It is mind-boggling to maintain emotional and intellectual distance while living through a revolution. We now should agree that the early twenty-first century marks a turning point in the fourth revolution, the information revolution, a fundamental dislocation (along the lines of the challenges posed by Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud) that the philosopher Luciano Floridi writes must, once again, alter our perceptions of ourselves in relationship to the universe. For Floridi and an international school of thought for which he is the most prolific spokesperson, humans do not sit atop the pyramid of life but are “informationally embodied organisms, mutually connected and embedded in an informational environment, which we share with both natural and artificial agents similar to us in many respects.” 1 Fifteen years into the twenty-first century, it is clear that archivists are still coming to terms with the information revolution and need to embrace colleagues who dare to look backward and beyond the boundaries of such fundamental, transformative change.

In Conceptualizing 21st-Century Archives, Anne J. Gilliland draws on some of her most important writings over the past decade. She extends this important and influential work by incorporating the perspectives of an international coterie of archival scholars who themselves have been struggling to define the domain of archives as it had come to be understood by the end of the last century. Gilliland’s approach to charting the transition of archival thinking over the past decade is highly selective, informed more deeply by her research partnerships past and present than by any particular conceptual framework. The book is informed by a deep historical sensibility but is not a history of archival ideas in any formal sense of the term. Gilliland resists the temptation to predict the future, instead providing ample evidence for the likely trajectories of archival descriptive practices, electronic records and recordkeeping, and digital curation. Near the end, she hazards some recommendations for deeper investigation, but readers seeking signposts or guidance for navigating the information revolution might be disappointed.

Anne Gilliland is a scholar and an educator who has focused her research on the distinctive elements of the “archival paradigm” that may survive the massive adoption of information and communication technologies for nearly all
human transactions. Gilliland has built her scholarly career at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she has chaired the Department of Information Studies, founded the Center for Information as Evidence, and is now a full professor with an extraordinary track record in graduate education of archivists at the master’s and doctoral levels. Her research is highly collaborative and international in scope. Indeed, between her long-standing and fruitful collaboration with Australian archival scholar Sue McKemmish, her deep engagement with the InterPARES research on authentic archival records, and her leadership with Elizabeth Yakel in directing the Archival Education and Research Institute, Gilliland is one of the few American archival scholars whose work is consistently informed by international perspectives.

Gilliland introduces her book as an effort to explore the lessons that the history of the archival field in the twentieth century has to offer twenty-first-century archivists. She summarizes her important work from 2000 to define the continuing relevance and value of core archival ideas for the digital world. Gilliland argues that seven emerging constructs are central to discussions of archives in the twenty-first century. Her consideration of postcustodial thinking, archivalization, communities of memory, community archives, cocreatorship, digital repatriation, and the archival multiverse is woven through the volume, and she provides definitions and pointers to important secondary literature.

Emerging constructs, however, do not provide structure for the book. Instead, Gilliland establishes the context of postcustodial archives (via F. Gerald Ham’s classic 1981 article) in a postmodern world and then presents three pairs of chapters on the nature of the archive, descriptive practices, and electronic records that move fluidly between historical insight and recent developments. Chapters 2 and 3 frame archival ideas in today’s information communication technology revolution, followed by a historical treatment of the relevance of the documentation movement of the first half of the twentieth century. Gilliland largely succeeds in highlighting the distinctive archival point of view that crystallized a century ago and in demonstrating how parts of that view remain true and strong.

Chapters 4 and 5 work together as a survey of descriptive practices that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century and how archivists have adapted those practices through thirty years of digital technology innovation. Gilliland’s synthesis is refreshing in its scope and a useful reminder that archival best practices have been and continue to be inextricably tied to national and international technology standards. As she moves through her story of innovation and development, Gilliland’s perspective widens from its American foundation to encompass practices pioneered in Canada and Australia.

Gilliland’s rhythm of juxtaposing historical analysis with contemporary issues continues with chapters 6 and 7, which focus on her deep scholarship
on digital recordkeeping and electronic records management. The foundation of these chapters is an important literature review that Gilliland prepared in 2005 for the *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*. In this new book, Gilliland builds on that analysis, updates concepts that have emerged in the intervening years, and provides pointers toward future developments. The extensive table of research projects in electronic records management is a very impressive overview of two decades of entangled experimentation, false starts, dead ends, and brilliant inspiration.

