival practices from a large range of disciplinary perspectives" (p. xii). The conference theme inspired the title of the book, which is arranged in two parts. Part 1 challenges archival theory and conceptualization while Part 2 examines the history of archival engagement in six studies of praxis.

After a short introduction by the editors, Jeanette Bastian's submission explores how the "archival turn" in disciplines moves "the archive" to the center of study in a way that threatens archivists with professional marginalization if they do not think about their mission more broadly. Juan Ilerbaig maintains this thrust by historicizing the Dutch Manual's concept of archives. Rather than following Darwin's theory, the modern profession's founding document adopted Georges Cuvier's paleontological idea of reconstructing a static organism from its remains—in the archives's case, an organization's records. This concept set the stage for archival theory across the twentieth century.

The next two essays focus on current issues. Jonthan Furner discusses the Expert Group on Archival Description's (EGAD) 2012 "Records in Context" and the state of library, archives, and museum descriptive standards alignment, concluding that EGAD must make a more compelling argument in favor of the alignment or risk creating a "pseudo-standard" (p. 57). Marlene Manoff contends that archivists can benefit from examining how digital artists and humanists create digital collections, and, reflecting Bastian above, that digitization offers archivists the opportunity to see the "critical making" of archives as an archives itself (p. 76). Creating archives, she believes, should be "a trans-disciplinary project" to correct for and avoid on-going archival silences (p. 77).

Elizabeth Shepherd completes part 1 with her own examination of archival silences, those of women archival pioneers in the UK. She focuses on Joan Wake's archival salvage work during World War I and Ethel Stokes' rescue, sorting, and distribution of collections from the UK Public Records Office to their appropriate local repositories. Both women influenced archival thinking in the UK by giving regional archives and records preservation "a national profile" (p. 99).

Part 2 includes case studies that demonstrate the global reach of archival history. It opens with Stefano Gardini's examination of the "phenomenology of archives" through the changes in arrangement and description as chancellors, archivists, French imperial and Italian national governors, and modern historical researchers made use of Genoa's *Giunta dei compini* records over four hundred years (p. 109). In a similar vein, Charles Jeurgens questions the tensions between secrecy and transparency in Dutch archival practice in the mid-nineteenth century, exploring how the Dutch idea of the archives as "the place for access to and disclosure of (historical) governmental records" did not penetrate to the Dutch East Indies government until the 1890s because the "colonial government's default was secrecy" (pp. 142-143).

The next three essays ruminate over ways to decolonize archival practice. Melanie Delva and Melissa Adams report how practices that privilege preservation and access collide with indigenous Canadian's "ways of knowing" that privilege relationships and the right to be hidden from outsiders. Examining a disagreement between the Dzawada'enuxw Nation and the Archives

of the Provincial Synod of British Columbia and the Yukon concerning 150 photographs made by missionaries in 1904, the authors call on archivists to incorporate indigenous ways of knowing, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Protocols for Native American archival materials into their codes of ethics.

Paul Lihoma traces knowledge production and recordkeeping in Malawi through four eras: pre-colonial tribal government oral traditions; the introduction of literacy and British recordkeeping in the colonial era, 1891-1964; the post-independence oppression and rejection of recordkeeping and access standards by the one-party state; and the revival of democratic forms, including records and transparency standards, in the 1980s. He concludes that the revived Malawian National Archives has become a place to account for atrocities carried out under the authoritarian regime after 1964. Magdalena Wisniewska provides a similar study of Polish community archiving through two projects: the KARTA Center and the General Elzbieta Zawacka Foundation. She determines that long cultural suppression of Polish identity from the Partition of 1795 through the oppressive one-party communist state led Poles to make local rather than national efforts to preserve their heritage.

The book's final essay, by Sian Vaughan, returns to themes taken up by Marlene Manoff in chapter 4—what archivists can learn from the "archival turn" among artists. Using the Epstein Archives at The New Art Gallery Walsall and Brixton Calling!, a participatory archiving project by artist members of the 1980s London Artists' Collective, as exemplars, Vaughn concludes that artists center affect, imagination, and the asking of questions rather than providing of answers. Archivists should emulate these practices when imagining archival practice for the future.

