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Review of Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives: A How-To-Do-It Manual

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Review of *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives: A How-To-Do-It Manual*. Third Edition.

By Gregory S. Hunter. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2020. 320 pp.
Softcover. \$85.00. ISBN: 978-0-8389-1277-5

The first edition of Dr. Gregory Hunter's *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives: A How-To-Do-It-Manual* was published in 1997. The fact that a third edition is being released 23 years later is a testament to the book's value. The title of this book accurately reflects its content and style. It is not meant to be used as an in-depth academic text, though there are academic elements, but rather as a practical manual for how to actually carry out the task of managing archival material.

Dr. Gregory Hunter is well suited to write—and update—this manual, having worked as an archivist and records manager in a variety of settings, as well as an educator, and as a long-standing editor of the *American Archivist*. Hunter is a Professor of Library and Information Science at Long Island University and, among many other positions, was part of a team that built an electronic records archives for the national archives in the United States.

In the first chapter, Hunter describes his book as “a first step in training of an archival eye.” The book starts with a broad overview of archives—some basic definitions, a history of the profession, and the requisite discussion of libraries vs. archives. The following chapters are logically grouped into the activities required to start and/or manage archives, from identifying and surveying records, accessioning, processing and preservation, through providing access, planning for security, and finding success in administration and leadership.

Each chapter is written in clear language, with bullet points, charts, and brief real-world examples that make the information accessible and instantly usable. Early on, Hunter introduces a fictional archives, the North Fork University (NFU) archives, to use as an ongoing case study in each section of the book. While the needs and practices of a university archives will be different than other types of institutions, using the same example throughout the book is an effective way to illustrate the range of policies and procedures that a new archival repository must develop and continuously update, as well as the diversity of relationships that archivists must develop outside of their department.

Although Hunter's main focus is on the practical, he does also dip briefly into archival theory. In most places, this is valuable, and to some degree necessary—one can't really talk about arrangement and description without delving at least a little into the debate over More Product, Less Process. On occasion, however, the theory might seem overwhelming and distracting to someone new to the profession, such as

a long discussion of EAD and its history in the Description chapter, but Hunter always follows any such theoretical discussion with a solid set of practical steps that help ground the theory he has just reviewed.

Not surprisingly, one of the largest changes in this new edition is a stronger focus on digital records. A notable feature of this revision is that it does not simply include an additional chapter titled “Digital Records.” Rather, Hunter successfully weaves the management of digital records into the existing text, which more accurately reflects the reality of contemporary archives and records management: digital records do not exist as a separate entity but are integrated into collections. The one place where he does discuss digital records separate from analog is in the Preservation chapter. This makes sense, however, as each type of material and media has different preservation needs. Hunter’s overview of digital preservation is impressive. It is short, just a few pages long, but gets straight to the point. Hunter provides a “Ten-Step Approach to Managing Digital Archives” that can provide more clarity on how to actually do something with digital archives than some of the much longer texts devoted to the subject. In keeping with the theme of the book, his approach is practical and realistic, and stems from his own extensive work with digital archives planning.

Any trained archivist may disagree with some points that Hunter makes, but that is to be expected with any book on archival practices. Hunter typically addresses the most likely points of divergence though, and allows for the reader to choose for themselves on these points. It should be noted that the book is generally United States-centric, which makes sense, being published by the American Library Association. But archivists working in other countries should be aware of some differences in terminology and practice that are not always explicitly noted in the book. Also, given the broad subject that this book covers, it could be beneficial to readers to have a list of additional resources for specific topics, possibly at the end of each chapter. For example, Hunter could point readers to Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler’s *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts* at the end of the Preservation chapter, in case they need more detailed information. Often such resources could be located by looking over the endnotes, but a more explicit list could be a nice addition to the book.

Overall, Hunter’s book, in all its iterations, plays an important role in the canon of archival literature. It is one of the few books that provide an overview of archival practices from beginning to end. Laura Millar’s *Archives: Principles and Practices* plays a similar role, but from a slightly more theoretical perspective, and laid out as straight text rather than as a manual. Hunter’s book may be most valuable to someone new to the profession, whether that is an archivist fresh out of graduate school, a librarian looking to work with more archival material, or an administrator or other employee at an organization newly tasked with the job of managing the institution’s important records. It can also be of value to a seasoned professional though, serving as a quick reference source for skills that may have become rusty over the years (for example, when time comes to update a disaster plan). It could also be a great resource to provide to a new volunteer, or a new assistant who does not have

formal archival training. This book would be a valuable resource to keep on the shelf of just about any archival repository.

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