

manual, apart from a rehash of basic methodology better presented in earlier manuals. For detailed discussion of important issues, we must turn to something like Michael Cook's *Archives and the Computer*, London, 1980.

To leave the impression that there is nothing of value in this ICA Handbook would be misleading. For example, in the short Part Three, "Planning", we may disagree with specific recommendations, but the necessity for archives to plan comprehensively their strategies of acquisition, arrangement, and description is both practical wisdom and sound advice. The bibliography is useful — one wonders if the purposes of the ICA might not have been better served here by appending an expanded, possibly annotated bibliography to the author's introduction, and leaving it at that. In any event, we should not accept this manual as other than it purports, in fairness, to be — an elementary primer. Certainly, it is indispensable to anyone contemplating a career in the Public Archives of Canada. Notwithstanding this stricture, the book apparently lacks a clear sense of purpose, and a strong, guiding editorial hand to pull it all together and keep it on course. The elusive manual for the modern archival era remains to be written. Let us hope that Mr. Taylor, having so well defined the need, may soon turn his attention to the task.

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Archives & Manuscripts: An Introduction to Automated Access. H. THOMAS HICKERSON. Basic Manual Series. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1981. 60 p. ISBN 931828-29-5. \$5.00, pa.

As more and more archivists master the harnessing of electronic computer power to assist them in the various types of control they exercise over materials, a major hurdle becomes apparent. Like so many other groups in our society, archivists present a broad range of abilities regarding the use of computers, and that range is daily becoming even larger. At the leading edge, we have a few innovative individuals who are actively involved in the development of computer systems for archival use. Not far behind come those who are knowledgeable and ready to begin, but who are prevented by circumstances from putting their ideas into action. This growing group includes those who are emerging from educational programmes which include basic education in the use of computers. The others, the vast majority, exhibit a variety of skills and attitudes, but all too many know nothing beyond the hyperbole they encounter in the daily newspapers and popular magazines. They understand only vaguely references to computers in the professional literature, and most of the concepts embodied in automation are totally foreign and incomprehensible to them.

The problem is a serious one, and like most major problems relating to archival automation, it is organizational rather than technical. If archivists are to make effective and productive use of computers, they must do so in a co-ordinated way that will reduce redundant systems design and will encourage the kind of computer-based co-operation that has, to their own surprise, assisted librarians to cope with the same increase in recorded information that archivists face. The solution to the problem must lie in some form of education, of which this book forms a part, for knowledge and understanding about computers must become part of every archivist's professional equipment.

In four well laid-out chapters, supplemented by bibliographies, a brief glossary and an even more brief introduction, Hickerson attempts to give an overview of the use of computers in archives. He starts with an introduction to computers and how they work, presenting basic concepts of automation and acquainting the reader with the terminology used in describing those operations. The second chapter focusses on applications of computers, pointing out those which appear to be the most relevant to archives. This chapter is not well organized, drifting from the explanation of file structures to how magnetic disks work and on to a discussion of direct versus sequential access. But it concisely covers a number of concepts that are vital to the task of archival automation and, like the other chapters, ends with suggestions for further reading.

Having accomplished the foregoing in no more than six pages of text, Hickerson then begins the chapter that forms the bulk and core of his work: a detailed examination of the past and present uses of computers for the control of archival materials. Such systems as MRMC, SPINDEX, SELGEM, GRIPHOS, CODOC, and NARS A-1, among others, are described rather generally. Once more, a list of further suggested readings is included, and the section is aided considerably by a number of illustrations of outputs produced by the various systems. The book ends with a chapter entitled "Implementing Automated Techniques", which attempts to introduce the reader to the subject of systems analysis, although the 4½ pages of text devoted to the subject are hardly enough to scratch its surface.

To evaluate such a work seems almost unfair. Hickerson offers us in no more than 25 or 30 pages of text an introduction to a subject that is at once so far ranging that it appears almost beyond the total comprehension of a single individual, so quickly changing that almost anything in print is out of date before it appears, yet so important that it may ultimately change the way in which all of us conceive the idea of a described and controlled collection of materials. We must be grateful to Hickerson for even attempting such an enormous task, for without doubt this modest book will, as it intends, provide a useful introduction for those who truly want to learn about automation and don't know where to start.

But we must also recognize that such a book, precisely because of its modest scope, is not really what is needed. Most people don't learn how computers work by looking at binary representations of the alphabet; they cannot learn the value of analyzing an information system, nor the method for doing so, from looking at a list of the major flowcharting symbols; they will never understand electronic data processing by reading a definition of that term which never explains what data processing is. Yet these are among the things that archivists *must* learn if they are to retain control of their own destiny rather than yield it to the outside consultant, the computer "expert" who thinks that automating archival control is somewhat less complex and certainly less interesting than automating a payroll or furniture inventory system. Clearly automation is a fit subject not for a brief manual, but for a far more thoughtful and comprehensive work that treats the subject in a way that will help archivists to prepare for their future.

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