

Closing an Era: Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. RICHARD J. COX. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000. 252 p. ISBN 0-313-31331-8.

Anchorites beware! This compilation of essays is not for you! Richard Cox has updated a series of 1990s essays as he explores, in nine short chapters, the role of records professionals (archivists and records managers) in modern society. He begins with an examination of the historical underpinnings (and our mythology around our roots) and ends with a discussion on the new and emerging Web environment and documentary publishing. In between, Cox discusses the history of North American archives and records management, the development of appraisal and records scheduling, the impacts and influence of public memory, and the role of education in the profession.

The author states that his perspective is that of an archival educator, and his writing is reflective of his experiences as an educator. His writing is clear and his commentary thoughtful and provoking as he takes us through the major changes in our profession in the last century. The chapters, at times, lack a cohesiveness that reveals the fact that stand-alone essays form the foundation of each chapter. Some may find it distressing, but, then again, it provides for bite-size reading.

As much as I enjoyed his view of the history of North American archives and records management, it should not surprise anyone that Cox concentrates solely on the experience and practice in the United States, although he is very generous in his acknowledgement of Canadian archivists as he describes his viewpoints. A larger continental context would have been a significant contribution to his historical commentary.

As I read the book, I was puzzled by an underlying sense that I could not pinpoint. It was only at the end, when Cox mentioned Thomas Cahill's wonderful work on how the Irish monks saved the documentary heritage of Europe, that it came to me. Cox's philosophy revolves around the fundamental belief that we, archivists and records managers, are the ones society designates to preserve and protect the evidence of our society's actions. This is not the usual banter one hears when we forecast change or budget cuts, or when productivity measures are applied to archival functions. It is a deeply rooted belief that we are the twenty-first-century equivalent of the Irish monks of the Dark Ages. Acknowledging this belief, it is easier to understand his tone and directness. I detected three undercurrents in his work. The first is a focus on the primary responsibility, that is, to acquire, preserve, and manage records as evidence. The second is a call to abandon rigid adherence to current theories and practices so that we are better equipped to handle the emerging e-world. The third is a call to build a national system of archives, encompassing standardized education (not training), and the acceptance of a common records history (one which is longer than post-1945) that will create a climate that

allows for a broader representation within archives of society's various social and cultural groups; in the not too distant past, some of these groups (native peoples, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, gays and lesbians, the disabled, for example) were not represented in any meaningful way by mainstream archives or archivists.

Some readers may find that the early chapters concentrate too much on the history of archives and record-keeping in the United States and of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Is it dull and without relevance? No! Within these chapters, Cox bemoans those archivists and records managers who use historical writings about archives and records management to be self-serving and self-congratulatory. In fact, Cox takes aim at records managers who undermine their profession by thinking that their principles and activities are post-Second World War. On the other hand, he questions those archivists who seek out Jenkinson and Schellenberg as authorities for dealing with twenty-first-century issues such as electronic records. Diplomats is cited as an example of archivists searching for a past in the wrong places. This is, dare I say, a statement which will have its critics.

In his discussions on the creation and continuance of NARA, he laments the absence of a truly national system of archives. Here is where a comparison with Canada would have proven very interesting and enlightening. Why did the Dominion government establish its national archives? Is the funding mechanism in Canada at the same level as the per capita funding in the United States? How have Canadian archivists handled the shift towards a multicultural society? Are the *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)* a contribution to a national system? Would a discussion of the Canadian (and American) contributions to the pioneering work at InterPARES soften his views?

As Cox moves into his discussion on appraisal, scheduling, and publishing, his viewpoints on the impacts of the information highway and e-government are fairly similar to those expressed throughout the recent annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, held in Winnipeg, Manitoba (June 2001). For Cox, the change to e-government will be more profound for archivists than we could imagine. It will not be enough to simply retrain archivists and records managers or adapt old methodologies to meet the new realities. Cox has a good understanding of the continued areas of friction between traditional records managers and archivists. In fact, I was mildly surprised by his statement that records managers need to comprehend that long-term records maintenance is not only for scholarly purposes, and archivists need to understand that preservation is not a value-neutral concept. Cox is a supporter of combined records management and archives programmes rather than stand-alone programmes. The one word missing from his discussion was "elitism"; from my experience working in both fields, each profession has a sense of elitism. Archivists tend to practice educational elitism, as contrasted with records managers' "institutional" elitism. A frank discussion on this topic would have

been beneficial, as both brands of elitism hinder our ability to protect and preserve electronic records as evidence. Speaking of different approaches, I might add that I was disappointed that Cox did not mention the different philosophical approaches taken by the various MAS programmes.

Whether or not twenty-first-century archivists and records managers will save civilization is a debatable topic and not for resolution here. Richard Cox's *Closing an Era* makes the case that archivists and records managers must be more aware of their surroundings and society, more strident in their belief in themselves, and more flexible and adaptable in this e-world. Will his viewpoints prove correct? Perhaps. Is this the definitive work on twentieth-century archives? Absolutely not.

Closing an Era is important as it presents the views, opinions, and insights of an archival educator on a broad range of topics. He practices what he preaches. He has taken a look inside the records-based professions and gives us, as active participants, cause for thought and time to be reflective. To anchorites, that is, people who have withdrawn from society to work in archives, this book is definitely not to your liking.

I look forward to Cox's second book, which will address the issues facing us in this millennium. Until then, I say, without reservation, that Cox's book should be required reading in our academic programmes, so that the debate which he so dearly urges us to have can continue (or perhaps begin).

Gary A. Mitchell, CRM
British Columbia Archives

Managing Government Records and Information. BRUCE W. DEAR-STYNE. Prairie Village, Kansas: ARMA International, 1999. 250 p. ISBN 0-933887-83-3.

Government records management professionals continue to be challenged by the accelerated pace of change and emerging technologies. The advent of digital technologies, "e-government," "reinventing government," "open government," information policies and public access issues, just to name a few, have had a dramatic impact on the required strategies and expertise that the records manager must employ to deliver a level of service that is relevant to the current corporate environment. While most records management professionals have accepted that change is occurring, many are still grappling with the logistics of operating programmes within this landscape. Change is a central theme throughout *Managing Government Records and Information*, and readers are reminded that being flexible, dynamic, and responsive to changing needs is paramount to the success of a programme. The book's main purpose is to deliver strategies and principles which can be utilized to develop and sustain