

From Practice to Theory: Fundamentals US Style

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Archival Fundamental Series of the Society of American Archivists

Understanding Archives and Manuscripts. JAMES M. O'TOOLE. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990. 79 p. ISBN 0-931828-77-5.

Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts. F. GERALD HAM. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993. v. 106 p. ISBN 0-931828-84-8.

Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts. FREDERIC M. MILLER. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990. 131 p. ISBN 0-931828-75-9.

Preserving Archives and Manuscripts. MARY LYNN RITZENTHALER. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993. ix. 225 p. ISBN 0-931828-94-5.

Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts. MARY JO PUGH. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992. 123 p. ISBN 0-931828-82-1.

Managing Archival and Manuscript Repositories. THOMAS WILSTED and WILLIAM NOLTE. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1991. 105 p. ISBN 0-931828-78-3.

A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers. LEWIS J. BELLARDO and LYNN LADY BELLARDO. comps. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992. viii. 45 p.

Introduction

Twenty years ago, after a long career, Herman Kahn summed up the outlook on theory and practice in the United States in these words:

One of the surprising things about the archival vocation in this country is that, although ours is an ancient profession, except for one or two basic principles practically the entire content of courses in archival science is derived from archival experience in this country during the past thirty five

or forty years. In other words, if you look at what students in our archives courses are now being told about methods of arrangement and description, about archival appraisal, about access policies and research and reference use, and about architectural design and physical equipment, one realizes that what is being taught today is almost entirely merely a distillation of what we have learned from doing these things in this country in the past forty years.¹

Kahn might have simply said, in this country we work from practice to theory. Much has changed since then, but, to judge by the underlying assumptions of this fundamental series, the homegrown and pragmatic *modus operandi* which Kahn celebrates remains deeply engrained in the profession in the United States.

In her preface to each volume, the Series Editor, Mary Jo Pugh, tells us that this new series “discusses the theoretical principles that underlie archival practice, the functions and activities which are common within the archival profession, and the techniques that represent the best of current practice.” She and her collaborators hope that it will be “a benchmark of archival literature for many years to come.” The various authors strive to raise the series from the mode of manual writing of its predecessor to a comprehensive statement of the ruling concepts, established methods, and common practices of the profession. In short, this new venture aims to be a series of fundamental texts for the profession in the United States. There is no doubt of the need, but how well does this series succeed? To answer that question, I shall compare the subjects broached in the old manual series with those in the new series and in light of current US educational standards, and then evaluate each of the volumes in the series, with the exception of the glossary, which I have already reviewed extensively elsewhere.²

Fundamental Subjects

Any such undertaking as the one under review necessarily makes a statement about archival knowledge by the subjects it selects. This series, like the earlier one, has works on the central archival tasks of appraisal, arrangement and description, preservation, and reference service, but has eschewed security, surveys, exhibits, automated access, maps and architectural drawings, photographic collections, public programmes, and reprography, each of which had a volume devoted to it in the earlier series. The new series adds three new works. The one by O’Toole aims to treat the vital matter of the nature of archives together with the evolution of archival institutions and the profession in the United States. Another revises and expands the glossary first published twenty years ago. The third by Wilsted and Nolte examines the management of archival institutions. Technical questions (security, automated access, reprography) have given way to works on central archival functions. Other subjects (surveys, exhibits, public programmes) and special materials (maps, architectural drawings, and photographs) have been subsumed in the new configuration or have disappeared in the move from “basic manual” to “foundation of archival theory and practice.” The old series in fact “grewed like Topsy” as the Society responded to the need for publications on any and all aspects of archival work. This time, the series sets out to characterize the fundamental realms of knowledge of the archivist.

