

Participatory Heritage. Edited by Henriette Roued-Cunliffe and Andrea Copeland. London, UK: Facet Publishing, 2017. 213 pp. Index. \$75.00.

In *Participatory Heritage*, editors Henriette Roued-Cunliffe and Andrea Copeland have created a valuable resource for archivists and other cultural heritage professionals navigating the treacherous intersection between the institutionalized repository and the eager and well-intentioned amateurs gathering and disseminating focused historical content via storefronts, websites, or social media. Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland describe participatory heritage as “a space in which individuals engage in cultural activities outside of formal institutions for the purpose of knowledge sharing and co-creating with others” (p. xv). Presented in 19 essays organized into three sections (“Participants,” “Challenges,” and “Solutions”), their goal is to stimulate collaborations between practitioners of participatory heritage that “value shared expertise, dynamism, and bottom-up approaches” and institutions that “value formal credentials, guiding policies and top-down approaches” (p. xvi).

Section 1, “Participants,” focuses on participants in the preservation of cultural heritage. In the opening essay, JoyEllen Freeman analyzes the Flat Rock archives in Georgia. A locally inspired and directed institution that gathers and displays artifacts, memorabilia, visual imagery, material culture, and the documentary heritage of an African American community, the one-hundred-year-old structure has been preserved as remembered while also functioning as a community center and a heritage site. While this multiplicity of roles has compromised archival effectiveness by complicating security and preventing the installation of environmental controls, the Flat Rock archives is a prime example of “allow[ing] historically marginalized communities to speak, not be spoken for” (p. 8). Andrea Copeland’s essay, “The Bethel AME Church Archive: Partners and Participants,” recounts a cooperative scenario that will be familiar to many archivists in academic-affiliated repositories or state archives. Although Bethel AME Church, the oldest African Methodist Episcopal church in Indianapolis, Indiana, has been a pillar in the African American community, the church has also succumbed to urban “progress” and demographic change. The church’s archives, a collection of its history accumulated and curated by dedicated volunteers, has been a casualty of this process. The impending sale of the church building and the congregation’s relocation away from the city’s core brought the preservation of this historic collection into question. Copeland recounts the crafting of a sustainable future for the collection that involved a transition from it being an archives in the church to it becoming an archives of the Bethel AME Church facilitated by a consortium of stable archival institutions.

The remaining essays that comprise section 1, while interesting, have little relevance for archivists. They focus primarily on digital history projects in education, participatory events such as festivals, and digital applications as platforms for local history societies and “do-it-yourself” historians.

Section 2, “Challenges,” focuses on working relationships between museums, archives, and cultural heritage professionals as one party, and participatory heritage enthusiasts as the other. Several of these essays are relevant for archivists. In their essay, Courtney Ruge et al. discuss online sharing of cultural resources by selected community archives in Australia. The authors found considerable variance among these institutions in their embrace of digitization and use of social media. Highlighted concerns voiced by those

expressing hesitation, generally representatives from cultural heritage institutions, include ownership of collected items, unauthorized reuse of digital images, and the impact of digital availability on existing revenue streams. While the authors suggest solutions such as low-resolution scanning, watermarking, and embracing outward-facing attitudes toward custodianship to allay these concerns, the question of sustainability still looms large.

In “Who Is the Expert in Participatory Culture?,” *Lýsa Westberg Gabriel* and *Thessa Jensen* compare and contrast two local history archives on the small island of Amager in Denmark. The authors describe the first archives, open only to members one day per week and with no Internet access, as a “cathedral.” The second archives, a privately owned, solely electronic archives through which participants may upload and discuss materials that meet the owner’s collecting criteria, they characterize as a “bazaar.” While an expert manages the cathedral, an amateur curator manages the bazaar. The authors clearly prefer the bazaar over the cathedral because of its open access and participatory culture, but they do not give sufficient attention to constraints that may bind the cathedral, such as provisions in its charter or bylaws, limitations imposed in deeds of gift or deposit agreements, and financial considerations.

