

Managing Local Government Archives. By John H. Slate and Kaye Lanning Minchew. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. 186 pp. Index. Softcover. \$45.00.

This is a book that has been needed for a long time and, according to the authors, is the first devoted to local government archives (hereafter LGA) management. The authors each have over 30 years of experience with local government archives and historical societies, and the book has been 10 years in the making. The result is a lean and carefully constructed book with much helpful information. There are some 90,000 local government units in the United States, most of which have been producing records for a number of years but are often small, underfunded, and have few personnel. The physical conditions of and the intellectual control they have over their records are often inadequate, if not dangerous, for the materials. This book will be an excellent starting place for the people on the front lines and perhaps also for those who are considering a career in LGA management.

After a short introductory chapter on the history of local government and local government archives in the United States, the discussion moves to types of LGAs, which include not only municipal and county archives but also school districts, courts, and authorities of various types (e.g., transportation, irrigation, hospitals, and utilities). Some of these may be quasigovernmental, such as the Elephant Butte Irrigation District in south-central New Mexico, whose archives are held both at the authority and by the Archives and Special Collections Department of New Mexico State University. A most important chapter deals with the relationship between LGAs and records management programs. Even when these are administratively entangled, the records management program and its record retention schedules will determine what and when materials are made available to the LGA. Also included are chapters on establishing LGA programs, including one on physical considerations such as space, physical maintenance and preservation, shelving and archival containers, environmental and pest control, security, and nonprint materials; and intellectual considerations such as appraisal, accessioning, arrangement, description, electronic records, reference, outreach, and exhibits. The book also includes appendices containing sample forms and a bibliography. All of this information is well packaged, the format is not in step-by-step form, and there are no distracting sidebars. As a result, the expository sections make a pleasant change from much current textbook writing. The chapters on physical considerations and intellectual considerations are particularly good at compressing a great deal of information and presenting it in an easily understood manner.

Chapter 8 on LGA reference is typical. The chapter includes discussions of staffing, physical access to materials, security, types of researchers, the reference interview, access policies (including detailed descriptions of how to properly handle physical materials), reprography, access tools, and “documenting reference work.” The organization of the chapter takes one from the necessary foundation through the actual reference process to documentation. Not discussed is electronic reference through various chat or e-mail mechanisms. The section on access tools could be titled “using access tools,” for it discusses how public service staff use tools such as finding aids, calendars, or indices, rather than how such tools are constructed. The chapter on outreach and exhibits

includes useful sections on media relations and other forms of outreach, along with a warning that an overemphasis can be detrimental to the mission of the LGA. The section on exhibits is quite substantial, but should have included more information about online exhibitions, which can be an important supplement to physical exhibits. Even simply posting images of display cases and item labels online would be a useful addition to a physical exhibit. Otherwise, a tremendous amount of labor is expended on the exhibit with nothing but short-term benefit.

Assuming that there will be a second edition of the book, and there should be, a few suggestions might not be amiss. The section on electronic records should include discussions of procedures for the accessioning, curation, validation, security, and preservation of digital files, as well as ways to archive and manage the increasing amount of information available on local government websites. Much of this online information is removed from websites without concern for future archival and historical needs. Additionally, dynamic websites containing features such as databases and moving images, or those built using scripting languages, often do not lend themselves to being harvested by tools like the Wayback Machine. It would also be useful to include a discussion of personnel management and some good books on the subject, for even the lone arranger has to cope with being managed. All archival units are subject to the politics of bureaucratic organizations, but LGAs, like public libraries, are perhaps more likely to get in the cross fire of partisan politics than are archives in academic institutions. It would also be useful to include a section on career paths in a field that can range from the one-person shop to very large metropolitan archives. Similarly, ways of keeping up with current professional issues and developing a network of face-to-face and online colleagues would help the LGA archivist keep up with changes and deal with perplexing problems. The usefulness of professional memberships is that the contacts and information allow one to grow professionally even without attending conferences or participating in committee work. Finally, in a chapter that discusses description of archival materials, it is surprising to find no reference to *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, when both EAD and MARC are covered. Similarly, when discussing strategies for documenting reference work, a future edition of this book may want to include information about the new standard currently being created by the SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force on the Development of Standardized Statistical Measures for Policy Services in Archival Repositories and Special Collections Libraries, which was recently submitted to SAA and RBMS for approval. All of these points can be easily rectified when the book is revised for another edition. The authors have created a useful tool for a very large segment of the archival community, and they are to be commended.

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