Book Reviews

Carson, Bryan M. *The Law of Libraries and Archives*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2007. 395p. alk. paper, $65 (ISBN 081085189). LC 2006-20318.

Picture this scenario: your library has been offered the chance to buy a valuable first edition from the collection of another library. The sale price is $100,000. You decline—graciously, of course. A week later, however, you learn from a confidential source that the book's actual worth is $1.5 million—much more than the seller was asking of you. On the basis of this new information, you call up the other library and say that you've changed your mind and have now decided to buy the aforesaid book. Is that library obliged to sell it to you? Or, what if, hypothetically, you had accepted the original offer and then the other library, discovering the true value of the edition, had refused to go through with the agreed-upon sale? Does your library have a legal claim? What are the other library's legal obligations?

Chances are, not many librarians will encounter this kind of problem. The scenarios that are likely to occur in libraries where the majority of us work are of a much more mundane sort. Take, for example, the roofing company that tells you, on the day they are to begin replacing the leaky roof of your library, that they will be too busy to do the work, as promised. Your library is forced to find another contractor who can't begin work until February. Sadly, in January, the roof leaks worse than ever and water runs into the shelves, ruining a particular collection of books. Are you entitled to sue the first roofing company that refused to do the work? If so, what kind of money could you expect to collect if you won?

The above examples, from Bryan M. Carson's *The Law of Library and Archives*, illustrate the types of issues that have legal consequences for a library. This book, in addition to making splendid reading, is an important reminder that there is so much more to the legal universe surrounding libraries and archives than we imagine. Some of our colleagues, for example, seem to be under the illusion that matters of copyright law are the only ones a librarian needs to be familiar with: they take courses to find out how they and their patrons stand with respect to photocopiers, interlibrary loans, Web sites, and so on. Yet these same professional librarians know virtually nothing about the rest of the legal landscape within which libraries operate on a day-to-day basis. Contract law applies to our interactions with vendors as well as builders. We formally sign many contracts in the course of a given period—but we may also be forming other contracts verbally whether we know it or not. So, what exactly are the basic elements of a contract? How easy is it to actually form a contract? And, just as important, how easy is it to get out of one?

But our legal involvement doesn't stop there. Employment law, for instance, covers the various issues that arise in our interactions with the people who work in our institutions. Most of us have a vague knowledge of the rights and obligations of employees and employers within a unionized or a nonunionized setting. Rules governing hiring and firing are certainly complex. But we tend to know little or nothing about what constitutes an agency relationship. In a court of law, how we act or don't act may spell the difference between an employee's being viewed as a full-blown employee, rather than someone toward whom we may have different obligations (for example, an independent contractor).

Much has been written in the news lately about the laws governing Internet usage, search warrants, and other potential threats to library records and privacy, as

well as issues of information malpractice. These are all areas in which librarians, ideally, ought to be well versed. In the best of all possible worlds, library schools would teach these subjects and we would turn to such volumes as *The Law of Libraries and Archives* as a refresher rather than our primary resource. Since, however, they generally don't, reading a book like this should be mandatory for anyone who works in a library and who wishes to avoid the legal catastrophes that may strike a library and its well-meaning staff, simply because we didn't know any better.

A final comment on Bryan Carson, the author of *The Law of Libraries and Archives*: he is, not surprisingly, a lawyer as well as a librarian. As a member of both the Ohio and Kentucky bars, he has written extensively on the law as it pertains to libraries. His subject matter, however, is American law, which doesn't always apply to institutions located outside of the United States. That said, the law in most Commonwealth countries is often similar enough that non-American libraries really ought to obtain a copy. As the old adage goes, "ignorance of the law is no excuse"; that saying surely applies doubly to a profession that claims all knowledge for its stock-in-trade.—*Nancy McCormack, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.*

Huvila, Isto. *The Ecology of Information Work: A Case Study of Bridging Archaeological Work and Virtual Reality Based Knowledge Organization*. Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2006. 385p. alk. paper (ISBN: 9517653360).

As both an archaeologist and a librarian, I was very excited when asked to consider writing a review of this book; detailed analyses of information behaviors among archaeologists are few and far between. The inclusion of virtual realities in the title also attracted my attention. However, I soon discovered that writing a useful review of this book would be a significant challenge. The first sign of difficulty arose when I learned from the preface that this study originated as Huvila's 2006 doctoral

dissertation at Åbo Akademi University in Finland. Dissertations are seldom, if ever, appropriate for a broader audience without significant reworking. Unfortunately, it appears that this book is merely a repackaging of the dissertation in its original form; there is no indication that it was revised with a broader audience in mind. Readers are forced to deal with the typical "tell them what you're going to tell them, then tell them, and then tell them what you told them" approach that might turn off even the most sophisticated reader.

This difficulty is compounded by significant semantic and syntactic problems on nearly every page. The language is often only superficially recognizable as English. These problems include awkward sentence structure; inappropriate use of commas; lack of agreement between subject and object; excessive use of the direct article; and "creative" word use. At first, I suspected that these problems might be a result of translation from Finnish to English. However, a search of the Åbo Akademi library's online catalog indicates that English was the original language of this dissertation. Apparently, the author and publisher either chose not to have the manuscript reviewed by an English-speaking editor, or the English assistance they received was less than adequate. In its present form, the language difficulties make an already complex and difficult work sometimes nearly impossible to understand. Although it might be partially my fault, I found that in many cases I had to read many sections two or three times before becoming somewhat confident that I understood what Huvila was trying to say. In spite of these difficulties, I believe that there is enough valuable material in this book to justify a brief chapter-by-chapter commentary.

As with almost all dissertations, the first chapter summarizes the goals, methodology, and structure of the study. Based on this summary, it seems that Huvila's primary goal was to develop a qualitative theory of information work in archaeology and explore how this theory might be