When Gilliland shifts her attention to the contribution of archival constructs to present and emerging digital technologies, she tends to sacrifice depth of analysis for breadth of coverage. The brief chapters 8 and 9 start with the “in the news” familiarity of personal archiving, social media, digital forensics, and cloud computing. Any one of these topics warrants a chapter, given the widening base of research across multiple disciplines. Similarly, Gilliland’s treatment of recordkeeping models seems cursory and out of place as a transition to her substantive writing on long-term sustainability. In chapter 10, Gilliland provides a very useful path through the complex and competing concepts of digital stewardship, preservation, curation, and their kin. The great service she provides in this chapter is to make the connection between enduring archival principles and a wide variety of national and international information and communication technologies. It is somewhat ironic that as fundamental archival principles become deeply embedded in the world’s cyberinfrastructure, archivists are increasingly in the position of reacting and reaching for the type of influence that they clearly exercised in the areas of metadata and digital records.

The last, short chapter in *Conceptualizing 21st-Century Archives* takes the form of a conclusion, but raises a serious challenge for practicing archivists. Gilliland states directly that “the ability to conceptualize archival ideas and practices . . . is an essential part of twenty-first-century archival work” (p. 256). But surrounding that unambiguous claim is her recognition that archival records “have become secondary to doing business” (p. 255) and also that archivists are the “profession of the record” whose essence is about evidence (p. 258). Gilliland is right to see the conundrum for professional archivists posed by the loss of control over the definition and implementation of archival principles in a digital, global world. Near the very end of her book, Gilliland asks a great question: what would archival principles look like if archivists started from scratch in the middle of today’s information revolution? Although she points backward to a century of growth of the archival paradigm, the real answer to her question may lie a hundred years hence, when archivists will know whether their ideas changed the world or the fourth revolution rendered them unrecognizable.

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Notes


Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia


The Khmer Rouge photographed prisoners at Tuol Sleng prison before executing them. These mug shots mutely attest to human rights crimes by the former Cambodian regime. As Michelle Caswell deftly examines the archival evidence of genocide, these photographs witness atrocities that are at once both “unspeakable” in their horror and also unspoken, due to the silence of the 5,109 killed at Tuol Sleng. Taking a “records-centered approach” to this topic, Caswell both explores the contributions archival theory can make to “the ongoing discussion about evidence, power, and historical production” and challenges archivists to “embrace their own power to counter the silences embedded in records, particularly those that document human rights abuse” (p. 7).

Written for archivists and nonarchivists alike, Archiving the Unspeakable contributes a vital perspective on social justice. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the ongoing discourse on archives and society. Carefully grounded in both historical and archival theory, this volume presents a nuanced case study of the mug-shot photographs with which the Khmer Rouge identified and controlled their victims. These images capture only a portion of those murdered at one of many extermination camps. Among the estimated 1.7 million victims of execution, starvation, or disease under the Khmer Rouge regime (one-quarter of the nation’s population), the dead of Tuol Sleng represent only a sliver of a sliver of those silenced during the four years from 1975 to 1979.

Caswell frames her analysis according to Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s concept of four key moments in which power relationships embed silences in historical analysis. The first chapter, “The Making of Records,” echoes Trouillot’s “moment of fact creation (the making of sources).” The Khmer Rouge’s “systematic prison bureaucracy,” Caswell argues, “hinged on documentation” (p. 29). The photographs at the center of her analysis represent only one of many forms of records created by the regime. Placing these records in context, Caswell effectively traces these mug shots to earlier French colonial police photography and
the Bertillon system for identifying and indexing criminals. In light of Hannah Arendt’s “banality of evil,” these bureaucratic records routinized genocidal procedures and isolated the “desk murderers” from their “administrative massacres” (p. 53).

