

Appraisal and Acquisition: Innovative Practices for Archives and Special Collections.

Edited by Kate Theimer. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015. 198 pp. Index. Softcover. \$55.00.

What a relief it is when an acquisition decision is straightforward and simple, when an entire collection fits within the collecting scope and the materials can be managed within existing accession and processing workflows. Alas, archivists more often than not must make appraisal decisions on collections that present privacy, format, and access challenges. *Appraisal and Acquisition: Innovative Practices for Archives and Special Collections*, Kate Theimer's compilation of case studies penned by practicing archivists, offers a variety of approaches to challenging appraisal situations. This is one of six publications in Theimer's *Innovative Practices* series.

The case studies in *Appraisal and Acquisition* present a wide variety of challenging appraisal situations and practical solutions. The authors provide thorough yet concise discussions of their strategies and workflows, including unanticipated complications and changes made midproject. Some chapters focus on issues related to privacy and sensitive information, while others focus on format-based challenges, especially in regard to digital files. Innovative ideas like processing as a means of appraisal and embedded appraisal are covered in addition to the challenge of prioritizing materials for acquisition. Reappraisal and deaccessioning are also addressed. All of the chapters in some way touch upon the balance of using resources to meet both institutional and user needs (e.g., the cost of housing materials versus providing access to materials of significant research value).

Each case study provides a summary of the materials in question; a review of the project planning, implementation, and results; a discussion of the lessons learned; and a conclusion. The authors excel at divulging their reasoning, and even hesitation in some cases, in accessioning a particular set of materials. The structure of the chapters creates a fluid narrative and facilitates the comparison of strategies and processes.

The authors mostly come from the academic special collections and archives perspective; however, historical societies and government archives are also represented. Some are subject specialists while others are more process or format oriented. Their findings are presented so that the strategies and ideas can be easily translated to other settings and parallel situations. This aspect in particular makes *Appraisal and Acquisition* a valuable resource.

As Theimer mentions in her introduction, "Archival functions and processes are interrelated and don't always fit neatly into compartments" (p. viii). Therefore, this publication on appraisal spills over into other equally challenging archival concerns. Morna Gerard's chapter on the Georgia LGBTQ Archives Project and Tiah Edmunson-Morton's summary of the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archives highlight the value of outreach and promotion efforts when establishing new collecting initiatives. Access challenges are addressed in Maurita Baldock's discussion of appraising the records of the Children's Aid Society and Will Hansen and Matthew Farrell's study of Duke University's acquisition of vintage computer equipment. Brad Houston's review of the University of

Wisconsin–Milwaukee electronic records acquisition program and Jane Gorjevsky and Dina Sokolova’s chapter on accessioning the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program records at Columbia University demonstrate the importance of working closely with record creators.

It goes without saying this publication is intended for archivists interested in other institutions’ innovative approaches to appraisal challenges. The case studies cover such a wide variety of challenges and solutions that the strategies can be applied at a range of levels, including small or low-budget cultural heritage institutions such as public libraries and historical societies. While this compilation is an excellent resource for practicing archivists, especially those faced with challenging appraisal and acquisition situations, it would also be a valuable addition to the classroom. The chapters are wonderfully set up to facilitate analysis, comparison, and discussion either independently or as a group. It would pair especially well with publications outlining fundamentals of appraisal.

There is little room for criticism of *Appraisal and Acquisition*. Some may expect the introduction to include a summary of fundamental or traditional appraisal and acquisition theories. Instead, Theimer uses the introduction to convey the intent of this publication as well as her larger *Innovative Practices* series. This approach sets the stage for the practical nature of the case studies in a refreshingly straightforward way.

This collection of case studies is a captivating read. Not only did Theimer curate a comprehensive assortment of essays on appraisal and acquisition, but she also managed to find several that are a real delight. Reading about hops and brewing, vintage computer systems, and SoftPoems (animated text poems) was an unexpected treat. The practical discussion of appraisal challenges brings the reader in the front door, yet the intriguing subject matter of the case studies invites the reader to take off his or her coat and stay awhile.

Sarah Doringhaus
Digital Archivist
University of Kentucky Libraries