

Book Reviews



Currents of Archival Thinking, 2nd ed. HEATHER MACNEIL and TERRY EASTWOOD, eds. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2017. xiii, 398 pp. ISBN 978-1-4408-3908-5.

In 2010, Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil edited the acclaimed first edition of *Currents of Archival Thinking*. This second edition is not simply an update of the essays previously published – only five of the 14 texts can truly be considered updated versions – but rather a new edition that focuses on both current and future directions of archival thinking. The collection follows the similar three-part division of the first edition, addressing archival foundations, functions, and frameworks. In “Foundations,” the authors examine the roots and subsequent development of archival theory and the history of archival institutions. In “Functions,” they cover the management, selection, preservation, and use of records – both analog and digital – that are of enduring value, as well as communication to the general public about the role of archives and archival institutions. The last section, “Frameworks” (previously titled “Models and Metaphors”), delves into the broad social and political movements that are reshaping the archival endeavour in the 21st century. This edition is dedicated to Sigrid McCausland, a contributor to the volume and a friend and valued colleague of the editors and of many others in the archival community.

MacNeil is a professor at the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Information, and Eastwood is professor emeritus of the University of British Columbia School of Library, Archival and Information Studies. As they did for the first edition, the editors gave authors a set of questions to consider in their respective essays: How has this area of archival concern been understood historically? How is it understood today? Where are the points of continuity and contestation in discussions of this topic? How have technological changes affected the way we think about it? How have currents of thinking in other disciplines influenced our own understanding of this topic? These questions, addressed by all the contributors, give ample latitude to

review the relevant literature on each of the subjects covered but force the reader into a historical review at the beginning of each chapter. While it is important to understand how a topic evolved – and the reader would expect to find this in the “Foundations” section – someone looking for a purely *current* discussion may be disappointed. Neophytes, however, will welcome this historical review.

What emerges as the overarching theme of the second edition of *Currents of Archival Thinking* is the balance between continuity and change, or, rather, the way that archival science continually reshapes and adapts to the shifting nature of its environment. The book comprises texts from six returning contributors and ten new contributors. While the majority are Canadian, the extensive review of each of the topics does not confine this text to a purely Canadian context. It is indeed an international endeavour, adopting broad North American, European, and Australian perspectives. In general, the authors focus on the points of continuity among regional approaches, contrasting, for example, Australian and European or European and North American perspectives. The goal here is not to convince the reader that one approach is better than another, but rather that national and regional differences explain how various theories and practices evolved. Differences are seen as complementary rather than antagonistic. However, one could only hope that in a potential third edition the boundaries would be pushed beyond this “Western” tradition to include not only perspectives from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, but also Indigenous perspectives, a theme notably absent from both editions of *Currents of Archival Thinking*.

In “Foundations,” Terry Eastwood and Jennifer Douglas pick up from the first edition and provide a full historical review of the concepts of archives and provenance. Eastwood reimagines the nature of archives by taking into consideration the effects of human, social, and ideological forces on archives, records, and recordkeeping. Since the late-19th-century, and under the influence of European approaches, archives have been characterized by their naturalness, their interrelatedness, and their uniqueness – the traditional view – along with their authenticity and impartiality. Eastwood argues that rather than downplaying or disavowing these characteristics or focusing solely on how our understanding of them influences archival practices, archivists should try to better articulate how they relate to the social roles of archival institutions and archivists. Douglas examines the concept of provenance and its relationship to context. She argues that provenance and context are different and that understanding the various types of contributors – including individual creators, communities of creators, custodians, archivists, researchers, and society at large – would help articulate provenance as a network of many-to-many relationships while ensuring proper contextualization. Both authors present traditional theories as evolving and adapting to our modern digital and socially driven world. Next, Adrian Cunningham looks at archives

as place. From his historical review of archives as institutions supporting transactions in Assyria and Mesopotamia to the modern institutions of the European revolutions and post-colonial era to the postcustodial realities of virtual archives, Cunningham concludes that archival institutions have always mutated and shifted in response to the societies that created them and in which they were embedded. Together, these three chapters provide an overview of the complexities associated with three facets of the concept *archives*: archives as things, archives as processes, and archives as places.

Glenn Dingwall, Geoffrey Yeo, and Wendy Duff and Elizabeth Yakel continue the discussions they started in the first edition – on digital preservation, description, and reference. Gillian Oliver, Fiorella Foscarini, and Sigrid McCausland complete this section with their views on records management, appraisal, and public programming. First, Oliver addresses the morphing nature of records management. The shift from paper to digital leads to the development of a handful of conceptual models, including the records life cycle, the records continuum, recordkeeping informatics, diplomatics, and rhetorical genre studies, all of which are reviewed. She then discusses the future challenges of a field that has gone from paraprofessional to professional. Foscarini reviews and synthesizes the literature on appraisal, using Terry Cook's four paradigms – evidence, memory, identity, and community¹ – and suggests that archivists select the framework that best represents their own institutional context. Dingwall traces the constant evolution of digital preservation and examines current trends, including institutional repositories, open source and open standards, digital curation, and cloud computing. He then discusses the challenges, notably funding and skills training, and how to adapt analog standards to a digital environment. Yeo's chapter, "Continuing Debates on Archival Description," builds on his contribution to the earlier edition and examines the future directions of digital archives. Yeo echoes the challenges identified by Dingwall, in particular a lack of resources for description, and argues for reconciliation between metadata generation, records management, and user-generated descriptions.