It is interesting to compare this choice of subjects with those regarded as fundamental in the Society of American Archivists' recently approved *Guidelines for the Development of a Curriculum for a Master of Archival Studies*.³ The *Guidelines* break the curriculum down into three areas: contextual knowledge, archival knowledge, and complementary knowledge. Like the old one, this new series has nothing, perhaps reasonably, to say about US organizational history, although it is a pity that somewhere the archivist's interest in and method of studying administrative history is not addressed. More seriously, the series fails to build on the work of Trudy and Gary Peterson to expose archivists to knowledge of the law in their volume in the earlier series.⁴ The Petersons treated the application of law to direct concerns of the archival repository; beyond that, however, archivists must be equipped with an understanding of the legal system as the context in which all archives are generated, maintained, accessed, and disposed.

In an equally important omission, the series does not have a volume on records management, a prominent subject in the archival knowledge area. The *Guidelines* call for study of "organizational theory as [it relates] to the culture, structure, procedures, processes, and communication systems of records creating bodies," and of how records are created, organized, controlled, maintained, used, and disposed in organizations.⁵ This omission only reinforces the notion that archivists restrict themselves to the treatment of records in the historical repository, and have no disciplinary interest in them before they arrive there. Do archivists still regard the study of records in their administrative context as being outside the sphere of their fundamental knowledge, and therefore their field of action? Are we still, in the age of electronic records, only interested in records management as the necessary evil someone else must attend to in order to set up archival acquisition? Omitting study of the generation and management of records in the modern office keeps the archivist intellectually captive in the historical repository.

First Order Fundamentals

The omissions that I have just mentioned might have been ameliorated had the introductory volume by James O'Toole realized his objective of "understanding... records—where they have come from, what they are made of, what services they perform, how they can be organized and managed, and how they are used...."⁶ Those are all fundamental matters of archival inquiry, but O'Toole gets sidetracked from addressing them directly. Part of the problem seems to be that he aims his work "for the beginning archivist, for the archival student, for the administrator contemplating establishment of an archives, and for the potential donor thinking about depositing records in an archives."⁷ In trying to write a book for such diverse audiences with such different needs, he loses sight of his own objective. That is a pity, because this series, and the profession as a whole, badly needs a fundamental text on the nature of records; for everything that is done to them requires a deep understanding of the characteristics of a record and of the various aggregations into which they accumulate.

O'Toole organizes his contribution to the series into four chapters. The first examines record-keeping, the second the history of archival institutions and the

profession, the third the knowledge and values of the archivist, and the fourth the archivist's responsibilities and duties.

The first task, one would think, is to seat in the reader's mind what an archival document or record is. This admittedly traditional approach is nevertheless fundamental to all other understanding that this series seeks to promote. Unfortunately, it does not recommend itself to O'Toole, who begins his introduction with the statement that "recorded information is everywhere in modern society," and then, a little later, goes on to say,

Several professions share the responsibility to care for and manage recorded information. Archivists, librarians, curators, records managers, and automated data specialists are among those who preserve, organize, and make accessible records [recorded information or documents is what he means here] of one kind or another. In the past, these professions too often tended to emphasize their distinctions from one another, largely on the basis of the physical format [?] of the information they held.

It is difficult to see what he is driving at in this passage, because he goes on to say that his purpose "is to understand *that portion* [emphasis mine] of the world of recorded information encompassed by the phrase "archives and manuscripts," which, rather unhelpfully, he takes to be "the recorded information of individuals, organizations and institutions." He then offers, almost in passing, what amounts to the closest he will come to a definition of records:

Those records are produced as a result of some activity, whether grand or mundane, and preserved because they have both an immediate and a long-term usefulness. They come in a variety of physical forms, but their intellectual significance is more crucial than their format. Archives and manuscripts are not necessarily "old stuff"; they may also include valuable records of the very recent past—even yesterday. What makes the records archives is neither age nor appearance, but rather content, meaning and usefulness.⁸

If we summarize O'Toole's assertions and their unstated implications, we have something like this: records constitute a portion of the world of recorded information; regardless of their form, records are produced as a result of the activity of individuals, organizations, and institutions, and are preserved for their continuing usefulness. Clear as this may be made to be, I sincerely doubt that unknowledgeable persons could penetrate the terminological confusions to grasp these absolutely fundamental concepts at the root of the nature of archives. Certainly, they would be puzzled by the claim that records become archives when we consider their content, meaning, and usefulness, because, at this juncture, O'Toole never explicitly says that he regards archives as records that have made their way into an historical repository. However, one may infer that he does from innumerable statements he makes here and there along the way. The matter only becomes worse when an unexplained distinction is made between archives and manuscripts.

