

Book Reviews



Cox, Richard J. *Closing an Era: Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pr. (*New Directions in Information Management*, no. 35), 2000. 252p. \$65, alk. paper (ISBN 0-313-31331-8). LC 99-089071.

In this age of “information as you need it” and virtual communities created in the changing landscape of the Internet, archivists and records managers concern for the record and its long-term preservation, may seem passé. To the public, the records manager and the archivist are imagined operating in dusty basements with boxes of old papers, useful only to the academic scholar or the genealogist. Richard Cox, in his book *Closing an Era: Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management*, presents a compelling case for the profession through a historical recounting of the role of records in society and the development of efforts to manage them.

Whether in the form of a digital expression or a stone tablet, the record, as Cox explains, should be preserved for reasons of accountability, evidence, and memory. Although advances in technology and communications have collapsed time and place and have certainly caused changes in work methods, the essence of the archivist’s and records manager’s work is still based on this historical foundation.

Beginning with a historical survey, Cox explores the changes brought about in society and in the archivist’s profession as a result of the digital age. He examines recent issues related to records management and archives, such as the court controversy over White House e-mail and what is and is not to be considered a “record.” Cox also reviews the argument between documentary editors and proponents of electronic records management that resulted from the National Histori-

cal Publications and Records Commission’s (NHPRC) setting of funding priorities. He laments that the profession is splintering into archivists and records managers rather than working together as records professionals. Finally, Cox describes educational programs for the archivist and discusses his views on what should be the best education for the archivist and the records manager.

Closing an Era is a carefully documented review of the historical foundations of the archival profession and an exploration of the changes occurring in the profession as the result of electronic records and communication through the Internet. It will be an extremely useful text for introducing students to the history and theoretical basis of the profession as well as to the current issues involved in working in a digital environment. Unfortunately, the book is printed in a very small font with faint print that makes reading difficult and the inclusion of exhaustive documentation can be tedious going, but the ideas presented make reading the book worth the effort.

Richard Cox is a professor at the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Information Science. His teaching experience combined with his past work as an archivist and editor of the journal of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) gives him a broad perspective for understanding the profession. With this book, Cox has made a significant contribution to the body of publications focusing on the records profession; for archivists, librarians, and records managers, *Closing an Era* is a book worth reading.—Norma Myers, *East Tennessee State University*.

Kaser, David. *Just Lucky, I Guess: My Adventurous Life as a Hoosier Librarian.* New York: Vantage Pr., 2000. 231p. \$13.95, pa-

per (ISBN: 0-533-13243-6). LC 99-94965. There cannot be many librarians who have had a wider range of experience, geographically and professionally, than David Kaser. This memoir is a very readable account of, first, his years growing up—in Indiana, then in the military here, in Canada, and in World War Two's European Theater—and second, the latter half of the book, his career in librarianship.

His library career, which began as a student assistant at Houghton College, gave way to a few years of graduate work in English and then resumed at the University of Michigan's Library School for a Ph.D. in 1956, with a brief interruption as serials librarian at Ball State University. His "life's plan" as a professional—to spend twenty years in library operations and then teach—worked out almost perfectly. From 1956 to 1960, he was at Washington University, first as acquisitions librarian and then as assistant director for technical services. From 1960 to 1968, he served as director of The Joint University Libraries (now Vanderbilt University), after which he was director of Cornell University Libraries (1968–1973). He then concluded his academic career as a very successful professor at Indiana University's Graduate Library School from which he retired in 1991.

Four years later, he retired from his consulting role. He had been doing library consulting, especially on buildings, for many years. By 1995, he had visited more than eight hundred colleges and universities, worked on some two hundred twenty academic libraries in thirty-five states and seven foreign countries. (Given such experience, there is disappointingly little about the role of a building consultant.) All of that entailed crossing the Atlantic or Pacific oceans sixty times and traveling 646,300 miles by plane. Impressive? To be sure, but there is more. He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1967 and by 1999 had published eight books; one hundred fifty-four papers, articles, or notes; and a hundred forty-six book reviews. From 1963 to 1969, he served as editor of *College & Research Li-*

braries, from 1965 to 1969 and again from 1975 to 1979 as an ALA Councilor, and in 1978–1979 as president of ACRL.