Chapter 2, “The Making of Archives,” mirrors Trouillot’s “moment of fact assembly (the making of archives).” Since Trouillot argues that archives perform “an active act of production that prepares facts for historical intelligibility” (p. 61), this chapter is especially important for archivists and those who use archives. Caswell states that the political and historical factors that shaped the archival record of the Tuol Sleng mug shots demonstrate how archives gather “facts” and thereby establish political power. After the Vietnamese Army captured Phnom Penh and overthrew the Khmer Rouge in 1979, they discovered the prison camp photographs. The Vietnamese established the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum to publicize Khmer Rouge atrocities. Subsequent American efforts to document these mass murders sought to establish both legal and historical accountability to bring the perpetrators to justice. Preservation librarians from Cornell University traveled to Cambodia to undertake a massive program of preservation microfilming for prison documents and prisoner confession statements. By 1994, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), initially established at Yale University and now based in Cambodia, undertook a more comprehensive effort to create an archival record for accountability purposes. This has resulted in extensive preservation and digitization initiatives, a large oral history project, numerous publications, and teacher education programs, among other DC-Cam activities. This is not a neutral or apolitical role for archivists. Echoing Verne Harris, Caswell states that “the process of transforming the Tuol Sleng mug shots into archives is inherently and inescapably political” (p. 95).

Trouillot’s concern for the silences embedded in the “moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives)” frames Caswell’s third chapter, “The Making of Narratives.” As the mug shots engender stories of atrocity, they become “active agents in the performance of human rights in Cambodia” (p. 98), but these stories that are told omit other potential stories. The records not archived and the victims not documented create further silences in the archives. One form of narrative based on these records is their use as legal evidence in trials of former Khmer Rouge leaders. This transforms them “from records of oppression to records of accountability” (p. 106). As the basis for several documentary films, the mug shots also revive memories of the victims, enabling “narratives of redemption” (p. 109) and justice. Exhibits, books, and other publications displaying these haunting images likewise create a “secondary layer of witnessing” (p. 130) in which viewers become advocates for justice and accountability.

The final chapter, “The Making of Commodities,” follows less closely than the others what Trouillot terms “the moment of retrospective significance (the
making of history in the final instance).” Caswell acknowledges that Trouillot’s framework does not fit her analysis of the mug shots, since the Cambodians “are still grappling with historical production” (p. 10). In its place, she substitutes the growing use of survivor memoirs, tourist photos posed with survivors, and other souvenirs of the killing fields. The snapshots of tourists posing incongruously with survivors of genocide make the tourists not just “secondary witnesses to past human rights violations” but also “primary witnesses to the current poverty of the survivors” (p. 140). This links genocide to current economic injustice. Since the survivors initiate these posed snapshots with tourists, Caswell argues, “the survivors are taking control of the Tuol Sleng narrative” (p. 156).

In her conclusion, Caswell explores “The Archival Performance of Human Rights and the Ethics of Looking.” The Tuol Sleng mug shots and other records of oppression, she states, “were not neutral by-products of activity (as classical Western archival theory would posit) but an integral part of that activity; they made the incarceration, torture, and murder possible” (p. 158). As stakeholders in the “community of records” surrounding the mug shots, these victims—as well as their descendants, archivists, and museum professionals, and those who look at the images and repurpose them—all form part of the provenance of the records. Reflecting on the role of archivists, Caswell concludes: “The creation of archives documenting violence in a transitional society is intimately linked to human rights activism and is inherently an expression of political power” (p. 159). Archivists thus participate in performing human rights. All who view the mug shots of genocide victims must consider the ethical implications of their participation.

In presenting this multilayered analysis of the Cambodian photographic record, Caswell writes with the passion and commitment of a participant in the experiences she describes. This is engaged argument at its best. Her first visit to Tuol Sleng as a tourist in 2005 transformed both Caswell’s personal commitment to human rights and her career as an archivist. Subsequent research trips to Cambodia shaped her doctoral dissertation and this book. Although she presents most of her account of these records in a professional analytical voice, at times she also employs the first-person “I was there” perspective. Far from detracting from the neutral academic distancing, this personal testimony both adds layers of emotion to her story and illustrates the impossibility of maintaining neutrality in the face of unspeakable horror.

In the conclusion, Caswell addresses an important anomaly suggested in her introduction, which describes several alternative models for structuring her analysis. These include the records continuum model, the social life of records, and the concept of societal provenance. After framing the book using Trouillot’s model, she discusses only briefly its limitations. His model is firmly linear and sequential, with records serving as the “static raw material
for historical struggle.” The continuum model shows that records and history “are always in the process of becoming” and that archives are “always already sites of intense mediation” (p. 161). However, Trouillot’s model offers attention to “power, silencing, and marginalization” (p. 161). This explains her use of an inexact model, which better suits her purpose.

