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Reviews

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Book Reviews

Architectural Records: Managing Design and Construction Records. By Waverly B. Lowell and Tawny Ryan Nelb (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006. 250 pp.).

Too often manuals dealing with archival topics employ overly dry writing styles and a lack of imagination in their use of illustrations. *Architectural Records: Managing Design and Construction Records* is a welcome departure from that trend.

The first thing one notices when opening the book are the numerous graphics, many in full color. That difference, along with the authors' ability to relay their extensive knowledge of the subject, should entice even complete novices to learn more about the history and management of architectural records. The book's authors are Waverly B. Lowell, curator of the Environmental Design Archives at the University of California, Berkeley, and Tawny Ryan Nelb, an archivist, records preservation consultant, and historian based in Midland, Michigan.

Lowell and Nelb, who wrote alternate chapters, begin with an interesting general overview of the history of western architectural design. The book looks first at the design practices of the ancient Egyptians, who held architects in high esteem, and then

examines the work of architects in Greek, Roman, and medieval societies. Highlighted next is the Renaissance, a time in which the definitions of architect, client, and builder began to take on their modern-day meanings. Last, the focus turns to American design practices from colonial times through the changing technologies of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Modern architectural archives often contain diverse groups of records and formats, ranging from sketches created early in a project to three-dimensional models representing the final design. The authors explain that archivists must understand the histories and contexts of all these records, along with the processes of design and construction, in order to be effective. They should develop consistent appraisal guidelines to deal with the unique nature and quantity of the records and not let what our culture sees as the “specialness” of drawings influence their decisions.

Additionally, archivists should strive to maintain the original order and provenance of their collections. They need to use standard methods of arrangement and description at series and sub-series levels, with the creation and use of multi-formatted descriptive finding aids as a final goal.

People who deal with design and construction records must consider the special preservation issues of their records. Architectural archives often hold large and diverse collections that may include a multitude of formats. By their very nature such archives present unusual challenges to archivists.

The book notes that varied groups of researchers use architectural archives. Users can range from those working on restoration projects to families researching the history of their homes. It is the responsibility of archivists to explain clearly the policies and procedures of their archives to these researchers.

One special concern pertaining to the use of architectural records involves the visual appeal of many of the drawings found within the collections. Materials such as presentation drawings are at risk for theft since there is a large market for them as art.

Rounding out the book are three appendices. The first two address procedures for documenting neighborhood histories and handling disasters involving water. The third lists common archival series and sub-series found in archives that hold design and construction records.

This well-written and beautifully illustrated manual is an excellent resource for both the novice and experienced archivist. *Architectural Records: Managing Design and Construction Records* is a welcome addition to any bookshelf.

Carol Bishop
University of Georgia

Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective. By Verne Harris with a foreword by Terry Cook (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007. 476 pp.).

This past June, *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd described archivists as “the new macho heroes of Washington” in response to Vice President Dick Cheney’s refusal to release classified documents to the National Archives. As American archivists stand by their professional obligations to preserve government records to promote accountability and support democracy, the selected writings of South African political activist and archivist Verne Harris are both timely and relevant. In the more than twenty essays, speeches, and newspaper columns in *Archives and Justice*, Harris repeatedly exhorts archivists to follow the “call to justice.”

Crucial to understanding his call is the concept that archives “open into (and out of) the future.” Record creators, record managers, archivists, and users all participate in making a record as they endow it with meaning and significance in multiple contexts. As such, “recordmaking” is determined by the relations of power in which the recordmakers find themselves; hence, archivists are inevitably complicit in the exercise of power in all aspects of their professional work. Harris explains the importance of not becoming a pawn of an oppressive power that privileges, marginalizes, and excludes, but rather of becoming an activist who engages with archives and records’ constructive powers. Foremost, archivists should extend “hospitality” to the marginalized. If justice is defined as our relation to “the other,” archivists should open up our principles, practices, institutions, and records to let in “radical otherness.”