In “Social Inequalities in the Shaping of Cultural Heritage Infrastructure,” *Noah Lenstra* explores the power dynamics at play during three projects in which he, positioned in a university environment, assisted community-based African American cultural heritage institutions in Illinois. Of the three projects, Lenstra characterizes only one as a success. Reflecting after several years had elapsed, Lenstra sees that the failed projects reinforced “relationships of dependency” by constraining local autonomy over cultural heritage. Conversely, the final project flourished “largely because it grew out of the interest and energies of a leader deeply embedded in her community” (p. 102). What made that particular project different? According to Lenstra, the successful project “empowered [the marginalized community] to find ways to direct how heritage infrastructures evolve” (p. 103). Lenstra’s discussion of the three projects is valuable reading for all archivists working with marginalized populations. Similarly, *Donghee Sinn* analyzes her experiences working with the No Gun Ri Digital Archives, a community-based archives that seeks to document a massacre of South Korean refugees in July 1950 at the hands of American troops. For years, the political and social calculus on the Korean Peninsula thwarted official recognition of this incident, and only in the twenty-first century has the cause of remembrance of the victims and survivors of No Gun Ri gained traction. With limited grant funding and reliance on graduate students, progress on the digital archives has been, at best, inconsistent. This situation, however, may make the essay more valuable to archivists as they reflect on how external archivists might facilitate the participatory relationship needed to organize and preserve the collective memory of communities of tragedy.

In “Giving Voice to the Community: Digitizing Jeffco Oral Histories,” a cast of authors led by *Krystyna Matusiak* discusses challenges associated with digitizing an oral history collection accumulated by the Jefferson County Public Library in Colorado. Archivists employed by small and medium-sized archives with modest budgets and limited technical support should read this essay before embarking on any digitization project. Also falling into this category of potentially required reading is the essay “Issues with

Archiving Community Data” by Lydia Spotts and Andrea Copeland. Using the growth of the bicycling culture in Indianapolis, Indiana, as an example, Spotts and Copeland examine the technical, social, and legal challenges associated with creating a digital archives for a movement extensively documented by social media.

Section 3, “Solutions,” discusses solutions to challenges associated with embracing participatory heritage. In an essay that should be of particular interest to archivists, Nicholas Nourse, Peter Insole, and Julian Warren discuss a crowdsourcing project conducted in Bristol, United Kingdom, to gather geographic locations and contextual information for a collection of 10,000 digitized postcards depicting local scenes. The authors describe the design and administration of a highly successful initiative that gathered robust information from a select cadre of volunteers. Their terminology for this approach is “heavyweight peer production,” a term attributed to Caroline Haythornthwaite that describes encouraging volunteers to make a “significant commitment in terms of time and emotional attachment to both the project’s action and its output” (p. 156). A second essay in this section, “Digital Archiving in Canadian Artist-Run Centres,” explores approaches to archiving artist-run centers in Canada. These entities, as described by Shannon Lucky, “support contemporary art, operate on a non-profit model and take an artist-centred approach that values self-determination for artists and themselves” (p. 164). Lucky proposes three potential documentation approaches in her essay. The first, archiving websites, she acknowledges is not a “permanent archival solution” (p. 167). The second, establishing independent archival repositories at each center, is not financially viable. As an alternative, she suggests a third “post-custodial approach” in which external archivists assist the artist-run centers in establishing and sustaining a digital archival presence. This model could work if both parties embrace and maintain a collaborative relationship.

The essays in *Participatory Heritage* likely to be of most interest to archivists tend to focus either on crowdsourcing or social media. Archivists wishing to explore these topics more thoroughly may also wish to also read *Crowdsourcing Our Cultural Heritage*¹ and *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture*,² both of which discuss approaches to using extra-archival resources and volunteers to gather and create contextual information that makes archival materials more discoverable and meaningful.

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NOTES

1. Mia Ridge, ed., *Crowdsourcing Our Cultural Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
2. Elisa Giaccardi, ed., *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2012).