What sets Caswell apart from others who have written about Cambodia, however, is her archival studies analysis of the mug-shot images. “When we see them as records first and foremost,” she states, we focus on “the act of creation” and on the victims and their descendants” (p. 77). This records-centered approach “forces us to connect them to the violation of human rights that occurred in their creation and the performance of human rights that occurs in their use” (p. 162).

Caswell embraces the archives and social justice perspective pioneered by Verne Harris. She cites many of the authors who have developed and articulated concerns about colonized peoples, marginalized social groups, silenced voices, collective memory, identity formation, and related issues. One surprising omission is the transformative work of Terry Cook and Brien Brothman, who introduced archivists to postmodern theory. That said, Caswell herself advances the discourse significantly, providing the first book-length case study of the power of archives in support of accountability, social justice, and memory.

Archiving the Unspeakable presents a compelling and multilayered account of recordkeeping, memory, power, and archival silences. Its perspective needs to be heard, evaluated, and debated by archivists in all parts of the world. It doesn’t explain how to carry out archival functions, but it does address the more fundamental questions of why archives exist and how archivists contribute to our knowledge of society and the human beings with whom we share this fragile planet.

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Notes

1 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997). This work outlines the “four key moments” and provides a framework for Caswell’s work.
A medium cleaned for reuse, a palimpsest, retains a ghost image of the old content—whether the medium is parchment or a VHS tape. Likewise, ethnic identities are composed of layers, the old overlaid with the new. These layers may include membership in an ethnic group based on a shared cultural background as well as an externally imposed ethnic designation. The role archives play in preserving and acknowledging these layers is a dominant theme in this volume of nineteen essays. The well-written essays range from theoretical background on the concept of ethnicity and cultural memory to case studies of history preservation for ethnic communities.

Contributors to the volume are archivists, sociologists, ethnographers, political scientists, cultural anthropologists, and sociolinguists. Dominique Daniel and Amalia Levi are well suited to their role as editors due to the breadth of their scholarship. Between them, they hold degrees in American studies, archaeology, history, history of art, museum studies, and library and information studies from universities in the United States, France, Turkey, and Greece.

The authors provide a multidisciplinary perspective that allows archivists to “appropriate the memory tools already developed by other disciplines and add them to their existing archival toolboxes,” says Jeanette Bastian in the opening essay (p. 15). The volume will be valuable to scholars and students in cultural heritage fields, particularly to those studying archives and ethnicity in the United States and Canada. Mark Stolarik’s essay on the early years of ethnic archiving and the tensions between museum and archival collecting is appropriate for museum studies programs. Benjamin Alexander’s chapter on palimpsests and Freedom Summer, one of this volume’s strongest essays, should be considered for inclusion in undergraduate historical methodology courses as well as archival appraisal courses. Immigration studies courses will find Joel Wurl’s discussion of emigration from the United States to be thought provoking.

Why form an ethnic archives? “Archives are mobilized to discover and recover evidence that has been lost or denied to communities seeking memory,” according to Margaret Hedstrom (p. 228). The lack of a repository that documented Arab American history and culture led to the creation of the Arab American National Museum, according to Andrew McBride and Elizabeth Skene. Authors Beatrice Skokan, Yolanda Cooper, and Jameatris Rimkus find that a lack of materials available for curriculum on the black experience in south Florida
led to the creation of the Collaborative Archives from the African Diaspora. Mark Stolarik shows that the dearth of materials on ethnic groups in Minnesota’s Iron Range led to the creation of the Immigration History Research Center, which influenced ethnic archives throughout the country.

Ethnic archives have an evolving role in reuniting communities. When the Leo Baeck Institute was formed in 1955, it was one of few repositories that collected materials related to German-speaking Jews and served to connect Jews around the world. Today, the Internet connects the Jewish diaspora. Mollie Hazelton and Frank Mecklenburg discuss the creation of the Leo Baeck Institute’s digital archives to continue serving the diaspora. The institute is also adjusting its mission to reflect changes in the identity of “German Jews”; today 90 percent of all Jews in Germany are Russian speaking. Anduin Wilhide and Mustafa Jumale discuss the role of technology in stitching together a diaspora, but in the case of Somali youth digital projects, they caution that technology can also reveal cracks in the diaspora. Konrad Ng, in discussing Asian American digital life, sees that online life is as real as physical reality. Pedro Oriarzabal raises concerns about a diaspora relying on cyberspace to hold its cultural memories. He supplies the apt comparison of the ethereal nature of the Internet to Basque shepherds’ social networking through tree carving.