The chapter on record-keeping does not clarify the matter. After offering a brief summary of the transition from the oral world to the literate world of recorded information, O'Toole launches into a categorization of the reasons for recording

and saving information. He classifies the reasons for recording information as *personal* (made “to promote personal memory and meaning”), *social* (connected with “individuals acting together in groups”), *economic* (connected with “acquiring, managing, and spending money”), *legal* (dealing with legal matters), *instrumental* (“designed especially to accomplish some specified task”), and *symbolic* (intended not for practical purposes but to symbolize something). He ascribes “the impulse to save” to the practical need to recall information, but judges that the preservation of archives (as opposed to records) ultimately springs from “the desire to recollect our individual and social past.”⁹

O’Toole’s classification of the reasons for recording information does not illuminate the nature of records. The various classes are not mutually exclusive. In particular, the instrumental class applies to every archival document, but, also, as O’Toole describes it, to every document of any kind, for presumably all documents are created for a purpose. The important characteristic of archival documents that O’Toole unfortunately fails to elucidate is that they all arise in the course of the conduct of practical affairs and are the product of those affairs. It is the needs of the practical affairs at hand that dictate the form and content of the document, not the various motivations to record or save information that O’Toole tries to classify. It is this failure that has him speak of content, meaning, and usefulness making records into archives, for he wants us to think not about the nature of archival documents deriving from their origin in practical activity but rather from the various uses to which the information in them may be put once they become part of the holdings of an archival institution. Presumably, he means that the records kept in an archival institution are there because someone has determined that their content, meaning, and usefulness is other than of practical significance, but that hardly tells us why and how they come into being and what purposes they serve, as O’Toole set out to discover.

It would have been much better had this chapter carefully fulfilled O’Toole’s aim to explain the characteristics of records and the purposes they serve in the terms adopted by archivists worldwide and reflected in the terminology of the *Glossary*. The first task is to develop discussion of what records are and how they accumulate to form an archives before turning to questions of how and why some of them end up in archival repositories. It is also a pity that O’Toole does not begin by defining and explaining fundamental concepts such as provenance, organic quality, uniqueness, interrelatedness, reliability, authenticity, impartiality, custody, public archives versus private archives, primary versus secondary value, rather than alluding to them here and there without naming or explaining them. Questions about which documents are records and which records are public and which are private are in the news.¹⁰ Surely, a fundamental text on the nature of records ought to arm archivists to answer these questions in theory so that they have some solid intellectual basis for effective practice.

With chapter two, the book takes an abrupt turn to explain the origins and history of archival institutions and the archival profession. The size and prominence of this chapter perhaps betrays the main aim of the book: to introduce newcomers to archival institutions and the archival profession. Chapters three and four treat the knowledge, values, and responsibilities of archivists. So it is a book about what

archivists in the United States have done, currently do, and share as values, all articulated in order to socialize those unfamiliar with the profession. These historical subjects and socialization objectives deserve a book on their own. We shall have to wait for the next series for an adequate treatment of the nature of archives.

