

of our profession, this is a book an archivist can turn to for inspiration at the end of the day, after enduring yet another argument with corporate masters about the importance of archives. This is a book that reminds archivists of the value to history, and to the future, of our efforts to “acquire, preserve, and make available” the archives in our care.

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Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage. DONALD T. HAWKINS, ed. Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc., 2013. xx, 299 pp. ISBN 978-1-57387-480-9.

This collection of thirteen essays explores personal digital archives through discussions of emerging personal archiving software and services, developing guidelines and best practices, as well as the many technological but also practical challenges posed by on- and offline digital content in personal environments. The book is edited by Donald T. Hawkins, an accomplished information science and technology professional who currently blogs and writes for Information Today, Inc.¹ Although the book is not formally divided into sections, each chapter is loosely structured around one of three themes: the unique characteristics of personal digital archiving; practical advice for non-professional archivists; and emerging personal archiving software, online services, and relevant research initiatives.

The many unique perspectives on personal archiving in this book are drawn from an eclectic group of contributors whose disciplinary backgrounds include corporate IT research, human-computer interaction studies, computer engineering, media studies, and digital libraries and archives. While the intended reader is “anyone who has a mass of digital information and wants to organize and preserve it” (p. xvii), the book is clearly designed to appeal to both academic researchers and practitioners in the information sciences, as well as individuals who seek to archive their personal or familial histories.

In her chapter titled “Personal Archiving for Individuals and Families,” Danielle Conklin describes how four different individuals have approached archiving their digitized photographic and textual materials, stating, “Individuals and families, unfortunately, are not presented with a handbook at the start of their personal archiving projects” (p. 14). Conklin goes further to suggest that the “average person is likely unprepared to create self-imposed

1 See <http://www.infotoday.com>.

standards for the order of operations or descriptive consistency” (p. 15). Such statements are echoed by Mike Ashenfelder who, in the chapter “The Library of Congress and Personal Digital Archiving,” argues that “most of the general public – the largest digital-file stakeholders in the world – are unaware of what digital preservation or personal digital archiving is or why they should care” (p. 31). It was with this in mind that the Library of Congress developed a number of information resources designed to assist individuals in their digital archiving endeavours.² Although he focuses primarily on photographs, Ashenfelder provides concise steps to follow, from the appraisal and arrangement of digital files to the processes of metadata creation and distributed storage.

Despite the usefulness of the digital archiving best practices put forth by Ashenfelder, Catherine C. Marshall is skeptical that people will actually perform these archiving actions on their digital materials. Marshall’s groundbreaking work on personal digital archives is revisited in “Social Media, Personal Data, and Reusing Our Digital Legacy,” in which, in addition to new conversations about ownership, control, and emerging social norms, she argues that the resources and skills required to archive personal digital belongings properly exceed the natural abilities of most people to do so.³ Correspondingly, Evan Carroll, in his discussion of the “digital afterlife” in the essay “Digital Inheritance: Tackling the Legal and Practical Issues,” notes that while there are definite legal issues surrounding digital inheritance, heirs or executors can also encounter serious obstacles regarding practical issues, such as not knowing what cloud-based services the deceased used or the corresponding account information. Indeed, as Ellysa Stern Cahoy notes in her essay “Faculty Members as Archivists,” information professionals should do more to understand existing information management practices and needs of faculty while, at the same time, educating them about the necessity of proactively self-archiving their research. The same could be said for non-academic environments; archivists could undoubtedly be more rigorous and far-reaching in their investigations of other habitats in the personal archives ecosystem.

If individuals therefore require assistance with their digital archives, but more than just professional advice and best-practice documentation, it

- 2 The Library of Congress website contains a series of web pages dedicated to personal archiving. See Library of Congress, “Personal Archiving: Preserving Your Digital Memories,” accessed 30 September 2014, <http://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving>.
- 3 See, for example, Catherine C. Marshall, “Rethinking Personal Digital Archiving, Part 1: Four Challenges from the Field,” *D-Lib Magazine* 14, no. 3/4 (March/April 2008), accessed 30 September 2014, <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/march08/marshall/03marshall-pt1.html>; and Catherine C. Marshall, “Rethinking Personal Digital Archiving, Part 2: Implications for Services, Applications, and Institutions,” *D-Lib Magazine* 14, no. 3/4 (March/April 2008), accessed 30 September 2014, <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/march08/marshall/03marshall-pt2.html>.

seems appropriate that four chapters in this book are dedicated to examining personal archiving software and online services. In another contribution to the book, “Software and Services for Personal Archiving,” Hawkins reviews a number of online archiving services currently available to individuals. While much can be said about the immediate utility of services and objects such as Lifemap, Timebox, and Recollect, which help individuals manage, describe, and re-access their on- and offline digital content in the present, it seems dangerous to entrust the long-term preservation of this data to for-profit organizations. A case in point is 1000memories, an online service for storing and organizing photographs, which was reviewed by Hawkins for this chapter but was acquired by another company and subsequently shut down by the time the book was published.

