

tems at each stop. Yet, can we really say that the standards we are now formulating for guides will directly benefit our researchers when we have little idea of how these tools are used in the first place? Use studies may cause us to revise our notions of what constitutes a user aid. The possibility exists, however, that the computerization of finding aids will solve such problems. The UBC guide, interestingly enough, states that it "serves as a window into a data base which is more accurate and up-to-date than a printed version can ever be." (p. vii) It also notes that there are a large variety of access points which exist only for the database that can be used to facilitate user searches .

The form of future guides is important at the present time as we face a kind of "twilight zone" in which some archives have automated their finding aids and some have not, in which some have databases which permit remote searching and some have not. Until most archives are linked by computer, users will have to depend on hard-copy guides. One of the most obvious problems is that they are quickly outdated. Additions to collections can only be noted by reissuing the guide or by distributing emendations. Because of the cost of publishing and distributing updated editions, it is naturally beneficial to ensure that a guide is as accurate as possible at the time of publication. The descriptions should therefore be as accurate as possible. Yet, to provide accurate descriptions, archivists must have in-depth knowledge of the collections they are describing. Can this objective be achieved without first producing an inventory of the contents based on the arrangement and description process? This question has implications for the Bureau of Canadian Archivists' Working Group on Descriptive Standards, which is operating on the premise that finding aids should proceed from the general to the specific. Their reasoning, one imagines, is that archivists should have firm control over their entire collections, rather than produce detailed finding aids for a few collections. The UBC Archives has, in fact, processed fully eighty per cent of its university collections, according to the 1985 *Canadian University Archives Survey*. The percentage of McMaster's total collections represented by that institution's guide is unknown, but it is noted that the descriptions were derived in the main from finding aids. What, then, should come first: fond-level descriptions or file-level inventories from whence the fond-level descriptions are taken?

The McMaster and UBC guides make interesting reading for an archivist. Both institutions have elected to keep archives in close proximity to rare books and special collections. Both collect in the subject field of labour and trade-union archives. Both have collected Canadian literary archives. The similarities of the two institutions make their different approaches to the production of their guides much more striking, and furnish one with food for thought.

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The Quiet Revolution: Managing New York's Local Government Records in the Information Age. NEW YORK LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS ADVISORY COUNCIL. A Report to the Governor, Legislature, and Commissioner of Education. Albany, 1987, iv, 26 p.

Our Memory at Risk: Preserving New York's Unique Research Resources. NEW YORK DOCUMENT CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE. A Report and Recommendations to the Citizens of New York. Albany, 1988. viii, 56 p.

It is now more than three years since Keith Stotyn reviewed *Towards a Usable Past: Historical Records of the Empire State* in *Archivaria*, together with two other American publications on state archival programmes. In discussing some of the criticisms of the state reports, Stotyn noted: "Some Advisory Boards, including New York's, have not been content to just write a report. They have pressed their recommendations, in some cases successfully." These two publications show how far the State of New York has gone, at the state level and beyond, in laying the groundwork for a broad base of support for archival activities among sponsors and users.

The Quiet Revolution and *Our Memory at Risk* come from two very different points of origin, each reflecting a particular corner of the archival universe. The former, which deals with local government records in New York State, was authored by an Advisory Board headed by a county clerk and with a membership which included village, town and city clerk's associations, the state bar association, school boards and administrators' organizations, municipal and county historians' groups, and related municipal and state agencies. Only two of the twenty-six members of this council held positions which were directly related to archive or records management. On the other hand, *Our Memory at Risk* was written by an Advisory Council consisting of conservators, archivists, librarians, and historians. The active verb in the first publication's title is "managing," whereas that of the second publication is "preserving". At first glance, we may suspect that these reports mark the return of the "archivist/scholar versus archivist/records manager" polemic. Yet, the reports address particular constituencies of archivists, and together reveal the overlap of different attitudes and activities that is necessary to get the message of archives across to a diverse audience.

The layout of the reports is similar but not identical. Each has analogous sections: whereas *The Quiet Revolution* contains "Principles and Assumptions for Local Government Records," *Our Memory at Risk* incorporates an executive summary. Problems and solutions are given as issues and recommendations. *The Quiet Revolution* has the closely-defined task of providing information to a particular audience who must, thanks to the New York *Local Government Records Act*, deal with these materials. Consequently, it carries out its purpose in fewer pages than *Our Memory at Risk*, which is aimed at the average citizen.

Our Memory at Risk covers such broad subjects as "Our Vanishing Past," "Research Resources and the Needs of Society," "Insights From the Past," "Practical Help in the Present," and "Current Strategies and Initiatives." Those issues common to both reports include the appraisal of materials, guidelines and standards, records protection/disaster preparedness, networking, and financial assistance. *Our Memory at Risk* also provides the general public with information on planning and recommendations for "Individuals, Associations, and Institutions that Administer Unique Research Resources." Through discussions of issues and resulting recommendations, both publications supply compelling arguments for archival activities at various levels. They display particular strength in their portrayal of archives as a vibrant, dynamic part of modern society, and their call for pro-

grammes to contain and correct the damage which neglect has caused, is causing, and could cause.

Each report serves its constituents well. Local government officials whose activities are now governed by new records legislation have a document to enable them to understand the significance of the records under their control. Issues and recommendations in *The Quiet Revolution* reveal the management side of archives, dealing with outreach to sponsors. *Our Memory at Risk* offers the general public relatively brief but deep insight into the needs of a vanishing resource of immeasurable importance. Each publication also works with an allied group in articulating an archival mission, describing the impediments which block the development, and stating recommendations which will lead to their resolution and to the ultimate realization of New York's archival potential.

Recalling Terry Eastwood's comments on state archival surveys made at the 1985 SAA meeting in Washington, Keith Stotyn wrote: "Eastwood contended that such studies have not been properly used. They have been treated as discussion papers within the profession rather than the action documents they were intended to be." Given the fact that the Advisory Councils which produced the reports included so many members from outside the archival profession, and given audiences which are so obviously outside the archival community, *The Quiet Revolution* and *Our Memory at Risk* show the progress which American archivists have made in developing compelling calls to action for all those associated with archives. In Canada, where so many provincial surveys have appeared and where the national compilation of archival needs is just around the corner, we would do well to learn from New York and prepare to convey to the public the message of archives. The Advisory Councils are to be congratulated for these important publications.

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Optical Media: Their Implications for Archives and Museums. DAVID BEARMAN. Pittsburgh: Archival Informatics Technical Report, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1987. 73 p. \$45.00 (Cdn).

Optical Media: Their Implications for Archives and Museums is the Technical Report part of the Spring 1987 issue of *Archival Informatics Newsletter and Technical Report*. This is the first issue of this publication. Future issues will cover software archives, requirements for archival information systems, automated techniques in collections management, and the implications of artificial intelligence for archives and museums.

The basic structure of the publication is useful in that it guides the reader through the types of applications that should be considered for optical disc, describes the various forms of optical disc, and identifies types of applications for each of the various forms. The report also gives a very useful list of other institutions involved in optical disc and of vendors offering optical disc services.