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## Book Reviews

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents.* By Lisa Gitelman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014. 210 pp.).

In *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*, author Lisa Gitelman, Professor of English and of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University, examines the histories of a number of common forms of documents and leads the reader to ruminate on the ways these documents reflect the societal, hierarchical, and labor contexts from which they arose. Specifically, she investigates the expansion of the scriptural economy, which she defines in her context as "the totality of writers, writings, and writing techniques that began to expand so precipitously in the nineteenth century" (x), from one focused on producing products of "official" action to one that may actually displace professionals in favor of amateurs.

Gitelman explores these changes to the scriptural economy through a specific focus on the histories of four general types of documents – blank form documents created by job printers, typescript scholarly publications (often referred to as "grey literature"), photocopied documents meant for distribution, and digital files in a PDF format. Two of these histories – blank form documents and photocopied documents – were particularly interesting to examine from the perspective of an archivist.

In her examination of blank forms, Gitelman explores "the question of how blanks, and job-printed documents more generally, may have worked to structure knowledge and instantiate culture in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century" (24). Her focus is specifically on the job printers' roles in printing the blank forms (as opposed to the office worker's or other's role in utilizing the form to convey information in a structured way). As Gitelman notes, these job print jobs represented approximately a third of the total printing sector at the time, yet "this sector of the economy has gone missing from media history, encountered if at all in that most unglamorous and miscellaneous of bibliographical and archival designations, ephemera" (26). For the archivist tasked with documenting the

work of society, this raises an important question. Job printers played an important role in reflecting society and societal change, yet where are they in the archival record? Do we look past the blank forms (and the work of the job printer) and focus only on the later-supplied, structured information they convey?

In her chapter on photocopies and xerographic reproduction, Gitelman discusses the importance of reproduction in spreading information as well as ways in which photocopying enabled the growth of personal file keeping and diminished the importance of (or eliminated altogether) central files in an office environment. Specifically, office workers "select, Xerox, and preserve documents in personal 'just in case' files valued for their potential openness [...and...] in 'accidental research' files, noticing incongruities in the everyday stream that might come in handy on another day in a different context, or to some other end" (103-104). How does (or should) archival arrangement and description (specifically in institutional settings, like university or corporate archives) reflect this evolution from a centralized filing system to a personalized one? Can archivists effectively maintain office records in a way that reflects each individual's unique filing systems?

As Gitelman notes in her afterword, "technological developments that have helped enable the expansion of the scriptural economy have arisen largely according to the interests of officialdom, but their benefits – thank goodness – devolve to outsiders as well" (137). As custodians of the documents arising from the growth of the scriptural economy, archivists will find Gitelman's work helpful in contemplating the ways we represent (or obscure) professional and amateur communities of publishers in our appraisal and acquisition work. As means of production become democratized by evolving technologies, how can (or should) our archival documentation practices change?

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**Archives and Recordkeeping: Theory into Practice.** Edited by Caroline Brown (London: Facet Publishing, 2014. 260 pp.).

In the editor's introduction, Brown starts with an understandable but seldom articulated point. This reviewer's experience agrees with Brown's position that archivists, in the press of their daily responsibilities, develop a "git-r-done" mentality and focus on the broader and seemingly less practical aspects of theory. Certainly, there is even less time to consider how the philosophical constructs of the profession, never mind personal philosophy, impact the givens of archival practice; the creation and maintenance of collections, audiences, ethics, and technological change. Brown's goal for this book, encouraging individual meditation on the theories and philosophies impacting modern practice, is both necessary and welcome.

Given a wealth of points which spark reflection, the reviewer is most intrigued by the following:

- Factors which could change the established definitions of records and archives for born digital records.
- Needs which necessitate the archivist being, or needing to assume the role, of subject expert to contextualize and promote collections to users.
- Increasingly less expensive digital storage makes it possible to retain all born digital records of key departments or individuals, rather than relying on strict parameters for records selection, an option not often available when retaining hard copy records, given the limitations of physical space.
- The hard choices for the preservation of born digital records shift from appraisal to post-custodial preservation
- The archivist's new and unfamiliar role as a creator of collections rather than solely as a custodian of collections

The quantity of entries in the Reference and Further Reading sections of each chapter, would allow the reader to create for themselves self-paced mini- study modules on each chapter's main themes, especially chapter five – Archives, Memories, and Identities- and chapter six – Under the Influence: The Impact of Philosophy on Archives and Records Management.

