

## *Book Reviews*

**Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival & Records Management.** Edited with an introd. by THORNTON W. MITCHELL. Foreword by ERNST POSNER. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press; London: Feffer & Simmons, ©1975. xxi, 288 p. ISBN 0 8093 0738 3 \$10.00.

Compendia of archival writings are few on this continent, no doubt because until recently only a few archivists have written widely about professional concerns. In so doing, they have begun to pierce the obscurity surrounding the keeping of records, to temper the concentration on historical editing, to banish the stigma of historian *manqué* or, as in Canada, merely to create a proper forum for writing on archives. Margaret Cross Norton, Illinois state archivist from 1922 to 1957, is an exceptional voice breaking the earlier silence. The articles in this compendium, "written to meet a deadline in the wee-small hours after a fatiguing day's work" and mostly for obscure library periodicals, reveal an archivist modestly immersed in the practical and philosophic concerns of her emerging profession. They are wisely written, wisely reprinted, and would be wisely read.

Margaret Norton began her career when the scholarly justification of archives, propounded mainly by historians, still held the field. In several addresses and articles, she put the justification elsewhere. "The fact that archives are primarily business records, kept because of their legal value and potential importance as evidence in a lawsuit, should always be kept in mind when discussing archives." Her whole outlook is informed by an understanding that archives are the product of governmental activity and valuable to the government insofar as they "portray the basic facts of its establishment, form, policies and operations." That records take on other historical or research value is "so much 'velvet'." As Ernst Posner asserts in his forward to the book, "her words paved the way toward recognizing archives administration as an indispensable element of public service and hence entitled to full public support"—no mean feat in any age.

Posner also describes Norton's writings as representing "the first American manual of archives administration." Much of the charm of this book is found in her keen application of the principles she so firmly held and clearly understood. She favoured an independent archives responsible only to the legislature, even though she was constrained, because archives were then frequently less than independent, to spell out the advantages and disadvantages of other arrangements. In 1957, the year she retired, Margaret Norton finally saw the creation of an independent archival agency in her home state.

Less than ideal arrangements did not prevent her from probing virtually every aspect of archives administration. Even though state archives did not have the power of federal archives, flattery, persistence and expertise could be put to work. Her rules of thumb in dealing with officials are: ask advice, never criticize and never embarrass. If the archivist

retrieves something that an official has thrown out, she advises crediting him with its rescue. There is a fascinating section on the Illinois name index, designed to include "all names found in documents in the Illinois archives prior to and including the year 1850." However much comprehensive name indexing has been swamped in the recent flood of paper, in Illinois in Margaret Norton's day, indexing was done with exacting care. In her other approaches to description she omits nothing. The archivist must include all series in paper description, whether or not the records are in the archives. Moreover, her grasp of practical and technical problems encompasses the design of forms, the constitution of typewriter inks, the handling of fragile documents, microfilming (where she advises a healthy suspicion of salesmen), and a host of details of archivists' daily work, of which she had first-hand experience. The technology of archives may have advanced greatly since the writing of these articles, but Norton's good sense and fine appreciation of the archivist's place in the administrative process attach a permanent value to her words.

The thirty articles in this book, written between 1930 and 1956, are organized into well-structured chapters ranging from "The Scope and Function of Archives" through interesting expositions on "The Comparison of Archival and Library Techniques," "Physical Properties of Archives," "The Protection of Records from Disaster," "Records Disposal" (really a chapter on records scheduling) to a finale on "The Archivist and Records Management."

Margaret Norton is unfailingly cogent and always interesting. For example, she leaves us with this advice: "Avoid asking the attorney general for opinions. Nine times out of ten he will say 'No' and it will be almost impossible to get that 'No' exchanged for a 'Yes'." The flavour of that advice is sprinkled throughout a book that is a delight to read. Archivists everywhere will be grateful for its publication and remember its author with warmth and admiration.

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**Draft Model Law on Archives: Description and Text.** SALVATORE CARBONE and RAOUL GUËZE. Paris: Unesco, 1972. 225 p. (Documentation, libraries and archives: Studies and research, 1) \$4.50 (U.S.) (Aussi disponible en français).

Unesco and the International Council of Archives jointly sponsored this draft for a law on archives. At the basis of the draft is the extensive experience of the Council which had promoted, through *Archivum*, studies in comparative legislation. The formation of innumerable new independent states following World War II made urgent the task of suggesting proven guidelines for archival legislation, before the documentation of the previous administrations and the relics of past periods of history disappeared through neglect.

The draft is detailed, comprising 238 articles, many extending to several paragraphs. This is not surprising, as all eventualities had to be foreseen, especially for countries where legislation and administrative procedures do not yet offer any parallel guidelines. In each country, the task of adapting and selecting belongs to the parties concerned with promoting the legislation. The length of the draft is understandable also because of its ambitious scope: it covers general principles, administrative structure, personnel policy, pre-storage and deposits, donations, purchases, expropriation, the selection of documents, secret documents, public access to and dissemination of information and the relationship of public to private archives.