How on earth did he manage all this? (And I have omitted a number of other professional responsibilities.) One imagines a human dynamo, brimming with nervous energy. On the contrary, although David is energetic, he is also relaxed, sociable, and invariably in good humor. Was he just lucky, as he frequently claims? There was a bit of luck, perhaps, but no more than most of us have. The answer may be gathered from the wholesome upbringing recounted in the book's first half. His father and mother, his chores, his schooling, his religion, his jobs, and, surprisingly to me, his military experience all helped shape his interests, work habits, and aspects of his personality.

All this is related in a personal, at times almost folksy, style. (That may excuse the lack of an index.) And although the style makes the book so readable and David so endearing, it does not provide much insight into his inner self. It is personal, but not at all intimate. One does not expect the candor or confessions of a Saint Augustine or a Marcel Proust, but one does miss meaningful reflections. At one point, for example, he notes that the army was "and still is, a very important influence on my life," but how and why is never made clear. Or his love of travel. He visited many countries, and the visits and the persons encountered are interestingly related, but other than satisfying his "wanderlust," which he felt even as a youngster, we do not have a sense of what those visits meant to him.

Over the years, I've chatted with Dave, both socially and professionally, and as anyone reading this memoir can infer, he is a very modest person with a delightful sense of humor, unfailingly upbeat and easy to talk with. Although I have long admired his writings and his accomplishments, I particularly have been struck by the esteem and affection in which he was held by his students, not only while he was actively teaching, but even since then. Is that a result of being "Just lucky?" No,

the title is mistaken. A little bit of luck, perhaps, but it was a combination of personality, intelligence, hard work, and character that made him such a successful teacher and permitted him to do all the other things he did and did so well. Readers of this book who have not known David will regret not having met him; those who have known him will appreciate him all the more.—*Evan Ira Farber, Earlham College (Emeritus).*

McMullen, Haynes. *American Libraries before 1876.* Foreword by Kenneth E. Carpenter. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pr. (*Beta Phi Mu Monograph*, no. 6), 2000. 179p. \$62.50, alk. paper (ISBN 031331277x). LC 99-043164.

Here is a work of extraordinary effort. *American Libraries before 1876* presents a compilation of descriptive statistics concerning the history of libraries in early America. Presumably, this work represents Haynes McMullen's lifetime endeavor. His interest began early in his career when he came across a thirty-page publication issued by the U.S. Bureau of Education in 1876. It was an extensive table identifying American libraries containing at least three hundred volumes. By his own confession, the author tells us that "many years ago I fell in love with [that] table."

Over the next fifty years, McMullen went on to collect information antecedent to that offered in the table. In *American Libraries before 1876*, he is careful to define his terms and explain his charts and graphics, giving readers access to detailed information about libraries in the colonies, and later in the young republic, including their numbers, characteristics, founders, and types of collection. Each of these categories is treated in a separate chapter. At the book's end, there are a useful glossary, a selected bibliography, and an index that belies the detail found in some one hundred fifty pages of categorization.

The statistics are interesting, but the book's organization is not user-friendly; would that it had been arranged more

handily. Although preliminary pages listing illustrations (nineteen tables and six figures) and closing appendices might make for a quick-reference tool, the textual presentation is of less certain merit.

McMullen asks interesting historical questions, for example, "Why did [Americans] establish so many [libraries]?" His less interesting answers include: because they wanted them, because the colonists were "bookish," because "Benjamin Franklin and his friends set an example," because business was good or times were prosperous, but not because of density of population. Later, he asks, "Why were the new kinds of libraries appearing in the years before 1875 ... being established in the older parts of the country?" Again, his response is unsatisfying. To the latter, he says, "The answer is clear: Americans in the older parts ... continued to introduce new kinds of libraries ... and people in the newer states made little or no contribution to the variety of libraries that were available." Included in the reasons for the popularity of the social library is "as fiction increased in popularity in the early nineteenth century, these libraries became better able to meet the *emotional needs* of their users. In most social libraries, novels seems [sic] to have made up only a small part of the collection; however, some records indicate that fiction circulated heavily" (italics mine).

It is this generalized speculation and conjecture that leaves the publication wanting. Had it been a collection of graphs and charts with the current text largely in explanatory footnote, the book could function well as a reference tool. But as a series of unanswered inquiries, it might be most useful for library school history courses and for doctoral students seeking dissertation topics.

This book clearly involved enormous effort, the painstaking collection of data, and an undeniable joy in discovery. The chapter notes attest to the author's familiarity with historical scholarship in numerous fields, not the least of which is library history. Library schools would do