

## Managing Local Government Archives

By John H. Slate and Kaye Lanning Minchew. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016. 186 pp. Softcover and EPUB. Softcover \$45.00, EPUB \$42.50. Softcover ISBN 978-1-4422-6395-6; EPUB ISBN 978-1-4422-6396-3.

*Managing Local Government Archives*, coauthored by John H. Slate and Kaye Lanning Minchew, focuses on challenges and opportunities for local government repositories and fills an important gap in the archival literature. As the authors note, it has been over three decades since the publication of H. G. Jones's *Local Government Records: An Introduction to Their Management, Preservation, and Use*, the last book dedicated to managing local government records. With firsthand, in-the-trenches expertise, Slate and Minchew are exceptionally well suited to address the issues, hurdles, and special circumstances repositories face when caring for local government records.

John Slate is the city archivist for Dallas, Texas, while Kaye Lanning Minchew managed the Troup County Archives in Georgia for much of her career. Among their many individual accomplishments, both authors bring to this volume decades of experience working in local government archives and are members of the Academy of Certified Archivists and Distinguished Fellows of the Society of American Archivists. In addition, Slate and Minchew have both written previously on local government records, notably contributions to the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) technical bulletin series on local government records management.

The volume consists of nine concise chapters, each including several inter-related sections. The appendixes provide useful examples of common forms and a template for legislation establishing a local government archives. It is fair to say *Managing Local Government Archives* is not aimed at archivists with graduate education or extensive specialized professional training who may already be familiar with much of its content. As the authors state in the preface, the primary purpose of this book is to address local government archives programs, often where “people suddenly have responsibility for caring for local government archives with very little archival education or training” (p. xi). For archivists who preserve local government records, this book is but the beginning of what one hopes will be further exploration. It serves as an easy-to-read, one-stop-shop, entry point to the complexities of local government archival programs. One of the real strengths of this volume is the bibliography and citations. While the archives profession will always have room to argue about the best publications among the sea of available literature, this volume capably distills relevant sources for additional information and guidance.

Chapter 1, “A Short History of Local Government and Local Government Archives in the United States,” as the title implies, provides a sweeping overview of the varieties of local government found in the United States and the foundation of their archives—from settlements with deep colonial roots stretching back more than 400 years to more recently incorporated areas that only now might be approaching their centennial celebrations. While local government archivists in New York’s Hudson Valley are likely to have a keen appreciation for their Dutch and British colonial roots, they may have only a passing interest in the intricacies of Spanish colonial administration in Texas. Likewise, the theoretical underpinning of archives, starting with the nineteenth-century “Dutch Manual” by Muller, Feith, and Fruin may be of small benefit to local government functionaries but is a necessary starting point. The professional organizations introduced at the end of the chapter, however, offer the lone government archivist an opportunity to seek support from the wider world of archives. Overall, this chapter provides an important starting point for discussing local government archives and affords the nongovernment archivist—student or seasoned professional—with a useful introduction to the varying origins and attendant considerations related to local government records creation.

Similarly, “Types of Local Government Archives,” chapter 2, offers the reader the briefest summary of how local government archives are organized either as stand-alone programs, joint operations with records management functions, regional or cooperative arrangements, or, in some limited instances, where the particular state assumes responsibility for local records. For a local government contemplating starting an archival program, these options are worthy of consideration. Depending on local circumstances, some of the options, such as relying on a state archives, may be nonstarters, whereas the cost benefits of a regional or cooperative approach may offer an appealing option to local governments with finite resources. For the nongovernment archivist ensconced in the academic ivory tower or the local historical society, understanding how local government archives can be conceived is important to understanding the overall professional landscape.

The third chapter, “Local Government Archives and Records Management Programs,” is where this volume starts to get into the meat of the issues facing local government archives. It introduces the importance of the appraisal process and the key function of retention and disposition schedules in this regard. The authors also serve up a survey of the most common types of records that might emanate from local governments. This is a tricky balancing act to pull off. The intricacies of appraisal and records scheduling are not easily reduced to the few pages devoted to them in this book. Likewise, one hopes that individuals charged with caring for local government records already possess a deeper

understanding of the types of records that local governments create. Given the wide variety of state records laws, local government archivists hopefully will turn to their state archives for guidance; as the authors note, in many cases, states have already developed general retention schedules for local records and often provide advisory services to local governments. But in considering an audience of nongovernment archivists or archives students, this chapter offers a window into a sector of the profession often misunderstood by its peers.

Chapter 4, “Establishing and Planning Local Government Archives Programs,” does not necessarily provide easy answers, but rather raises several critical questions one needs to consider before embarking on establishing a local government archives. By highlighting the symbiotic relationship between records management and archival programs, this chapter lays out the necessary grounding for any local government archives in concrete authority, with a clear mission and scope for its collections. In the planning phase, it is imperative that a local government entity be prepared to adhere to pertinent open records laws. The chapter concludes with a useful exploration of questions that justify establishing an archives program in the first place, including consideration of legal and cost benefits, as well as the particular audience the archives intends to serve.