Archives can strip away or create layers of truth in an ethnic community’s history. Benjamin Alexander sees the “process of remembering, forgetting, and re-remembering” (p. 188) in palimpsests as a metaphor for archival reappraisal and a renewed emphasis on the context of record creation. Understanding the closed society in which Freedom Summer records were created is necessary to peel back layers of obfuscation. Noah Lenstra, in discussing community tensions around African American archives in Champaign-Urbana, posits that “ethnic communities also use archives to project, perform and contest particular visions of what constitutes an ethnic community” (p. 228). Several of the volume’s Canadian authors discuss the ramifications of their government’s creation of homogenized ethnic identities from diverse populations. For Raphael Costa, Emanuel da Silva, Gilberto Fernandes, Susan Miranda, and Anna Onge, the solution to the government’s homogenized documentation of Portuguese Canadians was to create a community archives that would provide a more diversified narrative. In response to demands for an apology for eighty years of restrictive and punitive policies toward all Asian immigrants to Canada, officially identified as “Chinese Canadians,” the government instead provided one-time funding for a digital archives. Despite use of the term “community based” (p. 213), government control of the program has stymied efforts by the Chinese Canadian community to provide a broader narrative of its history.

It follows from Bak and Chen’s critique that successful ethnic archives require a long-term strategy for community participation in decisions about
how their histories are preserved. Michelle Caswell finds that independence from established repositories is necessary to retain community control of ethnic archives. For Krisztina Laszlo, building trust with the community is necessary for repositories in language preservation projects. Patricia Silver, in looking at Puerto Rican–centered collections at a Puerto Rican archives versus a primarily non–Puerto Rican archives, sees strengths in both. Kent Randell concludes a mix of types of institutions is needed to document ethnic communities.

Cautionary tales of past missteps in ethnic collecting are relayed by Jennifer O’Neal and Rabia Gibbs. O’Neal, in discussing the development of the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, emphasizes the need to put archival practice in a cultural and historic context. Gibbs’s essay, “If We Knew Then What We Know Now: Applying Lessons from Past Eras of Ethnic Archiving Collection Development to Contemporary Practice,” is particularly compelling because its young author passed away earlier this year.

Authors including McBride and Skene recount creating ethnic archives out of new cloth. Archives organizers often had no model, no palimpsests, and frequently no archivists to guide them. Although most authors voice a desire on the part of archives creators to make their stories more broadly known, only the essay by Skokan, Cooper, and Rimkus mentions a plan to use the content in education. While space considerations could account for the gap, the needs of users is not a dominant theme in the volume. Caswell notes that while community archives can flourish without archivists, the profession should lend assistance.

Several recently published books that include essays on the intersection of ethnicity and cultural heritage professionals are potential “companions” to this text. For example, *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory*, edited by Jeannette Bastian and Ben Alexander, is a rich resource that includes essays on ethnic-centered community archives and discusses how the United Kingdom supports community archives through short-term projects and best practice models. Also worth considering are *Through the Archival Looking Glass: A Reader on Diversity and Inclusion*, edited by Mary A. Caldera and Kathryn M. Neal, which discusses ethnic archives and other diversity issues, and *Ethnic Historians and the Mainstream: Shaping America’s Immigration Story*, by Alan M. Kraut and David A. Gerber, composed of essays by historians discussing how their ethnic identities shaped their research.

Amid the themes of multilayered identities, community control, and diversification of group narratives, *Identity Palimpsests* also reveals an opportunity for archivists to provide support for ethnic archives to ensure that their carefully collected stories will be taught to future generations.

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1 Jeannette A. Bastian and Ben Alexander, Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory (London: Facet, 2009).

Keeping Time: An Introduction to Archival Best Practices for Music Librarians


This is the first publication in book form to address the practice of music archives in the United States. The book is part of the Music Library Association’s Basic Manual Series, which aims to “assist the librarian in dealing with various aspects of the organization, administration and use of a music library.”

Lisa Hooper is the head music and media librarian at Tulane University in New Orleans and has published in music librarianship journals on issues pertaining to sound recording collections, audio course reserves, and document delivery services in music libraries. Donald C. Force is an assistant professor at the School of Information Studies, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and has published on records management practices and litigation processes. He has also been involved in international research projects, including the International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems (InterPARES) and Digital Records Forensics projects at the University of British Columbia.

