

Keywords will be as valuable to the academic community as it will to the scholar-archivist struggling with the fundamentals of subject indexing. Since the book is not addressed primarily to an archival audience, it does not discuss procedures for improving subject access to archives and manuscript repositories. Instead, we find a thorough investigation of the principal words used to describe the nature of society. A careful reading will provide archivists with innumerable insights into the historical evolution of vocabulary and demonstrate that subject access to archives must rest firmly upon the foundation of historical semantics.

Rod Young

Federal Archives Division
Public Archives of Canada

Microcomputers for Libraries: How Useful are They? JANE BEAUMONT and DONALD KRUEGER, eds. Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1983. 123 p. ISBN 0-88802-170-4. \$12.00 pa.

Information Management, Machine-Readable Records, and Administration: An Annotated Bibliography. RICHARD KESNER. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1983. 153 p. ISBN 0-931828-57-0. \$8.00 (members), \$11.00 (non-members) pa.

Computer Applications in Archives: A Survey. RACHEL BARTLE and MICHAEL COOK. (British Library Research and Development Department Report No. 5749.) Liverpool: University of Liverpool, Archives Unit, 1983. 58 p. ISBN 0-907156-01-0. £2.50 pa.

The computer is becoming a fact of life in archives in two ways: conservation of automated or machine-readable records themselves and the use of automation as a management tool. Computers will probably arrive in most archival institutions before machine-readable archival records. For the near future archivists must focus on the use of computers as archival tools. The three publications discussed here illuminate the rapidly evolving field of computer applications in archives and libraries.

The papers published in *Microcomputers for Libraries* share actual experiences in the use of microcomputers rather than theoretical views of potential applications. In particular, Jean Beaumont's papers on software selection and choosing a database management system for the microcomputer are among the clearest presentations on these subjects. Other noteworthy topics discussed are electronic bulletin boards and managerial applications. A fine list of sources of information and an alphabetical list of existing microcomputer applications in libraries complete the volume. There is no bibliography, but each paper is followed by notes and sources. *Microcomputers for Libraries* ought to assist archivists who may feel uneasy about starting down the micro path.

Richard Kesner's bibliography is a much-expanded version of his 1980 bibliography. There are close to nine hundred entries in the new version compared to approximately three hundred in the 1980 edition. Although the new bibliography has been organized into subject areas, the original format of sequentially numbered entries has been retained. The separate author and topic indexes in the 1980 edition

have been replaced by an integrated index. The bibliography covers periodicals and reference tools, bibliographies, electronic data processing applications in archives, machine-readable records and archives, records management and automation, library automation, information theory and systems, and future directions in archival automation. Each chapter is preceded by an introductory essay. Kesner provides the best starting point for a review of the literature on archival automation and care of machine-readable records. His annotations are most helpful in determining the best response to particular archival needs.

Rachel Bartle and Michael Cook provide the most recent survey of computer applications in British archives. The complex requirements for establishing a computer system at any level of sophistication are admirably dealt with in the introduction where solutions to various problems are summarized. Amazingly, use of computers to simplify routine office management has not yet taken hold. Thus, added time spent on office duties means less time for processing the backlog. In the cases studied where computers have been introduced, they have not reduced staff. Bartle and Cook surveyed three major areas: records management, archival management, and special applications. They report: "No archives service has yet succeeded in setting up and using a system for the general management or description of all its holdings." Commercial software has neither been comparatively tested "nor has there been any practical step towards planning a user network." Computerized indexes of wills are among the most prevalent forms of special applications in public records offices. The survey also reports that there is no evidence of interest in conserving or administering machine-readable records. Like their colleagues in North America, the British have little use for the library-developed MARC communications format. The theoretical and abstract data structure models have so far not made their way into British archival automation, and the survey notes that "operational systems tend to simplify, and reduce the number of fields actually used."

In large measure, because of microcomputers, data processing itself has undergone profound change. Computer applications, once prohibitively expensive, can now proceed smoothly from batch to on-line or semi-processing at affordable costs. Although the British survey revealed that only eight of eighty-one respondents used stand-alone microcomputers, there certainly appears to be a growing trend in that direction. Naturally, tied to the on-line mode is the question of interactive searching, and in this regard already five such systems are operational with more on the way. But it should also be noted that even with today's primitive microcomputer databases, it is possible to maintain small and/or static files of information. Ultimately, however, the economics of providing on-line information must be carefully weighed against the cost of doing so. For the extra cost and effort of conducting on-line searches may still make indexed print-outs more feasible.

The great variety of British systems is likely to cause serious problems once the British national forum for discussing computer applications in archives is established. What will happen to these early efforts is likely what has already happened in the library — retrospective conversion of old records to a new form. Simplification of this task by automating now puts many British archives and records management offices on the crest of today's "third wave."

David Mattison

Provincial Archives of British Columbia