Engaging with Records and Archives' most significant contribution is that each essay challenges existing paradigms of archival thought and practice and asks archivists to re-imagine their work in order to broaden the profession's understanding of its mission. The essays in Part 1 critique the current view of archival practices via theory while those in Part 2 offer concrete examples of how archival practice has changed and can continue to evolve.

Because this work was developed from papers delivered at a conference, the editors were restricted in the material available to

them. Some editorial decisions were particularly good—Bastian and Vaughan's submissions served as excellent bookends for the remainder of the essays. Other choices were less desirable but understandable. As is common in edited volumes, the quality of the writing in the essays is inconsistent; some would have benefitted from a stronger editorial hand. In addition, a concluding chapter could have provided need summation for readers.

These quibbles do not detract from the volume's value at a time when archivists are reevaluating their practices and purpose. Digital communications and the push to fill in the gaps of archival silences have forced the profession to open itself to new ways of identifying, preserving, and providing access to the historical materials of the communities it serves. *Engaging with Records and Archives* extends and broadens the conversation begun at I-CHORA 7 in 2015.

Martin T. Olliff
Wiregrass Archives
Troy University Dothan Campus

Oral History Theory (Second edition). By Lynne Abrams.
(Abingdon, UK; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016. 240 pp.)

Oral History Theory (Second Edition) describes the development of oral history research methodologies and the cross-disciplinary theories from the fields of linguistics to psychoanalysis that inform them. Most of the book duplicates the 2010 first edition, with sections related to the uniqueness of the oral history as an information resource, concepts around self, subjectivity and intersubjective, memory, narrative, performance, and power. In the second edition, Lynn Abrams adds a ninth chapter to engage with the ethical questions and exponential growth of "crisis oral history" where the focus of the interview is on traumatic life experiences.

The second edition purports to offer additional discussion on the impact of digital technologies on oral history theory, but the topic

is limited to the updated preface and glossary and does not represent a strength of the book. A companion website developed for the book offers useful additions to the print source. Built by Routledge, it is also a gateway for the publisher's other books so be aware of the pitfalls. The chapter summary and discussion points on the website help the reader wade through the dense explanations of theory and themes. Resource sections include the audio of some interview excerpts in the text as well as transcripts. This is especially helpful to reinforce points about the applications of theory frameworks and interpretative models.

Abrams writes that the chapters are interconnected, not discrete. While they build upon one another, the organization of the book lends itself to non-linear reading. There is repetitive information that grounds the chapters and allows for comprehension as an individual unit. Each chapter relates to an overarching thesis that oral history is a communication method adaptable to individual, environmental, and situational circumstances. Built on this premise, the principle objective of the book is to demonstrate that the practice of oral history—the conducting and recording of the interview—and the theory of oral history are inextricably linked.

Lynn Abrams is a professor of Modern History at the University of Glasgow in the United Kingdom. She is not approaching the field of oral history from the perspective of an archivist, so there is little consideration for the long-term preservation of interviews in her work. Nor can the information in the book give insight on how to create and then sustain an oral history program in the archival context. Rather Abrams approaches oral histories as a historian or social scientist—research methodologies that underpin the theory of oral history practice over a specific research project. This does not make the book an irrelevant resource for the archivist, though. On the contrary, it enlightens important aspects of the form for archivists to consider when interacting with the oral history as a source. The work can inform the archival tasks surrounding oral histories that Abrams does not discuss, including collecting, processing, preserving, accessing, evaluating, and teaching with them.

The introductory chapter of the book, "Turning practice into theory," begins with a simple, declarative sentence: "Oral history is a practice, a method of research" (p. 1). This early statement sets the

point of view and context for the reader. Abrams explicitly defines her intended audience as historians and researchers from other disciplines who conduct or use oral histories as qualitative data for a study "but who require an introduction to the interpretive approaches to analysis" (p. 3). Abrams emphasizes the unique position of the researcher to interact with and sculpt her source materials unlike other primary sources or quantitative data. This potential for manipulation and reliance on human memory creates skepticism among historians who do not trust the accuracy of the oral history as a resource upon which to base legitimate conclusions.