Fundamentals of Evaluation

F. Gerald Ham tackles the thorny question of appraisal, which he defines as “the process of evaluating actual or potential acquisitions to determine if they have sufficient long-term research value to warrant the expense of preservation by an archival repository.”¹¹ He sets out “to help archivists choose more wisely as they assume the responsibility for selecting the records documenting our times.” He views archival selection as “an integrated process of defining and implementing archival acquisition goals.” He treats scheduling, on the one hand, and field solicitation/donor contact, on the other, “as parallel systems.” He sees the essence of appraisal being “to determine the importance of recorded information, and the cost of [its] preservation and retention.” He approves of the “often perilous undertaking” of reappraisal to insure that “only records of enduring historical value” are preserved.¹²

After explaining Schellenberg’s classification of record values, which he thinks constitutes (rather miraculously) both the basis of appraisal theory and a shared body of “appraisal standards—the tools of the records selection trade,”¹³ Ham goes on to develop a discussion of various views of the goal or purpose of appraisal and the best method of realizing the goal. In the “welter” of views, he sees “five major documentation concepts or methodologies.”¹⁴

The first is represented by the ideas of Jenkinson. As Ham notes, Jenkinson wished above all to protect the integrity of archival documents as evidence of transactions—the discrete action-oriented events in the administration of affairs that alter the relationships between persons. That is surely a preeminent goal of appraisal for acquisition and selection, but Jenkinson implies another, which Ham also touches on in his exposition. Jenkinson believed that destruction or selection ought not to intrude in the process of “archive making,” the goal of which, his golden rule for the administrator, is “to have [records] always in a state of such completeness and order that, supposing himself and his staff to be by some accident obliterated, a successor totally ignorant of the work of the office would be able to take it up and carry it on” effectively by study of the records.¹⁵ If, in decisions about destruction, the creator and user of the records for practical purposes serve this golden rule, the result would ultimately be, as Ham quotes Jenkinson, “a representative body of unimpeachable archives,”¹⁶ that is, records that faithfully leave memorial of action and transaction for all and any purposes. We may infer from all this that Jenkinson saw archives as serving both the immediate needs of administration and the longer term needs of society for reliable evidence of the conduct of affairs.

Ham does not draw that inference, but instead seizes on Jenkinson’s notion that the administrator is the only appropriate selector. He avers that Jenkinson’s exegesis solves “the problems of complexity, impermanence, and volume of contempo-

rary records by ignoring them.”¹⁷ Far from ignoring them, Jenkinson’s whole argument is that selection, if it imposes considerations other than those of the immediate needs of the administrator, will introduce bias into the remaining archives, whether they are ancient or contemporary. If reliable evidence (“a representative body of unimpeachable archives”) is the goal, this difficulty and the methods of relieving it need to be addressed. Jenkinson was quite aware of the difficulty of getting administrators to live by his golden rule. It is rather Ham who ignores the central issue of appraisal that Jenkinson exposes for us. If the archivist takes over appraisal, how does he avoid introducing his own biases into the acquisition and selection process?

Much as Ham prefers the archivist-selector over the administrator-selector, he is none too certain about the effect archivists will have on the preservation of records in the end. He concludes this chapter by wondering whether archivists “can significantly affect the larger ecology of the information universe—and have a professional mission to do so,” but settles for the rather vague metaphorical aim of fashioning well tended “repository gardens.”¹⁸

It is unfortunate that he did not develop the discussion to situate the archivist’s responsibility more clearly, in relation to the society at large and to the administrators and persons the archivist serves. To do that means starting with some commonly-accepted broad theoretical understanding of archives to animate the exercise, such as Jenkinson articulated. Like O’Toole, Ham proceeds from purely curatorial assumptions about records as the sources of the study of the past, and the archivist as the person responsible “to document” the past by determining the long-term research value of records. This view of the matter has roots deep in the long struggle to rescue all manner of documents from which the history of the nation could be written. Ham seems to think that the contemporary archivist is in a different situation from the early rescuer because of the volume of modern records, “a world of documentary abundance in which modern technology in the service of burgeoning bureaucratic organizations has produced an unprecedented mass of records.” As he says, an archivist’s responsibility is to fashion “from this new world of recorded information a manageable historical record for the future.”¹⁹