In his essay “Our Technology Heritage,” Richard Banks provides a different perspective on how individuals might preserve their digital archives through objects that exhibit both physical and digital characteristics. Arguing that the perceived intangibility of digital content has an impact on the way people preserve and access their digital artifacts, Banks provides an overview of four devices (Shoebox, TimeCard, Digital Slide Viewer, and Backup Box) that have been designed not only to store and display digital content but are also engineered to mimic the physical nature of a box of photographs or a photo album. While the four devices discussed are only prototypes, the idea that disguising digital archives as physical artifacts may potentially increase their chances of preservation is an intriguing concept worth pursuing.

Although there seems to be a great deal of potential in the marketplace of personal archiving, it is difficult to estimate how long any hardware, software, or online services will be supported. For example, Jeff Ubois, author of “Personal Digital Archives: What They Are, What They Could Be, and Why They Matter,” does see a role for market solutions in personal archiving, but warns that “it would be foolish to assume that commercial services will continue to improve to the point where all personal archiving needs might be met by the market” (p. 5). Likewise, Aaron Ximm argues that while capturing and preserving the data we create with commercial services is paramount, “our online presence is distributed among players whose commitment (and ability) to preserve their fraction of our digital selves is undemonstrated or demonstrably absent” (p. 209). In his chapter “Active Personal Archiving and the Internet Archive,” Ximm provides an overview of the Internet Archive’s existing work with personal archives and suggests that a mechanism for capturing and preserving our online identities should be developed and “predicated on a comprehensive set of capabilities, and commitments, such as are demonstrated by the Internet Archive” (p. 213). Regrettably, the mechanism, or “active personal archiving” service, that Ximm advocates is currently only an area of research at the Internet Archive and not necessarily a service that the organization is going to provide in the future. However, in their essay “New

Horizons in Personal Archiving,” Christopher J. Prom and Peter Chan discuss two non-commercial software platforms that may satisfy some of the unique requirements of personal digital archives: myKIVE and MUSE, developed at the University of Illinois and Stanford University respectively, contain much of the same functionality as commercial archiving services but are free, open-source projects supported by universities, which can provide a somewhat more stable source of project funding.

Weighed against existing archival theory, the essays and themes in *Personal Archiving* appear to be a return to – or continuation of – the conversations on postcustodialism launched in the 1990s by theorists such as David Bearman, Terry Cook, and Adrian Cunningham, among others.⁴ Many of the essays in this book touch on key tenets of postcustodial theory, including its emphasis on the proactive documentation of provenancial elements closer to the point of records creatorship and on the need for information professionals to liaise with creators in their environments to provide management oversight in the areas of appraisal, documentation, access, and preservation. Sarah Kim acknowledges this connection in her essay, which surveys the current research landscape of personal digital archiving. She proposes that “we need to continue to see how post-custodial theory becomes a practice in archives” (p. 168). In “Landscape of Personal Digital Archiving Activities and Research,” Kim effectively argues that research findings in areas such as Personal Information Management studies may advance our understandings of how individuals attribute value to their digital belongings or how digital memory studies can reveal technology’s effects on the way people now remember and forget. Such interdisciplinary approaches are also examined by Jason Zalinger, Nathan G. Freier, and Ben Shneiderman, who in “Reading Ben Shneiderman’s Email” demonstrate that by applying *narrative search*, “a set of search techniques and a way of thinking and a way of thinking as a writer or storyteller” (p. 109), they were able to discover powerful stories and important information contained in an otherwise fragmented email archive consisting of over forty thousand messages.

Although discursive in its delivery and too focused at times on digitized collections at the expense of more consideration of born-digital media, *Personal Archiving* is still undeniably a strong contribution to a growing

4 Discussions on postcustodial theory and its implications for personal archives include, but are not restricted to, David Bearman, “An Indefensible Bastion: Archives as a Repository in the Electronic Age,” *Archival Management of Electronic Records*, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report 13, ed. David Bearman (Pittsburgh: Archives & Museum Informatics, 1991), 14–24; Terry Cook, “The Impact of David Bearman on Modern Archival Thinking: An Essay of Personal Reflection and Critique,” *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11, no. 1 (January 1997): 15–37; and Adrian Cunningham, “The Archival Management of Personal Records in Electronic Form: Some Suggestions,” *Archives & Manuscripts* 22 (May 1994): 94–105.

body of literature on personal digital archives.⁵ This volume boldly confronts and highlights the many technological, cultural, and professional uncertainties surrounding what Clifford Lynch aptly describes as a field of study still awaiting “clear definition and delineation” (p. 260).

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5 Comparable works on personal digital archives include Christopher A. Lee, ed., *I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011); Jeremy Leighton John, Ian Rowlands, Peter Williams, and Katrina Dean, “Digital Lives: Personal Digital Archives for the 21st Century – An Initial Synthesis,” A Digital Lives Research Paper, beta version 0.2 (3 March 2010), accessed 30 September 2014, <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/files/digital-lives-synthesis02-1.pdf>; Paradigm, “Project Documents: Workbook on Personal Digital Archives,” accessed 30 September 2014, <http://www.paradigm.ac.uk/index.html>.