Chapter 2, "The peculiarities of oral history," further explores the unique qualities of the oral history resource. Abrams quotes founding scholars of oral history practice and interpretation such as Alessandro Protelli, who defined six ways in which oral history sources are different from other historical sources: orality, narrative, subjectivity, credibility, objectivity and authorship (p. 19). Abrams uses these elements plus performance, mutability and collaboration to illuminate the distinct components that constitute the interview in process and source. Abrams compares the memory aspect of oral histories to other documents generated by recollections like minutes, legal records, and journalistic reports, noting that "every documentary source will contain a fallibility as to accuracy and bias" (p. 23).

The chapter also charts the differences between forms of personal testimony, including oral traditions, autobiography, and oral history. The themes of borrowing from other fields and the mutability of the practice continue with Abrams concluding that "oral history is a peculiar practice in many ways: in terms of its distinctiveness as a methodology, its marrying of practice in the field with interpretive analysis, and in terms of the ways in which it is used and presented to the wider public. (p. 32).

Chapter 3 explores several theories of self and self-narration that influence oral history practice and the analysis of collected stories. Abrams centers the concept of self from a Western perspective but raises awareness about oral histories conducted outside of Western cultures which may necessitate changes to the gathering and interpretation models for an oral history project. She asserts that an increased comfort around the sharing of life stories

may be the result of an effusive share culture propagated through social media and reality television.

Chapter 4 dives more deeply into the interaction between the narrator and interviewer through a look at subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Abrams writes at the onset of the chapter "The interviewer as well as the narrator is present in the creation of the oral history story; there can be no pretense at neutrality or objectivity" (p. 54). This chapter explores the interaction between the interviewer, the narrator, and the larger frameworks that influence the states of minds for both. The existence of an unmediated or pure narrative is summarily rejected by Abrams. External forces create subjectivity, but the extent to which the interviewer, narrator, and researcher can recognize, accommodate, or circumvent the pressures of power imbalance among race, gender, or class is debatable.

Chapter 5 addresses the memory—how it works and why the memories retold in the narrative were chosen. Abrams explores the reliability of the memory again and defines memory systems such as semantic memory, procedural memory, working memory, episodic memory, and flash-bulb memory. Understanding how memory is encoded helps an oral historian to develop practices that solicit meaningful responses from an interviewee or help cue memories in a logical order. Abrams characterizes the roots of common factors thought to affect memory and recall (i.e., gender and age) as cultural influences, not biological predisposition. Abrams scrutinizes misremembering and 'false memory syndrome', warning that the "interviewer should be aware of the power to distort or at least shape the memories that are recalled" (p. 85).

Chapters 6 and 7 cover narrative and performance theory, showing how these frameworks interact when conducting an oral history interview. Both chapters examine how the telling of the story is important to understanding what is being told. Oral historians have progressed beyond questionnaire-style interviews to a narrative style which allows for a creative, discursive and lengthy reply to be captured. The narrative theories draw mainly from the linguistic and literary fields. In as much as the narrative structure is understood as "not just the sequence of event or facts but emphases, embellishments, cadences, structures, digressions, silences—in short the arrangement and dramatization of the story," it is very close to the performance aspect discussed later (p. 107).

Chapters 8 and 9 look at the opportunities and limitations of oral history practice to break down hierarchical power structures as well as the ethical obligations of the oral historian to her source. Abrams charts the explicit role of oral history practice in the second half of the twentieth century to give visibility to groups not documented or silenced in other historical sources. This trend has continued into the present day, keeping oral history "at the intersection of academic research and the political sphere" (p. 154). Abrams is optimistic about the leveling abilities of the oral history, but she notes that the enthusiasm can morph into academic privilege blind to some of the power issues present in interview settings and the interpretation process. As appropriate, oral history projects should be designed with the active collaboration of participants to create shared authority at every level of the project.

