

Book Reviews

Modern Manuscripts: A Practical Manual for their Management, Care and Use. KENNETH W. DUCKETT. Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1975. Pp. 375. illus. \$16.00.

The distinction between archives and manuscript collections has always been vague. Many archives collect manuscripts other than official or institutional records, while many manuscript collections include records. In general, however, most repositories concentrate on one or the other type of collection and service. The archivist and the manuscript curator share many concerns, like conservation, copyright, and so on, but each also has special problems and procedures.

For those of us who work in manuscript collections, the search for professional guidance on our particular problems has always been difficult. The standard text-books from Jenkinson on discuss archival principles and practices, and devote little space to questions such as collecting policy and methods, which are of great importance to the manuscript curator. Training courses are usually slanted towards those who are working or will work in archives. There is a growing number of periodical articles concerning aspects of the work in manuscript collections, but new institutions probably cannot subscribe to all the relevant professional archives and library journals, and certainly would not have backfiles. Beyond Lucile Kane's pamphlet, *A Guide to the Care and Administration of Manuscripts* (2d. ed., 1966) and the somewhat longer *The Modern Manuscript Library* by R.B. Bordin and R.M. Warner (1966), the manuscript curator has had to depend on guidance intended primarily for the archivist or librarian.

Meanwhile the number of manuscript collections has been increasing, with the establishment of the American presidential libraries, and of manuscript collections in more and more university and college libraries. The American Association for State and Local History, aware of the need for professional guidance among the growing number of people working in the field, commissioned Kenneth Duckett to write "a big, detailed book that might serve as a text for archival and library students and as a reference work for curators themselves." Duckett was the secretary of the Manuscript

Society for many years, and worked in the manuscript collections of the Wisconsin, Oregon, and Ohio historical societies before joining the staff at Southern Illinois University. An editorial advisory committee chaired by Lucile Kane assisted the author, and he consulted many other curators, librarians, and archivists, as well as visited the major American repositories.

His book begins with a history of manuscript collecting, in which the importance of the nineteenth-century private collector in the preservation of documents is emphasized. The rest of the text is concerned with the practical procedures involved in the curator's three primary functions—"to acquire manuscripts, to conserve them, and to make them available for research." Duckett begins with the administration of the repository, discussing staff organization and training, management techniques, funding, budgeting, and the physical plant. His next chapter deals with the mechanics and ethics of acquisition—formulation of a collections policy, possible sources of manuscripts, negotiations for donation or purchase, and the problems of appraisals. He considers the ethical questions of conflict of interest, fair treatment of unknowing donors or sellers, and competition among repositories.

Physical care and conservation are next discussed; the chapter ranges from advice to the curator who cannot afford a vacuum cleaner (use One Wipe) to the lamination controversies. The methods of arrangement and description of manuscripts are described, with cataloguing procedures more closely allied with those of the librarian than of the archivist. Past and possible future uses of automation and microphotography are discussed, including SPINEX and SPINDEX II. There is a chapter on non-manuscript material—artifacts, printed ephemera, motion picture film, photographs, sound recordings (including oral history cassettes), mediagraphics, microforms, and machine-readable records. The book ends with sections on the use of the collections (including restrictions, security, assistance to researchers, and the legal questions of copyright, libel, and slander) and public services such as exhibitions, publications and Friends organizations.

The appendix contains specifications for making manuscript boxes and containers; a one-page table of equivalents (for example, the number of pages, cubic feet, and weight contained in a Hollinger manuscript box); a perpetual calendar; a list of associations, suppliers, and services; a list of frequently reproduced manuscripts and newspapers; a glossary; and a bibliography. Footnotes are extensive, and are at the back of the book with a running title giving the pages in the text to which they refer. A brief note on selected readings follows each chapter. References in both the selected readings notes and the footnotes are abbreviated, so that it is necessary to check the bibliography, which is arranged alphabetically by author without any subject division, to find complete bibliographical information. The index is somewhat skimpy, and the rather smudgy illustrations add little to the text.

