

Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History. ANTOINETTE BURTON, ed. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005. 396 p. ISBN 0-9223-3677-4.

It is nearly impossible for archivists not to be drawn into the intriguing stories uncovered by historians conducting research in archives. But exactly how historians intellectually process archival material and how they view the experience of researching in archival institutions have generally remained a mystery, until now, thanks to the book *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*. *Archive Stories* examines the stories behind the creation of archives, how their creation inevitably shapes the records found within their walls, and how historians interpret archival materials. Although Antoinette Burton, the editor of the book, reveals how, when interpreting the archival record, their political and cultural environments affect historians, she also convincingly demonstrates that archives are not as objective as traditionally thought.

Archive Stories is comprised of a series of essays written by fifteen histor-

ians and is divided into three parts. Part I, entitled “Close Encounters: The Archive as Contact Zone,” discusses the experiences of individual historians as they conduct research in various types of archives around the world, and how those experiences influenced their eventual interpretation of the archival records studied. Part II, “States of the Art: ‘Official’ Archives and Counter-Histories,” focuses on the development of several institutional archives, illustrating how external events shaped the mandates and organization of these archives, and, subsequently, the context of the records. Part II also provides an example of the birth of a private archives, and how the motives behind its creation, as well as the regulation of its activities, have impacted the histories coming out of the archives. Part III, “Archive Matters: The Past in the Present,” explores how current social, political, and economic issues indirectly affect the way in which archives are kept, described, and used. The subject matter and perspectives presented in the essays will be of interest to archivists, from Horacio N. Roque Ramirez’s essay on queer Latino community histories, to Laura Mayhall’s discussion of the formation of suffragette archives, to Helena Pohlandt-McCormick’s experience researching the 1976 Soweto uprising in the state archives of South Africa, before and after the 1994 elections. However, for this reader, several essays stand out.

Durba Ghosh’s “National Narratives and the Politics of Miscegenation” describes the historian’s contrasting research experiences in archives in the United Kingdom and in India. Ghosh was researching the history of local Indian women who cohabitated with, or married, European men circa 1760 to 1840, during the time of British rule in India. In Indian archives, archivists went so far as to deny that native women ever cohabitated with European men, and viewed Ghosh and her research with suspicion. By comparison, in British archives, Ghosh became the resident expert of the reading room, helping people find genealogical proof of native women in their families. Her essay clearly illustrates how different cultures, politics, and viewpoints can affect the research experience, and the availability and interpretation of the historical record.

In “Toiling in the Archives of Cyberspace,” Renée M. Sentilles describes how traditional historical research methods are changing with the vast number of sources now available on the Internet. Historians today must “master” the perpetual flow found in cyberspace of information related to their expertise and must interpret, edit, and incorporate this content into a reasonably sized manuscript. That said, Sentilles is quick to admit that it is historians who support the notion of digitizing “everything in the archives,” thus adding to the proliferation and dissemination of massive amounts of material on the Internet. Most interestingly, she notes that digital archives cannot replace “real” archives in historical research. She asserts that the context of the historical material and the little clues found among the original archival record can often be lost or overlooked in digitization projects, making it necessary to work with archival sources in person. This essay is especially timely as archives across the nation

struggle with balancing the need to digitize material for online access while finding the resources to continue to arrange, describe, and process the rest of their archival collections.

A further highlight, especially from a Canadian perspective, is Adele Perry's essay "The Colonial Archive on Trial: Possession, Dispossession, and History in *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*." Perry discusses the role of archives and records, or lack thereof, during the politics of possession and dispossession in British Columbia. Her essay focuses in particular on the 1991 provincial Supreme Court decision made by Chief Justice Allan McEachern on Aboriginal land rights. McEachern dismissed land claims made by the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples, based on what he saw as a lack of adequate documentary evidence. Oral tradition evidence was disregarded, and only written documentation was seen as valid. Perry produces a detailed and comprehensive look at the facts surrounding this debate between the validity of oral tradition versus the written record.

Despite the diversity of topics explored throughout the essays in this volume, there are several weaknesses. One of the most glaring problems is the essayists' constant references to their fellow authors' articles found within the book. Not only does this seem false and forced, it takes the reader out of the essay for a moment to question whether or not they have already read the cited text. This seems an unnecessary step as it does not provide any additional coherence to the publication; the essays flow adequately from one to the other without the distracting references. Another weakness is the inconsistency in the intended audience and the level of readability from article to article. Several essays are clearly meant for a scholarly audience, while others are more understandable to a general audience. Perhaps clarification to the authors regarding the intended audience would have helped to make a more consistent product and widen the potential readership for the publication.

Notwithstanding these minor criticisms, *Archive Stories* offers an intriguing insight into how historians use archives and their records, as well as how we, as archivists, can influence the final interpretation of the archival record by historians. Historians could gain perspective on the archival record if they were introduced to the concepts of archival theory, especially in the areas of appraisal, arrangement, and description. Historians could also benefit by learning about the rationale behind the collection policies of archives, and how they are restrained by access and privacy legislation, donor agreements, and other factors. This publication makes apparent how the work of historians and archivists constantly intersects, and how both groups could benefit from learning more of the ins-and-outs of each others' profession.

Deirdre Bryden
Queen's University Archives