The second idea, “that a paramount goal is to document bureaucratic accountability and institutional history,” he attributes to Schellenberg and his concept of evidential value. Ham believes, wrongly I think, that “the method of determining evidential value is objective.” He claims that evidential value is explicit in functional analysis of record groups and series, the outcome of which will determine “the most important aspects of executive direction and institutional activity” and extract “a small core of documentation” of them. How the method of functional analysis can objectively determine the most important aspects of the conduct of affairs and extract documentation of them is not clear. After canvassing several criticisms of this “mechanistic approach,” he ends with the statement, “those archivists who advocate selection in a broader context find the critique telling; those archivists whose narrower selection of records is legitimated by their institutional acquisition mandates dismiss it as irrelevant.”²⁰ This recitation of varying viewpoints, as if grasping fundamentals were a matter of choosing the opinion which suits one, is bound to mislead the earnest learner.

In this case, the point missed is about accountability, and it is a serious one related to the goal of appraisal in a democratic society. It also traces back to the flaw in O'Toole's work. If records are the product of practical activity and bear information about its conduct in a direct and natural way by virtue of being a part of the activity, they then serve as the most immediate and reliable source of knowledge about the conduct of affairs. Records show both how actions were taken and what was done, and can be used either to render an account of the process or the outcome of actions. Both senses of accountability are important in a democratic society governed by the rule of law. Public officials, citizens, jurists, and scholars alike judge actions through reference to records.

It is, then, misleading to suggest, as Ham's recitation of opinion pro and con the value of the concept of evidential value does, that it is a question of overvaluing "documentation regarding the anatomy of bureaucratic organizations" at the expense of what Michael Cook, whom he quotes, calls "useful information on relevant subjects." When discussing accountability, we are discussing using archives as evidence of actions and transactions and how they were conducted. There is no room for notions of informational value (to continue to use Schellenberg's categories) to intrude as competitor with evidential value. Newcomers need to understand that records are a preeminent source of knowledge on which society relies to understand its past actions. They do not need confused debates about whether archivists overvalue the evidential over the informational in records. Part of the problem is that Ham is quick enough to see that the two are not mutually exclusive but not patient enough to explain why. A persuasive argument can be made that every record has both evidential and informational value in the sense in which Schellenberg uses the terms, and therefore that neither concept is of any use on its own in appraisal decision-making. Appraisal is perplexing enough without confusing learners about fundamental concepts like evidential value.

Things become even murkier when Ham discusses the third of his major concepts, that "selection should be guided by the utility of the records for current and future historical studies."²¹ This approach he identifies with Meyer Fishbein and Maynard Brichford and with "collecting repositories" in the historical manuscripts tradition as opposed to the bureaucratic approach in "corporate settings," which concentrates on evidential value, "with its emphasis on institutional documentary needs."²² Ham is equivocal, at best, about this view of the archivist's "primary role as a representative of the research community," in the words of Maynard Brichford. He finds that "archivists and historians have accepted the premise that past research use is an important predictor of record value," but judges its application to be intuitive, speculative, and untested scientifically. Which leaves us where, one might ask?

The fourth concept/methodology is documentation strategy, which he finds "highly theoretical (i.e., speculative) and untested in the crucible of practice."²³ (By the way, the just quoted phrase nicely sums up his attitude towards and understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, his thoroughgoing pragmatism.) He describes documentation strategy as a kind of apotheosis of representativeness, the idea that archival institutions are committed to preserve records of every sphere of human activity.

He attributes the fifth concept, “archival Darwinism,” to David Bearman. Bearman forecasts that the efforts of archivists to engineer a representative record will fail in the face of effects of “random retention,” what Ham calls “archival natural selection.” Perhaps Bearman is more the Adam Smith of archival appraisal than the Charles Darwin. After all, deciding to preserve or keep preserving records is a social rather than a natural phenomenon. Bearman does seem to believe in some invisible hand directing the preservation of “an historically valid sample,” and countenances intervention by archivists only when there is reason to believe that the market forces of records preservation fail the test of representativeness (presumably when someone, usually a historian or an archivist acting as the historian’s surrogate, beholds what is usually referred to as “a gap in *the* record,” as if the objective were indeed to provide a blanket of documentation to lay over the past.) We are left to wonder just what is meant by representativeness as a concept applied to appraisal. It seems clear that Jenkinson meant no more by the idea than that selection, if properly approached, would result in adequate memory of the affairs of the office to which no one could complain that some outside bias had been applied. To carry the notion further to make archivists responsible “to document” all aspects of society is something Ham leaves largely unexamined and unjustified, however much it appears to be widely accepted in the view of a great many of his fellow archivists in the United States.

