

2022

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Michael Don Fraser

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, michael.frazier@unlv.edu

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Recommended Citation

Fraser, Michael Don (2022) "Review of Advancing Preservation for Archives and Manuscripts," *Journal of Western Archives*: Vol. 13: Iss. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol13/iss1/4>

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Review of Advancing Preservation for Archives and Manuscripts

Cover Page Footnote

Author's last name previously spelled Frazier.

Review of *Advancing Preservation for Archives and Manuscripts*

By Elizabeth Joffrion and Michèle V. Cloonan. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2020. 227 pp. Softcover. \$69.00. ISBN: 978-1-945246-35-7

In their book *Advancing Preservation for Archives and Manuscripts*, Elizabeth Joffrion and Michèle V. Cloonan give an overview of the trends and challenges of archival preservation within collecting institutions in the U.S., but with a twist. While they introduce the reader to various critical studies, standards, and guidelines that shape current preservation principles and practices, their book also tries to introduce a fresh “holistic view of archival preservation” into the profession.

Historically, many institutional digital collections developed and grew outside the traditional analog gathering and preservation infrastructures. If “preservation deals with the relationship between records and the environments in which they are created and maintained,” they argue that the archiving, care, and maintenance of DIGITAL RESOURCES should also be part of a comprehensive preservation management plan. Their argument for a holistic approach comes across as unique and distinguishes it from previous books on archival preservation.

In this holistic argument, the authors explore how and why the field of preservation broke into two distinct and sometimes competing disciplinary branches, focusing on either analog materials or digital resources. To underscore the separation, they point to the distinct lack of literature that comprehensively addresses theories behind best practices associated with the management of materials across the two disciplines.

Central to this theme is a somewhat comprehensive review of preservation initiatives, protocols, and strategies. While delving into these topics, the reader should note, *Advancing Preservation for Archives and Manuscripts* is part of the updated and ongoing Archival Fundamentals Series III produced and published by the Society of American Archivists (SAA). The first of these groundbreaking series appeared in 1977, illustrating and defining core concepts within in the profession. Through the years, respected authorities have provided updates periodically as technologies and philosophies change.

When it comes to respected authorities, SAA has selected two noted voices working in the field to update this series. According to their biographies, Michèle Valerie Cloonan is a professor in the School of Library and Information Science, College of Organizational, Computational, and Information Sciences, as well as Dean

Emerita of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons University. Elizabeth Joffrion is the director of Heritage Resources and associate professor at Western Washington University. She also leads the Libraries' Special Collections, University of Archives and Record Center, and the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.

Because the book is part of this series, there is a conscious effort by Joffrion and Cloonan for this volume to be a companion piece to Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler's earlier work *Preserving Archives & Manuscripts*. They wanted to acknowledge that that volume is still a valuable tool to preservation managers, even though the most recent edition was published back in 2010. They deliberately exclude most topics from that publication, such as "*implementing preservation programs in archives, establishing a collections-friendly environment, storing and handling archival materials properly, copying and reformatting archives and records, and evaluating approaches to conservation and repair.*"

This leaves the authors focusing on the more current trends of "*digital records, improved (and more rapid) access to records, the relationship between appraisal and preservation, risk management, sustainable preservation, the role of social networking and community archiving on preservation, and a consideration of who has the right to preserve and who decides what will be preserved.*" By doing so, they attempt to outline a new context for preservation planning. Following current trends, they look at the opportunities and challenges presented by the digital world.

The authors clearly state, that this book is intended to be a beginning. They hope the work acts as a springboard for discussion, which will inspire additional debate and writings that address the range of challenges associated with the preservation of cultural heritage, regardless of format. They have a lofty goal of uniting digital and analog preservation into an integrated set of practices. Unfortunately, by excluding topics from the earlier work in the series, they probably did not do themselves any favors in their argument.

The history lessons of Section 1 will be a favorite for many readers. This section may be career affirming for some professionals because many of the issues that are encountered have been a part of archival preservation since its inception as a concept. Indeed, Joffrion and Cloonan look back at how preservation management emerged as a separate and distinct discipline, beginning as early as the 1960s. In chapter 2 "History of Archival Preservation," the authors provide an overview of landmark events in the preservation and conservation disciplines. More importantly, the chapter expands upon the ideas behind the societal responsibilities of the archival profession as well as the development of sustainable preservation strategies. Specifically, they review the evolution of archival theory related to appraisal and the relationship between models such as "More Product Less Process" (MPLP) and preservation activities. In addition, they compare the life-cycle model versus the continuum model of preservation. All of these have become hotly debated subjects within the profession, and this book's contribution to the debate should be appreciated.

Chapter 3 focuses on “Principles of Archival Preservation”. The chapter offers an overview of best practices and principles, as well as the values of archival preservation. The authors consider the challenges presented in a digital environment and describe the difference between digital curation, digital stewardship, and digital preservation, and they discuss archival ethics and preservation. They conclude by considering archival preservation principles in a digital context.

