

ence, requiring, as it does, an earnest attempt to suspend pre-conceived ideas. It is, no doubt, a challenge, but he certainly rewards the effort.

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**On the Case: Explorations in Social History.** FRANCA IACOVETTA and WENDY MITCHINSON, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998. 369 p. ISBN 0-8020-8129-0.

They say one can't judge a book by its cover, but this book is worth a look simply because it is probably the only non-archives publication ever to sport a photograph of an archivist at work – the venerable Roy Reynolds, former government records archivist at the Archives of Ontario, taken in 1961. The photo shows Reynolds, ensconced in the stacks, reading through case file docketts. He is, one might assume, “on the case,” arranging and describing a valuable series of records. The explorations made in this collection of essays are all based on case file research, the fruits, one could say, of Reynolds', and many other archivists', labours.

In 1995, a number of social historians were invited to attend a three-day workshop in Toronto convened for the purposes of discussing experiences and offering feedback on the use of case files as historical documents. This volume is the tangible result. The types of case files used by the researchers run the gamut from the expected legal files, court records, medical files, and social welfare files, to more unusual materials: shipping crew agreements, immigrant settlement records, Native soldier settler files, and church registers. Most of the files date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—not surprisingly, given that the case file as a documentary form evolved around the turn of the century. On the other hand, two of the essays are based on earlier nineteenth century church records, a reminder that the church was the social safety net and regulator of social values before the state stepped in.

Every one of the papers published in this collection gives a fascinating description not only of the people captured in the files, but also of the records themselves. Eric Sager describes a shipping crew agreement as a “documentary panopticon” (p. 54); Carolyn Strange notes that “the capital case file can be approached as a textual artefact of *competing* truths” (p. 27); hospital case files are “a distilling of a life” according to Wendy Mitchinson (p. 267); for Margaret Little and other authors, a case file is “a site of contestation and resistance” (p. 231).

A methodological dichotomy forms an undercurrent running through this book. Says Steven Maynard, “Case files have emerged as one particularly fractious site in the debates over evidence” (p. 66). He is referring to the dif-

ferences between the materialists, who use case files to uncover people's life experiences, and the post-structuralists who use discourse analysis to deconstruct texts and who deny that the subjects of the files are anything more than social constructions of the hegemonic bodies that created the files. But none of the historians here is obstinate in support of his or her chosen methodology, and some seek a reconciliation of the two.

All authors would agree that case files reveal as much (if not more) about those who created them as about the subjects of the files themselves. The essays differ in the degree to which this dimension is explored. Some authors focus on the documenters, exploring their biases and the contemporary community standards they upheld: Angus McLaren, Franca Iacovetta, and Steven Maynard use legal files to explore, respectively, manliness, girls' behaviour, and homosexuality. Robin Brownlie looks at the Department of Indian Affairs' excessive expectations of Native soldier settlers, while Lynne Marks uses Upper Canadian church discipline records to explore how private life was regulated within the sacred sphere. Other authors focus on the individuals found within the files in an effort to recover their voices and experiences. Margaret Little discusses single mothers as viewed through Mothers' Allowance case files, Geoffrey Reaume and Lykke de la Cour uncover the patients' perspective in psychiatric records, and Wendy Mitchinson explores women's self-perceptions of their bodies through hospital files. These three essays deal with the concept of "agency" – the ability of the client to exercise power despite being in an unequal relationship with so-called experts.

Two essays employ completely different approaches. In his study of merchant shipping crew agreements, Eric Sager calls for an injection of social science methods, particularly statistics and computing, to deal with the problems of institutional bias and abundance of data. James W. St. G. Walker, on the other hand, solves this second issue by using the "singled-out case" approach through which he studies the concept of racism by exploring the prosecution of a Chinese restaurant owner for hiring female employees in contravention of Saskatchewan's *Female Labour Act*. This approach, he says, is used "not necessarily because it is 'representative' but because it can provide a 'key' to its historical moment" (p. 217).

Some of the essays also explore documentary form and its determining effect on the subjects documented. Annalee Golz notes (p. 290) that in court files detailing family violence, what is "striking is the degree of rhetorical sameness and the structured and scripted narratives that recurred in the testimonies of wives (and indeed husbands)," an observation echoed by other authors. Marlene Epp's study of Mennonite "grab-bag" families, which uses Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization family registers, shows that "any given 'family' was thus defined by virtue of the individuals grouped together on a registration form" (p. 347). Bettina Bradbury's study of the elderly in Montreal employs chronicles kept by female religious orders, showing how

nuns' "own subjective assessments are generally submerged in collective and often didactic reconstructions of events" (p. 130).

