Organizing Archival Records. **4th edition. By David W. Carmicheal. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019. 163 pp. Softcover. $37.00.**

Public archives make up a majority of our country's historical records. Libraries, museums, historical societies, church repositories, and other cultural organizations around the country have historically taken it upon themselves to preserve their histories at the local level. It is not uncommon for these organizations to operate on limited resources, funded by local governments or generous donors. Community volunteers who have no formal training in archival science run a significant portion of public archives. However, David W. Carmicheal argues that these individuals bring with them a high level of intelligence and dedication to historic preservation. In *Organizing Archival Records*, Carmicheal presents an introduction to archival organization aimed at guiding the nonprofessional stewards of our cultural memory. Carmicheal is the director of the Pennsylvania State Archives, a Distinguished Fellow of the Society of American Archivists, and a past president of the Council of State Archivists. His experience developing materials for small archives and avocational archivists dates back to 1986. This manual focuses on demystifying archival arrangement and description for both nonprofessionals and emerging professionals alike.

While Carmicheal focuses primarily on arrangement and description of archival records, he also introduces readers to guiding archival principles and best practices for which even nonprofessionals should strive. For example, the concepts of *provenance* and *original order* help to preserve the context and meaning of records as they were created. Adhering to these principles when processing collections provides both archivists and researchers with a deeper understanding of the records themselves, as well as the situations in which they were created or collected. Carmicheal goes on to describe the various levels of archival description (e.g., collection, series, filing unit, and item), but focuses primarily on collection- and series-level description. He walks readers through creating metadata at these levels and provides numerous examples through description forms. Along the way, Carmicheal introduces nonprofessionals to using *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS) when incorporating collection- and series-level descriptions into a finding aid.

The recent fourth edition of the book also includes a chapter on tools that institutions can use to organize and share their data. These tools include simple text-based finding aids, spreadsheets, databases, and archives-specific software. Carmicheal argues that no matter which method is used to create and store finding aid data, the ultimate goal is to be able to share that data with the world. To this end, he introduces Encoded Archival Description (EAD) as the de facto standard for encoding finding aids and making them accessible online. While he does not direct the reader to specific archival software, Carmicheal does provide multiple examples of EAD finding aids and suggests conducting an Internet search for archival management software to compare products and service providers.

Although archival arrangement and description methods are based on the content rather than the format of records, the author dedicates a chapter to the unique challenges of electronic records. Carmicheal acknowledges the increasing prevalence of collaborative

documents originating from multiple people or departments, particularly in corporate and government environments. The use of collaborative tools such as Google Docs and Microsoft SharePoint can complicate issues of provenance. Carmicheal argues that as collaborative behaviors become more prevalent, the archival community will need to develop clearer standards to address these types of records. For instance, how will titles be assigned to collections when multiple individuals, institutions, departments, or agencies have contributed to their creation? Finding aids create a particular challenge in that many descriptive elements such as biographical, administrative, and historical notes may become more cumbersome. The digital environment also introduces challenges in discerning the creator's original order. As the digital world allows multiple means for access and retrieval, it may be difficult to know which order takes precedence. Establishing how users of electronic documents have applied facets and sorting tools can also be difficult. Carmicheal also stresses that preserving digital records takes a considerable amount of time, energy, and money. As software and hardware change, records must be upgraded to the latest technologies to remain accessible. While printing electronic records can be an option, he presents three questions to answer before doing so: 1) Do you risk losing essential context for the records? 2) Do you risk losing the data's appearance? and 3) Do you risk losing the data's functionalities? Carmicheal encourages archivists to consider the importance of each of these aspects when preserving digital records. For example, some electronic environments may store extensive amounts of data, or allow data manipulation that may not be easily discernable when printed.

While the primary focus of the book is the arrangement and description of archival records, in a single chapter titled "Beyond Arrangement and Description," the author does address other intersecting topics such as the appraisal, labeling, handling, preservation, storage, and promotion of archival materials. Beyond the scope of the book, this chapter is a useful reminder that arrangement and description is only one aspect of archival management and that these differing tasks often intersect. With this in mind, Carmicheal states that successful processing involves describing the context around the creation of the records, arranging them in logical order, describing the contents, and shelving them in a way that allows them to be found when needed. Additional descriptive information, including item-level description, can be added later. Thus, the arrangement and description process continually evolves throughout the curatorial life cycle.

The last half of the book is devoted to providing detailed examples, templates, and practical exercises to test readers' knowledge. Carmicheal provides excellent advice for how to begin to create finding aids that contain collection- and series-level information. The book is filled with examples, illustrations, and figures to help readers visualize the process. However, while the book includes a multitude of visual illustrations, the lack of consistent quality is a drawback. Many of the figures containing forms appear blurry and are difficult to read. Additionally, the use of shading to block off sections of text is not prominent enough indicate stand-alone sections. Instead, these blocks appear to blend into the main text of the chapters, making it difficult to keep one's place while reading.

In *Organizing Archival Records*, Carmicheal presents an easy-to-read guide for untrained individuals working in small archives. Geared toward nonprofessionals, the book nevertheless emphasizes professional archival principles, but does so in a way that is relatable to the layperson. Two topics that could use further explanation through examples are storage and labeling. Once records have been described and arranged properly, nonprofessionals will need to learn how to store their collections in a manner that facilitates retrievability. Proper labeling and storage methods are important steps when organizing archives. Without a consistent labeling and storage system in place, records can quickly become inaccessible. These particular topics, however, may be difficult to address within the two dimensions of a book, as opposed to seeing how they are practiced in person. Given that storage and labeling directly correlate to arrangement and description, these topics may even warrant their own resources. Carmicheal suggests consulting topic-specific bibliographies to identify in-depth resources about these topics. Including a list of resources for each of these concepts would have been helpful, as nonprofessionals may not know where to find them. For example, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania[1] has an excellent list of resources for small archives, which include topics such as preservation and cataloging. Similarly, the Texas Historical Commission[2] also provides an extensive list of resources related to historical preservation.

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1. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, "Resources for Small Archives," https://hsp.org/historical-heritage-organizations-0/hidden-collections-initiative-for-pennsylvania-small-archival-repositories/resources-for-small-archives.
2. Texas Historical Commission, "Preserve," https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve.