

2016

Review of Archives in Libraries: What Librarians and Archivists Need to Know to Work Together

Amber D'Ambrosio

Willamette University, ajdambrosio@willamette.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

D'Ambrosio, Amber (2016) "Review of Archives in Libraries: What Librarians and Archivists Need to Know to Work Together," *Journal of Western Archives*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26077/1637-e8dd>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol7/iss1/8>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Western Archives by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



Review of Archives in Libraries: What Librarians and Archivists Need to Know to Work Together

By Jeanette A. Bastian, Megan Sniffin-Marinoff, and Donna Webber.
Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2015. 137 pp. Softcover. \$69.95.
ISBN: 1-931666-87-9

With this book Bastian, Sniffin-Marinoff, and Webber have written a guide for librarians and library directors to understand archives, archivists, records management, and how these fit into the mission of the library. They draw on their own experiences as well as e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face interviews with fifteen archivists and eight library directors. Throughout the book the authors draw on anecdotes and quotes from their interviews to highlight the topics they address. While public libraries do come up, the scenarios and information offers more for academic librarians and archivists.

In the first section of their work, the authors begin by looking at common ground shared by librarians and archivists. This common ground includes mission, professional roots, identity, values, and language. In all cases presented, there are divergences between the two groups that are explored in detail, but the focus of this first part is on identifying what seemingly disparate aspects of each profession actually share in common. The authors provide useful background on both librarians and archivists throughout this section, but what may prove the most beneficial for both is the section on language. A glossary of archival terminology helps librarians understand the professional jargon of archivists. To further aid understanding between professionals, three tables provide instances of overlap in language between archivists and librarians: same word, different meaning; different word, similar meaning; and same word, similar meaning. This section is concluded with a look at the educational paths of archivists and librarians, comparing the typically straightforward path for librarians to the historically varied paths that have produced professional archivists. However, they note that the movement of archival education from public history programs to information science programs has resulted in more overlapping knowledge and understanding between archivists and librarians, a trend they expect to see continue to the benefit of both groups.

The second part of the book provides an overview of the actual work that archivists do. Bastian, Sniffin-Marinoff, and Webber cover collecting, records management, appraisal, processing, preservation, access, reference, and outreach. Of particular note within the section are the differences between cataloging and archival processing and library reference and archival reference that are addressed. In both cases the emphasis is on the complex nature of archival processing and reference and how the length of time it takes for both is important for library directors to

understand when attempting to provide staff and support to archives. The third chapter of this section is intended for libraries that wish to start an archives, including the planning and managing of that archives. The authors focus on aspects of archival management that they anticipate would cause difficulties for a library director.

The third section of the volume is dedicated to considering issues related to archives and libraries. This covers archival ethics and then goes on to cover the issues in common between librarians and archivists such as information literacy, digital access, and digital preservation. As with the first section, details of the differences between librarians and archivists on these issues take the forefront, but the common ground remains the takeaway. Bastian, Sniffin-Marinoff, and Webber compare the codes of ethics from the American Library Association and the Society of American Archivists, and it becomes clear that the corresponding ethical statements for archivists require more detail and explanation than those for librarians. The final chapter of the section looks at convergences and divergences among the issues faced by both groups. Bastian, Sniffin-Marinoff, and Webber also explore the idea of museums, archives, and libraries converging, either digitally or physically, to collaborate and in some cases combine their cultural heritage and information services at single points of access. As their final act of guidance, the authors provide an appendix of archival standards and an extensive bibliography.

In spite of what the title suggests, the authors' approach in this book is more about educating librarians and library directors about what archivists do than it is concerned with educating archivists about what librarians do. This becomes clear from their interview pool, which did not include any librarians, only archivists and library directors. The interviews did furnish the book with pertinent and real-life examples and perspectives from both library directors and archivists.

An interesting thread that appears several times throughout the work is the idea of merged or hybrid positions, where there are professionals who serve both as librarians and archivists. They also mention the topic arising in prior professional literature. The authors see it as a potential method to bridge the divide between the two groups and bring added benefits to institutions, but they also acknowledge that interview results have shown that professionals who do fulfill dual roles within their institution often feel overwhelmed, split, and unable to competently fulfill the duties and responsibilities of both roles. As someone who has served as the dual role of academic librarian and archivist in a small institution, I have felt exactly what the interviewed archivists have felt. Rather than feeling capable of serving my institution better for being better-rounded, I instead felt that the archives suffered in the wake of my library responsibilities. The potential for benefitting students and the institution could not be realized for lack of support and because only a single archivist served in the hybrid role. From my familiarity with the studies of my graduate school cohort, it was more common for students with an interest in becoming archivists to learn basic information science and library-related skills than it was for students with an interest in becoming librarians to learn archival skills. This means that any hybrid archivist/

librarians responsibilities would more likely and more easily fall on the shoulders of archivists rather than librarians, especially in small institutions with few professional librarians. For this reason I am skeptical of their idea of the hybrid archivist/librarian as a benefit or bridge to the divide between librarians and archivists. I believe it could only successfully work under circumstances where the library director commits resources and engages the librarians to learn and engage in the work of archivists rather than relying on archivists to act as the bridge by assigning them librarian responsibilities.

Overall the book would be most useful for library directors responsible for a library that includes an archives and librarians who work in an institution with an archives or who find themselves responsible for establishing an archives. Archivists will find this book most helpful as a method to educate library directors and librarian co-workers about the professional role and responsibilities of an archivist or as a tool for establishing common ground from which to work together on projects. For these purposes the book seems a satisfactory and succinct introduction to archivists and the work they do. As mentioned above, its primary strengths are its coverage of archivist responsibilities, the language used by archivists, and the heavier time commitments involved in archival work. It provides all the necessary information without dwelling on conflicts or delving so deeply that it discourages those who wish to learn more about archives and their role in a library.

Amber D'Ambrosio
*Processing Archivist and Records
Manager
Willamette University
Salem, Oregon*