

Letters to the Editor

Review of *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology: The Authors Comment*

We were very pleased to have our work (*Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology: a Guide*) reviewed in the Winter 1986-87 issue of *Archivaria*. Brien Brothman's praise of the format and content of our work, and his recommendation that the work might even prove useful to non-scientific and technological archivists, pleased us very much.

The criticisms in the second half of his review, however, prompt this reply. Mr. Brothman's first criticism is that the work deals with the records of individual scientists and engineers and excludes records of government agencies, grant foundations, scientific societies, etc., thereby disregarding "the patrons of modern science." As the book contains sections on professional societies, the funding process, and communication, the authors find it difficult to accept this criticism. On the contrary, one of the main points the authors make is that in examining the records of an individual scientist, a team of scientists, a laboratory, or a project, the archivist is only seeing one portion of the documentation. "To appraise effectively, archivists need to understand that the nature of the scientific and technological process and the complex patterns of communication and funding affect the existence and location of records..." (p. 23) The format of the book is structured around the scientific and technological process, but relevant sections (funding, communication, patenting, etc.) contain discussions of the role of and the documentation produced by government, granting agencies, and professional societies. Though these sections are not meant to be in-depth analyses, they do indicate the importance and location of interconnected records.

Mr. Brothman's feeling that the authors have neglected the patrons leads him to accuse the authors of being interested only in "internalist" history. The authors are chided along with all those whose "blindness or indifference to the sociological or historical implications of our choices is at best intellectually lax." If Mr. Brothman had been less eager to demonstrate his knowledge of "internalist" and "externalist" history, and had instead examined the book a bit more carefully, we think he would have seen that the authors went to great lengths to meet the needs of historical researchers who want to place ideas and inventions in their historical, economic, and sociological context. Responding to

recent trends in the history of science and technology in which these two approaches are increasingly merged, the authors emphasized the external and internal factors that impinge upon scientists and engineers. The recommendations offered in the volume were specifically formulated to support the collection of documentation that will enable a diverse group of historical researchers to ask a broad range of questions about the scientific and technological process.

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The Reviewer Responds

Thank you for this opportunity to reply to Helen Samuels' comments on my review of *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology*.

First, I am inclined to suggest that suspending introduction of a "main point" until page 23 of a publication that is only ninety-six pages long gives as much point to my criticism as to her complaint. Second, the authors do mention professional societies. The section on "Communicating and Disseminating Findings/Issuing Technical Reports" explains that scientists confer and communicate with colleagues, give papers at professional conferences, and submit articles to appropriate journals in their respective fields. Yet nowhere in this section is there any intimation that the records of scientific journals and professional societies might themselves be worth acquiring. Instead, the authors focus on the records created by the individual scientist — his drafts, his articles, his papers, his technical reports. (Incidentally, the authors fail to mention that published articles and other items may more properly belong in the domain of the librarian than that of the archivist. Nor do they address the issue of "gray literature," a looming problem for both archivists and librarians.) Third, the section on funding is plagued by a similarly narrow focus. True, we learn that scientists sometimes rely on internal and external financial assistance to underwrite research projects and other work; but, again, their remarks and comments are largely confined to the contents of the scientist's personal grant application file. Any suggestion that the records of the granting agency ought to be acquired — and I am not merely referring to case files here — must be inferred. Fourth, this publication also gives short shrift to the records of scientific agencies, especially public and para-public institutions, whose primary role is not to provide funding or to undertake research but to make science policy and to conduct studies into the role that science ought to play in the making of social and economic policy. In other words, there are records which document *policy for science* and records which document *policy through science*. In the section on "Establishing Research Priorities," for example, there is nothing beyond a barely discernible nod in the direction of information obtainable — not records available — from agencies such as the National Academy of Science. As before, too much is left for the reader to guess at.