This leads into Chapter 4 “The Context for Archival Preservation”, where Joffrion and Cloonan provide refreshing insight in the differences between the separate cultures of museums and libraries and, of course, archives. From collection origination to patronage use and expectations, they delve into how archival theory and preservation and conservation science unite and should be practiced with a variety of missions. They compare preservation managements in a variety of cultural heritage institutions. These inter-disciplinary comparisons are not discussed enough in professional literature. The authors explain how professional training in the various cultural heritage sub-disciplines (library and information science, archival science, museum studies, and conservation) may affect approaches to preservation. They refer to key studies central to an understanding of preservation practice, and they review important preservation standards, setting up their argument for united preservation planning.

Overall, this first section was the most compelling in the book, with its history of the development of the profession. It provides the reader with a rich amount of context and theory behind the core goal of managing heritage through preservation. It takes the familiar and re-illustrates it a way that is meaningful. It is helpful to be reminded that we should be guided by “local customs, professional practices and standards, education, the enactment of the legislation and international conventions and charters.”

In Section 2, Chapters 5-8 expand on the concept of establishing a holistic preservation management program, and they look at specific steps required to manage a unified program that accounts for both digital and analog materials. Their discussion covers “policy development, assessment, and the prioritization of institutional preservation goals, and advocacy for needed resources.” They discuss “staff management, strategies to address the causes of deterioration and loss in collections, standards and best practices for maintaining stable storage environments and systems, and the use of digital and analog formats.”

The section concludes with a chapter on risk management, in which they argue risk management is a critical aspect of preservation, especially on the institutional level. They explain that collecting institutions must manage risk in order to protect their assets, as well as ensure the continuity of services. They focus on how risk management principles can be used to improve disaster planning and recovery. They give examples of “how risk management is used to assess building environments, security systems, IT systems, and digital assets.” At this point, the reader should remember that this book is not intended to be a technical manual. While the authors guide the reader to numerous sources, the reader will be left wanting to explore

different angles to various topics, but ultimately must pursue them in other publications. Those explorations are not offered here.

An example can be found in their discussion of institutional vulnerabilities with a couple of short sections on “Security,” and “Information Systems and Digital Collections.” For these topics, the authors direct the reader to Sidney E. Gerger’s chapter on security in *Rare Books and Special Collections*, without fully exploring the subject themselves. They do provide a managerial framework to work from, and they agree security is usually considered a technological issue, but they purposefully avoid specifics. Unfortunately, the history of the archival profession is full of security failures. Those looking for tales of intrigue and lessons learned from high profile thefts or cyber-attacks will not find any here. This is by design, and the reader will be left asking questions and wanting to explore more.

The authors conclude that the security of both digital and analog collections deserves equal consideration in an archival setting. However, “if the archives is a part of a large institution, risk management processes for digital collections and systems are likely in place, but probably remain outside the control or influence of archivists.” For a unified preservation plan, they argue that, “risk management of digital collections should be integrated into preservation management.” However, this is a hard sale to many administrators and stakeholders focused on other issues, with collections barely registering as an afterthought. How does the archivist enter this sphere of influence? There are no easy answers.

While these chapters are thought provoking (and they are necessary arguments), they do not to give substantive examples of real-world incidents and lessons, aside from the example preservation policies in the back of the book. This is disappointing, when contrasted with the rich history lesson of Section 1.

In the final section, the authors focus on the emerging areas of sustainability in Chapter 9, “Sustainable Preservation Practices”, bolstering arguments that cultural heritage institutions must become efficient stewards of the environment. Chapter 10 “The Right to Preserve: Who Decides?” considers ethical problems when archivists collaborate with underrepresented communities. The book concludes with “Final Remarks” in Chapter 11, and some observations about emerging trends in preservation.

In conclusion, *Advancing Preservation for Archives and Manuscripts* by Elizabeth Joffrion and Michèle V. Cloonan is a worthy update to the ongoing Archival Fundamentals Series III, by the Society of American Archivists (SAA). They introduce the reader to various critical studies, standards, and guidelines that shape current preservation principles and practices, while excluding topics previously covered by Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler’s earlier work *Preserving Archives & Manuscripts*. Their call for a holistic approach (where digital resources should be part of a comprehensive preservation management plan) distinguishes it from previous books on archival preservation. It offers the reader a broad and heavily sourced framework for understanding the field of archival preservation, giving the reader perspective to

previous works and training. The authors did not intend the book to be a technical manual, instead it is a broad presentation of managerial philosophies. Unfortunately, the book may seem too broad at times, leaving some concepts not fully developed. Nevertheless, the authors hit their mark by provoking thought, and leaving the reader wanting more and asking questions.

Michael Don Fraser
Book and Paper Conservator
Special Collections and Archives
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Las Vegas, Nevada