The book was written “to assist librarians with the organization and care of archival music materials.” It is an ambitious project, intended to cover all possible aspects of the archival enterprise in 144 pages. The authors aim to serve the needs of music librarians and students, as well as archivists with no music background who are faced with working with music materials. The book is divided into eight chapters: “History and Development of Archives, Archival Practice, and Archival Theory”; “Acquisition and Accessioning”; “Appraisal”; “Arrangement”; “Description”; “Preservation”; “Digitization”; and “Funding.”

In the interest of focusing on my appraisal of this work, I have chosen not to expand upon each chapter as the content should be familiar to The American Archivist readership. For nonarchivists, each chapter provides a brief overview of the topic at hand and then delves into a discussion of best practices to achieve the desired result, be it creating a finding aid or removing a staple. The
organization of the information makes the chapters easy to navigate, and the authors give advice and list potential steps to take in the course of the work that needs to be done. The book is successful in describing the broad range of activities an archivist must perform to preserve and provide access to our cultural heritage, and the reader should be impressed by the broad range of work that every collection or record group requires, even if one chooses to apply minimal processing standards.

The book doesn’t hold up well as an introductory work that seeks to equip music librarians facing imminent archival acquisitions with a solid overview of basic archival concepts. The authors pick and choose what concepts to expand on and deliberately leave out such crucial matters as the meaning and implication of enduring value when discussing archival appraisal, or the importance of maintaining original order as a vital component of archival arrangement. More specifically, the authors suggest, “[i]f there is an apparent order supplied by the creator, consider documenting this order as evidence of the creator’s practices. Once this is accomplished, it is time to set about arranging the materials in a logical order, providing the greatest level of physical and intellectual access to the collection” (p. 26). Ignoring respect for original order when arranging and describing a collection is a questionable move, if one’s purpose is to provide an introduction to the most essential tenets of archival practice. Moreover, the authors backpedal on their advice toward the end of their discussion on arrangement by advising that “even though two adjacent papers in an original folder may not seem to have anything in common, there may be an existing relationship that only a researcher with extensive subject knowledge will recognize. If the relationship between documents is broken through arrangement, a researcher may never be able to make the connection” (p. 31).

In addition, the book could have shone a light on a truly unresolved matter in archival practice: the need for meaningful and coherent description of music materials. Instead, the authors recommend that readers put their inner music librarians aside and not arrange music scores and manuscripts by genre or thematic catalog number (p. 29).

Archival appraisal is brought forward as a separate chapter, where the authors take an overly detailed approach to determining a collection’s value. The discussion centers on weeding materials at or before the arrangement and description stages, advising examination of items and identification of duplicates, photocopies, published materials, information that needs to be redacted or deaccessioned (i.e., Social Security numbers, student records, etc.), and preservation concerns. All of these are valid steps that need to be taken during the arrangement stages, but it is also important to inform readers of the impact of archival appraisal on the historical record. The chapter needs at least a brief introduction to the concept of enduring value and the importance of recognizing
the materials’ evidential, informational, and intrinsic values. These documents were not created in a vacuum, and it is important to transmit this idea to whomever is relying on this manual for guidance in navigating the acquisition of a collection and preserving its content for future access.

The book is a useful tool for taking a novice archivist through the motions of the archival enterprise. The sections dedicated to the importance of securing a clear deed of gift from a donor, documenting collection information in pre-acquisition stages, and tips for packing fragile materials for transportation are clear and informative. The section devoted to reading room best practices is spot on, especially since it is located within the chapter on preservation, which is a very different approach to access than usually applied in the traditional academic music library. The book also has a list of suggested readings for those who want to delve deeper into archives management and preservation issues. These are important article and book-length works in the literature, but the authors missed works that address the specific access and preservation needs of music materials, especially works that bridge the practice gap between archives and librarianship.

It is important to note that expanding on seemingly “obscure” archival practices will move the profession into the future. While not all archivists and librarians can engage in extensive professional development to meet every need of every collection, publications like this one open the door to more responsible stewardship of our cultural heritage.

