

Balance of Archival Principles and Practice Moves Text from Prescriptive to Practical

Crista Bradley

Seven years after penning a comprehensive primer on archival theory and practice, Laura Millar returned to the text to execute a major overhaul. Because technology has changed all aspects of archival operations in recent years, Millar updated and reworked the original book to knit digital issues throughout, rather than addressing them in a distinct chapter at the end. The final product, as Millar writes, “turned out not to be a tweak around the edges but a fundamental rewrite of this book.”

For a Broad Audience

While the book is intended for archivists and students, its important intersections to active and semi-active records throughout it make some of its elements relevant to the information management (IM) community as well.

Inter-Connected Chapters Stand Alone

Millar divides the book into two parts: principles and practices. The chapters in the first half of the work are entitled “What are archives?,” “The nature of archives,” “Archival history and theory,” “The uses of archives,” “Types of archival institution,” “The principles of archival service,” and “Balancing access and privacy.”

The chapters in the second half align with core elements of archival practice: “Managing the institution,” “Preserving archives,” “Acquiring archives,” “Arranging and describing archives,” and “Making archives available.”

While the chapters inter-connect to form a cohesive and complex whole, each chapter can stand alone for those readers looking for a quick



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overview or update on the chapter's topic.

The book concludes with a section on additional resources, with lists of relevant journals, websites of institutions and associations, and specific readings, grouped by topic. The list stretches to 19 pages and will serve as a helpful launch pad for readers looking to dig deeper on specific themes.

Outreach Somewhat Slighted

When a book such as this travels through so much space and time, some topics are bound to receive less coverage to make room for others. In this regard, the treatment of archival outreach feels somewhat slim, beyond its focus of web-based and

social media tools. While communications, marketing, and fundraising are disciplines in their own right (and well covered by professionals beyond the archival orbit), outreach is an essential part of the archivist's work. In an age of shrinking budgets and cancelled grant programs, the book would benefit from additional attention to the topic.

Overall, though, Millar winds her way through a vast amount of complicated content in a thorough, understandable, and highly engaging manner. She is to be commended for tackling myriad archival dilemmas head on when it would have been easier for her to look the other way, and for regularly drawing on interesting examples to illuminate her points. Topics are presented in a way that is relevant to archivists of all training and backgrounds, regardless of their geographical and structural settings.

'A Great Service to Archival Community'

The most outstanding feature of the book is the balance that Millar strikes between its two main players: principle and practice. While the two-part structure of the book ensures both are represented, the interplay is also woven throughout each of the chapters.

Millar's 30-plus years of extensive experience and engagement within the archival community are evident as she marches through the topics, regularly pairing how things “ought to be” with how they actually are in many archival settings. She reassures readers that “principles and theories provide a valuable map, helping us find our way to some destination. But that is all they are: the map, not the destination.”

The breadth, depth, and balance that Millar achieves move the text from what could be a clinical and prescriptive overview to a practical

tool that constitutes a great service to the archival community. Seasoned professionals will appreciate this tidy refresh, and up-and-coming archi-

vists will find the book a useful tool as they work to wrap their heads around a complex and ever-changing profession. **E**



About the Author: Crista Bradley is the university records and information management (RIM) archivist at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan, Canada, where she oversees the organization's RIM program and the management of university records in archival custody. She has a master of arts degree in history - archival studies from the University of Manitoba, serves on the executive committee of the Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists, and is a past member of the ARMA Saskatchewan board of directors and various committees of the Association of Canadian Archivists. Bradley can be contacted at crista.bradley@uregina.ca.