

Book Reviews



Many Happy Returns: Advocacy and the Development of Archives. LARRY J. HACKMAN, ed. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011. xi, 411 p. ISBN 1-931666-37-7.

In *Many Happy Returns: Advocacy and the Development of Archives*, editor and former New York State archivist Larry J. Hackman argues persuasively for considering advocacy a core archival function, as central to archival practice as appraisal or arrangement and description. While the term “advocacy” brings to mind the efforts by archival associations or individuals in support of archival-friendly legislation or government funding, for the purposes of this volume it refers to the advocacy work that archivists (should) do on behalf of their own programs. Hackman defines advocacy as “activities consciously aimed to persuade individuals or organizations to act on behalf of a program or institution” (p. vii).

More than fifteen years have elapsed since the publication of the manual *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archives*.¹ This new publication expands on the previous manual both in terms of the definition of advocacy and the exploration of the topic. Indeed, *Many Happy Returns* is very comprehensive. Part One is an essay by Hackman in which he outlines a series of advocacy principles, as well as suggested strategies and approaches. Part Two consists of thirteen case studies that describe successful advocacy projects in a good, but not perfect, cross-section of archival institutions, including special collections departments of university libraries, independent arts organizations, and state and municipal archives. Unfortunately archives that collect corporate records of universities or religious institutions are not represented in the case studies. Part Three comprises a series of essays examining “perspectives on advocacy,” including the implications for archival

1 Finch, Elsie Freeman, ed. *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archivists*. Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1994.

education; the role of social media; and advice for conducting advocacy at the US federal government level. It concludes with a wrap-up essay by Hackman, and a substantial list of additional readings.

In his opening essay, Hackman urges archivists to consider advocacy an essential, ongoing archival function that should be incorporated into the regular operation of the archives. The creation of an “opportunity agenda” of strategic priorities is the first step in establishing an effective advocacy program. Advancing these objectives – from aiming to influence immediate superiors to cultivating a group of internal and external supporters to using both successes and crises as opportunities to advance the archives’ agenda – should be as much a part of everyday work as collection management or reference activities. More radically, Hackman implores archivists to become risk takers in pursuit of their goals, and he provides the following advice: create an opportunity agenda that reflects the true ambitions of the archives, even if it is at odds with the goals of the larger administrative unit; do not settle for just making people feel good about the archives, but be willing to ask supporters to act on behalf of the institution; and be prepared to strategically ignore the chain of command or even the written and unwritten rules of the organization (pp. 13–39).

The thirteen case studies and reflective essays provide detailed examples of archivists doing these very things. Almost all of the authors describe projects or achievements that were the culmination of years of systematic advocacy. Roland M. Bauman, for example, chronicles a successful campaign to create an endowment for the Oberlin College Archives in Ohio, which resulted from twenty-five years of ‘relationship-building’ with university administrators, faculty, academic researchers, donors, and the local community.

While some of the case studies describe major public campaigns, others reflect the quiet, behind-the-scenes efforts that can be the most appropriate form of advocacy in some situations. For example, Stanford University’s SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory Archives faced the challenges of both inadequate funding and the tendency of Laboratory staff to see the archives as “‘extra help,’ available to them to assist on whatever emergency projects arose” (p. 168). In response, J.M. Deken describes how the archives instituted a “program review,” the regular, independent appraisal of a project or experiment that is standard operating procedure for scientific endeavours at the Laboratory. By subjecting the archives to “the same kind of rigorous review and report process that each proposed and ongoing science project regularly undergoes” (p. 168), the staff eventually succeeded in improving the credibility of the archives within the Laboratory, and in stabilizing its funding.

Most dramatically, the case studies highlight the degree to which successful advocacy requires the archivist to be strategically and politically savvy. For example, in her description of the creation of the New York Philharmonic’s archival program, Barbara Haws cites the identification of “power centers”

within the organization as crucial to her advocacy work, as well as the importance of boldly cultivating key individuals. Haws advises that “It is critical to have independent relationships with many members of the board of directors, even though there is the potential for an archivist to at times appear insubordinate” (p. 194).

Together the essays and case studies demonstrate how crucial systematic advocacy efforts can be to the success of an archival program. They offer useful, practical suggestions for guiding these efforts. The volume should be of considerable interest to new professionals who are in the process of defining their own professional practice. For seasoned archivists who might get bogged down in the daily demands of budgeting, supervising staff, and managing collections, the case studies provide inspiration and an important reminder that systematic advocacy efforts can yield big payoffs in the long term. However, this emphasis on the long term is both a strength and a weakness of the case studies. A common characteristic of the examples cited is the length of service of the archivist. Many of the advocacy success stories document efforts that cover ten or more years and often seem to span the career of a particular archivist. The projects, as described, rely on the persistence, personal network, and charisma of particular individuals. While many archives continue to enjoy the services of long-serving employees, this is becoming less common. One wonders if these types of success stories could be replicated in archives that have a high staff turnover.

All of the case studies in *Many Happy Returns* describe American institutions. In some instances, particularly those involving state archives, the details about the operation of the archives may be somewhat unfamiliar to Canadian readers. However, the lessons are general enough to be applicable to archivists outside of the American experience, with the sole exception of the chapter “Advocacy at the Federal Level,” which describes the processes of lobbying in Washington.

Many Happy Returns is a comprehensive, provocative, and interesting look at the issue of archival advocacy. Editor Larry J. Hackman and the contributors present a compelling case that archivists need to work constantly and strategically to advance the long-term goals of their institutions. While an aptitude for, or love of, strategic manoeuvring within an organization may not be what draws people to the archival profession, this volume makes it clear that it can be as vital to the success of an archives as the depth of the collections or quality of service.

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