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Notes

Rare Books and Special Collections


Many of us in the field of rare books and special collections have often reached for a quick reference volume on our shelves, hoping to find both succinct and reliable content such as a description of a deed of gift, advice on how to deal with security concerns, or an explanation of a particularly obscure bibliographic term. Unfortunately, there always seems to be an empty space on that shelf. Sidney E. Berger’s comprehensive work, Rare Books and Special Collections, seeks to fill that void and is largely successful in doing so. Practitioners in the rare books and special collections field will find this an extremely useful go-to volume, as it will help save time spent in searching the field’s exhaustive, but sometimes dated, published literature, scanning online resources, and/or surveying peers at other institutions for best practices. Though not the book’s primary audience, archivists will also find much of practical use in this volume, especially those who may have been trained as traditional archivists but are now in administrative positions overseeing combined special collections and archives departments. The author also identifies booksellers, historians and other scholars, and collectors, as his target audiences. Students in rare books and special collections librarianship courses are also potential readers.

The author’s credentials in the field are many and varied. Berger is currently the Ann C. Pingree Director of the Phillips Library at the Peabody Essex. His previous positions include head of Special Collections at the University of California, Riverside, and curator of printed books and curator of manuscripts at the American Antiquarian Society. He has also served as a faculty member in the Communications and English Departments and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College and as an adjunct professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He has lectured and published widely and is coproprietor of the Doe Press, which hand prints books of poetry and other works. Sidebars throughout the extensive text feature stories from his own and others’ experiences in the field. Alternating between entertaining and cautionary, these anecdotes liven up what might have been a relatively dry text.

In his own words, Berger has written an “overview of the realm,” essentially creating a textbook for the field, with the basic premise that “a person working in rare books and special collections must know a certain body of information.” He also states that one of his goals is to correct common inaccuracies about how we as a profession talk about aspects of the history of the book and printing.
The volume attempts to be comprehensive, but not definitive, and encompasses only the basic foundational knowledge that one needs to know about the profession to do one’s job in an informed and competent manner. Organized into fourteen chapters, with lengthy notes and works cited at the end of each chapter, and seven substantial appendixes, the volume begins with an overview of what normally constitutes a rare books and special collections department and its primary constituencies, as well as sections discussing the meaning of the terms rare and scarce, the importance of first editions, and the role of professional organizations, such as the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS), and continuing education in shaping today’s professional. The importance of maintaining collegial and productive relationships with others within the department’s institution and beyond is highlighted here and throughout the text. This cannot be overemphasized, considering how many institutions have started paying much closer attention to their special collections, to what makes their holdings unique, and to how those collections can be used to demonstrate the institution’s value on campus and beyond. Chapter 2 delves deeper into how a special collections department is managed and how it functions, examining the diversity of functions within a department, all of which should support the ultimate goal of providing access to the materials. Recommendations range from high-level, strategic exercises like the creation of a collection development policy and the cultivation of relationships with book dealers, to the more mundane, like the expeditious shelving of books and the creation of loan and patron policies. He also introduces the critical functions of cataloging and processing without going into too much detail. Berger threads a discussion of the ethical issues that should be considered when undertaking many of these departmental functions, from deaccessioning to charging fees for services, throughout this section and the text as a whole. Appendix 6 includes a practical and convenient description of all of the major departmental forms that can be found in the special collections setting.

Archivists will be curious about this author’s take on archives and their functions in relation to and independent from the rare books and special collections world. Referring to archives as a close relative to rare books and special collections, Berger spends time describing the institutional archives and emphasizes the differences in training between archivists and record managers and rare book and special collections librarians, focusing on how they conduct acquisitions, collection arrangement, and outreach, as well as on their professional service and continuing education opportunities. He is also quick to direct his readers to Laura A. Millar’s Archives: Principles and Practices published in 2010 by the same publisher for a “complete course” in managing an archives, which in his opinion are often misunderstood, underfunded, and understaffed. Berger is effective in describing how collection practices, especially selection of
materials, can sometimes overlap in both areas. He also takes a strong position on the pitfalls of having the two departments administered by the same person, as librarians trained in the rare books and special collections fields placed in charge of archives often “look the other way” and pay little or no attention to archives and vice versa.

