

A Manual for Small Archives. ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVISTS. Vancouver: Simon Fraser University, 1988. iii, 213 p.

A Manual for Small Archives, published by the Association of British Columbia Archivists, is a model publication by an archival organization. The *Manual* is well-researched, simply and effectively presented, and will serve its target audience well. Although the preface humbly states that the *Manual* is *not* a textbook for professionally educated or trained archivists, it would serve as a handy reference manual in virtually any small archives.

The *Manual* arose from a survey conducted by the ABCA into the state of small archives in British Columbia. Findings indicated that 70 per cent of responding archives had no permanent full-time employees and that their most urgent need was for more educational assistance from the ABCA. The result was a co-operative effort sponsored by the ABCA Small Archives Committee and funded by a variety of British Columbian heritage organizations (including the ABCA) and the Canadian Council of Archives. A number of writers worked on the project including Diane Beattie, Linda Johnston, and Laura Coles.

The intent of the Small Archives Committee was to provide a manual which would "explain archival principles and practices, offer guidelines and suggestions for various archival activities and provide information on available resources, such as archival publications, regional and national associations, and other supplies and services for archives." (p. i) To the credit of the writers and designers, the *Manual* achieves all of this without becoming a dry and stuffy series of lists and "how-to's." It is arranged in logical chapters beginning with "Getting Started," following through with a general description of the appraisal, accessioning, and descriptive processes, and ending with individual sections on the idiosyncrasies of the many types of archival records an archivist might encounter. The authors have also wisely included separate chapters on records management, reference services, and computers. The publication itself is glossy, well laid out in a clear typeface, and is presented in a three-ring binder with tabs for easy reference.

The tone of the *Manual* is refreshingly unpatronizing and recognizes that perfection is seldom achieved in a small archives environment. The authors carefully point out that "each archives is unique, with its own priorities, goals and problems" (p. 3) and that common sense must remain one of the archivist's most important tools. For the extremely green, the *Manual* also provides sample forms, catalogue cards, indexes, and processing checklists, all of which would make perfectly good models for a new archives.

The *Manual* has also benefitted from test runs in numerous small archives in several other provinces before final publication and this has resulted in a generic publication suitable for use in any archives in Canada. National standards are identified and recommended wherever possible; for example, the nature and purpose of descriptive standards are explained, and the basic descriptive elements are analyzed in some detail.

In some areas the authors' caution has weakened the publication. Deacidification, fumigation, and appraisal activities such as weeding and sampling are not discussed because "anything less than a complete analysis would be mis-

leading.” (p. 3) This sounds like a lazy author or a clumsy edit! Great detail on these types of topics may be unnecessary, and dangerous for the amateur and his records, but an enquiring reader deserves more than this simple brush-off and a recommendation to consult the bibliography or a qualified conservator.

The appraisal section should also have emphasized more strongly the importance of evaluating records in context. A cash book may ordinarily have little archival value, but if it is the only remaining item from a particular period, individual or organization then its relative value changes. Similarly, the archivist must also learn to develop foresight. What is not valuable today may achieve new value in the future. These points were not made strongly enough.

Conservators, records managers, and professionally-trained archivists may also take exception to a few minor points. The *Manual* suggests the sponging of maps to eliminate creases, the identification of originating departments on the outside of record storage boxes, and the creation of clippings files from local newspapers. While the authors do not recommend these questionable practices, it might have been advisable not to mention them.

Nonetheless, *A Manual for Small Archives* is a commendable effort. The format should make updates of the text, bibliography, index, and glossary relatively simple and it is to be hoped that the A.B.C.A. (or a larger organization) will work towards a second edition.

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The Research Collections at McMaster University Library. CHARLOTTE A. STEWART and CARL SPADONI, co-compilers. Hamilton: McMaster University, 1987. viii, 100 p. ISBN 0024-9270.

A Guide to the University Archives and Special Collections. Personal Papers and Private Records. CHRISTOPHER L. HIVES and LAURENDA DANIELLS. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1988. ix, 210 p. ISBN 0-88865-189-9 \$20.00.

These works are guides to the archival collections of McMaster University and the University of British Columbia. A very interesting aberration in the style of guide we have come to expect, the McMaster publication takes the form of an issue of *Library Research News* which was the Library's contribution to the University's centennial year. It describes both the archival and rare book collections held in the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, thus reflecting the University's long-standing tradition of housing rare books together with archives. Descriptions of sixty-one collections are organized into sections emphasizing such interests of McMaster University Library as business and labour, Canadian literature, music, peace, and war, science, medicine, and technology. Within these sections, the collections are arranged alphabetically by title. Each unit includes cross-references to other collections of possible interest to the researcher, and an alphabetical index to titles leads one directly to individual collections.