The rest of the volume turns to matters of method in the historical repository, to acquisition policy, the role of records management in archival selection, “field collecting” of non-institutional records, methods of analysis of records for appraisal purposes, sampling, accessioning, and reappraisal and deaccessioning. Ham’s discussion is an excellent exposition of how current practice is conducted. Each chapter is well illustrated with instruments of practice, and the author is ever ready with pungently phrased advice for the novice. Like O’Toole, Ham seems uncertain about whether there are any firm or distinctive intellectual foundations for archival work, but he is knowledgeable about the body of accepted practices that pass for fundamentals.

Fundamentals of Processing

Frederic Miller takes on the task of explaining the operations of arrangement and description, which are, he says, “commonly joined under the rubric of processing.” He aims to cover “generally accepted principles and techniques of archival accessioning and processing,” and sees the principles and techniques as being accepted “because they are firmly based on the particular nature of archival materials and the logical progression of archival work.” He admits that his work applies mostly to traditional textual records, but he wishes to bring the methods and practices of both archives and manuscript repositories into his purview.²⁴

Unlike some of his fellow authors, Miller takes the trouble to define his basic terms: accessioning, arrangement, description, record group, collection, and series. He is particularly good at making it clear that arrangement is a process of identifying what he call sets of records and their relationships with other records and with their creator. His discussion of provenance, original order, levels of control, and

collective description succeed in introducing the reader to most of the fundamentals of arrangement and description. He illustrates each stage in the process using three separate examples of his own, imaginary construction, one suitable to a public archives, one to a manuscript repository, and one to a corporate archives. This method of exposition makes the principles clear, and provides the novice with a firm understanding of their application. Anyone reading it would gain a good sense of the fundamental principles, methods, and practices of arrangement and description such as they have developed in the United States. In this sense, his volume comes far closer to achieving the editor's aim than those of O'Toole and Ham.

In particular, the fictitious examples he develops allow him to produce very instructive illustrations of various instruments of descriptive practice so that readers can see their elements and relationships. Miller methodically moves from accessioning, through the main issues of arrangement, to an overview of an archival descriptive system, and then its component parts. The ability to illustrate in a consistent and comparable manner throughout lends his work a steady progression of exposition of concepts and a clarity often lacking in some of the other volumes in the series.

At the end, he also provides a very good summary of the US approach to the subject. In the context of a discussion of information about archival holdings in bibliographic databases such as RLIN and OCLC, he says:

...improved access to archives remains the ultimate justification for information exchange, as it does for the entire processing program. Effective access is not only vital for users, but also improves all archival operations, from appraisal through preservation and outreach.... Archives and manuscript repositories exist not only to collect and preserve historical records, but equally to facilitate their use. That connection remains fundamental to every principle and practice of archival arrangement and description.²⁵

That Miller sees it that way is the product of long, often agonizing experimentation to produce a kind of American amalgam of archives, library, and information science. Richard Berner told of the agony of experimentation;²⁶ Miller rationalizes the practice in an admirable way.

Fundamentals of Preservation

Ritzenthaler's work on preservation strikes one immediately as the only volume in the series of a length to warrant consideration as a fundamental text. It is more than twice as long as all but Miller's work, with which it can favourably be compared. Like his, Ritzenthaler's is very well organized and illustrated to cover fundamentals in a logically progressive way. Reflecting the now common appreciation of the subject, she takes the view that "preservation is a management function." She therefore aims to "address preservation problems and issues, and...propose solutions to assist archivists in caring for their collections from a sound preservation perspective."²⁷ She then goes about achieving her aim by seeking to establish a foundation of concepts about preservation, preservation programmes, the material nature of records, and the causes of deterioration before going on to the more prac-

tical aspects of storing and housing, management concerns, and conservation treatment.