Reframing archival mediation as archival interaction, Duff and Yakel expand the scope of archival reference to include interactions among users, archivists, and archival records. The user is presented as an important figure who is not simply taught by the archivist but who interacts with the archivist and the records through various forms of engagement. This relationship is more reciprocal than traditionally envisioned. Finally, McCausland argues that public programming is an archival function separate from outreach, reference, and advocacy. This second part of the book covers all the archival functions:

1 Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms," *Archival Science* 13, no. 2–3 (June 2013): 95–120.

selection and appraisal, description, preservation, reference, and use. The general theme across all chapters is that there has been, in recent years, a turn toward users, communities, and society that can be contrasted with an earlier, more limited focus on the record itself. The authors touch upon these elements, perhaps to address or perhaps to reject this perception. This shift in archival thinking is even more evident in the third and final section of the book.

The section “Frameworks” brings new perspective to the second edition. It investigates the significance of concepts such as access to information, social justice, participation and engagement, and co-operation with users and other institutions in the community. Seeing current archival practices through these lenses increases the societal role and value of archives. Elizabeth Shepherd focuses on democratic accountability, the purpose of which is to encourage and help citizens assert their rights to information. She balances the concepts of accountability, transparency, good governance, and recordkeeping with the rights to access records. Her discussion on secrecy and privacy highlights the issues of access to information and open government. David A. Wallace looks at archives and social justice, and how justice and injustice are administered and documented in records. He examines the professional discourse on this topic and argues for breaking the notion of archival objectivity and archival neutrality. The last three chapters all turn to collaboration: with users, with other memory institutions, and with community members. Alexandra Eveleigh discusses archival functions from the perspective of power and identity and the need to recognize user motivations, perspectives, and interests in order to fully achieve a participatory archives. Jeannette A. Bastian examines the convergence of archives, libraries, and museums and presents both the strengths and pitfalls for archives and archivists of this blurring of categories. While there is a need to collaborate and break down silos, true convergence must be based on mutual respect for the expertise, distinctiveness, and integrity of each field. Finally, Rebecka Sheffield presents the life cycle of community archives from their emergence to decline. She argues that the archival community ought to support these democratizing projects.

In summary, the second edition of *Currents of Archival Thinking* should be considered a stand-alone book, rather than simply an updated version of a resource that is already in your bookcase. It is interesting to note the progression of chapters from a broad theoretical discussion of archives and archival theory to a functions-specific discussion of selected topics. Overall, there appears to be a sense of openness to users, communities, society, and social justice in nearly all the chapters, but these contemporary issues are more clearly focused in the final section of the book. Whether intentional or not, this shift in archival discourse, grounded solidly on “traditional” archival theory, is more than welcome. One would hope that a future edition would not only continue this trend but might also integrate more essays from

professional archivists and community members. As mentioned above, Indigenous perspectives and perspectives from non-Western countries would enrich the discussion and provide an outlet for voices that are often silent or silenced. Pairing theoretical essays with case studies that focus on concrete applications of the same topic would also strengthen the continuing dialogue between theory and practice.

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Evidence and the Archive: Ethics, Aesthetics and Emotion. KATHERINE BIBER and TRISH LUKER, eds. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. x, 168 pp. ISBN: 978-1-138-21032-5.

As Katherine Biber and Trish Luker rather flatly understate in their introduction to this generally stimulating collection of essays, “the notion of the ‘archive’ has been claimed and contested within cultural and critical discourse in the humanities” (p. 6). The proof of the editors’ contention is to be found in the pages of their book. In *Evidence and the Archive*, we discover, for example, the Solomon Islands National Archives, the type of state repository of official records familiar to most archivists and historians. But we also run up against “law’s archive as ‘commandment’” and “as genre” (p. 124). I am no longer certain what is to be gained in the long-running tug-of-war over the archive as workaday, bureaucratic institution or Derridean metaphor. The editors would seem to agree, concurring with one cultural theorist that “to some extent, the term has to be surrendered” (p. 6). I, for one, surrender.

Thus freed up, one is better able to appreciate the many useful ways this collection expands the notion of law’s archive and the afterlife of legal evidence. As a historian who for over 25 years has been researching court records to write queer history, I expected to encounter a series of essays on the by-now familiar methodological possibilities and limitations of using the kinds of evidence – textual, photographic, artifactual – that one finds in law’s archive. Readers of this journal might expect to be treated to discussions of the acquisition and processing of court records, along with the rules governing access to them. None of these matters is entirely absent. However, the book is aimed at legal scholars (it originally appeared in 2014 as an issue of the *Australian Feminist Law Journal* and, incidentally, the book reproduces what was then the journal’s sloppy footnoting format), who, it is claimed, have not sufficiently grappled with the “archival turn.” It’s a paradoxical state of affairs in view of the law’s voluminous contributions to archives, both public and private. Yet this is no simple primer on archives for those in the legal