

**Managing Local Government Archives.** John H. Slate and Kaye Lanning Minchew. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. xix, 166 pp. ISBN 978-1-4422-6394-9

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**In their book *Managing Local Government Archives***, authors John H. Slate and Kaye Lanning Minchew make the alarming claim that local government records are “among the most neglected records in the [United States]” (p. xviii). They argue that local governments are often under-resourced and unable to support robust records management or archival programs, leaving the task of preserving and providing access to archival records with staff members who do not have archival education or professional training. The objective of their book is to educate this group of individuals in an attempt to remedy the problem; the book functions as a basic overview of archives management for staff responsible for managing archives without the benefit of archival education or professional training.

The authors are in a good position to provide advice and guidance on local government records. John H. Slate has been the city archivist of Dallas, Texas, since 2000. He is a certified archivist and was named a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists in 2017. Kaye Lanning Minchew is a consultant in archives and historic preservation. She was the executive director of the Troup County Archives and Legacy Museum on Main in LaGrange, Georgia, from 1985 until 2015. Between 2007 and 2011, she co-chaired the Local Government Archives Project of the Council of State Archivists (CoSA). She is a certified archivist, a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists, and a Fellow of the Society of Georgia Archivists. Together, the authors have combined their extensive experience in a basic guide to managing local government archives.

The book begins with a short history of the local government structure and local government archives across the United States, placing them within the larger context of American history. As the authors note, there are various interpretations regarding the definition of *local* government. For the purposes of the book, local governments include counties and parishes; municipalities and townships; school districts; water districts; transportation authorities; utilities; housing authorities; and industrial development authorities. These local government bodies provide a diverse number of services, from supplying drinking water to providing transportation services to managing waste removal and recycling programs. There are over 89,000 local governments in the United States. Despite the importance of the services they provide, archival programs are uncommon.

Local governments in the United States are diverse, with origins tied to former Spanish, Mexican, German, or French rule. The authors state that “the key to understanding the nature of the archives of a local government is to understand where that government’s record-keeping traditions originated” (p. 1). The first chapter describes local government in the British colonies, multinational customs, and historical events and figures in the development of local government archives. The authors emphasize the significance of local governments in the history of the United States and argue that “governments, individual employees, and responsible citizens must do whatever is within their means to protect and preserve these valuable assets of American history” (p. 13).

The core of the book provides practical advice and definitions. Slate and Minchew describe common types of archives, the role of archives in the record-keeping process, and different options for management, including consortiums, regional archives, and transfer of records to state archives. Records management is defined, and records retention schedules are discussed, including explanations of common records series, types of records found in local government series, records of special purpose districts, issues relating to records management programs, and disposition and disposal of records.

The authors then discuss the establishment of an archives program, encouraging all local governments, regardless of resources, to preserve and provide access to records. As they emphasize, “*it is not enough to simply say you have an archives*” (p. 43). Functions and elements of a basic archival program are described, including administration. The ideal arrangement, they argue, is to position local government archives with a records management program. Justi-

fications for establishing an archives program are also provided to help readers understand or argue in favour of doing so.

The following chapters provide general overviews of basic topics that are relevant to all archives: physical control, intellectual control, electronic records, reference services, and outreach and exhibits. The chapter “Intellectual Considerations” includes material more specific to local government archives, covering appraisal, accessioning and transfer, alienated records, and arrangement and description. The inclusion of electronic records, a modern reality, is welcome, with discussions of policies, the need to obtain initial control of electronic records, as well as considerations for maintaining continued control over time. The chapters and sections are short, providing readers with a taste of best practices and the complexities of archival work.

The book ends with two appendices: a sample legislative document for establishing an archives and sample forms common to local government archives. The forms consist of a records inventory, archives regulations for use, and a city/county archives photographic reproduction services form. The documents are provided free of copyright so that readers can reuse or adapt them as required. There is also a bibliography of useful resources.

Books and resources about managing local government archives are scarce, as the authors acknowledge: “Professional literature written specifically on or about local government records and archives practices is limited to only a few book-length treatments and a few dozen scholarly journal articles” (p. 11). In Canada, the Association of Canadian Archivists published a 20-page *Municipal Archives Booklet*<sup>1</sup> in 2001 that includes basic information about establishing an archives program. Previously, H. G. Jones’s book *Local Government Records: An Introduction to Their Management, Preservation, and Use* (1980) was the authoritative guide. Jones has demonstrated his support for this new book and has passed the baton by writing the foreword. *Managing Local Government Archives* fills the gap and provides an updated guide, but there is room for additional literature. For example, information about the local government archives in other countries or specific types of communities would be welcome additions.

As the authors promise at the beginning, the book is a practical guide rather than an introduction to archival theory. However, it is difficult to discuss archival

1 Association of Canadian Archivists, Resources, ACA Books & Guides: ACA Booklets, “Municipal Archives Booklet,” accessed 31 January 2018, <https://archivists.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/resources/11%20-%20Municipal-Archives-Booklet.pdf>.

practice without discussing archival theory. For example, the section on appraisal provides a brief introduction to T.R. Schellenberg's concept of archival value. There is no discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of these ideas or other approaches to archival appraisal. The attempt by the authors to cover a significant amount of archival practice in a short book means that inevitably the depth and theory are absent. There is a brief mention of sampling archival records (p. 40). A reference to Terry Cook's article on sampling case files<sup>2</sup> would have been helpful to anyone contemplating how to apply sampling.

The purpose of archival education should be to introduce students to common problems and solutions, and, most importantly, to teach them how to explore and discover solutions to these issues so that they are equipped to solve future difficulties. Issues in archives are continually evolving, and one of the greatest skills archivists can develop is the ability to research and find answers to the problems they are facing. The book would have been strengthened by providing additional references to articles, websites, organizations, tools, and standards to encourage readers to continue their education.

The value of *Managing Local Government Archives* is that, as it promises, it provides a basic overview of managing local government archives. From the explanation of local government history in the US to the majority of resources listed in the bibliography, the information is largely confined to an American context. However, common issues cross international borders, and this book raises much-needed awareness about the importance of local government archives. As such, it is useful for readers outside of the United States. Despite the significance to citizens, the importance of local government archives is often overlooked. This argument is a major strength of the book, and one that makes it worthwhile. Local governments without archival programs would be wise to study it.

2 Terry Cook, "Many Are Called, but Few Are Chosen: Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files" *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 25-50.

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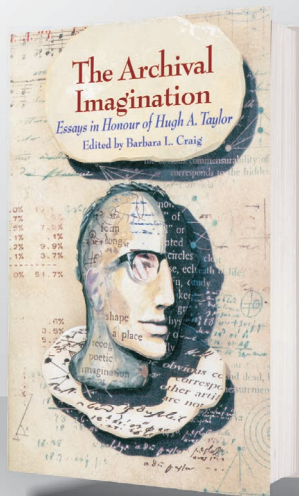
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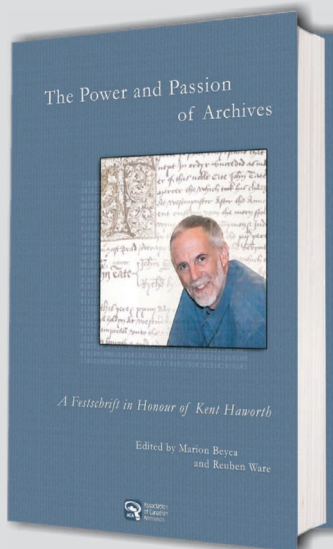
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