While the book's authors readily accept post-structuralist/postmodern concepts of authorship, textuality, and discourse, and the idea that the subjects of files are constructed by the state, by filing systems and documents, and by historians themselves, it is odd that not one of the writers mentions the similar role that archivists play. This is not a new idea – it was first expressed in the pages of *Archivaria* nearly a decade ago when Brien Brothman disrupted our complacency as objective hunter/gatherers of documents and domesticated us into subjective sowers of historical value. The decision to preserve case files as archival documents is a consequence of appraisal activities undertaken by archivists. Whether case files are reordered or refoldered, whether paper clips are removed (which may erase groupings of documents), whether files are culled in whole or in part, or series sampled, all have an impact on the evidential traces that remain for the use of historians. The provenancial trail does not cease once records are deposited in an archives.

Despite what seems like a logical omission, there is much here to make an archivist's heart leap with joy. For example, the concept of provenance is mentioned several times. As well, Gregory Kealey deals extensively with the trials and tribulations of using access to information legislation – perhaps not surprisingly since his essay concerns the National Archives of Canada's State Security Archives and its documentation of subversives. It is also encouraging to see a reference to relevant archival literature in Wendy Mitchinson's article on women patients, where she cites Barbara Craig's work on hospital record-keeping published in *Archivaria*. It would have been even more encouraging to have seen some indication that social historians are aware of the archival literature on case files and sampling. No one would have expected the authors to have read Terry Cook's 1991 RAMP study, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information*; yet one might have expected at least a footnote in the introductory essay to various case-file related articles in *Archivaria* (a journal, in my experience, about which many Canadian historians have at least heard).

For me, as an archivist responsible for medical and social welfare case files, what this volume suggests is the perennial dilemma over whether to acquire voluminous series of case records. Our thinking as a profession has been refined by the excellent work of Cook and others, who have promoted a macro-appraisal, "mind over matter" approach to capturing those records reflecting the best "image" of society. Policy and program files usually provide the best societal image, but case files are acquired to sharpen that image, particularly where the citizen-state interaction (or client-organization interaction) distorts, alters, or negates articulated program objectives, social norms, or values. For the most part, the essays in this collection confirm the soundness of macro-appraisal theory. The files used by the authors (and thus obvi-

ously appraised as having historical value) by and large reflect intense citizen-state interactions. Court records, asylum records, secret service files, and church discipline registers all document interactions with people who are considered to be out of step with social norms.

However, theories are not step-by-step procedures, and appraisal is still a subjective assessment as to which records best reflect the societal image. Several of the essays use files that might be thought to document routine interactions with “normal” people. Shipping crew agreements and Mothers’ Allowance case files might seem to be poor mirrors of society given their routine, administrative nature; however, these files amplify the voices of the people behind the files in a way that policy and program records cannot. The ability to hear the voices of marginalized people – indeed the ability to recognize that someone *is* marginalized – is in the eyes and ears of the beholder. This has affected which records are saved. It is not surprising that Margaret Little had difficulty finding significant runs of Mothers’ Allowance files, or that the majority of shipping crew agreements were scheduled for destruction by the British PRO before being rescued by the Maritime Archive in Newfoundland.

Apart from the theoretical issues, both historical and archival, which the book raises, it is also worth reading because it tells interesting stories about dead people, to paraphrase the title of Karen Dubinsky’s afterword. Case files, she says, “grant us admission to the historical party” (p. 361).

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**The Prague Spring 1968, A National Security Archive Documents Reader.** JAROMIR NAVRATIL, chief ed. & comp. Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998. 596 p. ISBN 963-9116-15-7.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 was one of the pivotal events in modern history. Scholars interested in tracing one of the significant roots of this collapse should closely examine the epic events of the year 1968 in Czechoslovakia, which would bear later on the Velvet Revolution of 1989–1990 and the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 had significant international repercussions and led to defections from the international communist movement, including many from the Communist Party of Canada. Events in 1968 generated genuine patriotism and heroism among Czechs and Slovaks, but at the same time revealed examples of dishonour and humiliation.

For many years, the causes and effects of these events were shrouded in mystery. It was only recently, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, that archives were opened to researchers and this material, along with the memoirs