

It is the last of these sections which is the strongest. Most authors of archival primers try to steer their readers well away from any active conservation efforts on the principle that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. In so doing they either terrorize the would-be archivist with a litany of things that pose a danger to his papers or create a reckless disregard and a fixed notion that nothing can be done. Norvell Jones's article, "First Steps in Preservation for Small Archives and Historical Societies," presents a rare exhibition of common sense and a preventative approach which does not presuppose the existence of perfect temperature and humidity controls and a six figure conservation budget. This section of the volume also includes articles on disaster planning and conservation of bound material, both of which reflect Jones's common sense approach.

Where the volume does not succeed as well as it might is in the articles on two of the foundations of the archival process, arrangement and description. Part of the problem is that these two areas do not lend themselves well to coverage in ten and six pages respectively but the authors have not improved the situation with frequent quotations from *American Archivist* articles. Essays of the same general length on cartographic and photographic records are much more successful.

The volume is rounded off with good, although brief, coverage of reference and security concerns and an uneven article on "Storage, Space and Equipment." In a volume so well directed towards small and relatively poor repositories it is somewhat jarring to find reference to computer output microfilm. Several appendices provide forms and checklists which appear quite useful and there is a select bibliography.

This volume is a primer and is not intended to be a complete course in archival education. For the most part, however, the authors do realize that many persons handling papers may go no further and so it does provide a good grounding in most aspects of archival operations. This small volume would be an excellent suggestion the next time the volunteers of the Upper Rubber Boot Historical Society ask what they should do about the records in their museum.

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Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance. NANCY E. PEACE, ed. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1984. 163 p. ISBN 0-669-05354-6 \$23.00.

At first glance, *Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance* appears as yet another contribution to the burgeoning body of archival literature on the subject of appraisal. Upon closer examination, however, one discovers that the book transcends the question of archival selection in its attempt to address the problems facing archives and archivists in an age of archival proliferation.

Prompted by a workshop on processing contemporary collections at Boston's John F. Kennedy Library in 1980, Nancy Peace decided there was an urgent need for a publication which addresses the difficulties posed by contemporary records. Although the book was originally to have restricted itself to the vexing issue of archival appraisal, the solicited chapters convinced the editor that the book's focus must be expanded to include such archival questions as de-accessioning, pre-archival control, records management as an appraisal tool, and archival networks, among other issues.

“In the years since 1948,” Peace argues, “collections have become larger, the need for selection greater, and the issues more complex.” These factors, she continues, despite the impact of the computer revolution with its obvious implications for data storage, will prevent archivists from escaping their selection responsibilities. In the chapters that follow, a number of divergent archival collections ranging from business records to literary manuscripts are examined under two general themes — “the philosophical basis for evaluation of materials for selection and techniques for implementing selection decision.”

While for the most part her brief narrative history of archival appraisal does not extend beyond the United States, the editor does briefly mention the work of prominent European archivists such as Hans Booms and Nils Nilsson; Canadian contributions in this area are relegated to a reference to Dr. W.K. Lamb’s writings on records destruction. Nevertheless, we cannot condemn Peace too harshly for these omissions as this introduction admirably achieves her intended goal of providing the reader with the appropriate context for the volume’s other contributions.

In *Archival Choices*, some prominent archivists and their lesser known colleagues discuss a variety of issues related to the appraisal of twentieth-century records. Francis Blouin explores his familiar territory of business records and Gerald Ham offers incisive comments on collections management. Patricia Aronsson provides readers with the benefits of her experience in dealing with congressional collections and Philip N. Cronenwett confronts the peculiar problems posed by literary manuscripts. The remaining essays by John Dojka and Shiela Conneen, and Lawrence Dowler respectively discuss the controversial subjects of records management as an appraisal tool and de-accessioning collections.

All chapters in this volume will provide archivists with useful insights into the management of twentieth-century records but Dowler and Ham’s articles are particularly noteworthy for their fiesty attempts to tackle controversial subjects and their bold initiatives in proposing radical solutions. Dowler, in his well-written essay on the often taboo topic of de-accessioning, endeavors to present this operation as a function of appraisal. In so doing, he argues, de-accessioning becomes a “legitimate and shared responsibility of curators and administrators working together to develop those principles and guidelines that will in the end serve the goals of the institution” — not merely generate revenue. He proceeds with great insight to examine three issues at the heart of the de-accessioning controversy: guidelines for de-accessioning, sale of de-accessioned collections, and motives and ideas influencing their sale. While he does not claim to have definitive solutions, he does posit numerous questions along the way which beg the consideration of all archivists contemplating de-accessioning.

Gerald Ham, at his best in a wide-ranging essay on the issue of archival collections management, places the onus on the archivist to develop more sophisticated methods of selection and control to solve the problems presented by modern records administration. While Ham’s ideas are probably well known to most archivists south of the border, they bear repeating for Canadians who may be less familiar with the American literature. The author insists that the concept of collections management confronts archivists with a brand new way of thinking about their work and challenges them to question previously held assumptions regarding archival practice which until now he claims have “followed the dictates of conventional wisdom and unexamined habit.” The growing preservation

demands of modern records coupled with the sacrifices made by pursuing less effective alternatives, Ham argues convincingly, require archivists to ensure optimal use is made of scarce resources through effective planning and evaluation of archival options. Ham cites six important elements in archival collections management (interinstitutional cooperation, documented application of appraisal procedures, de-accessioning, pre-archival control, record-volume reduction, and analysis and planning) which he maintains, while by no means all-inclusive, will, if applied judiciously, rationalize and streamline archival acquisition and appraisal.

For all its obvious strengths the book at times is marred by problems which limit its intended audience and considerably detract from its overall usefulness. The editor's decision to restrict the book's focus to the American archival experience unfortunately ignores the work of archivists in other countries. This is not to suggest that they cannot profit from the experience of their American colleagues, but merely to highlight the fact that the archival problems detailed in this volume are not restricted by national boundaries. It is therefore surprising that Peace chose to ignore the contributions of her Canadian, British, and European counterparts when assembling the volume. The inclusion of a brief comparative article contrasting the context and rationale behind American approaches with other international solutions would have rendered the book more applicable to archivists in other countries.

Finally, the book's challenge to archivists to prepare for the future begs for a chapter on the impact of automation on archival development. Yet, with the exception of some scant references to computer technology in Peace's opening essay and a brief mention of laser disc technology in Ham's concluding chapter, the volume completely skirts the question of automation and automated records keeping. Certainly it is simplistic to suggest, as Peace seemingly believes, that computers and other forms of high technology are and will remain mere archival weapons in the battle to reduce the physical bulk of records. The promise of computer technology in archival management is limited only by the vision of the host institution itself and currently the field abounds with a vast array of programmes which if properly adapted will provide the necessary equipment to leap most archival hurdles. Writings by Margaret Hedstrom, Thomas Hickerson, and Trudy Peterson, to name but a few, have detailed recent advances in this area and future developments in microcomputer technology promise limitless possibilities for archival intellectual control. Peace might have considered including an additional chapter on the promise and prospects of the new technology for archival management and control. By so doing, she would have convinced readers of her willingness to confront the automated future and would have lent added credibility to the book's stated objectives.

Such criticisms aside, Nancy Peace is to be congratulated for compiling an incisive collection of essays which possesses the courage to address controversial questions crucial to the contemporary archivist. She has challenged the profession to question its methods and approaches in a thought-provoking contribution to the field of archival theory.

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