The book is eminently practical. Duckett does not discuss principles or theories, but concentrates on methods and procedures. In a book of this nature, no problem can be considered at length, nor can there be much innovation. However, the author occasionally challenges accepted beliefs or practice, such as the "fetish" of acid-free folders and boxes. In discussing collecting policy, he suggests that it might be a good idea if the curator concentrated his attention in the area of his own personal interest, since his knowledge and enthusiasm would thus be an asset, and a balanced collection would be achieved by a succession of curators with different interests.

To me the book has two main weaknesses. First of all, some of the information it contains is out of date. The terminal date of the research was the end of 1973, more than a year before publication. There have been many developments, especially in technology, since then. This slow publishing process also lessens the value of the bibliography and of the list of suppliers and services.

More important, however, is the problem of the potential user of the manual. Duckett says that it is "directed towards the novice curator." He certainly includes many extremely basic, detailed directions; for example, "when the curator comes to the bound volumes, he reaches for his small note pad and slips a carbon in between the first two pages." In some parts of the book, it seems that Duckett is not writing for the novice, but for the mentally retarded. This errs, of course, on the right side; so often the author of a basic manual assumes a knowledge the reader does not possess, and omits important steps obvious to the author but not to the reader.

There is, however, a pitfall in reducing complicated procedures to simple directions—if followed literally in inappropriate cases the directions could result in irreversible damage. This is particularly true in the chapter on physical care, but appears occasionally elsewhere, as in the brief footnote on sampling.

On the other hand, Duckett devotes a considerable portion of his book to the description of highly technical procedures, on approach which contrasts sharply with his sometimes simplistic writing in other areas. I agree that the manuscript curator must know something about the technology of lamination, deacidification, automation, and microphotography. Duckett, however, gives more than the general concept, but not enough information for the curator about to embark in these specialized fields. It might have been more useful, for example, to expand the directions for preparing manuscripts for microfilming, and shorten or eliminate altogether those for the actual photography, which are inadequate.

Despite this criticism, *Modern Manuscripts* is an extremely useful book, filling a real need. Its author has gathered together a mass of valuable information, and has presented it in a clear and interesting way. With few

reservations this manual can safely be recommended to the novice—and not so novice—manuscript curator.

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Archivistique Québécoise. Textes choisis et présentés par FRANCOIS BEAUDIN. Montréal: Librairie de l'Université de Montréal, 1975. Approx. pp. 400. \$7.15.

The archivist at the Université de Montréal has for some years offered a course in the history department on "Public and Private Archives" and, feeling the need to gather some resource materials together on his subject, produced in 1974 a *cahier* of selected readings within the Québec and francophone context. *Archivistique québécoise* is the resulting issue, somewhat bizarrely strung on a plastic hinge bearing xeroxed sheets of articles written for *Archives* (the journal of the Association des archivistes du Québec) and pieces from divers published sources. These are shoddily reproduced and almost impossible to distinguish owing to a complete absence of pagination, though green and gold dividing sheets attempt to assist with section and chapter separations. It must be debatable to what extent even M. Beaudin's students find the compilation useful given the very random nature of its contents and the uneven quality of many items. Nevertheless, the compilation has declared itself to be the first tentative synthesis of archival science as practised in Québec and on that basis it deserves notice by Canadian archivists.

Two areas in particular command attention. One is the notion of *archivistique*, defined in the opening glossary as the science of administering records at the various stages of their life. The term ought to be attractive to archivists who refuse to be misled into accepting anything less than a totally integrated records continuum from creation to disposition, current to non-current use, developed and managed by professional archivists. Thus the two administrative solitudes of records management and archives management happily disappear and the management of *archives administratives et historiques* most sensibly prevails. Bisonette and the Frenières do not go quite that far in their snappy article on new concepts in archives management but they rightly hold that the relationships need emphasising. Anglophone archivists outside Québec have no cause to gloat, for the principle so effectively embraced by the term *archivistique* is not widely exercised within their ranks, let alone acknowledged in most jurisdictions. Well indeed might the enterprising editor of *Records Management Quarterly* publish an English version of this article.