“Physical Considerations” and “Intellectual Considerations,” chapters 5 and 6, address core archival processes such as holdings maintenance including housing and special format considerations, preservation actions including environmental concerns, accessioning, arrangement, and description. Similarly, chapter 7, “Electronic Records in Local Government Archives,” draws attention to these same archival processes as they relate to the unique nature of born-digital records. These chapters are a whirlwind review of archival processes presented in a very practical, accessible fashion. Here, the authors’ caveat that this volume is but an introduction becomes most clear, as these chapters cover a lot of ground in a very short space. When appraisal or description are dealt with in no more than three pages each—or born-digital records, while given a full chapter, still spans only ten pages—it elicits a natural inclination to cry out for more. Each of these subjects has produced reams of conference papers, journal articles, and full-length books. It would be unreasonable and unfair to expect a single volume to comprehensively cover all aspects of archives to everyone’s satisfaction, and perhaps it would be unfair to quibble too much over such brevity. Of particular value to local government archives is the discussion of alienated records—unfortunately a common occurrence—and the option of pursuing replevin as a last resort. One conspicuous omission, however, is any mention of DACS. While DACS is admittedly a dense subject with which the average local government archivist may never have to grapple, not mentioning this while still introducing the notion of EAD seems a missed opportunity. These

chapters, however, hit the highlights of each topic and provide citations to valuable resources for further reading.

It is gratifying that “Local Government Archives Reference” garners individual treatment in a separate chapter. Noting that access is “perhaps the most important role an archivist can play” (p. 105), chapter 8 provides a near comprehensive review of the necessary facets of reference from staffing and security to access policies and tools. However, the section on “Documenting Reference Work” could have mentioned efforts of the SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force standards for public service metrics.<sup>1</sup> These standards define appropriate metrics for describing and measuring public services, such as reference, provided by archives, including local government repositories. In terms of staffing, as elsewhere in the book, the authors suggest relying on volunteers when necessary. This would have been an excellent opportunity to refer to SAA’s “Best Practices for Volunteers in Archives.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the advice regarding establishing clear boundaries for what an archives can and cannot do goes a long way toward mollifying the expectations of a diverse patron base. Furthermore, in an era when diversity and inclusion in archives garner much attention, Slate and Minchew’s counsel regarding potential language barriers to access is an important consideration.

Likewise, chapter 9 on “Outreach and Exhibits” succinctly tackles a complex, wide-ranging, but critically important area of archives. But as Slate and Minchew stress, these important public relations activities require a clear plan and should be a process that builds upon itself rather than a one-off effort. The gentle admonition that a poorly executed exhibit or program reflects poorly not just on the archives, but on the local government as a whole, should be taken to heart. The authors could have strengthened the brief discussion of online exhibits by mentioning the need to adhere to any web-accessibility requirements increasingly part of government-wide policies.

Any attempt to capture the breadth, depth, and complexity of the full range of archival processes in a single volume is bound to be wanting in some area. Another challenge of contemplating local government archives in a single volume, which the authors acknowledge throughout the book, is the wide variety of local governments that exist and the variety of records laws across each of the fifty-six states and territories that affect government archival programs. Written “under the premise that the vast majority of the people” responsible for local government archives “have very little formal training” (p. xvi), the authors consider this volume a starting point. Slate and Minchew claim that government records are “among the most neglected in the nation” (p. xviii), an assessment that carries much weight. When one stops to consider that the vast bulk of government records are created at

the local level, it is indispensable to have a book focused on this sector of archives.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For more on the status of the SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force on Public Services Metrics, see <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/saa-acrlrbms-joint-task-force-on-public-services-metrics>.

<sup>2</sup> “Best Practices for Volunteers in Archives,” Society of American Archivists, August 2014, <https://www2.archivists.org/standards/best-practices-for-volunteers-in-archives>.

## The Data Librarian’s Handbook

By Robin Rice and John Southall. London: Facet Publishing, 2016. 192 pp. Softcover and EPUB. \$95.00U.S., £54.95U.K. Softcover ISBN 978-1-78330-047-1; EPUB ISBN 978-1-78330-183-6.

In *The Data Librarian’s Handbook*, Robin Rice and John Southall examine the role of the data librarian in academia. Detailing the foundation and development of the field of data librarianship, this work is a valuable resource to new data librarians or curators, or anyone interested in the field. Authors Robin Rice and John Southall, data librarians at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Oxford respectively, have provided a comprehensive outline of the field of data librarianship and illustrate how data librarians fit into the overall research and education experience.

The first chapter, “Data Librarianship: Responding to Research Innovation,” provides an overview of data librarianship and the phenomenon of the “accidental data librarian,” comparing the similarities and differences between data librarianship and “traditional librarianship.” Data librarianship and traditional librarianship share the same basic goals “to support learning and the spread of knowledge” (p. 1). Data librarianship, however, is concerned with a specific type of information—digital data. Likewise, the distinctions between archivists and data librarians are very subtle and vary based on the environment and institutions in which they operate. While both positions focus on long-term preservation, archivists manage records in a variety of formats, including born-digital materials. Data librarians, on the other hand, are more likely to handle born-digital objects, but can also manage analog data that has been digitized. In addition to describing the “accidental data librarian,” the authors provide an overview of outside influences that encourage the management of