

Mayo” (mothers of the victims). Here official records, photographs, posters, combine with the repertoire. As Taylor writes, “when the Madres took to the street to make the disappearances visible they activated the photographs, performed them” (p. 177). This excellent and insightful book should make archivists worry – not about acknowledging alternate narratives, but about being able to fully respond to the powerful nature of the materials they hold and having the vision to place these materials within a sufficiently wide context of peoples and cultures. If, as Taylor convincingly argues, the enduring materials in the archive holds sway over the way our civilization works, then the power of archives is very great indeed, and archivists must understand both their negative as well as their positive impact on society.

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Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts. FRANK BOLES. Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2005. 192 p. ISBN 1-931666-11-3.

In 1999, Pulitzer prize-winning writer Larry McMurtry posed the question, “What in this age, when we are so oversupplied with information, does a given human need to remember ...?”¹ The question is amplified when one considers the range of information, not just from the current period, but also from the past. Archivists face this question continually when selecting and appraising manuscripts and archives. Obvious considerations such as the continuous space crisis for warehousing records, and the costs associated with processing, help archivists determine, to some degree, what becomes part of our collective memory. However, other determinants are less evident and archivists are often compelled to read the future in order to predict what is worthy of preservation. Now, thanks to Frank Boles and his latest contribution to the professional literature, McMurtry may have the solution to his problem.

In the introductory chapter entitled, “Why Archivists Select,” Boles discusses the realities associated with most modern archives, especially government archives. Too much information in too many formats is shared among too few archives. Tough decisions must be made with respect to selection because of the overabundance of records. He adds that no one is better equipped to assume this societal responsibility than an experienced and fully qualified archivist. From this starting point, Boles proceeds to examine the ins and outs, as well as the pitfalls and consequences, of employing flawed selec-

¹ McMurtry posed the question in his book, *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen: Reflections at Sixty and Beyond* (New York, 1999).

tion criteria. Theodore Schellenberg and Hilary Jenkinson are first on Boles' list of quarry. Thankfully, old archivists do not simply fade away; they are eventually replaced by new paradigms, such as the Universal Theory of Archives, the "big tent" philosophy, or the Canadian concept of "total archives." Boles traces the development of these changes and identifies the key players involved in promoting the acceptance of such transformations within the archival community.

As a proponent of the American "big tent" philosophy, Boles distills archival selection into three main areas of consideration. The first involves the freedom of the archival institution to establish its own distinctive mission without regard for universal principles. Next, Boles emphasizes that selection can and does occur at various stages in the record-making process, in some cases even before the record has been created. Last, he acknowledges the fact that both context and content have weight in the selection decision. These underlying principles provide the scaffolding for the discussion that follows.

Change is rarely easy to implement. It helps if one has a clear view of the big picture. Institutional policies, mission statements, and the like can assist in bringing about unity and focus to one's work. At one point, as an apologist for the art of imprecision, Boles defends "vagueness" (p. 50) in important founding documents, such as scope statements, as an opportunity for flexibility. Since founding mandates are rarely so punctilious as to inhibit movement of any kind, I expect many archivists will disagree with this point. Formal charges to an institution's collection mandate are simply not useful when they are too broad. As in all things, finding balance is essential. The remainder of this chapter assists readers in the process of how to refine mandates and selection policies to achieve this balance. This section also tackles records management issues and offers a critique of the continuum process of records management.

Those who have wondered whether the archival selection process is an art or a science will want to have a look at chapter five. Not only does Boles provide a model for selection, but he also delves into the associated areas of prioritizing, defining functions and documentary levels through diverse sources such as annual reports, planning documents, chronologies, biographies, and newsletters. He calls this "putting the pieces together" (p. 97). Although elements of both science and art go into the process, much depends on the archivist's skill in selection. This point is demonstrated in two mock-up examples which, although instructive, offer humour along with the message.

The concluding chapter is of particular interest as it deals with the need to consider media of all types in terms other than convenience. The question Boles recommends asking is whether or not this is a "compelling record that my institution seeks to preserve" (p. 135), without concern for the difficulties involved in making it accessible and sustaining it over time. Non-print, non-textual materials are discussed in terms of their authenticity, stability, and

reproducibility and are measured against the standard, a text-based paper record. Archivists who manage specialized archives will appreciate this chapter as much as archivists who administer diversified archives.

Included at the end of the book are three useful appendices. The first is archivist F. Gerald Ham's important work on accessioning and transferring records to the custody of the archival repository.² This section explains how to accomplish many of the details that accompany the process of physically acquiring and establishing administrative custody of archives. Unscheduled, or "disorderly," acquisitions are also discussed. The second appendix is entitled a "Mathematical Sampling in Selection" (p. 149). Here, different types of sampling techniques are presented and evaluated on the basis of their appropriateness to the records being examined. Third, and last, is a comprehensive bibliography of readings on appraisal. This list was originally compiled by Terry Cook in 2000, and a year later it was supplemented by Mark Greene. Added to their work, are the efforts of Julia Marks Young whose published bibliography of appraisal in 1985 provides historical literature on the subject that did not appear in either Cook's or Greene's contribution.³ The end result is a collaborative one that involved the work of four talented archivists.

Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts, published by the Society of American Archivists, is the third book in the Archival Fundamentals Series II. This is a book I will keep on my own reference shelf, because it is an even-handed treatment of the subject. The author draws on positive examples from the global archival community and does not simply offer the American perspective on his subject. For new archivists, it offers historical background on theory as well as practical examples and strategies. Furthermore, Boles traces the development of selection and appraisal with honesty and a touch of humour. This manual adds a valuable text to the body of professional literature available to archivists. Reviewing this book was a pleasure, but recommending it to other archivists is a professional obligation.

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2 Appendix one is Chapter 9 of F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Manuscripts* (Chicago, 1993).

3 Terry Cook in 2000 and Mark Greene in 2001 prepared the bibliography for a course on Archival Appraisal at the University of Michigan's School of Information. Their work was not intended to be comprehensive, but rather, was created to serve a specific function.