In chapter 4, by far the longest chapter in the volume, Berger tackles those canonized inaccuracies about the history of the book and printing that partially motivated this volume and writes an impressive and detailed account of the varied physical materials in rare books and special collections. Those librarians used to consulting Carter and Gaskell for their bibliography questions can add this resource to their list. Berger is clearly passionate about this topic and could go on for pages about early writing surfaces, the history of papermaking, the intricacies of printing types, illustration processes, bookbinding, and the various parts of a book. Especially pleasing and important to note is the inclusion of numerous pages of glossaries for some of these topics, including type, bookbinding, and the general parts of a book. A later chapter expands this discussion of the book as physical artifact into a discussion of the various disciplines within bibliography. It is obvious that the author feels that the knowledge and skills needed to understand the subtleties of enumerative, historical, descriptive, and textual bibliography are being lost in the profession today. This is indeed a valid point, but the chapter would benefit from a shorter section on textual editing and a longer section on the basics of paleography for librarians, especially for those cataloging rare materials or interpreting provenance evidence.

Returning to the management of a rare books and special collections department, Berger covers the physical operations of a department, including advice on dealing with departments whose physical space has evolved, sometimes problematically, alongside its collections and the department’s needs, presenting solutions for reconfiguring old spaces. Those librarians fortunate enough to actively participate in the renovation of their spaces or the design of a brand new space would also benefit from Berger’s expertise in this area, especially the checklists he shares for project planning. The author readily draws upon years of experience in other areas as well: fund-raising and donor relations in a discussion of the benefits and pitfalls of working with administrators, development officers, and donors, and security and legal issues, including those dealing with donors, appraisal, and personnel. The author stresses the importance of designating a library security officer, of being aware of security standards, of the importance of marking books (though he doesn’t go into much detail about marking manuscripts or other materials in the department), and of reporting theft when it happens. The requisite section on copyright in the digital age is also included.
Having attended a discussion at this year’s RBMS Preconference where participants lamented the lack of knowledge of the antiquarian book trade among younger professionals, it is not surprising that Berger also stresses the importance of understanding the book trade to better perform collection management responsibilities. Chapter 10 covers strategies for collection building, including negotiating with booksellers, understanding how dealers determine selling prices, purchasing materials on the Web, and buying at auction. The section on buying items at auction is a little long considering how uncommon this practice is outside of the premiere institutions in the field. A rather cursory section on outreach, including exhibitions, publications, public programming, and social media, follows this chapter. Relatively absent from the outreach chapter and this volume is a conversation about the growing significance of instruction in the special collections environment (it is addressed in one paragraph in this section and less than a page in a closing chapter). While Berger understandably cannot provide an in-depth treatment of every subject he touches on in this volume (nor does he claim to do so), this oversight is somewhat disappointing considering so many special collections departments are prioritizing the integration of rare books and special collections materials into undergraduate classrooms.

In one of the last chapters, the author provides an instructive overview of activities surrounding preservation, conservation, and disaster planning in the field. He excels at describing a variety of concerns in these areas, such as care and handling (i.e., the “white-glove controversy”), environmental controls, encapsulation, preservation and conservation treatment, and digital preservation, without relying too much on scientific or technical jargon. The last two chapters outline the current trends in special collections departments and provide an opportunity to include content that didn’t naturally fit elsewhere in the volume, including discussions of how digital technology and digitization have made linking researchers with information easier, but the age-old tensions of preservation and access remain. Other trending topics included in the closing chapters are open access, assessment, linked open data, RDA (resource description and access), and digital humanities. Berger makes no obviously provocative statements about any of these topics, and this seems appropriate for a text that is meant to be a general summary of the subjects of interest to the rare books and special collections professional today. The following passage best illustrates Berger’s perspective on the current state of the field:

Those dealing with rare books today have seen immense change in their worlds in some areas of action, while other areas remain fixed and seemingly immutable. One reason for this is that their basic missions, goals, and responsibilities have not changed, and many old methods of operation cannot be improved upon. . . . Another reason for this continuity in practice is that the
basics of research are still the same: scholars need information and seek it in the traditional places. Knowing this, librarians and archivists make it available by employing all tools at their disposal. (p. 449)

Overall, *Rare Books and Special Collections* is most successful as a reference text of foundational knowledge of the history of the book and printing and as an entry point for best practices in the management of special collections departments. It is also decidedly rare-book-centric in its treatment, and the length of each section sometimes seems arbitrary (or at the very least dependent upon the interests and experiences of the author). Nevertheless, Berger excels at presenting a streamlined treatment of an impressive number of topics, drawing on a variety of print and online resources in addition to his own experiences.

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Notes