The first section of the book, entitled “Discourses,” gathers together Harris’s postmodern meditations on archives. In

1995 Harris discovered Jacques Derrida, and he was “quickly seduced” by Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, likening it to the Song of Solomon. Derrida influences Harris’s conception of the archive, the record, the other, and justice as well as Harris’s playful, passionate style and deconstruction methodology. Harris challenges many fundamental archival beliefs and practices. For example, he deconstructs common definitions of the record and its supposed truthful representation of an event or transaction, but also offers new ways to think about the record. He deconstructs descriptive practices, particularly attempts to be objective or to obscure differences, and offers instead a model for a “liberatory” descriptive standard that reveals archivists’ intervention and biases and strives for openness to counter-narratives or sub-narratives. Harris’s call to justice in these two sections is largely about awareness, attitude, and engagement, and he later concludes that it is “without blueprint, without solution, without ready answers.”

In the third and fourth sections, “Politics and Ethics” and “Pasts and Secrets,” Harris brings to bear his experience as deputy director of the National Archives of South Africa and liaison to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and his work as director of the South African History Archives (SAHA), an organization dedicated to documenting struggles against apartheid and promoting freedom of information. Here, Harris offers critical analyses of South African archives under the oppression of apartheid (in which secrecy was an integral part), the destruction of state records before the fall of apartheid, the significance of the TRC’s attempts to investigate apartheid’s atrocities, and the work of SAHA in filing freedom of information requests. Although rooted in the historical and legal contexts of South Africa, Harris’s suggestions for defining a balance between the public’s right to know and the state’s need for secrecy are sure to resonate with archivists in other countries. Many times he returns to the point that allowing public access to official information is the lynchpin of a democratic society. He posits a politics for archives, which include the responsibility to understand the political nature of the recordmaker and the record, to disclose the “culturing” of the record and the recordmaker, to be hospitable to other ways of knowing and doing, and to be active and “engage openly the politics of the record” for when “we give up on activism, we give up on democracy.”

In the foreword, Terry Cook states that Harris “plays archives as a fine musician plays a beloved instrument, searching for harmonies, improvising sounds, inviting engagement.”

Indeed, Harris’s writings both inspire and challenge archivists to question their role in society, reexamine the nuts and bolts of their daily work, and consider how they can take action in their professional lives to help create a more just society.

Michelle Light
University of California, Irvine

Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice. By Karen F. Gracy (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007. 296 pp.).

In the first part of *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice*, Karen F. Gracy examines the history, economics, and organization of film preservation in the United States. Film preservation poses a particular preservation challenge because the costs of preserving film are so great—most film archives lack funding, staff, facilities, and equipment to care adequately for their collections. In the early chapters of this ethnographic study, Gracy traces the development and functions of film archives, the influence of the motion picture industry and other commercial interests on film preservation, and how deposit agreements and copyright holders affect preservation work. Commercial interests have different priorities than non-commercial interests; certain types of film, such as silent films, avant-garde, industrial films, and amateur/home films, are often neglected due to the lack of appeal to broad audiences and their inability to provide an economic profit.

The second half of *Film Preservation* is dedicated to narratives examining the preservation process. This section, especially the chapter documenting the process of film preservation, will prove the most useful to those actually implementing film-preservation activities. In this chapter, Gracy asserts that there are eight stages of film preservation: selecting film, finding funding, inspecting or inventorying the film, preparing the films for lab work, duplicating the film, storing master elements and access copies, cataloguing masters and access copies, and

providing access to the preserved film. Gracy provides details of how each of these steps can be accomplished. In the chapter on the evolving definitions of film preservation, she tries to untangle the ever-changing meaning of the phrase. There is not a consensus regarding what activities fall under the category of film preservation. Many film preservationists believe that their activities should include more than simply providing viewable copies and preserving items in their original format; these film archivists have expanded the definition of preservation to include cataloguing, providing access, and exhibition.

Chapter 8 of *Film Preservation* discusses the source of power and authority in determining what gets saved and what does not. For example, while the orphan film movement has helped to preserve items not under copyright by providing federal funding to preserve these films, it has shifted the focus of non-commercial institutions to focus on areas where they can get money instead of spending resources on the items that potentially are the highest priority for preservation. There are plenty of items under copyright that need preservation work as well, but because many institutions rely upon federal funding for their preservation work, they choose to follow the money and save what they can get money to save.