This volume delivers theory, method, and practice in a very professional manner. It does serve as a fundamental text on the subject.

Fundamentals of Service

Archivists in the United States are known for their dedication to service and to the promotion of accessibility and use of archives. In part, this would seem to be a product of the close link, especially in manuscript repositories, with librarianship. Mary Jo Pugh takes a programmatic view of her subject quite in keeping with this tradition. She sets out to describe “policies and procedures that represent a commonly accepted professional standard,” and she is primarily interested in “providing intellectual, legal, and physical access to textual records, with only limited attention to other records forms.”²⁸

In her introductory chapter, she briefly discusses the history of the use of archives, and comes to the conclusion that the archival profession has moved from

a custodial role...to a more activist role promoting wider use of archives....

Today, most archivists emphasize service to a broad public and seek to develop new constituencies to support archival programs. Archivists’ attention to reference services and user education reflects a desire both to enlarge constituencies and to respond to their needs.²⁹

The rest of the book speaks to that theme.

Pugh then turns to a chapter on “Identifying Users of Archives.” She classes them as vocational users (staff of the parent institution, professional users, scholars, students, and teachers) who approach the archives in association with their work, and avocational users (genealogists, local historians, and hobbyists) who seek their own edification or enjoyment. By the by, she illustrates the variety of uses of archival material and aspects of serving the needs of particular user groups. The discussion is very general. One wonders whether she might not have taken a leaf from Miller’s book and set up some institutional situations and hypothetical reference circumstances to illustrate the dynamics of serving users. As it stands, one never gets a clear sense of why and how people approach archives, the process of identifying their needs, and the methods of satisfying them. Some imaginative work along the lines established by Millar could be made to work very well in this very complex and often underestimated subject. It might be essayed next time round.

Pugh’s chapter on intellectual access discusses the use of various kinds of finding aids to provide information about holdings, to assist users to gather information from holdings, and to provide information about records creators. Although she discusses provenance-based descriptive systems, and cites Bearman and Lytle on the matter, she never thoroughly discusses the ways in which inference from information about the creator can be used to provide routes of access. Some fuller explanation of this traditional method of guiding the user would seem to be in order, especially since direct access to information on topical subjects is not possible in many more instances than it is.

Chapters on the reference process, access policies, physical access, copies and loans, and managing and evaluating reference service cover the basic policy and procedural grounds very well. Nevertheless, this volume reflects the poorly-developed state of research and writing about archival reference service. Though much better than its predecessor, it seems still to be in the mode of advice-giving rather than the mode of plumbing “the theoretical principles that underlie archival practice,” to use Pugh’s own words about the aim of the series.

Management Fundamentals

The work by Wilsted and Nolte is virtually the first of its kind. Indeed, to judge by the almost complete lack of citations to either books or periodical articles on archival management in the footnotes and bibliography of this book, the authors labour in virgin fields. Occasionally by stretching themselves, the authors manage to recommend readings from archival literature, but they are very few and often only obliquely relevant to the fundamentals of management. So it is that Wilsted and Nolte offer a kind of primer for archivists on management which focusses on “the application of the principles and techniques of management science and practice ... to archives and manuscript repositories.”³⁰ A subsidiary aim is “to acquaint archivists with managerial culture” in order to equip them to understand managerial values, concepts, and terminology. The SAA guidelines call for exploration of this subject, and it has long been recognized that the profession needs to strengthen its managerial capabilities. The first attempt to cover the ground in the compass of a single volume should be hailed by everyone who has searched for some basic introduction to the subject for archivists.

