

Book Reviews

The Archival Appraisal of Machine-Readable Records: A RAMP Study With Guidelines. HAROLD NAUGLER. Paris: UNESCO, 1984. 161 p. Free of Charge.

Harold Naugler's study of the archival appraisal of machine-readable records is the latest addition to UNESCO's series of Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP) studies. This publication provides archivists with the first overview of the appraisal of machine-readable records, complete with guidelines to assist them in establishing programmes for the archival preservation of machine-readable records and in refining appraisal where such programmes are already in place.

A brief introductory chapter, which presents an overview of computer systems and discusses the nature, sources, and uses of machine-readable records, provides a useful orientation to archivists who lack familiarity with basic terminology and concepts. It is followed by an examination of areas where changes in government information policies and expanded records management programmes may be needed before archivists can acquire records in machine-readable form. The lack of legislation which defines machine-readable records as public property, restrictions on the transfer of recent information to archives, and the absence of programmes for the identification, inventorying, and scheduling of machine-readable records make the systematic acquisition of these records difficult, if not impossible.

Principles, guidelines, and techniques for the appraisal of machine-readable records are discussed in two separate chapters. Because machine-readable information can be separated from the base on which it is recorded, easily manipulated and reorganized, the study distinguishes evaluation of the information contained in the records (content analysis) from the assessment of the physical and logical arrangement of the data (technical analysis). The final chapter outlines additional issues of concern such as the appraisal of confidential information, transborder data flow, sampling machine-readable records, and reappraisal. Appendices contain appraisal guidelines and forms developed by the Public Records Office in London, the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, and the Machine-Readable Archives Division of the Public Archives of Canada.

This study is the first comprehensive work on the appraisal of machine-readable records. In the past, archivists have relied on guidelines which were most applicable to the appraisal of survey data in machine-readable form. This study brings appraisal

methodology up to date with respect to the great diversity of computer applications for government records keeping. The guidelines cover wide-ranging computer applications such as how to control financial data, in project management, measurement or instrumentation systems, and automated office applications to name only a few of the valuable examples. On the other hand, procedures for technical analysis recognize that archivists increasingly encounter data created in database management and other software systems.

Analysis of the content of machine-readable records, as with government records in other formats, requires an evaluation of the record's administrative, fiscal, and legal use, and an analysis of its evidential and informational value. The informational value of machine-readable data remains the primary concern of the content analysis. However, archivists must also consider both legal and evidential value as data in machine-readable form gains wider acceptance as evidence in courts of law and as electronic data processing systems become increasingly central to policy analysis and development in government agencies. Each department's administrative use of its machine-readable data becomes an issue of concern because archivists may appraise and acquire machine-readable data which is current or still in active use.

Naugler discusses several well-defined criteria that are likely to distinguish potentially valuable machine-readable records: the uniqueness of the information or its format, the manipulability of the information, the level of aggregation, and the potential for linkage with other records. In addition, he provides a well-developed methodology for applying content analysis to several common types of machine-readable records. Most government agencies now produce personnel data, financial data, licence data, surveys, and several other types of records in machine-readable form. For each common type of machine-readable record, the study describes its function, the information typically found, its possible legal and evidential value, and factors bearing on its research potential. Each type of data is further subdivided into categories which have "high potential," "less potential," and "limited potential" for secondary research use. Survey data, for example, are likely to have high research value if they are collected regularly and provide detailed observations of a particularly significant event or phenomenon, less potential value if they contain data from one-time surveys associated with specific events or phenomena, and little potential value if they contain data from a one-time survey of a very specific event. The precise appraisal guidelines will be especially helpful to archivists who have found the appraisal of machine-readable records rather mysterious.

Content analysis is only part of the story because archivists must also consider the technical requirements which might affect the acquisition and processing, preservation, interpretation and access, and the distribution of machine-readable records. In a chapter devoted to technical analysis, the study describes retention, acquisition, and servicing considerations for files with different technical characteristics. Problems which arise out of the use of different hardware, software, and processing techniques are discussed and guidelines are provided for handling such difficult problems as data files that are updated continuously. Worksheets, called "planning tools," for survey files, time series files, and databases will help archivists assess the technical obstacles and potential costs of acquisition, processing, and servicing data in different physical formats.

The appraisal methodology detailed in this study is a significant contribution not only to the literature on machine-readable records, but to appraisal generally. The conceptual approach and the appraisal guidelines are far more precise and rigorous than the unarticulated criteria sometimes used to assess the archival value of records. The appraisal of

traditional textual documentation would benefit from the development of similarly well-defined and systematic criteria as those outlined for machine-readable records in this study. While there is no perfect taxonomy for records and no formula for determining the archival value of recorded information, this study moves appraisal closer to a process of systematic selection.

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Susanna Moodie: Letters of a Lifetime. CARL BALLSTADT, ELIZABETH HOPKINS, and MICHAEL PETERMAN, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985, x, 390 p. illus. ISBN 0-8020-2580-3 \$29.95 cl.

The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery. Volume I: 1889-1910. MARY RUBIO and ELIZABETH WATERSTON, eds. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985. xxiv, 424 p. illus. ISBN 0-19-540503-x \$24.95.

These books will be of greater interest to students of Canadian literature than to archivists. As historical documents their value is limited, although from Moodie we can learn a bit about the publishing trade in England and Canada in the nineteenth century and from Montgomery we can derive, within certain boundaries, a picture of life on Prince Edward Island at the turn of the century.

The 138 Moodie letters, which the editors located in eighteen different repositories and six newspapers, date from 1826 to 1882. They represent therefore only a very fragmentary record of their author's life and are further limited by being only Moodie's side of her correspondence. Those who preserved Susanna Moodie's letters were either relatives, fellow writers, or publishers: thus the letters are almost entirely about either literary publishing or family matters. We discover that the two hundred copies of her first book, *Enthusiasm, and Other Poems* (London, 1831), were printed only when the subscription list reached one hundred and fifty names, a practice similar to that which prevailed in Canada at the same time. In letters forty-six and forty-seven, addressed to her publisher, Richard Bentley, Moodie gives some indication of her writing methods, and in letter seventy-two to Henry J. Morgan, dated July 1861, after almost thirty years in Upper Canada, we find her asserting that she is English rather than Canadian. As far as understanding her personality is concerned, both her admirers and her detractors will find evidence to support their positions.

The editors have, on the whole, done an excellent job of making these scattered letters intelligible to readers. There are four genealogies, one for Thomas Strickland and his children, and three others for Thomas's "Canadian" children, Samuel, Susanna, and Catharine, and their families. The genealogical charts are complete as to birth dates, but lack some death dates. There are also fifteen illustrations, principally pictures of family members, family homes, and some individuals to whom letters were addressed. One cross-written letter page is reproduced.

The letters have been sorted into five chronological periods, for each of which the editors have provided an introduction giving background for the letters to follow. The explanatory notes appear on the same page of the text. While policy with regard to transcription of the actual text is carefully described, there is no mention of any policy