The final chapter of this work looks toward the future of the field of moving-image archiving, in which, Gracy believes, film archives will find “a balance between meeting cultural heritage needs and market forces” and where digital technologies will further alter the functions and activities that comprise film preservation.

Students at film or library and information schools will find Gracy’s study to be a good example of how ethnographic methods can be used to investigate what information professionals do—and how they do it—to ensure that materials remain accessible into the future. If you are looking for a practical, step-by-step guide to film preservation and collections care, this book is not for you; however, if you are interested in the origins of film preservation in the United States and how we arrived at many of the current issues and challenges of preserving films, then you will find this book a good guide to that exploration.

Kara M. McClurken
SOLINET

Photographs: Archival Care and Management. By Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler and Diane Vogt-O'Connor with Helena Zinkham, Brett Carnell, and Kit A. Peterson (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006. 550 pp.).

Photographs: Archival Care and Management is a must-have book for all photograph archivists, whether new to the archival profession or seasoned veterans. This is a manual that must be in every archives. As the authors state, their book “is a how-to manual about the preservation and use of photographs in archives, libraries, museums, and other cultural heritage organizations.”

This work is a worthy replacement of the ever-popular *Administration of Photographic Collections*, published by the Society of American Archivists in 1984. *Photographs: Archival Care and Management* continues to focus on the traditional aspects of photograph preservation and processing, but it also deals with developing issues focusing on technologies that surround digital photographs and proper storage. The book also takes a fresh look at reading and researching photographs, reference services, and photograph duplication.

The book's thirteen chapters are divided into different aspects of photographic collections. The first two, “Photographs in Archival Collections” and “History of Photographic Processes,” deal with the basics, the meat and potatoes of photographs. For example, the history chapter includes many pages on identification of images and the basic photographic processes, such as daguerreotype, collodion emulsions, gelatin emulsions, and color processes. Other chapters address acquisition and appraisal, reference services, and outreach.

Also, anyone dealing with copyright and ownership issues will certainly want to read the chapter on “Legal and Ethical Issues of Ownership, Access, and Usage.” Here the reader will find information on donor restrictions, loan agreements, copyrighted and uncopyrighted materials, and public domain. The reader can also get a brief but valuable introduction to learning more on legal issues when dealing with photograph reproductions and exhibits.

Photographs: Archival Care and Management also focuses on preservation of both paper and born-digital photographs. In these chapters, the authors discuss proper housing and

storage procedures while also spending time on digital conversion and management of digital images.

A great feature of the book is the highlighted boxes. The authors offer helpful “tips,” terminologies, and resources for the reader. These areas can be very useful for archivists new to the profession. For instance, there are numerous “tip” boxes that focus on photograph identification, preservation priorities, and donor restrictions. Tables will help archivists trying to find aid identification elements from DACS and EAD.

The appendices are particularly valuable. The authors review the proper “Supplies and Equipment for the Care and Storage of Photographic Materials” and “Funding Sources.” Again, these sections are very useful for any new archivist and will guide them through the tedious process of ordering supplies and working with vendors.

The illustrations and images in *Photographs: Archival Care and Management* make this book stand out from other books and manuals that deal with photographs. Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, Diane Vogt-O’Connor, Helena Zinkham, Brett Carnell, and Kit A. Peterson have produced a manual essential to any archivist who deals with photographs.

Jody Lloyd Thompson
Georgia Institute of Technology

Planning New and Remodeled Archival Facilities. By Thomas P. Wilsted (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007. 204 pp.).

If one reads Thomas P. Wilsted’s *Planning New and Remodeled Archival Facilities* while working in an older facility not yet slated for remodeling, it is likely to make her either weep or salivate. If the reader’s institution is preparing to remodel or create a new facility, then the book will prove a useful guide that will walk her through the basics of either of these scenarios.

Archival Facilities opens with a discussion of the importance of archival facilities as symbolic structures. Wilsted states, “archive buildings are the material manifestation of the concept which human societies have of their collective identify.”