The assembled authors represent national and international thought on archival issues, and perspectives are evenly split between the United States, and Britain and Europe. On the one hand, awareness of the similar issues confronting our international counterparts is valuable. On the other hand, a reader unfamiliar with the national environment and its effect on custody and access to records when contemplating differences between their viewpoint and the viewpoints of the authors may assume more similarity in the archival environment than is actually there. For instance, in Britain there is a natural ladder to follow when determining where particular public records are held, from local authority, to county, to National Archives. Differences in the governmental structure of fifty states create a tangled path of discovery which is more difficult for the user to navigate. A simpler structure may radically affect an author's conceptualization of the challenges and possible solutions in scenarios that look identical on the surface.

The assertion in the back matter, that this book is valuable reading for both the practitioner and the student is essentially true. The reviewer posits that the content reimagined as a textbook would better serve the needs of students. Each author starts their chapter with an explanation of traditional principles which is useful to the student and, while the refresher is sometimes necessary, and always valuable, irritating to the practitioner. An introductory chapter that reviews traditional principles, followed by chapters beginning with the meat of the opposing viewpoint would be beneficial. This arrangement might better serve to highlight what is original in each treatment, a boon to both students and practitioners. Study questions to guide reflection would reinforce the learning outcomes of both groups.

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***Exhibits in Archives and Special Collections Libraries.*** By Jessica Lacher-Feldman (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2013. 200 pp.).

Jessica Lacher-Feldman's *Exhibits in Archives and Special Collections Libraries* is designed to "help archivists at all levels plan and implement exhibits" (1). To address the challenges of exhibit development, she draws on her experience in exhibit curation from her (now former) role as the Public and Outreach Services Coordinator at the W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library at the University of Alabama.

Exhibits are a valuable component of archives and special collections. They are a tool for promotion and outreach, and provide helpful context and interpretation for collections. Many archivists find themselves charged with producing exhibits in spite of a lack of formal training or education on the subject. Exhibit development is a complex process that brings together a diverse array of activities and skills: planning, promotion, subject knowledge, writing, editing, and graphic design, among others. Archivists also face budget and time constraints that can make the process even more challenging. Lacher-Feldman aims to replace some of the "dread, fear, uncertainty, and anxiety" (1) that can accompany exhibit development with enjoyment of the process.

The book is divided into sixteen chapters that flow in logical order, beginning with the abstract concepts related to exhibits and concluding with post-exhibit activities. Twelve of those chapters cover the various aspects of exhibit development, while three chapters are case studies of actual exhibits. The book also includes six appendices of additional resources. Throughout, the book is filled with practical exercises, instruction, and examples. The book can be read cover to cover as an exhibit primer, or individual chapters can be consulted for advice as needed.

Lacher-Feldman begins by answering the question "Why exhibit?" (7) in Chapter 1: Exhibit Theory and Philosophy. She states that "we exhibit because we *should*" (8), and follows up with a discussion of how archives and special collections benefit from exhibits. Chapter 2: From Soup to Nuts covers the exhibit cycle.

This provides a helpful outline for the entire process, from planning an exhibit to archiving it once it's dismantled.

Chapters three through seven delve into practical matters. Lacher-Feldman offers guidance on selecting exhibit topics, even providing a list of different events, commemorative declared months, and holidays for inspiration. Chapters on exhibit planning, policies, and best practices include a useful planning exercise and a sample exhibit policy. Chapter 6: Labels, Design, and Layout provides guidelines on exhibit production that will be especially helpful to archivists who lack the assistance of a graphic designer, or who have to mount exhibit labels themselves. Online components of physical exhibits are addressed in chapter seven.

Public interaction with exhibits is covered in chapters eight through twelve. Lacher-Feldman begins with promotion and marketing of exhibits, and goes on to address public programming, outreach and education. Assessment and evaluation are also covered. The American Alliance for Museums Standards for Museum Exhibitions are included, as well as six categories of exhibit effectiveness to aid in assessment.

Chapters thirteen through fifteen are case studies of specific exhibits at three different institutions. The institutions represented in the examples are diverse, but the exhibits have a common thread of covering controversial topics. Lacher-Feldman discusses the exhibit process, the inherent challenges, results, and lessons learned.

*Exhibits in Archives and Special Collections Libraries* concludes with a brief chapter on post-exhibit activities, including documenting and archiving exhibits. Six appendices follow the final chapter. The appendices include a literature review, sample forms, resources for supplies, and templates for book supports and label layouts.

Archivists who are new to the profession or simply new to exhibits will find the book to be a practical, hands-on guide for the complete exhibit process. Archivists who have experience with exhibits will also benefit from the book's A to Z coverage of the exhibit process. This book should be kept close at hand when doing exhibit work, and is sure to be revisited frequently for inspiration and guidance. Lacher-Feldman approaches her topic with a positive and encouraging tone, and she delivers practical

information in an engaging and entertaining way. *Exhibits in Archives and Special Collections Libraries* belongs on the bookshelf of any archivist whose job includes exhibit development.

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