

**A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice.** MAYGENE F. DANIELS and TIMOTHY WALCH, eds. Washington: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1984. 357 p. ISBN 0-91333-12-6 \$12.00.

Although a book of collected readings is difficult to assess, given the nature of the material, it is possible to provide some general impressions of this work based on the editors' goals and their success in achieving them. The *Reader* was developed in response to the requirements of the Modern Archives Institute of the National Archives and Records Administration. Established by Ernst Posner in 1945 and jointly administered by the National Archives and the American University, the Institute has provided basic training for archivists to prepare them for work in a variety of archival settings. Editors Daniels and Walch have assembled this collection of reprinted essays to satisfy a growing demand for basic readings which encompass many facets of archival administration.

From the outset the editors recognize that archives administration is "part intellectual discipline and part applied science." They acknowledge that while archivists work within a framework of accepted archival principles, they must also be able to adapt these theories to deal with the "practical reality of records creation and records-keeping." As a result, Daniels and Walch have assembled a set of readings which reflect their belief that archives administration represents a blend of "the abstract and concrete, the theoretical and the practical."

The *Reader* contains classic pieces by Jenkinson, Posner, Schellenberg, and Holmes, whose collective writings have significantly influenced the course of archival development. It also includes modern essays that "review basic archival concepts or that synthesize various approaches into a cohesive whole." In addition to the theoretical literature, the *Reader* includes material which focusses more on practical considerations. Intended to serve as a supplement to the SAA "Basic Manual Series" which deals with numerous, diverse topics in considerable detail, the *Reader* successfully integrates information about various issues. The material selected is in no way institution-specific. The essays represent a wide spectrum of archival theory and practical applications which might be utilized by archivists of varying levels of expertise from institutions of any size.

Divided into nine chapters, the *Reader* deals not only with standard archival topics such as appraisal, arrangement, description, and reference, but also includes sections which focus on the historical development of European archival theory, pre-archival functions, acquisition, public programmes, and the establishment of priorities. The editors have purposely omitted articles on technical subjects such as conservation, microfilm, and automation because the rapid developments in these fields quickly render the literature obsolete.

The nine chapters are usually composed of three or four articles which explore various facets of the topic. Each chapter is prefaced with a brief introduction to the subject and a short description of the articles chosen and how they fit into the general discussion. These introductory sections have been kept to a minimum which allows the articles to "speak for themselves" and avoids an overbearing presence of the editors in the book. A selected list of further readings has been included for each section.

The *Reader* truly deserves the epithet "modern" in its title. Even taking into account the inclusion of the classic essays of archival theory, twenty of the twenty-eight articles have been written in the last decade. One-half of the essays have been drawn from *The*

*American Archivist* with the rest coming from a variety of sources including *Midwest Archivist*, NARA's *Information Papers*, *Georgia Archive*, *Drexel Library Quarterly*, and *Picturescope*. Unfortunately, the long list of sources does not include any articles from *Archivaria*.

Appropriately, the *Reader* concludes with Gerald Ham's "The Archival Edge." In many ways, the profession now finds itself on the "edge" as archivists are being asked to collect a multitude of different records for an increasingly diverse audience. In addition, archivists are being called upon to anticipate and predict the requirements of future users. Although those in the profession might disagree as to how far the archivist should venture in determining what records should be retained for posterity, few can argue that the profession does not and will not continue to exist on the "archival edge." In this sense we must strive to develop archival literature which will help equip archivists to meet future challenges. This is why a publication like the *Reader* is important. Rather than attempt to provide a blueprint for future archival development, the book provides a collection of works which includes both classical theory and modern insights into these issues. In bringing this literature together in a single volume, the *Reader* helps to broaden and strengthen the foundations upon which the profession might build in the future. This book should be a standard reference work and a welcome addition to the growing body of archival literature.

**Christopher L. Hives**  
Special Collections  
University of British Columbia

**The Mountain of Names: A History of the Human Family.** ALEX SHOUMATOFF.  
New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985. 318 p. ISBN 0-671-49440-6 \$29.95.

In 1961, when Alex Shoumatoff was fourteen, his family moved to London and rented a flat in a house belonging to the Society of Genealogists. He left the bath running one day and the resulting overflow damaged some of the parish registers in the society's search rooms. This hardly augured well for any future interest in genealogy. Neither did his first youthful foray into genealogical research. He spent day after day in the PRO scanning ships' musters in an attempt to prove a family legend that an ancestor, as a visiting Russian midshipman, had been with Nelson at Trafalgar. While he eventually discovered that his ancestor had at least been within sight of the battle if not of Nelson (which makes this family story closer to the truth than most), he came to the conclusion that genealogical research is "tedious and often disillusioning."

Despite this unpromising start, Shoumatoff was later to write a book about his family history called *Russian Blood*. (Its working title was *Rootsky*.) His most recent book, *The Mountain of Names*, is concerned with genealogical research and family history in general. Shoumatoff is a *New Yorker* staff writer and much of this book first appeared in its pages. As one would expect, *The Mountain of Names* is chatty, discursive, and immensely readable. While it is not intended for a specialized audience, it is a book that archivists should enjoy reading. Genealogists are among the most frequent users of archives, not to mention perhaps the most diligent and determined, and as archivists we should know more about what brings them to our doors.