On a day-to-day basis, this meaning is probably overlooked by most archivists so that eventually an archival facility becomes relegated to simply a place of work or even a source of stress. Wilsted highlights in his book that archival buildings provide legitimacy for a cultural heritage, just as the unique materials held within their walls do.

Archival Facilities is a practical guide for the uninitiated into the specifications of what a new or remodeled archival facility should contain. In addition, it also provides advice on how to work with all the people who will be involved in such an institution-changing and financially challenging process. Though state, federal, and academic archival facilities are most heavily represented in photographs and project examples, the information provided is relevant to a broader audience including museums, historical societies, and organizational and corporate archives.

The audience for the title is varied, and Wilsted advocates for the active participation of the archivist in planning committees regardless of institutional size and structure. As archivists tend to work in an insular community, it is easy to forget that those outside the profession do not speak the same archives-focused language. Wilsted provides advice on how to prepare archivists to communicate effectively with architects, engineers, specialists, and contractors. He stresses the obligation of archivists to educate all stakeholders in the needs of collection preservation and security and the requirements for daily management of storage areas, reading rooms, and staff spaces.

As a contributor to archival literature on the topic of building and remodeling archival facilities, Wilsted does not ignore those authors who came before him. He provides references to their work in his text and each chapter is followed with a paragraph of suggested reading. These references guide the reader to a wealth of information, including national and international print and Internet sources on everything from fire codes to storage standards. Thoughtfully, Wilsted provides a six-page glossary of building and construction terms and acronyms that will serve the archivist well.

When planning new or remodeled archival buildings, or just going about the daily duties in a preexisting one, the balance between practical and theoretical information in Wilsted's text can help guide archivists in advocating for the resources needed

to fulfill the professional obligation of preserving the evidence of society.

Nora Lewis
Georgia Historical Society

BOOK NOTES

With the increasing awareness of internationalism in archives, it is fitting that the vice president of the Federal Archives of Germany, Angelika Menne-Haritz, wrote the introduction to a new edition of *Archives and the Public Interest: Selected Essays* by Ernst Posner (edited by Ken Munden; Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006). Indeed, Menne-Haritz's comments remind us of the bridge that Posner's work provided between the American and European worlds of archives. When written, Posner's essays illustrated the contrasts between the two archival cultures and evinced his patrician attitude toward American archives; today they provide context in tracing the history of archival development in the United States and point to the shrinking differences in archival theory and practice among various nations. If you have never read this collection or are unfamiliar with Ernst Posner, the book offers a new opportunity to get to know the German-American archivist and his views. If it has been awhile since you have read the 1967 edition, try the new release. You may find that a second look gives you new perspective on the twenty-first-century archival world.

Kenneth D. Crews's second edition of *Copyright Law for Librarians and Educators: Creative Strategies and Practical Solutions* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2006) provides an easy guide to many of the copyright issues that organizations large and small face. Crews is the Samuel R. Rosen II Professor at the Indiana University School of Law and a professor in the Indiana University School of Library and Information Science. His book covers copyright; rights of ownership; working with fair use; education and libraries; and issues with digital, music, and unpublished materials. Its organization and language make it usable for professionals and non-professionals outside the library (and legal) world in institutions such as archives and museums where copyright questions often arise with no one on

staff to readily answer them.

A somewhat dry and technical addition to the books we have received is Willow Roberts Powers's *Transcription Techniques for the Spoken Word* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2005). In a matter-of-fact way, the book runs through the science of interview transcriptions. Useful appendices provide sample interview forms, typographic notations, and sample transcripts. Unfortunately, it does not take into account oral histories or the archival context of oral history.

Understanding Archives & Manuscripts by James M. O'Toole and Richard J. Cox (Archival Fundamentals Series II, Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006) proves true to its series' reputation for providing fresh studies in archival basics. In this case, O'Toole and Cox make sense of the twenty-first-century realm of archives and manuscripts in a way that will be valuable to beginning archival students and part-time practitioners who need to understand the profession but don't have the time for exhaustive study. While the book is not daunting, it is thorough in its treatment of the subject; at the same time, the bibliographic essay and notes will not disappoint those who seek exhaustive study.

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