Abrams declares advocacy as a relatively new objective of oral history practice. Combining the skills and knowledge of the researcher and respondents, the interview becomes a way to not only document and give voice to marginalized groups, but effect change on a larger scale. This development segues into the discussion on trauma and ethics in chapter 9, which is new to the second edition. The sub-genre of crisis oral histories and research on trauma narratives correlates to increased visibility of refugee and asylum seekers in communities both as a physical presence—migration movements—and virtual presence—pace of information dissemination through media and online platforms. The theoretical framework for this type of oral history comes from psychiatric and psychoanalytic approaches. Like other sections of the book, Abrams articulates the need for the interviewer to be an active and deep listener. The impact of listening to trauma narratives may affect the psycho-medical state of the interviewer in a concept known as the vulnerable listener. To what extent listeners experience transference from the interaction and how they can accurately advocate for survivors in an appropriate way are additional ethical dimensions that must be considered.

Overall, oral history is not subscribed to any one ideology in pure form or attached to any true north. Oral history theory is a mashup of interdisciplinary theories that are pieced together to the needs of each individual project's intent. Abrams sums up this point at the end of chapter 8: "Oral history is a constantly evolving practice

that sits at the interface between the personal and the social, between past and present, and theory merely helps us to negotiate a route towards a better understanding of the significance of people's memories" (p. 174). In reality, the practice of oral history is not as complicated as its theory suggests. This book may run the risk of deterring practitioners who see this as an overwhelming endeavor. However, it provides ample proof that oral history resources are as legitimate as other evidential history sources and deserves to be part of the academic and community discussion to understand the impact of the past from multiple perspectives.

Amanda G. Pellerin
Special Collections and Archives
Georgia Institute of Technology Library

Torn from Their Bindings: A Story of Art, Science, and the Pillaging of American University Libraries. By Travis McDade. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2018. 229 pp.)

Travis McDade's *Torn from Their Bindings* is a dramatic tale of a book thief and his exploits in the latter half of the twentieth century. The primary audiences for this book include archivists, librarians, and anyone else looking for a little adventure. The book is split in two parts: the first half is an overview of the main character Robert Kindred, his partner in crime Richard Green, and library theft, while the second details their inevitable capture and eventual prosecution. Written like a hard-boiled detective novel, *Torn from Their Bindings* delves into the life of a thief and the books he destroyed in his quest for money.

McDade spreads the history of Robert Kindred and the reasons he stole from libraries throughout the book, ensuring to incorporate additional contextual and historical information. A major theme of the work is why library theft was popular even though a librarian in 1935 described it as "one of the original and basic sins of mankind" (p. 6). Various unsavory library thieves weave in and out

of the story, adding to the rich history of the practice. In some places the book reads like a novel, but returns to the non-fiction realm when McDade reviews the books mutilated and stolen by the Kindred-Green team. Readers will learn what they stole, why they stole it, and the provenance of priceless items looted and destroyed for a quick buck.

The author's thrilling storytelling mixes with an almost ridiculous cadre of characters that seem straight out of a Hollywood writer's room. Based on McDade's description, it seems incredible that Kindred and Green took so long to be caught. "It was not that their plan was flawless, it was that even flawed plans for stealing from libraries were usually successful. To get caught at the crime—even one as audacious as theirs—required them to first get monumentally unlucky and then to act stupidly on top of it. This very low bar was why serial library thefts were so popular and lucrative" (p. 79). McDade recounts how Kindred and Green barely contained their crimes, even once bragging about them at a family party (p. 80).

Librarians are vindicated when, finally, Kindred experienced a moment of monumentally bad luck and then acted foolishly while attempting another theft at the Main Library at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Librarians played a role in assisting police on the case, fighting back against Kindred's acts against our shared cultural heritage for his own financial gain. Unfortunately, the Kindred Collection, as his motely grouping of stolen library prints came to be known, never saw a library again.

Torn from Their Bindings is an engaging and enjoyable read. A major takeaway for library and archival professionals is more serious; however. Library theft is only as heinous as it is visible; the more public outrage from the theft, the more jail time perpetrators get. People who steal from libraries will face few repercussions if national media outlets do not pick up on the story. This crime is popular and lucrative because, while most people think it is wrong to steal from libraries, it often goes unpunished.

Kay Strahan

University of Tennessee Health Science Center