Perhaps because they sense the virgin territory they explore and suspect archivists are uneasy in it, the authors maintain a conversational and conciliatory tone to their work. For instance, at the end of the first chapter, which very briefly discusses what management is and something of the history of management studies and theories, the authors offer this advice: “the archivist turned manager should see this transformation not as an abandonment of professional skills and status, but as their extension and enhancement.”³¹

There follows a discussion of the archivist as manager. It perhaps most deserves the authors’ own warning that their book “will barely address, let alone explore, major areas of interest to the archival manager.” Certainly, we do not get a direct assessment of the archivist’s involvement in management. Rather we are treated to a paragraph or two on concepts such as leadership, vision, time management, effective communication, and, heavenly days, organizing paperwork.

The next four chapters on organizational structure, planning, human resources, and financial management cover the traditional, core subjects of management texts. The last four cover managing facilities, fund-raising, public relations, and technology and the manager. Anyone at all familiar with management literature, or even anyone who has worked in a large organization for any length of time, will perhaps find these discussions rather simplistic. They seem to be designed for the complete neophyte, but no doubt reflect the fact that there is almost no literature delving into aspects of archival management in any serious way.

There is little doubt that every professional archivist is a manager, works in some sort of larger corporate environment, and must understand his or her situation in managerial terms. It is perhaps lamentable that this volume spends so much time trying to convince the reader that archivists must become good managers (who could be against that?) and so little time delving beneath the surface of important concepts, methods, and practices and their application to the management of archival institutions.

Conclusion

Judged by its own objectives, this series only partially succeeds. In only a very few areas does it rise to elucidate the fundamental principles and concepts which inform practice because in the United States, as Herman Kahn pointed out, it does not work that way. Archival science there has grown inductively as practice has become regularized and generalized. Time after time, the authors in this series fail to delve beneath the surface of the subject to work out its principled foundation. Instead, they veer off into description of practice, perhaps with some justification of the way it is done. In many ways this series is a great improvement on the previous one, but it does not yet provide a comprehensive statement of fundamental theoretical concepts and the methods and practices flowing from them. Indeed, to do that would still seem to run against the grain of the pragmatic and underdeveloped state of archival science in the United States.

Notes

- 1 Herman Kahn, "The First Generation: The Autodidact," *American Archivist* 38 (April 1975), pp. 147-51. This essay, delivered at the opening plenary session of the 38th annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Toronto on 2 October 1974, was published under the heading "Documenting American Cultures Through Three Generations: Change and Continuity."
- 2 In *American Archivist* 55 (Summer 1992), pp. 493-96.
- 3 I quote from the draft version published by the SAA in 1993.
- 4 Gary M. Peterson and Trudy Huskamp Peterson, *Archives and Manuscripts: Law* (Chicago, 1985).
- 5 Society of American Archivists, *Guidelines for the Development of a Curriculum for a Master of Archival Studies* (Chicago), p. 3.
- 6 James O'Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, 1990), p. 3.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 10 For instance see, Bruce P. Montgomery, "Nixon's Legal Legacy: White House Papers and the Constitution," *American Archivist* 56 (Fall 1993), pp. 586-613, and David Bearman, "The Implications of *Armstrong v. Executive Office of the President* for the Archival Management of Electronic Records," *American Archivist*, 56 (Fall 1993), pp. 674-689.
- 11 F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, 1993), p. 2.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 15 Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration Including the Problems of War Archives and Archive Making* (Oxford, 1922), p. 132.
- 16 Ham, *Selecting and Appraising*, p. 9.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

- 21 Ibid., where he says “many archivists hold” this view. But is it a correct or even supportable view? We may expect, but do not get, an answer to that question.
- 22 Ibid., p. 11.
- 23 Ibid., p. 12.
- 24 Frederic M. Miller, *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, 1990), p. 3.
- 25 Ibid., p. 123.
- 26 Richard Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle, 1983).
- 27 Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, 1993), p. viii.
- 28 Mary Jo Pugh, *Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, 1992), p. 9.
- 29 Ibid., p. 5.
- 30 Thomas Wilsted and William Nolte, *Managing Archival and Manuscript Repositories* (Chicago, 1991), p. 3.
- 31 Ibid., p. 8.